OUR GLORIOUS LEADER
NO. 3545

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, JANUARY 4, 1872.

"And when He had thus spoken, He went on ahead, ascending up to Jerusalem."
Luke 19:28.

A VERY beautiful spectacle it is to see the Lord Jesus marching in front and His followers eagerly following on behind. They were going up to Jerusalem, where it is true, He would receive some honor, but also where He would be betrayed into the hands of cruel men and put to a shameful death—but He went on ahead of them. As the shepherd goes before the sheep, not driving, but leading. As the captain goes before his soldiers as taking the post of danger, so our Lord went on before them. It was far better that He should go first than that they should, for the disciple is never more out of place than when he outruns his Master. If he will follow his Master's commands, he shall do well. But if he shall follow his own devices and invent his own way, he shall do badly. The pilgrimage behind the cloud is a safe one, but a rush before the cloud will end in a disaster. The Master must go first, not the disciple. But then, when the Master advances, it is right to see the disciple follow, ready of foot, quick at his Master's heel, delighted with his Master's company. One likes to think of that journey up to Jerusalem, with Jesus Christ just a little ahead in the front, and His disciples closely following Him. I thought it was a picture that might serve us as a model throughout the whole year. I am not going to talk to you long at this time, but wish just to sketch that picture before your mind's eyes and say, " So be it unto each one of us." May Jesus be with us. May Jesus lead the way. And may His own divine spirit give us grace to follow Him—not like Peter, afar off—but as loving disciples who keep closely under their Master's guidance! From the beginning of the year to the end of the year may we rejoice to feel that He goes ahead of us, but may we also, with cheerful willingness, follow close behind! I present it to you, I say, as the picture for this new year of grace, and may it be verified in your experience.

Very simply, then, I shall try to call attention to the blessed fact that Jesus goes ahead of us and, having done so, I shall ask you, in the second place, to seek after a sweet sensation of this truth of God. And the first truth, then, to consider is—

I. THE BLESSED FACT—He went ahead of them.

We have already said that He was going the way of suffering. He was going up to Jerusalem to suffer. When you are in the way of suffering, He will go before you. He was always in the way of service. There was more to be done at Jerusalem before He had finished His course. May we, in the way of service, always find Him going before us. And He was also, in the third place, on the way to death—and if we have any fears about our passage through the river, may this console us—He went before us!

To begin, then, at the beginning, here is the blessed fact that Christ has gone ahead of us in the way of suffering. He has done so by His own actual experience while He was here in the flesh. "He was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief." "In all our afflictions He was afflicted." "He Himself took our sicknesses and carried our sorrows." Rest assured that in whatever way of suffering you have to go in consequence of your being a child of man, and especially in consequence of your being a child of God, you will find that Christ has gone that way ahead of you! Are you full of bodily pain, stretched upon the bed? Are you apt to think that none ever suffered as you do? He suffered more than you! He went ahead of you along that flinty pathway. The pangs of His death must have been extreme. And remember His passion in the garden, His agony in Gethsemane. You have not in this matter yet come to having drops of blood oozing in sweat from your countenance. No, He has gone ahead of you there. In all the pangs of your bodily frame, Jesus has preceded you. Read the 22nd Psalm, with all its wonderful expressions—"I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint." "You have brought Me into the dust of death." He knew the fever and its thirst upon the cross when He was dying there. He said, "You have brought Me to the dust of death." You have not one suffering that may be imagined to be more exquisite than what He endured! Your griefs are molehills compared with the Alps of His sufferings!

But you will say that it is not exactly the pathway of personal bodily pain you are traversing, but you have endured much in the sufferings of others you have lost. You have had half your heart, perhaps, taken away at one time. Friend after friend has been carried to the tomb! But He went ahead of you in this pathway, also. Did you never read where it is written, "Jesus wept?" "Behold how He loved him," said the Jews, as they beheld Him at the sepulcher of the well-beloved Lazarus. He knows what bereavements means as well as you—He has ahead of you. "Ah" you say, "but in consequence of the bereavement I have suffered, I am left a widow. How shall I be provided for? In addition to the woe of the loss, I have to look forward to the future! Will these hands be able to find me daily bread? My garments may become, by degrees, more and more thin and time-worn. I fear cold, nakedness and hunger." And suppose it should come to that, as it will not, I trust, yet He went ahead of you! You are not so poor as He. Hear His voice tonight, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have not where to lay My head." To pay the common tax, He must borrow money from the fish

of the sea. His garment was the common seamless robe of peasants. He was but poorly clad—He was in all respects the child of poverty. First cradled in a manger, and then laid for His last sleep in a borrowed grave, for still He had not where to lay His head. In the sleep of death, Jesus went ahead of you! O son of poverty, O daughter of need, you may see the print of His footsteps all along that thorny way!

"Yes," says one, "but still there is added to poverty in my case the fact that I have been forsaken by friends, and I am very fearful that even those who stood somewhat faithful to me will soon grow weary, and I shall be left alone." And did you never hear Him say, "And I shall be left alone, and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me"? And have you never read how they all forsook Him and fled, and Peter denied Him with oaths and curses and, worst of all, Judas, who had been trusted with His little stock, sold Him for the price of a slave? "He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me." Ingratitude most cruel, treachery most base! Your Lord has suffered it! You may see the prints of His pierced feet along that pathway if you will but look for them. Jesus went ahead of you in actual suffering. And what if you have been serving your Lord with zeal and fervor, and you have been reproached, even by those who love Him? You have met with the cold shoulder where you expected to find encouragement. If your motives have been misrepresented by the very persons who ought to have supported you in your ardor, ah, what then? Was not He also a reproach among His mother's brethren? When His zeal had eaten Him up, they said that He was mad—and even His mother and His brethren stood outside desiring that they might see Him because they thought Him bereaved of His wits! And if the wicked world has reproached you, did they not call the Master of the house, "Beelzebub"? Shall they have soft names and honorable titles for the men of His household? If they said of Him, "He has a devil, and is mad, why listen to Him?" do you think they will say great and flattering things of you? O you that are made ashamed for His sake, and made a spectacle unto men and unto angels, be not afraid! No strange thing has happened to you! Thousands of saints have passed along this road and, chief of all, your Master, Christ, has gone ahead of you! In the path of suffering, then, Jesus has gone ahead of us from the fact of having actually and literally experienced what we suffer!

He has gone before in another sense, namely, that now, though He reigns exalted high in the highest heavens, He still goes ahead of us in the intense sympathy of His sacred heart. Jesus is not separated from His people by the mere fact of distance. "Lo," He has said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world," and you know what mysterious, yet real union exists between Christ, the head, and all His members. It came out clearly in the case of Paul, when Jesus said to Him, "Why do you persecute Me?" He was persecuting only a few poor people in Jerusalem, or in Damascus, whom he despised, but Christ said, "Why do you persecute Me?" because persecuting the saints was persecuting Christ!

Christ suffering in His members. Christ suffering on the cross was the head suffering, but when His people were torn to pieces in the amphitheater, when they were burned at Smithfield, and when, today, they are hooted and made a jest of, it is Christ suffering—still suffering in His members—and when any child of God suffers in any righteous cause, whenever affliction comes upon a saint in any form, Christ sympathizes with him. Rest assured—

"In every pang that rends the heart,
The man of sorrows bears His part."

In all their affliction He was afflicted. A finger never suffers without the brain participating—and no humble member of the true Church of Christ ever suffers without Christ, the glorious head, suffering in sympathy therewith.

Now this is very cheering to those who have faith to receive it, because very much of the heart-breaking that comes into the world is from a sense of loneliness. When men feel that somebody sympathizes with them; when those who are being beaten feel that others smart as they do, then they take courage. Oh, there is one who loves you more than you can love yourself, who sympathizes with you, you suffering saint, from the throne of His glory! Be you, therefore, glad! Be of good courage and let this comfort your heart!

There is a third way in which Christ goes ahead of us in the path of suffering—that is, in the matter of providence. While He has Himself suffered, and sympathizes, in a third respect He always goes ahead of us in our sufferings, in preparing them for us, and preparing us for them. Our Lord has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us—and I believe He has prepared all the road as well as a place at the end of it. You shall find, O child of God, when you come into the deep waters, that Christ is there—there by His grace and spirit, and there, also, by His providence, to take care of you. It was appointed that Jacob and his tribes should all go down to Egypt. To Egypt they must go, but Joseph went down there before them and became lord over all Egypt—not for his own sake, but for the sake of his brothers, for all the wealth of Egypt shall be used, if necessary, in order that Jacob and all his household shall be preserved during the time of famine! Now if there is an Egypt to which you are to go, Jesus, your Joseph, has gone before you to make it ready for you, to find you a Goshen and to nourish you there till such day as you shall come from it. God, even your Savior, Jesus, leads the van! As the cloud, like a mighty banner of fire, went through all the mazes of the winding way of Israel over the desert, so Jesus marches before us, the leader, the standard-bearer among ten thousand, always in the front and with His eternal power and Godhead making straight the pathway for His people's feet! Let us be of good courage, then, in this respect. In the matter of suffering, He went ahead of you.

But now realize here the retrospect. If He goes ahead of you, then follow Him. You love not suffering. It were not suffering if you did love it,

but still, if Jesus leads, look not to the way. It were better that that way should be full of thorns and briers which would tear your flesh, and Christ be with you, than that it should be a long green pathway, and your shepherd lead you not! Go on! He went to His sufferings without a murmur. Moreover, even His flesh shrank and, at last, He said, "Not My will, but Yours be done." Say you, the same. Do you fear as you enter into the cloud? Within that cloud shall be the secret tabernacle of the Most High, wherein He will reveal Himself to you as He never did before! Some of us owe much to the anvil and the hammer, and the fire, much to suffering, much to trials—and we thank God we had them! And you will yet have to do the same, but, oh, stay not back! Remember, after all, a lack of resignation will not assist you in your suffering, but, on the contrary, nothing makes suffering so light as resignation to it—and a perfect acquiescence in the divine will does much to take away the gall from the cup! You must go where Jesus leads—go, therefore, willingly, cheerfully, trustingly and even joyfully, for it is a triumph to a Christian to bear the cross after Jesus—and to be crucified and buried with Him were a high honor to any child of God. Go on, then, for Christ leads the way!

But now I must not tarry so long on that part, but I observe it is said Christ leads the way in service as well as in suffering. He was going up to Jerusalem to accomplish the rest of His life-work before He surrendered His spirit to His Father. Now you and I, and each of us, have a service to perform. We were redeemed and with a price that we might serve the Lord. We are a royal priesthood, a peculiar people. We have a priesthood to fulfill. All God's children, all God's servants are priest and kings, and they have a rule to discharge, and a priesthood to fulfill. Now we are beginning a new year of service. It will be a very sweet thing to us if we can know that Jesus Christ has gone ahead of us in the path of service. Beloved, I might take the same truth of God and say that He has actually gone before us in having fulfilled the same service. If there is any good thing for you to do, Christ has done it before you! Are we called to preach the gospel? You know how He was anointed to preach glad tidings to the poor. Are you called to teach the little ones? Did not He say, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"? Have you to feed the hungry? On what a large scale did He do it! Have you to visit the sick and to minister to their needs? Oh, how many thousands owed their opened eyes or restored limbs to Him! Christ's life anticipates all the service of the church. One might very easily, in taking the life of Christ, find all the operations of a truly active church prefigured there—all of them. There is nothing new under the sun, and when a man has found something, and thought, "Here is something that is fresh," you shall find Christ has looked after the halt, the blind and the lame before you—and if you seek to raise the fallen woman, you will be made to remember Him who said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." I should be afraid to undertake any

service in which I could not see that He has gone before. What Christ has done, it is right for us to do, save only in that work of expiation where we cannot help Him. There He treads the winepress alone, and of the people there is none with Him—but in all in which He is our exemplar, it is always a safe thing for us to follow very closely—and we shall find that He has gone before us!

And truly He goes before us in all our works by His Holy Spirit actively proving His divine sympathy still with us. I do not look upon the Church of God as so many pious men and women at work by themselves, but I see God working by them, working in them, working through them! They are the workers to the eye, but no further. It is God who works in them to will and to do of His own good pleasure! If Satan saw in the work only the man, he would laugh at him, but he perceives "the hand of Joab" is there—a mightier hand than the hand of man and, therefore, it is that he is often put to the rout. O you that speak for Jesus, that pray for Jesus, that give to His cause and work for His name, let this be your joy and your comfort—that Jesus Christ is with you and goes ahead of you in all this service!

And so He does in His providence. If we had but eyes to see it, and could know all things, we would perceive that when we come to preach the gospel, God has been preparing men's hearts to receive it. Many a time a man will come up to the house of prayer, and he has a trouble that has been plowing up and down, and the minister has got a handful of seed to sow, which the birds would have devoured if they had fallen on hard soil—only God has plowed the man and made him like soil, ready to receive it! He has gone ahead of us! If ever I see these benches full, I feel a little distressed, and yet elated, because I always reckon that I have got a picked congregation and each man is sent with a design. Though there may not be salvation in every case, yet there are some to whom God will bless the Word, to which the Word will be fitted to the very letter, for God will guide the preacher and oftentimes as much reveals Himself from the pulpit as ever a Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed again by Daniel when it was gone altogether from his mind. You shall be sure that God is in the Word if it comes home to you in that way! And if you are a Christian worker, you may expect that the providence of God will prepare men's hearts for that work which you are trying to do!

I would that the Church of God would now recollect that assuredly God is going ahead of her in all her service at this moment. The world is prepared for the gospel if we were but willing to present the gospel to the world! When our Lord Christ came into this world there was a universal peace, and the peace of the public mind and the state of the public pulse was just suitable for the preaching of the gospel by the Lord and by His apostles—and there is some such suitability as that now. Chains that long have galled unhappy nations have been filed through. The people that sat in darkness have seen a great light—they have demanded liberty and won it with a good right hand—and mean to hold it! And now is the

time when the darkness flies and light comes for those who have the still brighter light of the everlasting gospel of the ever blessed God to spring into the gap and proclaim salvation by a crucified Redeemer to all the sons of men! Up, churches of London, and to your work! Even now the very demand for education among you, and the stir that there is among the people, the breaking up of hoary systems of abomination, the motion and commotion—all this means good to you! You have been embedded in the ice and frozen up these long wintry days, but, lo, the sun has risen and the long summer days shall soon come and your boat shall be freighted and put out to sea—and bring a blessed cargo of souls home to God their Father! Let us be up and doing, for Jesus goes ahead of us in the matter of providence. May He help us to keep always near Him. What He would have us do, oh, may we do it! Word for word what He would have us speak, thought for thought what He would have us think, act for act what He would have us do! Let us never have a glorious leader and be a laggard people. Oh, for the grace that is in Him to bedew us plenteously, that as He goes ahead of us we may follow Him in the path of service!

Now very briefly upon one other point, which was the path of death. Our Lord was going to Golgotha, and there was to be, as far as this world was concerned, the end of His journey. To the cross He must be nailed, and in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, the Lord Jesus must sleep. Death is not a pleasant thing. It matters not how you gild the pill, it is a pill. If the Lord comes not, however, before that time we shall have to pass through death, and we shall find it, if we are His people, to be infinitely less painful than the fear of death! We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, and if our faith were greater, we would have no fear of death. "Ah," says one, "what I dread is parting, leaving my friends." He went before them—He parted from them all, and from His mother. And He said to John, "Behold, your mother," and to His mother," "Woman, behold your son," as the light faded from His eyes. He went ahead of us in the path of death. "Ah, but I cannot bear to think of the pain of dying," says one. You will never have such pain as His in death—He went ahead of you. He had a sense of sin in dying. He was made a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree," but no curse can ever light on you, believer. The blessing is yours because the curse was His! Oh, He has gone ahead of you—He has gone where you shall never go, for He suffered the wrath of God, which you never shall suffer, for that wrath is gone and passed away forever! There are none of the surroundings of a dying bed which can suggest such horror as that which surrounded the death of our Lord—so that He has gone ahead of you in everything that might alarm you in the prospect of your departure. He has gone ahead of you. Be content to follow Him to the grave. It is no more—

"A charnel-house of sense,
Relics of lost innocence,

The place of ruin and decay;
The imprisoning stone is rolled away."

It is now a nest of sweetness since Jesus laid in it. The grave is no longer unfurnished—there are His grave clothes left for you and, moreover, the stone being rolled away, you have the promise that you shall come out of it again! When the trumpet of the archangel sounds, those poor bones shall arise and the body that was sown in weakness shall be raised in power! What joy it is, then, to think that He went ahead of us and how obediently, no, triumphantly, may we follow Him, even to death itself! Here, then, is the blessed fact, in suffering, or service, or departure, Christ goes ahead of us! Now the point we close with is this—

II. MAY WE, ALL OF US, HAVE A SWEET REALIZATION OF THIS TRUTH DURING THIS YEAR.

We believe a good deal of doctrine which we have never yet realized. We know much to be food which we have never fed upon. Many Christians are like those who have sacks of flour in the house, but no bread. They have nothing available for present food. Some are like rich men that may happen to be abroad with thousands in gold, but no small silver, no spending money. May you be able to coin the bullion of precious promise so as to use it in the journey of life. May you make practical application of precious truths of God, tasting the honey, drinking the wine and being satisfied with them. Now, then, to realize that Christ goes ahead of us is to realize that we are never alone. If I am in my study, and a problem staggers me, I am not alone—my Lord will teach me. You are in your little chamber with the needle, working hard for very scanty pay. You have to suffer—you have not got to suffer that alone. "I am with you when you pass through the fire; you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon you." But you have got to go into the workroom and there are those that point at you, and they have a jest for you, whom they know to be a follower of Christ. You have not to bear that alone! He has the heaviest end of that cross and He is persecuted in His persecuted members. But you are busy in business, and your cares afflict you. Blessed be God you have not got to bear those cares alone! No, nor yet at all, for concerning them He has said, "Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." I have got to come here and preach. Who is sufficient for these things? But I am not to preach alone—"My grace is sufficient for you." His strength shall be made perfect in your weakness. You have to go to that Sunday school class. Oh, how incorrigible those boys are and how careless those girls—but you have not got to win those souls alone—Jesus will go and His spirit will be there, and you shall be helped in your work! Do try and realize all through this year that you are never alone. Not only is it, "You, God, see me," but it is this, "Fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed, I am your God." And Christ is not with you behind, or pushing you into the danger, but He is with you ahead of you—He goes ahead of you—He is the shield

catching the fiery darts upon Himself! You shall come behind the screen and be sheltered by His precious promise.

I do not know where you may be this year, but let this thought abide with you—He will be with you! Perhaps you will cross the sea. Your lot may be to help to colonize some distant land. Over the sea and on the billows, and on the shore so strange to you—He will be your near companion! Perhaps this year there is a trial awaiting you, very heavy, or perhaps a temptation arising out of some new joy or fresh prosperity. Do not fear it—you shall be safe on the hilltops of joy and in the valley of humiliation. He is with you anywhere! A child is told, perhaps at nightfall, that he has to go a considerable distance. It is to a lonely farmhouse and the little one trembles to go across the moor in the dark. "Oh," the mother says. "but Father is going with you." Oh, then that changes the aspect of everything! The boy is pleased to go! Even the dangers that seemed so great, only attract him now—he will be glad to be with his father. Through the moor land of another year, you have to go, and it may be dark and cold, but your heavenly Father and your blessed elder brother will be with you! Therefore, be not afraid. You will have to contend this year for "the faith delivered once for all to the saints," and to do much service, too. If you are to render a good account at the year's end, you are to try and live this year, not at a slow rate, like the cold-blooded frog, but to have hot blood in you! Regulated by prudence, and yet boiling over with a burning zeal, you are to serve the Lord! And it may be you think you cannot do it. Is anything impossible when He helps you? Is any sacrifice impossible when it is for Him? Is any difficulty insurmountable when He, Himself, gives the all-sufficient strength? Oh, this is a very choice thought, though a very simple one, that Jesus will be with you all the year through!

The only other thought is, take care that you abide with Him. He is a quick walker. Idle souls will be left behind. He lives a holy life. Unclean spirits will find Him part company with them. Be you watchful, vigilant, sober, careful, zealous, and seek to have perpetual fellowship with Jesus Christ. I am sure those are the happiest that live nearest to God! I am certain of it. I do know it is not the wealthiest who are the happiest. It is not those who have the most health that are always happiest, and those who are most esteemed among their fellow men. There is one rule without any exception—he who lives nearest to God has the most of that profound peace of God which passes all understanding. He says to you, "Abide in Me." May His words abide in you! May you abide in Him and may this be to each one of you, and to this church, the very happiest year we have ever had! Oh, that some poor sinner would seek the Savior! May the Lord's lovely attractions entice Him!

And I shall close by saying this—that if any soul longs for Christ, Christ is already longing for Him—and if you have a half of a desire towards Him, He has a heart full of desire towards you! There never was a soul that had a head start on Christ in the matter of desire for

salvation. God grant you grace to touch Jesus and then to follow after Him, and to make His blessing abide with you, both now and forever. Amen and amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
ISAIAH 35, HEBREWS 12:1-6.

Verse 1. *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them.* They shall be so glad that they shall inspire gladness where all was desolation, brooding, melancholy and dragon's howls. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them."

1. *And the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.* God's people are a happy-making people. They are a blessing in themselves and they shall be a blessing to others till all shall say, "These are the seed that the Lord has blessed." "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

2. *It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God.* A wonderful sight to see, for there is one of the most lovely sights in the world when the glory and excellence of God are to be seen in the works of His grace in His own people. It is such a sight that it makes men first rejoice in their hearts and then rejoice with their tongues. They shall "rejoice with joy and singing," which is the double rejoicing of the heart and of the lips. Well, these must be a favored people who, wherever they go, can make others glad after this fashion! Brothers and sisters, they must be full or they could not overflow! They must be alive, or else they could not quicken the desert places. They must be in flower, blooming like the rose, or they could not make the wilderness so full of verdure. The Lord grant that we may be in that state, that we may be able to go into the wilderness. There are some of God's people that cannot trust themselves to go where they are needed because they have not divine grace enough. They are so weak that they are like the weak man standing on the river's brink who cannot leap in to pull out a drowning man for fear he should be pulled in himself. But, oh, they are blessed, indeed, who dare go into the wildernesses and into the solitary places, and carry the transforming benediction of heaven with them till the wilderness changes its dress—and the brown of the arid sand gives place to the ruddiness of the rose—because God has come there with His people!

3. *Strengthen you the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.* Are there such here tonight? No doubt there are—weak at work and weak at praying. The two things go together—weak hands and feeble knees. May they both be strengthened!

4. *Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you.* It is very singular how salvation and vengeance are

so often associated together in Scripture. It is the day of salvation, "and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn." Vengeance upon the false is the best consolation to the true! When God smites the sham, even to the heart, then does He bless those in which His truth is found. "He will come and save you."

5, 6. *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.* See what the presence of Christ does? See what the presence of Christ's people will do when He comes in them and with them! They make the wilderness rejoice. But, besides that, the dwellers that are found in the wilderness—these lame and deaf people—get the blessing. Oh, may God make us to be a desert to others of this sort!

7. *And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.* The greenest spots your eyes ever rested upon are just there where the grass is so rooted in the morass that it is always green with a delicate tinge, and the reeds and rushes spring up abundantly. O God, make poor parched hearts to become like this! You barren ones, you desolate ones—He can give you the best verdure that is possible! Your hearts shall be as green and fresh as the spots where there is grass with reeds and rushes.

8. *And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it: but it shall be for others: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.* Oh, what a blessing that is to us poor fools! We could err anywhere. To err is human and we seem to have come in for a double share of it. The more we look at our lives, the more we see the folly of our hearts. What a mercy it is that when we walk in the way of faith, in the way of Christ, fools as we are, we shall not err!

9, 10. *No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go on it, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.* Like frightened things; they kept us company part of our road, but when the Lord appeared, they took to themselves wings and fled away. We could not tell where they were gone. We were surprised to find that they had quite vanished. Oh, for the appearing of the Lord tonight to His mourning people who may be here!

HEBREWS 12:1-6.

Verse 1. *Therefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us. Or "entangle us."*

1-3. *And let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was*

set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Throne of God. For consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds. The Lord does not wish His people's hands to hang down and their knees to become weak, so in this passage, as in many others, He administers gracious remedies! Among the rest, He bids us consider His own dear Son. Shall we faint under our small afflictions when He endured so well under His heavy burdens? Come, be strengthened, my weak heart—

"His way was much rougher and darker than thine—
Did Christ, your Lord, suffer, and will you repine?"

4. *You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.* It has hardly come to blows and bruises yet—certainly not to bloody strokes! You have not yet lost blood for Christ.

5. *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not you the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of Him.* Neither think too little of it, nor too much of it—too little of it by despising it and not listening to the voice of the rod, nor too much of it by fainting when you are rebuked of Him.

6. *For whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.* Oh, what comfort there is here! Whenever we are under the scourging hand of God, how we ought to be cheered with the thought that this is a part of the heritage of the children! There are Elis who spoil their children. God is not one of them. He spares not the rod and the more He loves, often the more He corrects. A tree of common fruit may be left alone so long as there is some little fruit on it, but the very best fruit gets the sharpest pruning—and I have noticed that in those countries where the best wine is made, the vinedressers cut the shoots right close in, and in the winter you cannot tell that there is a vine there at all unless you watch very carefully! They must cut them back sharp to get sweet clusters. The Lord does thus with His beloved. It is not anger. Afflictions are not always anger. There are often tokens of great love!

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ASSURANCE SOUGHT
NO. 3546

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Say unto my soul, I am your salvation."
Psalm 35:3.

DAVID knew where to run to for shelter in his hour of difficulty. Many were there that opposed him. He had been much slandered. His course was rough. So, after spreading his case before the Lord, as Hezekiah did Rabshakeh's blasphemous letter, he turns to the Most High and he cries to Him for succor with one request, as if this would suffice to relieve him from all his troubles—"Say unto my soul, I am your salvation." He thus invokes God to give him a word from His own mouth, to take the buckler and the sword in his defense, and to be his champion. "Oh, my God, speak to my soul some assuring word and it shall be enough for me!" It is a sign of adoption, a mark of the residence of the Spirit of God within us, if in our times of trouble we fly to our God! Soul, can you find any difficulty in doing so? Is this not one of your spiritual instincts? Then, be afraid lest you are an alien, and no true-born child, for the true-born child seeks its Father's face, cries out for its Father's notice and creeps into its Father's bosom!

This short prayer I commend to everyone present—to saint and sinner, to the young and the old, to those who are assured and to those who are doubtful—"Say unto my soul, I am your salvation." It appears to me to imply certain doctrines, to express certain desires, and to suggest certain practical lessons upon which we may profitably meditate.

I. "SAY UNTO MY SOUL, I AM YOUR SALVATION."

Is it not very clear on the surface of the text that we need salvation? Salvation is the great necessity of the human race. We need to be saved from the consequences of the fall, from the results of our own transgressions, from the penalties due to our guilt, the indwelling power of sin and the domination of our corrupt nature. You all know this by the witness of conscience. Therefore I need not argue or attempt to prove it. The main question is whether we know it experimentally, for it is one thing to know the letter, but quite another thing to know the spirit—one thing to know a matter with the head—and another thing to be affected by it in a lively manner in the soul. Answer me then, have you learned experimentally that you need to be saved? Did you ever see your past

sins in their true color? Did you ever behold what a future sin opens up before you, till you did start back alarmed and terror-stricken? Have you perceived that you need just such a salvation as Christ came to bring? Truly we never seek it till we see we need it! We are usually driven into the port of grace by a storm. It is not often that we fly to Christ if there is any other door open. In the sore straits of poverty, we have to cry to Him for sustenance. When we are sick we resort to Him for health and cure.

Moreover, beloved, we continue to require a continuous salvation. It is well for the Christian to remember that in a certain sense he too, needs to be saved—not from hell, for we are saved from that—nor from the guilt of our sins, for, thank God, that is purged by the blood once shed for our remission. But we need to be saved every day from the temptations that assail our souls, from the trials that beset our path, from the corruptions of our nature. Mr. Whitefield said he hoped he was converted, but conversion was a thing to take place every day—not regeneration, mark you—that is once and for all. But conversion, "Why," he said, "I need to be converted from lying too late in bed in the morning, and converted from idleness all the day long." So do we! There is something or other we need to be converted from, some wrong thing that we need to be saved from—and until we get within the gates of pearl we shall still have need to cry for salvation from some evil that harasses us! Salvation by blood we have—salvation by the might and power of the Holy Spirit, who is to conquer and to destroy all our dire iniquity and innate depravity—we still need! Do we feel that we need it? Believer, do you feel that you need it? Beware of getting spiritually rich in yourself! Nothing is so near akin to soul-poverty as this! Beware of thinking that you are increased in goods. You are near to bankruptcy when you thus make account of your possessions. I counsel you, therefore, to still bow your knee and cry unto the great Savior, "Lord, save me, or I perish!" That prayer should never be in advance of the most advanced Christian!

Another doctrine lies on the surface of the text. His own personal salvation should be the matter of a man's highest thoughts and greatest earnestness. "Say unto my soul, I am your salvation," should be the uppermost and the uttermost cry of your heart. Ask not the Lord to make you rich—you may well reckon that this would involve too high a position and too heavy a responsibility for you to bear with equanimity. Seek not a pinnacle from which you might be in peril of falling. Did you ask to be learned in all the knowledge and languages of the ancients? You might miss the road to heaven, for oftentimes the shepherds are guided to the place where the Holy Child is, while the wise men miss their way, going to Jerusalem instead of Bethlehem! I will not crave the Lord to give me food for my vanity, or good fortune for my wishes, or anything besides for which my passions yearn, but, "Lord, give me salvation!" This is a gift I must have. It is essential to my instant and my endless welfare! Let not

Your servant be put off with any inferior blessing. If You please to keep me poor on a scanty pittance, or bid me toil hard for slender wages, so let it be. Yet deny me not a draught from the upper springs! Give me the heritage of Your chosen. Grant me Your salvation!

Salvation! Oh, salvation! This should be the chief, the insatiable longing of each man's spirit! Alas, for the ignorance and callousness that can trifle with salvation as though it were a matter of no immediate concern. Are you mad enough to imagine that whether you have an interest in Christ or not, is a question that may be solved in a few minutes in a fearful emergency upon a dying bed? Ah, it is not so! Wisdom should urge us, or peril should drive us to seek shelter from a calamity that would leave us a total wreck! Nothing lies so near to our interest and our happiness—nothing, therefore, should press so closely on our hearts as to be in Christ and be made, through Him, partakers of everlasting life! Dear hearer, this question, then, I press upon you. Be pleased to answer it. Have you been led by the Spirit of God to see to this, your first concern? Are you saved? Or are you anxious to be saved with an anxiety that will not rest or abate? Are you striving and struggling in your heart to find the Savior, without whom you are utterly lost, ruined and undone? Unless God's Holy Spirit clothes it with power, preaching reaches no farther than the ears! Oh, that He would speak to your souls! With what energy you would then be filled!

A third doctrine is couched in these words. Salvation, if it is worth the having, must come entirely from the Lord, Himself. "Say unto my soul, I am your salvation." The eyes of the suppliant here is evidently turned to God alone, and rightly so, for salvation comes not from the hills, nor from the multitude of the people, not yet from the prowess of individuals. Surely in the Lord, alone, is the salvation of Israel. Never did salvation spring from the devices of this poor heart. In vain do you seek to obtain it by any religious ceremonies, or by any bodily exercises. The source and fountain of salvation are only to be found in the eternal purpose of God! In the covenant of God it was resolved, in the wisdom of God it was planned, in the great redemption of God it was effected, and by the Spirit of God it is applied! Jonah went to a strange college to learn this masterpiece of sound theology that salvation is of the Lord. As for Israel, he could destroy himself, but he could never save himself. In his God he found help, in his God alone! Happy the man that knows this! Thrice happy he who knows it experimentally! He will turn his eyes to the Lord alone.

My hearer, are you seeking salvation by works—by anything that is meritorious or meretricious? You are spending your money for that which is not bread! Are you seeking knowledge of salvation by your own feeling? Do you consult your frames of mind, hopeful or desponding, as

one marks the rise or fall of a barometer? Do you dream of being prepared for Christ and fitting yourself to receive mercy? This is to impose on yourself and to insult the Savior! Christ needs nothing from you—He comes to bring everything to you! Even your sense of need He gives you. All your fitness is to be unfit! All your preparation for washing is to be foul! All your prerequisite for enriching is to be poor as poverty can make you! Come as you are to your God through Christ, the mediator, and in Him you shall find salvation! Do notice particularly that the words are not, "Say unto my soul, I am your Savior," but more than that—"I am your salvation." As if God were not only the giver of salvation, but absolutely salvation itself. To get a hold of Christ is to get salvation! To get God on our side is to be saved! Salvation does not merely come from God as a gift—it absolutely involves the appropriation of God, Himself, as the portion of one's own soul! How wonderful this is! Who can find God? Who can imagine, much less describe, His infinite perfections? Salvation proceeding from THE LORD, from JEHOVAH, from the GREAT I AM, communicates the wealth of His adorable attributes. "Say unto my soul, I"—our translation reads—"I Am." Ask, what are You, Lord? The answer comes, "I Am your salvation." No title, however noble, could enhance the description! He is the "I AM." His existence is original and pure. "He sits on no precarious throne, or borrows leave to be. "From everlasting to everlasting He is God the Most High. To Him there is neither past nor future, but one eternal now."

The God who can save us must be the only true and living God. So great a salvation you cannot realize without a clear apprehension of Jehovah in all His attributes! And if any speak of Christ as delegated Deity, discredit His eternal power and Godhead, or deny that He made the heavens and the earth and bears them on His shoulders, they bring to us a Christ who cannot save! We must have a Redeemer as mighty as the Creator and the Preserver. We must have the strong Son of God, immortal and eternal, to rescue our souls from going down into the pit of hell! If you are leaning on any arm but an eternal one, it will fail you! Poor silly heart, if you are depending on anything for salvation but the same God who bears the earth's huge pillars up, your dependence will fail you when most you need its help! The strongest sinew of an arm of flesh will crack—even an angel's wing will flag and the earth, itself, will grow dim with years! This globe, with all her granite rocks, shall melt with a fervent heat! The eternal God must be your refuge, and underneath you must be the everlasting arms, or else the salvation you pretended to have is worse than useless! "Say unto my soul, I, the glorious Jehovah, I am your salvation."

These doctrines may seem to some of you so commonplace that you will say, "We have heard them ten thousand times." But I refer to them now to press the question—do you know the vital force of these great

truths of God in your own hearts? Beloved, let each man, let each woman, enquire, "Do I know my need of salvation? Do I know that it must come from God? Have I got it from Him? Have I applied directly to Him for it? Have I received it at His hand in such a way that I have seen the glory of God therein, so that my salvation shall be to me for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off?" If you have had no dealings with God, your soul is in bad plight. Let us turn now to observe—

II. THE DESIRE EXPRESSED IN THE TEXT.

It was David's wish not only to have God for his salvation, but to know it for a fact, and that on the most conclusive evidence, with the best possible assurance, by a positive communication from God Himself—"Say unto my soul, I am your salvation." There are some who doubt whether full assurance of faith can be obtained. They need not discredit an attainment which multitudes possess and daily enjoy! Others suppose that if they could experience a full assurance, it would be dangerous—and yet there are thousands of the saints who, so far from finding the privilege perilous, constantly prove its sanctifying, elevating power while they walk by faith and live near to God! Some have conjectured that any man who knew himself to be saved would inevitably grow listless in character and negligent of his conduct, but it is not so. A man who knows that an estate is really his own does not become indifferent about its culture; he tills and farms it all the more sedulously. The fact is this—he who knows himself to be saved—being rid of that curse and burden of fear which often renders him incapable of serving God, passes beyond the sphere of a servile bondage! No more does he selfishly seek his own interest. His labor is free, cheered by love and lightened by song—

"Now for the love I bear His name
What was my gain, I count my loss."

Out of sheer gratitude he devotes himself to the service of the good God, by whom so great a blessing has been bestowed. If your confidence in your own salvation makes you walk without tenderness of conscience, then rely upon it—you have mistaken vain boasting for pure faith, and haughty presumption for true assurance! They who are really possessed of this grace are always very tender of the Lord's will. It compels them to walk humbly with God. A king's courtier knows that conduct is expected of him far beyond that of ordinary subjects. He would not encroach upon the freedom he enjoys in approaching his sovereign, lest by any negligence or impropriety he should forfeit the good esteem and grateful smile of his royal master. He is not afraid that the king would kill him, nor is he in terror as if his majesty were a tyrant. But he is jealous of himself, lest he should provoke the king to take away the light of his countenance from him. And to any child of God who has once enjoyed the favor of heaven's eternal King and basked in the light of that

countenance which beams with grace and glory, there is no attraction in all the world that can compare with the peace and pleasure in which he abides! True assurance of faith is a humble thing, a comforting thing, a sanctifying thing—and it should, therefore, be the desire of all faithful hearts.

This assurance of which the Psalmist speaks is a personal matter, "Say unto my soul, I am your salvation." Oh, beloved, we must have personal dealings with our God! No proxy will avail. Churches may invent what ordinances they please to gratify their notions of expediency, but there can be no sponsors in godliness—the thing is irrational, it is impossible! Every vow and every offering, to be acceptable, must have its own proper individuality. No eyes but your own can acceptably weep for your sin. No heart but your own can acceptably be broken and contrite for your transgressions. You yourself must repent! Even the Holy Spirit cannot repent for you, as some seem to imagine. He works repentance in you, but you must, yourself, repent. And as to faith, that must be the looking with the spiritual eyes to Christ, and resting on Him with your whole heart. Another cannot do it for you. National religion—if it is depended upon for personal acceptance—is the most deceitful of all delusions! What use is it that we call ourselves a Christian nation if God does not call us so; might we not be pronounced a heathen nation if we were polled? Take a survey of this great city and see how many there are who never enter a house of prayer, who spend the entire Sabbath in idleness, or seek their own pleasure in sensual pursuits! What multitudes there are who scarcely know the name of Jesus! Are these Christians? It is a pity we should lend the slightest sanction to such an empty profession. While men live as heathens, we ought to deal with them as such, and seek to convert them from darkness unto God's marvelous Light! And as to the religion which descends in families, this will not suffice, though it is perpetuated from generation to generation. Not a drop of true religion comes in the blood! You are all born of a corrupt stock and you naturally bear the image of the earthly! If, however, you are born of God, it is not of flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God! "You must be born-again" is as true of the child of a long generation of godly ancestors as it is of the young Hottentot in the kraal who never heard the Savior's name. "You must be born-again" is of universal application! There must be a personal work of the Spirit of God in each individual soul, and the assurance we ought to pant after is our own personal assurance, our own individual interest in the salvation of Jesus Christ!

Have you thought of this, dear hearer, or, thinking of it, have you trifled with it? Let me urge you, since you will have to die alone. Since through the iron gates you must pass as solemnly as others. Since in the awful balances you must be weighed alone and before the last tribunal

you must come as a separate spirit, I beseech you seek Christ, seek union with Him, that so you may have a blessed companion in your death and in your everlasting destiny! These vast congregations are made up of units! Oh, that I knew how to reach your conscience one by one! O man, awake to righteousness! Your brother's conversion, your sister's salvation, your mother's piety, your father's grace—how will these avail you? Thank God if you have such relatives, for therein God has been so kind to you. But how will they comfort you if you are cast out? What drops of water can they administer to your burning tongue if you are cast away into the place of torment? Oh, I beseech you, be eager, be earnest, be anxious with a sacred covetousness to make your own calling and election sure! It is a personal assurance that we must seek after—so shall our souls be joyful in the Lord—and in His salvation we shall exceedingly rejoice.

But, remember, lest any should be mistaken, that the assurance David sought was purely spiritual. When he says, "Say," it is, "Say unto my soul." We do not expect that God will make fresh revelations to us. We are far from believing that voices heard or visions seen, or supposed to be seen, or dreams, can give any satisfactory evidence of the divine love to any man. I am ashamed of such ministers as would encourage their hearers in the conviction that their fancies are to be taken as assurances from God! Why, were you to dream tonight that you were in hell; thank God it would not send you there! Or were you to dream that you were in heaven, it would not carry you there. If you think that you see angels, or that you hear voices—well, there is much pretense in your tales, but little profit you will ever derive from them. Think as you like about your own experiences, but attempt to build any inference upon them and your construction will prove a baseless fabric. Such things furnish no grounds of dependence. Whether there may ever be supernatural manifestations of this kind to some men, or whether they can have a good effect upon their minds, are questions which I will not discuss, but that these visionary things can afford any evidence of the favor of God, I utterly deny! The voice which alone can confirm you is the voice of God to your soul, to your mind, to your spirit—not to your ears, not to your eyes! Salvation is a spiritual thing. It belongs not to external sounds, nor to external impressions upon the eyes. There is an eye inside the eye, an ear far quicker than this organ of sense. It is with that inner eye that you must see God, and with that inner ear that you must hear the voice of God saying unto your soul, "I am your salvation." Be sure that you cultivate always a spiritual religion. "God is a Spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him." The assurance that comes from God is addressed to the heart, to the mind, to the conscience, to the soul—it is

purely spiritual. Seek not, therefore, after visions, fancies, miracles, signs and wonders, but believe when God speaks to your heart, according to all the statutes and testimonies, the precepts and promises which are contained in the sure word of revelation.

And now mark this well, the assurance craved is divine. "Say unto my soul, I am your salvation." Do you ask in what manner does God, Himself, tell a man that He is his salvation? He does it simply enough through His Word. If I read in God's Word, I shall not find my name enrolled there among the saved—if I did, I would be suspicious that perhaps I was not the person intended. I should be rather dubious as to the spelling of the name, or I might be apprehensive that there was another individual of that same name. But when I find myself properly and fully described, then I cannot doubt my own identity. For instance, it is written, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Very well, I have believed—I know I have—I know I trust Christ with all my heart. I have also, in obedience to His Word, been baptized. Therefore, if the testimony of God's Word is true—plain and designed to make mistakes impossible—that, "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved," the conclusion is reached, the problem is solved, the evidence is transparent! When you find a description answering to yourself, you have only to accept the distinct statement of God's Word. And, mark you, God's Word in that old book—this blessed Bible—is as good as if He rent the heavens and spoke right out from the excellent glory! It is just as sure and as steadfast to the souls who believe it to be His Word as if He did speak with a trumpet, or as if He sent a message through an angel! "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life." You have but to make sure that you believe on the Son, and you have God's assurance that you have everlasting life! But, over and above the testimony or Word, which is as clear as a mathematical demonstration—though Euclid is not more reliable than Moses and the prophets—there comes a vital force to God's people with the Word, compelling them to perceive the meaning and to accept it. This mysterious energy comes from the Holy Spirit, Himself! Of this we cannot speak to those who have not proved it, for we only know it and understand it by its effect—quickening us, enlightening our understanding, speaking to us—and saying of God to our soul that He is our salvation!

Moreover, it is an immediate assurance. "Say unto my soul, I am your salvation." That is a pressing cry for prompt succor. It meant in David's case that present moment. We, reading it, take it for this very hour. Beware of postponing the expectation of assurance until when you are about to die! You have no more reason to expect it, then, than to expect it now! If you are content to live in doubt and slur over the disquietude of your soul in the vigor of your days, you will probably be haunted with gloomy misgivings when the time of your departure arrives. It is your

duty and your privilege as a believer not to stand wavering over God's promise, but, knowing it is truthful, to accept it with un-staggering faith! I can understand a man doubting whether he is truly converted or not, but I cannot countenance his apathy in resting quiet till he has solved the riddle. You may say—

"'Tis a point I long to know."

But, oh, beloved, how can you trifle, how can you give sleep to your eyes till you have known it? Not know whether you are in Christ or not? Perhaps unreconciled, perhaps already condemned, perhaps upon the brink of hell, perhaps with nothing more to keep you out of Tophet than the breath that is in your nostrils, or the circulating drop of blood which any one of ten thousand haps or mishaps may stop, and then your career is closed—your life story ended! What? Sit on such a volcano, take it easy on the brink of such a precipice and content yourself with merely saying, "I am but a doubting one"? I entreat you, I beseech you, shake off this sluggishness! Ask the Lord to say unto your soul tonight, "I am your salvation." He is able and He is willing! You know that, beloved. He will do it for you when you eagerly seek it from Him. How often does He suddenly disperse the doubts that overshadow us like clouds? An autumnal day like yesterday—what a strange, fitful atmosphere we breathed! How fiercely the wind blew—how heavily the rain fell! And then, how quickly afterwards the soft sunshine made the earth look cheerful and the heart of man feel glad! Perhaps you may be dull and heavy, or the raindrops of your weeping and the winds of your fears howling about you. All of a sudden the rain may stop, the clouds disperse, the clear shining come about you. God, by His dear Son, through His Spirit, may shine unto your soul at once. You may come in very heavily burdened, and go out very light-hearted! You may be exceedingly depressed and, all of a sudden, your soul may be like the chariots of Amminadab. Your attire may be changed from mourning to dancing with unspeakable joy and full of glory! You may rejoice in tribulation if the light gleams from His chambers. Pray, then! Let your soul now breathe out the prayer, "Oh, my God, if indeed I have relied upon Your dear Son to be all-in-all to me, whisper to my heart the full assurance of my everlasting safety and my present acceptance in the beloved."

The Lord answer such a petition to every troubled spirit. And now—

III. WHAT LESSON DOES THE TEXT TEACH?

Surely it teaches us this—if we need blessings from God, let us pray for them. David needed assurance, he needed comfort and he prayed for both one and the other. The quickest road to spiritual wealth is prayer! Every prayer is like a ship sent to the Tarshish of spiritual riches to bring us back treasures better than gold or silver, or precious stones. Let us

not be lax in the commerce, lest our wealth decline. Every cry to God from the true heart brings a result. You see the men in the belfry sometimes down below with the ropes. They pull them and if you have no ears, that is all you know about it. But the bells are ringing up there—they are talking and discoursing sweet music up aloft in the tower. And our prayers do, as it were, ring the bells of heaven! They are sweet music in God's ears and as surely as God hears, He answers, for, indeed, in Scripture, to hear and to answer are precisely the same things! Praying breath is not spent in vain. They who truly cry shall find that passage true, "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them, and delivers them out of all their troubles." If a man may have anything for the asking, and he will not ask, he deserves to go without! Why, if you may have assurance of every precious thing merely for the asking—and assuredly you may—if you will not knock and intercede at mercy's door, if you are such a fool, who is to be blamed but yourself? Be much in prayer, beloved. What I say to you I say especially to myself. Yet I would press this home upon believers with the more earnestness because these times are so full of labor and anxiety that they rob Christians of the opportunity for much prayer. Oftentimes, too, we get so fatigued and weary that we have not the inclination to pray as we should. I like to think of Welsh, who used to cast a Scotch plaid over the bed where he rested at night, and would always rise in the night and cast this plaid about him, and pray for one or two hours. And he says in his biography, "I cannot understand how a man can sleep through the night without prayer." That is a point to which few of us have ever thought of coming! David Brainerd, too, speaks of rising one morning by four of the clock, and the sun had not risen at six, and he says that in those two hours of prayer he had so wrestled with God that he was wet with perspiration! Such was the earnestness of his spirit as he pleaded before the Lord. I am afraid we do not practice much of this sacred importunity. We are sad hands at this devout exercise, whereby saints became famous in the days gone by. God restore to us the spirit of prayer, and all other blessings will come as the result.

Another lesson is this. Let everyone of us be satisfied we get a word from God. This was all David needed. Would God only say, though not do anything? He did not ask Him to interfere practically, or put out His hand to help, but only to say. If you go into the city, you may find plenty of merchants who, by simply writing their names, can enable you to get from the bank shovelfuls of gold. Think you not, then, that God's promises always stand to us as good as their fulfillment? Will you blow upon His credit? Will you refuse to take Him at His word? I think I heard a brother ask, the other day, I know I did—at family prayer—that we might trust God where we could not see Him. I have heard that prayer many times before. I have prayed it myself, I am sorry to say. But is it not rather a wicked prayer, if you scan it narrowly? Should anyone say at

our Monday night prayer meeting, "Grant, O Lord, that we may be able to trust our minister when we cannot see him"? I think I would want to know a little about what that brother thought of me! I am sure if I prayed like that for any of you, I would be likely to see you in the vestry before long to learn my cause for suspecting your character! How dare we, then, pray such a thing about our God?

Yet I suppose this never struck us in that light. It seemed very proper. That is just because we have not learned yet to believe in God. If the Son of Man were to come into this world, would He find pure faith among His disciples? Talk of Diogenes with his lantern looking for an honest man! Were God to look with the sun, He could hardly discover a believing man. Mr. Muller, of Bristol, believes in God for the support of his benevolent institution—and God supplies him with all his needs. But whenever you speak about him you say, "What a wonderful thing!" Has it come to this, that in the Christian church it is accounted a marvel for Christians to believe in the promises of God, and something like a miracle for God to fulfill them? Does not this wonderment indicate more clearly than anything else how fallen we are from the level of faith at which we ought constantly to live? If the Lord wants to surprise His people, He has only at once to give an answer to their prayers! No sooner had they obtained their answer than they would say, "Who would have thought it!" Is it really surprising that God should keep His own promise? Oh, what unbelief! Oh, what wretched unbelief on our part! We ask and we receive not because we do not believe in God! We waver—we must not expect to receive anything at His hand except what He chooses to give as a gratuity, an act of sovereign mercy, not a covenanted blessing. We do not get what we might have as the reward of faith because we have not got the faith that He honors!

I like that story of a godly old woman, who, when told of God's answering prayer, supplemented with a reflection, "Is not that wonderful?" She replied, "No, it is just like Him. Of course, He answers prayer! Of course, He keeps His promise!" We ought to consider it a right, natural, and blessed thing that believing prayer should be answered, and that faith should have its reward. Christian, rest content with a Word from God and be satisfied therewith. And as for those of us who have been living in the enjoyment of the full assurance of our own salvation (and, God be praised, there are some of us who do not often have doubts and fears), how thankful we should be! God likes to give to those who are grateful. Men like to put their jewels into a good setting and a grateful heart is a fit setting for so gracious a mercy! God loves to pour the river of His bounty along the channel of grace in the soul. Be thankful, and you will keep your assurance—perhaps, keep it untouched till you die. It is a rare thing, I suppose, though I have known one or two holy men of

God who have told me that they did not remember, for the space of 30 years, having been left to question their interest in Christ—they had enjoyed unbroken communion with Him. Why, then, should they doubt it? May we even come to that assurance, if so it pleases the Master!

In what way, however, can we better show our gratitude than by comforting and assisting such as have not this blessing?—

"Thousands in the fold of Jesus
This attainment never could boast.
To His Name eternal praises,
None of these shall ever be lost—
Deeply graven
On His hands, their names remain."

Have you faith? You are saved, even if your faith should not develop into assurance. As the Puritan well said, "Faith is necessary to the being of a Christian. Assurance is necessary to his well-being." Yet, mark you, it is a great necessity. Let us try to comfort, then, such as are distracted, distressed and bowed down. When the Lord sees that we are using our strength and our joy for the help of the rest of the family for whom He cares, He will give us yet more abundantly, and make us to be stewards of the manifold grace of God in the midst of the church! Thus shall we glorify His name while we cultivate happiness in our own bosoms.

I would that all whom I now address could have this assurance. Some of you, alas, have not faith. "All men have not faith," said the apostle. Too true is this testimony! Soul, would you have faith? Consider what it is. You have to believe in God made flesh. Think of the Son of God bleeding on the cross. It is at the foot of the cross that faith is brought to light. If you would get faith, Christ must give it to you. Look to Him for the power to believe as well as for the grace to receive all the benefits that follow. May He give it to you now! To you, oh, seeker, He will give it. While you are seeking salvation, you shall find it near you. He will say to your soul, "I, even I, am your salvation." May it be so with many here. Amen.

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SIMPLE FACT AND SIMPLE FAITH
NO. 3547

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 18, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses."
Acts 13:38, 39. (NKJV)

APOSTOLIC preaching was widely different from the common sermonizing of this age. Doubtless, when the apostles addressed assemblies of believers, they took distinct subjects and kept to them, opening up and expounding the particular truths of God they had in view. But when speaking to the outside world, and making their appeals to unbelievers, they do not usually appear to have selected any one doctrine as their topic. The manner in which they preached did not so much consist in inculcating a specific doctrine and showing the inferences that would naturally arise from it, as it did in declaring certain facts of which they had been actual witnesses themselves, and had been chosen to bear witness to others. Turn to Peter's sermon at Pentecost, or the same apostle's sermon to Cornelius, or to the record of Paul's preaching at Perga or at Antioch. You will find these discourses were an argument from the Scriptures that as God had of old promised to send a Savior, so Jesus Christ had come into the world, had lived a holy life, had been put to death, being falsely accused, had been laid in the grave, after three days had risen again and that afterwards He had ascended, according to the testimony of the prophets. Of Him they spoke, that whoever believed in this man, who was very God, should certainly be saved by Him. This was the declaration which they made. I do not find them, as a rule, expounding the doctrine of election in promiscuous assemblies of unbelievers, or arguing the subtle questions of free agency and predestination, or striving about words to no profit, to the subverting of the hearers. Their resolute purpose was to declare those things that pertain directly to the salvation of the soul, this being the all-important matter which they would have all men to heed. Thus they charged everyone who heard them, at the peril of his soul, to accept the revelation and embrace the faith of the gospel!

Listen to the apostle Paul in that famous 15th chapter in the first epistle to the Corinthians which is usually read at funerals. He says there—"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I

delivered unto you." Now you expect him to begin a long list of doctrines, but instead of that, he says, "How that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that on the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures." This it is that he emphatically describes as the gospel! To assert these facts, to exhort men to believe them and to put their trust in the man who thus lived, and died, and rose again, was the preaching of the gospel which of old shook the hoary systems of superstition, fastened though they seemed to be upon their thrones most securely! This preaching it is which enlightened the darkness of heathendom and made, in those first ages of Christianity, the whole world to be astonished with the light and the glory of Christ!

Let us, then, strive to imitate the apostles, and endeavor to preach a simple gospel sermon, if not with their ability, or with their inspiration, yet with their earnestness and with the same desire as burned within their bosoms—that men may be saved thereby! We shall accordingly have to deal, first, with the history of Jesus, whom we hold forth as a Savior; secondly, with the claims of Jesus, and thirdly, with the blessings which Jesus brings. In respect to—

I. THE HISTORY OF JESUS, if you will kindly refer to your Bibles, you will find that the apostle here commenced his sermon by noticing that many prophets had gone before to speak concerning the coming of Jesus. In the 23rd verse he especially mentions the promise made to David, that of his seed God would raise up a prince and a Savior to the house of Israel. Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, that full often in the world's history, sages have appeared claiming a divine inspiration, whose announcements fostered the hope of a coming man who should redeem the world from thralldom, and become the Savior of our race. All the seers whose eyes were anointed of God to look into the future, heralded the advent of a great prophet, a prince and a Savior, whose claims to homage it would be alike perilous and preposterous to reject! These prophets appeared at divers times and various places, and without any collusion they have, one and all, proclaimed the same thing! The most of them sealed their witness with their blood. "Which of the prophets did not your fathers slay?" Yet in the teeth of extreme suffering, or of violent death, they seem to have been compelled by a divine furor within them to proclaim, even to the last, that one was coming who would overturn the old reign of terror and the old order of outward ceremonies, to introduce a spiritual kingdom, and to redeem the world from its sins and sorrows!

In the favored land of Judea, that bright star of hope beamed most brightly through the dark night of long years and dreary watches. At length there appeared a remarkable individual who had been foreshown by some of these prophets. They had signified that before the promised man, the Messiah, arrived, there would be a harbinger—one like unto Elijah. Elijah would come first. Now the Tishbite, whose career had been so memorable in Israel, was a man of much sanctity, but little polish. His

raiment was rough, his diet frugal, his bearing austere and his address earnest or even vehement. He seemed to be fire embodied, if such a thing could be—so strong was his passion and so dauntless his courage! He laid the axe at the root of every sin, nor did he quail before any man's face, however high his station or lofty his pretensions. Let him but detect a wrong, he denounced it with all his might! Eighteen centuries have transpired since there appeared in the wilderness, near the river Jordan, a man whose raiment was of camel's hair and whose meat was locusts and wild honey. John the Baptist, a child of the desert, ascetic in his habits, with a ministry all his own, rebuked the vices of the age with a defiant air and summoned men to repentance in trumpet tones till the whole of Judea was startled with the phenomenon—and the multitudes poured forth from town and village to hear his preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The one culminating point of his exhortations was this, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Look for Him, gaze at Him, resort to Him. He takes away the sin of the world. John's mission it was to make straight in the wilderness a highway for the coming of the Lord, whose shoe laces he declared himself not worthy to unloose!

At length the Savior came—the Savior long promised. From the privacy of His home at Nazareth, where He had been brought up, He came to the river of Jordan. Of His miraculous birth and His infancy I forbear to speak. He appeared in the wilderness where John ministered by the fords of Jordan, and demanded baptism—and as He came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, and a voice was heard by many witnesses, "This is My beloved Son. Hear you Him." This man, this wonderful individual who had now become openly manifest, lived for three years a public life of extraordinary benevolence in which there was a combination of deep humility and divine power—the most memorable life on record! Imagination has never dreamed its equal! Those who have thought much on virtue have been utterly unable to construct the story of a life out of their invention that could at all resemble it, or compare with it for purity or symmetry—a life in which there was not so much any one prominent virtue, as all the virtues divinely blended! As gentle as a lamb, as bold as a lion, stern against hypocrisy, always tender towards the sinner, especially when the teardrop of repentance glistened in the eyes. A man who tore to pieces all the old formalities, denounced the learning of the Rabbis, and came with nothing but His own force of character and the witness of God, to speak truths of God which, like light, are self-evident truths which stand the test of time and weather the changes of circumstance—truths which will endure unimpaired when this old world has passed away—truths which have set free human minds from the shackles of superstition! Truths which have gladdened the daughters of despair! Truths which have always been most acceptable to the poor and needy! Truths which have elevated humanity

from the very hour in which they were first proclaimed! Truths which have drawn disciples through the ages and have filled heaven with His admirers who fall down before the glorious Son of God and worship Him! Truths of God, I say, which will yet make this world bright in the light of heaven!

Now that man lived a perfectly blameless life—so blameless that when His enemies sought His death, they could not find anything to lay to His charge and, therefore, by false witnesses they accused and condemned Him. The great point in His history to which we always call your most devout attention, and to which the apostles always bore the most vehement testimony, was this—that He was crucified. It would be policy, some suppose, to conceal this. This great teacher, this promised one, this divine man—for He was man, yet God, perfect God and perfect man—actually died a felon's death! He was taken by wicked hands, scourged, mocked, made to carry His cross, and then on Calvary was fastened to the tree and there He died. But we must tell you the interpretation which lends a charm to the information. He died there as a substitute for man. He had no guilt of His own, but He was appointed by God to bear all the sins of all His people—of all men, in fact, who will believe on Him! He was punished that they might not be punished. He bore the penalty for all believers, that they might be released from the dread punishment that justice demanded of them. He did, in fact, go up to that tree with the load of all the guilt of all who had believed and all who should believe piled upon His shoulders! And owing to the excellence of His nature, being God, His sufferings made atonement for all the guilt of all that vast multitude! It was as much a vindication of God's justice as if all those ten thousand times ten thousand had been cast into hell forever. Here was the fact. The punishment due to all those souls was put into one bitter cup and Jesus, on the cross, put that cup to His lips and—

"At one tremendous draught of love
He drank damnation dry"

—drank to the very dregs all the wrath which God had towards His offending, sinful, guilty and condemned people! And they were, therefore, clear. This is the great doctrine of the cross. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." When taken down from the cross, He was laid in a tomb. There His sacred body remained for three days but on the morning of the third day, by His own eternal power and Godhead, He rose again from the grave, since He could not be held by the bands of death. And now He lives—henceforth He ever lives! At this moment, the man who was born of the Virgin at Bethlehem, who was put to death in weakness by Pontius Pilate, but was raised in power having ascended on high after His resurrection, sits at the right hand of the Father, whereas man, though God, He incessantly pleads with God for us, and by His eternal merit saves as many as put their trust in Him. These are historical facts which

the gospel holds forth to be surely believed. Some think them old wives' fables. Let them think so—they miss the benefit which simple faith would certainly confer. On their own heads be the blame, for on their own souls will come the smart! Many of us can vouch, with our hands on our breasts that we have proved the Truth of all that is written in the book. These precious Truths of God have exerted a potent spell over our own lives. Our believing them has enabled us to overcome our passions and it has been the leverage which has lifted us up out of our depravity. These verities are our unfailing solace while as creatures we are subject to vanity—and in the hour of death they shall be our succor and support as tens of thousands before us have found them to be! With the history of Jesus thus clearly in our view, let us now ask—

II. WHAT ARE THE CLAIMS OF JESUS?

He claims, as the ever-living one, that we should accept Him as being what He professes to be, if we would derive any benefit from Him. He professes to be the Messiah, anointed and commissioned of God. Do you believe that? Reading the prophecies concerning Him, can you see how exactly He fits them as the key fits the wards of the lock? If you see that, I am glad. Moreover, He demands that you should receive Him as God. This is His profession, that He is God over all, blessed forever, God incarnate. He trod the waves of the Lake of Gennesaret. He raised the dead. He healed the sick. He multiplied the loaves and fishes. He stayed the winds. He lulled the storm. He has done all things that only God can do! He was almighty, even here below as a man. Accept Him, then, as very God. If you do so intelligently, sincerely, I am glad. And now will you accept Him as your Priest, and none upon earth beside? To have Him, you must renounce all else, for know of a surety that our High Priest will not stand side by side with any other priest! Resort to Him only for atonement, for intercession, for benediction. He offered Himself as a sacrifice, gave Himself up for the sins of His people. Believe in Him as your Priest, and in His sufferings and death as your sacrifice. Away, you priests of Rome! Be gone, you priests of every other order! Away with every vain pretender to the priesthood! To Him who has entered into the holy place not made with hands pertains the exclusive privilege of the priesthood! Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only priest over the house of God. His people become priests through Him—every one of them. Yes, kings and priests after the Melchizedek type, but we acknowledge no priestcraft now. The religion of Jesus disavows and denounces all prelatic pretenses. It proclaims forever the putting down of the hierarchy of men, with all their empty conceits and their inflated arrogance, their frocks and their robes, their lawn sleeves and their fine millinery, their vain boasting and their sanctimonious finger play—with all the preternatural influence that is supposed to emanate from a bishop's hands! Jesus is the only Priest!

Will you take Him to be such? Then I rejoice that you are thus enlightened! Yet know that He claims to be your King. You must do what He bids you. You must be His subject, observe His statutes and keep His commandments. Are you His subject? He will be your friend. You shall even be His brother or sister, and you shall live near to Him as one dear to Him, in affectionate communion with Him. Though He is in heaven, yet will He reveal Himself to you on earth. Now, are you willing to accept Him as such—your prophet, so that you shall believe what He teaches you? Your Priest, so that you shall confide in His mediation. Your King, so that you shall serve Him. And oh, in what accents of tenderness does Jesus claim that we should trust Him! This is a blessed message to some of you who may not have heard it before. If you will but trust this glorious man, this blessed God, you shall this moment be saved! To trust Him is what He demands. He said, "I am God; rely upon Me implicitly. I am perfect Man. I died for My enemies out of love to them. I have all power given to Me in heaven and in earth, and with My blood sprinkled on My Father's throne, I reign supreme in the realm of mercy. Only trust Me, and I will save you—save you from the guilt of the past, save you from the power of passion in your soul, save you from the dominion of sin—and in the future I will change you. I will make you a new man. I will give you a new heart and a right spirit. All of My grace shall be yours, if you will but trust Me."

Even the power to trust Jesus—He gives—for it is all of His grace from first to last! But whoever trusts Him shall be saved. My Master has a right to this, and nothing short of this will He take, for these are His own words, "Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; He that believes not shall be damned." He does not admit of any medium! You must either believe or not believe—and if you believe not, His wrath falls upon you." He that believes not has made God a liar because he has not believed on His Son, Jesus Christ." "He that believes on Him is not condemned, but he that believes not is condemned already." "He that believes on Him shall never perish; he shall never come into condemnation, for he has passed from death unto life." I do hope I am making this plain. It is my fervent desire and my heart's prayer that you may all know the gospel if you never knew it before. If you have known it before, I would that you might discern it more clearly. Should you reject it, the fault shall not be mine. God is my witness—I have eschewed every idea of trying to be eloquent or oratorical in my preaching! I care nothing whatever about the gaudy show of speechmaking. I only want to tell you these Truths of God in unvarnished speech. It may be that they awaken prejudice and you who listen to them, perhaps, are saying they are dull and trite. Such trite truisms, however, contain the very pith and marrow of the gospel whereby you can be guided to heaven! Dull as you may account them, if rejected, dark and dreary, indeed, will be the ruin of

your souls. I charge you, therefore, before Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead, that you remember these few simple things, seeing they involve your hope or your despair, your salvation or your condemnation for eternity! Door of heaven, there is none but this! Gate of Paradise, there is none beside it! "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation." He has devised for us a way of redemption. Trusting in Him, we shall be saved! Rejecting Him, we are lost!

Jesus claims of you that you do not trust in yourselves. That you do not think that you are good enough. That you should not imagine that you ever can be good enough of yourselves. That you rely not in any ceremonies. That you will not depend upon any man. That you do not encourage a hope of heaven by any reasoning or resolution of your own, but that you just put your sole trust in Him! Though it seems too good to be true, yet true it is, that if you are the worst of sinners, defiled with vilest lusts and degraded with heaviest crimes—though your sins are of scarlet dye, and their remembrance haunts you like ghostly specters—yet if you will trust in Jesus, whom God has set forth for a propitiation, you shall have perfect forgiveness from God, the eternal Father, and power shall be given you to overcome those very trespasses to which you were prone, that you fall not into them again! Oh, glorious Gospel of the ever-blessed God! Would that men had hearts to receive and welcome its gracious provisions!

III. THE BLESSINGS WHICH JESUS CHRIST BRINGS TO ALL WHO TRUST HIM.

This may well exceed our power to enumerate them. "By this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins." Not lenience, but pardon—the forgiveness of all sins! From your childhood to your old age! The sins of fourscore years, if you have lived so long! Your public misdemeanors, your private trespasses, your overt acts, your secret thoughts, your uttered words, your smothered wishes—the whole catalog all unrolled of your transgressions and obliquities shall be at once blotted out from the book of God's remembrance, if you trust in Jesus Christ! They shall not be laid to your charge. However black the list, or long the inventory, do but trust in this man and they shall be all forgiven you! He that confesses his sin and comes to Jesus shall find mercy, shall find mercy now! Is there one here who feels his guilt? What grateful news this must be to his aching heart! I wish that you all knew how guilty you have been, and how deeply stained you are. A real broken-hearted sinner is a gem wherever you meet with him. There is no music in the world like the notes of pardon to the conscience-stricken self-convicted sinner! Jesus gives pardon for all sin. To those that believe in Him, He gives immediate pardon—not pardon in prospective, not pardon to be revealed when you

come to die, but pardon now—pardon reaching sins yet to come, pardon comprehending the whole of your sinful life, given into your hands to be read by the eye of your faith and to be as distinctly known as though it were delivered to you on parchment written by an angel's hand, sealed with the Savior's blood! Christ Jesus will give a pardon which shall never be revoked! A pardon that cannot hereafter be canceled. God never plays fast and loose with men. Whom He once pardons, He never condemns. If He pronounce a man forgiven, forgiven he is and forgiven he shall be when the world is on a blaze! What unspeakable joy shall fill the soul of him who hails this hallowed hour a pardon from the skies! His burden gone! His manacles struck off! His fetters loosed! The fever cured! His health restored! How he will leap with delight! Dance with pleasure and sing with holy mirth! Believe in the slain but ever-living Son of God, poor sinner, and this heavenly rapture shall be yours to prove!

This is a pardon of pure good will that retains no dregs of animosity. A man forgives his child and foregoes the rod, but he may say, "I shall not forget your conduct, for in the future I cannot trust you." But when God forgives, He does not reproach. He takes the prodigal to His bosom. He does not seat him at the end of the table to remind him of his waywardness, but He kills the fatted calf for him to convince him of his welcome! In some of us who were the very chief of sinners, He puts such confidence that He gives a commission to preach the gospel to others by which we are saved ourselves—and sends us about the business which lies nearest to His heart—and most concerns His own glory. Oh, yes, it is a blessed pardon which sweeps the whole extent of human ruin and redeems us, restores us and recoups us for the losses we sustained by sinning! And not only so, but by Him, by Jesus, all who believe are justified as well as forgiven—justified from all things which we could not be justified by the law of Moses. Here we have a comparison, or rather a contrast. What does this mean? When men came to the altar, according to the law of Moses, they brought a bullock which they offered for their sin. This done, with what feelings would they depart from the altar? Conscious of guilt the man came—convinced that he had complied with a statute, he went away. But his conscience was not cleansed! The stain was not removed. Though the blood of the beast quieted some of his scruples and eased some of his terrors, it did not, could not, give him perfect peace! He must have known that the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a heifer could not take away sin, neither could it atone for its guilt or eradicate its venom.

By so much is the gospel of Christ better than the law of Moses. If you will come and trust Christ, you shall feel that you are no longer guilty! Up till now you have lived in guilt and sin. Henceforth the whole force of sin upon the conscience shall be gone! You shall have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord! You shall feel that for the past it is so obliterated that you have it no longer on your conscience. You can sing—

"Thro' Jesus' blood, I'm clean."

What a mercy this is—this perfect cleansing of the conscience from guilt! He that come to the altar under Moses' law did not always feel that he could come to God. The blood was sprinkled and there was the way of access—but only the High Priest went within the veil once in the year. The law of Moses could not so justify a man as to let him have access to the Mercy Seat, but Jesus Christ so justifies His people that they come right up to God and speak to Him as a child to a father! They tell Him all their needs and weaknesses, all their gratitude and joy. Into His very ears they pour out their loving hearts. How sweet the access of the creature man, to his covenant God, when once he knows Christ! I do avow that some of us have as truly talked with God as ever we spoke to men—and have been as sure that we were in the presence of our heavenly Father, and as conscious of that wonderful overshadowing as ever we have been conscious that we have been in fellowship with any man or woman born! Oh, if you did but know it, God would not seem far off from you when you once trusted Christ! You would not think of Him as the God of thunder driving His rattling car over the sky with a flashing spear of lightning, but you would sing of Him—

"The God that rules on high,
And thunders when He pleases,
That rides upon the stormy sky
And manages the seas.
This awful God is ours,
Our Father and our Love—
He will send down His heavenly powers
To carry us above."

You would see Him everywhere about you with the eyes of your spirit and rejoice in Him!

They who came by the law of Moses to the altar were not justified from apprehensions of the future—but each worshipper, as he went home after all the killing of lambs, and rams, and bullocks—was afraid to die. But he that trusts in Jesus feels that, as far as the future is concerned, he is perfectly secure. "Now," he says, "God has promised to save those who trust Christ. I trust Christ—God must save me. He is bound by His justice to do so." On the lion of justice rides the fair maid of faith, and she has no fear! While God is just, no disciple of Jesus can be destroyed! What if Justice charges me with being a sinner? I reply, "'Tis true I am, and yet I am not amenable to judgment, for all my sins are taken from me. They were laid on my blessed Surety! I have not one left. Christ has been punished for my sins—shall two be punished for one offense? Shall my substitute die, and I die, too? Shall Christ be condemned and I be condemned, too, for the one and same offense? God is not so unjust as to punish first the substitute, and then the man for whom the substitute stood."

Oh, this is something to roll back on! This is a pillow for an aching head! This is a safe boat to sail in amidst the storms of life and across the seas of death. Jesus Christ in my place, outside the gate of the city, poured out His heart's blood as God's great victim! I trust in Him. Trusting in Him, I cannot perish! He has sworn and will not change His mind! By two immutable things wherein it is impossible for God to lie, He has given strong consolation to them who flee for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel! Oh, beloved, surely we can live on this promise, and on this promise die!

Would to God that you all trusted Him! May full many of you trust Him now for the first time. The preaching of this gospel is trustworthy because the promise is trustworthy. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. Do you believe? Say, "Yes," or, "No," for there are signs following in either case. Say "Yes," and say it now! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
ACTS 13:14-42.

Verses 14, 15. *But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, and sat down. And after reading of the law and the prophets.* From which there were always two appointed lessons, one from the writings of Moses, and another from one of the prophets. And on this day it was probably the first chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, or the first chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah—"the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them."

15. *The rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, You men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.* They were seen to be Jews who were traveling, and they were invited by the minister who conducted the service, to stand up and say anything they had to say. "Then Paul stood up and, beckoning with his hand, said—

16. *Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and you that fear God, give audience.* You, who, though Gentiles, have come to worship Jehovah, God of Israel—"men of Israel."

17, 18. *The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought He them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness.* You that are familiar with your Bibles will be struck with the great likeness of this sermon by Paul to that of Stephen. It seems to run on the same lines. Stephen gave the history of Israel to the Israelites. Paul does the same. Ah, we can never tell how great was the influence of that dying Stephen upon this living Paul! Paul is the continuation of Stephen. His blood was not lost in that day when they stoned him to death. From his ashes sprang this mighty preacher of the Word of God!

19-22. *And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He divided their land to them by lot. And after that He gave unto them judges for about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterwards they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul, the Son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up unto them, David, to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, which shall fulfill all My will.* All this would be very pleasing to the Jews. They were never weary of hearing the ancient history of themselves as a chosen people. Paul ingratiates himself with them. The gospel that he had to preach was bitter to them, but he gilds the pill! And we must do what we can lawfully and properly do to win the attention of men and their kindly feeling to us, although we must faithfully preach the gospel. Now he got as far as David into history. Now we will step to Christ.

23-25. *Of this man's seed has God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior—Jesus—after John had first preached before His coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think you that I am? I am not He. But, behold, there comes One after me, whose shoes of His feet I am not worthy to loosen.* He brings in the testimony of John, who was universally respected among them. They regarded him as the last of the prophets, and so Paul still tries to win their kind feelings.

26, 27. *Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whoever among you fears God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him.* Not knowing it, they have fulfilled the prophecies of old in condemning Jesus, the Son of David!

28, 29. *And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulcher.* You see he has given the story of Christ—His life, His death, His burial, His Resurrection.

30, 31. *And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people.* He does not expect them to believe without proofs, but he adduces the proof of the resurrection in the many witnesses who saw Him after He had risen.

32-37. *And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God has fulfilled the same unto us, their children, in that He has raised up Jesus again: as it is also written in the Second Psalm, You are My Son, this day have I begotten You. And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give You the sure mercies of David.*

Therefore He also says in another Psalm, You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption. But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. So that David was not speaking of himself, but he was speaking of another and higher David, his greater son, the Son of God, begotten of the Father!

38. *Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins*— Now they have it. Now he brings it out very clearly, indeed! Glad tidings are now ringing in their ears!

39. *And by Him all who believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.* The sins which the law of Moses did not propose to touch, yes—all sins which the law of Moses could only typically remove—all these sins are now really taken away by this glorious son!

40, 41. *Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets: Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though one were to declare it unto you.* You cannot imagine anything more appropriate to the occasion, more properly set forth, more bold, more clear—but these men were not prepared to receive it.

42. *And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.* They are earnest hearers who want to hear the same sermon again! But perhaps they did not expect to hear the same words, but to get the same sense and have it explained more fully that they might the better grasp it. Oh, what a mercy it is when the congregation is going away, if there are some that stay behind, anxious to learn more!

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THE SAINT'S TRIALS AND THE DIVINE DELIVERANCES
NO. 3548

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JANUARY 11, 1872.

"I cried unto God...You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."
Psalm 77:1-20.

THIS Psalm describes the condition of a child of God under deep depression of spirit. He is much tried and bowed, and yet, at the same time, the saint at last gets the victory and, before the Psalm is over, the clouds are all removed from the sky and the heart rejoices in the sunlight of divine love. It is known to every believer that the experience of a Christian is very variable. We are like our own strange weather in this land. South winds blow and all is warm and balmy, but in a few hours the north wind comes, or the cutting east wind—and soon the ground is covered with snow or hard white frost—and yet, perhaps, in another day or two there will be a storm! Some believers have all spiritual weathers in a week. Being somewhat excitable, perhaps naturally, they readily take to themselves wings and mount aloft, but then as a high soar is often followed by a great fall, these very believers are soon sighing and crying out of the very depths and half doubt whether they are the people of God at all! Nor must I say that is common to merely excitable people. Some of the very noblest heroes in the Christian army have had a very dark experience to go through. If you read the life of Martin Luther, of whom we may well say that never braver soldier fought beneath the banner of the cross, you will find him the subject of the most terrible exercises. He was strong in his God, but he was very weak in himself—subject to ferocious temptations—temptations the like of which probably few of us have ever known because we are not men of his gigantic mold, and God does not allow trials to come upon us which were only suitable for him. He oftentimes seemed to lie at hell's gates, but then, again, the man seemed as if he had looked heaven in the face and lived in perpetual communion with his God!

John Bunyan's description of the progress of the pilgrim to heaven would lead us to expect that there would be changes, for at one time we find the pilgrim safely housed in the Palace Beautiful—all around him is redolent with the odor of flowers and the song of birds—next day he descends to the Valley of Humiliation. Even there he has a conflict or

two, but a little farther on he comes to the Valley of Death Shades and there he has to fight for every step, while darkness surrounds him and the adversary of souls comes forth to meet him! We are uphill and downhill all the way to heaven! Like the children of Israel, our path to Canaan lies through a wilderness, and though, blessed be God, the grace of heaven has made the wilderness to rejoice and blossom as a rose, yet are there fiery serpents in it and it is a wilderness, after all. Notwithstanding all that God does for us while in it, this state in this present world is a state of bondage. "We that are in this body do groan, being burdened"—longing for the time of the home-bringing, when we shall come to our own country and be at rest forever and forever!

Now at this time I shall not attempt to describe all the spiritual conflict with error; if I am not able to describe that—(and who is?)—I can at least speak with a measure of assurance of the spiritual experience of some of God's servants, for I will go no deeper than I have gone myself, and if I do that, I shall be able to speak with some measure of assurance.

First, then, let us make the remark that the child of God may undergo great spiritual trials. But, secondly, we shall ask you to consider the conduct of the child of God when in the condition—very different from that of the worldly man. And, thirdly, we shall notice those springs of comfort which relieve saints in that spirit, and will relieve us also. First, then—

I. A TRUE CHILD OF GOD MAY UNDERGO VERY DEEP MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL TRIALS.

No superficial trials, such as are common to men, but really overwhelming trials seem to come to those who are favorites of heaven, who lean their heads on Jesus' bosom, and are among the most gracious of the Lord's chosen. Asaph's trial was no light one—it was a great grief that came upon him. From some words in the Psalm, one would think it was a personal disease under which he was suffering. But from other words it would seem to be a deep affliction that had come upon his family and those he loved. This had caused him to be depressed in spirit and heavy in soul to a very solemn degree, for he declared that his sore ran in the night, and ceased not. He complained that his spirit was overwhelmed. Don't, therefore, conclude that you are no child of God because the joys you once had are gone! I am delighted when I have been with young Christians full of their first joy—and I earnestly pray that it will be very long before those joys are dampened, but at the same time, it may be prudent to let them know that should those joys depart, it will be no evidence whatever that God's love is departed, too! We must always beware of living by feeling. It is pleasant in summer, but it is an ill way of living in the winter of the soul. We walk by faith, not by sight, nor yet by feeling, for we remember that our feelings are often of a very mixed character—and what we think to be holy joy may be, some of it, animal excitement—may not be altogether that joy of the Lord which is our

strength. Don't; don't, I beseech you, base your evidence of the possession of salvation upon your joy, because if you do, you will be in sad trouble when your joy varies or flies. Build your hope on something better than unsubstantial delights, namely, on the finished work of faith, such as the poor publican had, still crying, even in your best frames, "God be merciful to me a sinner! God be merciful to me a sinner." For between here and the gates of heaven you will have to go by a weeping cross, perhaps many times—and if the Lord loves you more than others, you will have more trials than others—strange trials shall come to you! Therefore, regard it not as though some strange thing had happened to you. Some of the best of God's people may pass through the deepest trouble.

And remark, next, that this may not only be very deep, but very frequent. It appears to have been so with Asaph. He describes himself as being by day and by night vexed with his trouble. It was not a transient cloud—it was a heavy storm that brooded over his spirit. For 40 days and nights the heavens seemed to pour down their torrents and his soul felt no rest. Do not wonder if you sometimes shall come into that condition. I pray you may not, but if you do, I say be upon your guard not to condemn yourself! You remember how holy Job's friends, when they saw him upon a dunghill scraping himself with a potsherd, began to tell him that he must be a hypocrite, or he would not be there? How could he be what he professed to be, and yet be there? Now that is exactly what the devil will tell you! If you are in deep trials and are on a dunghill, too, he will say that—and perhaps some of your Christian friends will say the same. It will be very ungenerous and not like Christ if they do. Worst of all, perhaps you, yourself, will think the same. But let the warning of this evening help to keep you from such a temptation. It is no evidence whatever that God has no love to you if He chastens you, for remember who it was—that it was none other than a great servant of God who said, "All the daylong have I been plagued and chastened every morning." And He who was still greater, even your blessed Lord and Master, was the "Man of Sorrows" and the acquaintance of grief. Do not, then, for your own soul's sake, permit an insinuation as to God's love being shown in your happiness, or His hatred being manifest in your depression of spirit! Do not allow it to cross your mind! Some of the best of God's servants have, moreover, not only been in the deeps, and been there long, but when in such a condition they have refused to be comforted. Read the second verse—"My soul refused to be comforted"—as if he had put away everything that could cheer him! A man of God, and a poet, too—a man inspired and who could cheer others, as he has done by the sweet lays which he has left us in the Book of Psalms—yet when these sweet things were brought before him, he said, "Put them away!"

And have you never known, O you advanced Christians—(I know you have)—what it is to say of a promise, "No. It is very precious, but I am

afraid I should deceive myself if I were to think, 'That is mine.'"? You have found the word come very preciously home to your soul when you have heard a sermon—and then at night, when you have tossed upon your bed, you have said—"I am afraid it would be nothing better than presumption if I were to suck in all the consolation out of that." All the while the comfort was yours, and you might have had it—the sweets were meant on purpose for you—and yet you could not take them! Now there is something good about that. A holy anxiety is a thing that is desirable, and I would never preach up the full assurance of faith so as for a moment to speak a word against that holy anxiety! My soul has often said, "I will not be comforted till Jesus comforts me"—put away the peace that many have spoken and said, "No! No peace shall ever come to my soul except the peace, the Master's peace—peace from His own lips by His own Spirit." And I believe that is right, but sometimes that anxiety may be carried to an unbelieving extent and state! We set up tests for ourselves that are not warrantable and condemn ourselves when God does not condemn us! And though we are the precious children of God, comparable to fine gold, we reckon ourselves to be as the earthen vessels, the work of the hands of the potter. It is very easy to write bitter things against yourself when the clouds of darkness are hanging over your soul. This good man did so—he refused to be comforted.

When this occurs, it is not at all remarkable if the grief of soul that is caused in the man should break his sleep. Observe how he puts it, "You hold my eyes waking." The eyelids, those guards of the eyes were made to keep their station. The eyes would still be open. There was no rest for the man. And who can rest when he does not know that he is a saved soul? Let me doubt whether I am God's child, and dare I rest? I am often astounded at the ease with which some men talk of their doubts and fears. Do not know whether you are saved or not, and yet go to sleep? Perhaps you may wake in death! An enemy to God, or afraid that you may be, and yet find rest? My dear brothers and sisters, I will not condemn your doubts, but I must condemn you if you can be in ease at all while you are under them, for surely this is a matter of the first importance—"Am I His, or am I not?"

Am I really regenerate, or is it all pretense? Am I made to seem to live, while I am dead? Or am I truly one of these whom God has made to be a new creation in Christ Jesus? Now when a man gets really disturbed about that, and that is the question, and he is afraid lest God's mercy and God's promise should not be to him, that he is left to himself to perish—when a man is in that state, he cannot rest—he must then feel that until this quarrel is over and this problem is decided, he can find no rest for the soles of his feet.

Moreover, in such circumstances, it may sometimes occur that the good man cannot tell his story to anybody else; so it is here—"I am so troubled that I cannot speak"—dare not tell it to anybody else—too great

a grief to be unburdened. He could whisper it low at the Redeemer's feet, "My Lord, have pity on Your servant," but he cannot come and tell others because he does not know that any other has been through the same. He is afraid that his course is singular and so remarkable that if he were to mention it, his brothers and sisters would shun him! Besides, perhaps he has begun to mention it to some and they, not understanding him, have given him such a harsh reply that he shrank altogether from them. There are many fat cattle that push and push with horn and shoulder the lean ones of God's flock, and 'tis ill, 'tis ill when we do this." He that is troubled in spirit and cast down is often as a lamb despised by those who are at ease. He may be the best man of the whole company and yet, if he were to tell his experience, they would think him to be the worst. He may be the best in the whole church and yet such may be the turmoil of his soul, sometimes, that were he to narrate his experience, many who are not to be compared with him for a moment would fight shy of him altogether! He has a grief within him which he cannot tell.

And now comes one other point, and this, perhaps, is the worst phase of the depression through which this man of God may go, namely, that even that which ought to comfort him, will minister to his yet greater grief. He says, "I remembered God, and was troubled." Why, brothers and sisters, our thoughts of God are refreshing to us, they always should be! Just as good meat ought to nourish the body (only when the body is sick, that good meat turns to mischief), so thoughts of God ought always to delight our soul, and I rejoice that they do for the most part. In our pilgrimage there is nothing yields us such a delightful song as the thought of our God, the Father, the Savior, and the blessed indwelling Spirit! But when the soul is sick, and a gracious soul may get sick in that way, the very thoughts of God become a trouble. See how it is. You will think, "He is very just—how can I stand in His sight?" But He is very gracious. Yes, and how gracious He has been to me, and how unworthily have I made any return for that grace! He is loving, ah, and very loving. How can I expect that I should taste of that love after the poor return I have made? And shall every attribute of God's will at such times seem to be black against you. His very faithfulness you will feel. "Ah, if He is faithful to His promise, what part and lot shall I have in that promise? It must be, after all, a mere delusion of mine that my name is written in His book! How can it be that I shall have a share among His chosen?" Whereas, when the soul is right, every attribute of God is cheering, when once it gets in darkness, and gets away from the foot of the cross—gets away from looking with a poor sinner's tearful eyes to the sinner's Savior, simply and alone, shall every attribute of God's seem to roll with thunder and flash with lightning on his spirit! I do know what this means. I have stood and seen the storm fly over my head, cloud on cloud, blacker and yet blacker, and my spirit crushed and utterly broken, until not a hope was left! Then have I seen one rift in the midst of the cloud, and a lone

star shining there, the star of Bethlehem and, looking up, all seemed calm beneath my soul, even on that sea! Just then the storm stopped at sight of that star and there I seemed to see the love of God to the very guiltiest of men, to the off-scouring of sinners and the refuse—and resting as a little child, humbly, simply, and alone, upon what the Master did for sinners on the cross—joy and peace have come back! But many and many, and many a child of God has known what it is to see every hope blasted, all experience gone and all grace withered—that is, apparently so, for it was not really so—because after all, perhaps we are never richer than when we think we are the poorest of all, never so well clad as when we know we are naked in ourselves, never so near to God as when we feel we are near to hell if the grace of God does not interpose!

Thus I have given you but a very brief outline of the mental and spiritual trials through which an heir of heaven may sometimes pass. Now, secondly—

II. WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE CHILD OF GOD WHEN HE GETS INTO THIS DEPRESSION OF SPIRIT?

Well, I will tell you what a man does when he is not a child of God. He cries, with Pliable, "The first time I get out of this, if I get out on the side nearest my house, you may have the brave country to yourself, for I am not going floundering through this bog of mud." Anybody's dog will follow me if I feed it, but only my own dog will follow me if I beat it. And any man will be a Christian, or profess to be one, while it is all joy, and silver slippers, and gravel walks—but only the man who really loves God, who says, "All the daylong have I been plagued and chastened every morning"—it is only the man of God who can say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him—if He takes away my comfort, and I have no joy but in Himself, still will I cling to Him."

Now Asaph did not go off, as many men would, to worldly pleasures to make up his loss. He did not say, "Well, well, I am not as happy as I used to be in my religious profession—I shall go to a theater, or find joyful companions, or stick to business to drown my thoughts." No, no. He, just as the child which has been chastened by its parent (if it is what it should be) can only find comfort by clinging to the very parent that chastened it, and ask for a loving, forgiving kiss! And even so it is with the chastened child of God—he clings to God the more, the more he is made to smart. So the first thing Asaph did was he prayed. "I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice." Oh, sweet consolation of prayer; would not some hearts be utterly broken if they could not pray? This is the sweet vent that we get for our fermented griefs. Our spirits are soon at rest when we can but pray. Let us pray! "Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe God; believe also in Me." You see how Asaph puts it twice, "I cried unto God with my voice even unto God with my voice." He betook himself to prayer!

The next thing he did was, he betook himself to meditation. "I remembered God." (fifth verse). "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times." (sixth verse). "I call to remembrance my song in the night. I commune with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search." He began to meditate more, to meditate on his God—to meditate on what God had done for other saints—to meditate upon his own former joys and helps in times of trouble, and to meditate upon the sweet songs which he had then uttered when he, himself, had been in trial before. Now this was a sweet way of gaining consolation. Does the Lord smite me? Well, then, I will think of the day when He caressed me! Am I in trouble, and has He put me in it? Then I will think of the times when I was in troubles before, and He brought me out of them! He has been with me in six troubles; will He leave me in the seventh? I have gone through the waters. He was there with me; will He leave me now that He has brought me so far? Can it be that with so long a time of love, He will now desert His child? This gathers force. Aged Christian, you are 60 or seventy. You expect to live another ten years, and God has preserved you for seventy—cannot you trust Him for the other ten? After so much kindness in the past, will He cease now? Oh, it is good to go over these things and then to recollect when, in years gone by, you were in as bad a condition as you are now, and you sang all the while! Ah, dear friend, you lost one you dearly loved, but you were supported. What? Are you going to sink now? Why, the time was when you could play the man for Christ! Why, you ran the risk of losing all that you had for His name's sake—and are you going to throw down your weapons now? You are like the old navigator who had been round the world and when he got into the Thames coming home, the wind blew. "Oh," he said, "Have I been round the world, and am I going to drown in a ditch? Not I!" And so I say to you—have you passed through all these troubles and difficulties and are you going to be lost, after all? Remember your song in the night, and begin to sing again! Let the new song be in your mouth. One who long loved music said, "Glory be to You for all the grace I have not tasted yet!" If you cannot sing of what you taste, think of what you are to taste in the glory land that is before you, when you get there! Be of good comfort—meditation shall console you!

Then this man of prayer, after using prayer and meditation, betook himself to these employments. If you notice, he spent his time in self-examination—"In communion with my own heart and my spirit, I made diligent search." Show me why You contend with me. Lord if I am chastened, tell me why. If I have lost the light of Your countenance, why do You hide Yourself from me? For what sin is it that You are rebuking me? What grace is it that You would strengthen in me? What idol is it that You would take away from me? What duty have I neglected, of which You would remind me? I commune with my own heart, and look within to see if there is the cause of the distress—and look up to God, my

Father, and say, "Why do You leave me? Why have You forsaken me?" And then I repeat to myself, "Why are you cast down O my Soul? Why are you disquieted within me?" "Oh," says one, "I don't care much about self-examination. Mark you, I do not think much of your religion." There are a great many people in the world in trade that do not like looking at their books and when a man does not want to know the position of his trade, I think we can, most of us, make a pretty shrewd guess at where he is! And when a man is afraid of self-examination, when he is afraid of a heart-searching discourse or heart-searching providence, he may be pretty sure there is something rotten within. God deliver us from being unwilling to know the very worst of our position! May we be always anxious to know the worst, than for a moment to be flattered! Let us, then, if we would get comfort, get to self-examination!

And then, once again, in time of trouble this man of God took to holy arguments and devout reasoning. Here is the question, Will the Lord cast off forever? He may put His child aside for a moment, but can He quite forget? Can He quite leave? Can He ever cast off those that are His own beloved? Will He be favorable no more? He has said, "For a small moment have I forsaken you," but will He make that small moment into forever? I know He turns a deaf ear to His people for a moment—but will He never hear prayer again? Has He not said that He is a God that hears prayer? Is His mercy clean gone forever? Oh, it is a grand thing when a man says—"Can it be that God has left off being merciful? Is not His very name, 'Love'?" That is His very nature. He delights in mercy—can it be true that God has left off His mercy? It cannot be! Is His mercy clean gone forever? Does His promise fail forevermore? Another question—Can it be that God won't keep His Word? Will His promise be broken? I know it may tarry awhile, but can it be that it shall fail, and fail forevermore? And then He puts it again, "Has God forgotten to be gracious—got out of the habit of being gracious? He used to be always gracious to those who sought His face—has He forgotten it? Is it possible? Has He, in anger, shut up His tender mercy? Can it be? Can it be?" Oh, beloved, if we were sometimes thus to school ourselves and cross-question our own unbelief, the Holy Spirit would give us comfort. "Can the woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, she may forget, yet will not I forget you. I will never leave you, nor forsake you." They that trust in the Lord shall not want any good thing. "Fear not, I am with you. Be not dismayed, I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness." Is all this nothing? Are these promises, and ten thousand more, only so many words and so much chaff? O you wicked unbelief! The virgin daughter of Zion has shaken her head at you, and laughed, because you have not a foot to stand upon—no argument to defend yourself. Away with you, you lie, you child of hell! Away with you! I must believe in my God. I will fall back into His arms. I will

confide, again, in His eternal faithfulness. Is He a God, and can His love grow weary of saving? He is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Yes, He will do it, and to the last jot and tittle shall His Word be fulfilled and His promises shall be kept for they are yes and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God by us. God grant us grace thus to battle with unbelief! And now, in the third place, as we have seen the man in his condition and what he does, let us now consider—

III. SOME OF THOSE COMFORTABLE THINGS WHICH MAY HELP US OUT OF THAT POSITION, or help us not to fall into it! First, observe that the great source of comfort, to the tried believer—any believer—is to be found of God. All those questions were about his God. "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord. I will remember Your wonders of old. I will meditate also on all Your work, and talk of Your doings." If you get to meditating on your own works, you won't get much comfort out of them! And if you get to talking of your own doings, you are brewing for yourself bitter drinks. But when the soul looks at God, at God's mercy, God's grace, and Christ the incarnate God, and the finished work of Christ—at His merits—then it is that the soul is comforted! All that there is in us that may be seen in a time of depression is of man. We must look right away to Him in whom our hope lies; I will not lift up my eyes to anything else; from where comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who has made heaven and earth! Child of God, store your mind with His knowledge and His glory. Seek to know the Lord Jesus! Ask to be instructed in the knowledge of Him, for then in the times of difficulty you will have a store ready to your hand—great reasons for consolation which will be comfortable to your spirit!

But do you notice how he dwells upon the works of God and the power of God? "You are the God that does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the people. Lord, You can help me. My case is difficult, but You are strong enough. You are able to help me." Oh, this is the way to get comfort—to know the power of God, which is past finding out. One thing especially the Psalmist dwelt upon, and that is redemption—"You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph." When there is no light anywhere else, there is at Calvary! Look there to the Paschal Lamb, and to the going out of Egypt by blood, and to the ransoming of His people. Do you think that Christ bought you with His blood and that you should lie in hell and perish? Do you believe in redemption of that kind which does not redeem? Have you a Savior who came to save those whom He never will save? Do you believe in such a Savior? Then I marvel not at your doubts and fears! But if you have reliance upon the mighty God, in whose hands the pleasure of the Lord must prosper, and who shall see His seed and rejoice in the travail of His soul, then, leaning on Him whose hands were stretched to the nail for

you, you have good ground for joy, confidence and peace! Study the atonement, study the redemption, study the cross and you will be readily comforted!

At the close of the Psalm, Asaph, after his usual habit, takes himself away to the Red Sea and suggests as a ground for comfort what God did there. There were His people—slaves, and in bondage—and He brought them out. He will bring you out! Pharaoh was very strong and he said, "I fear not the Lord, neither will I let the people go." But God was stronger than Pharaoh and He will be stronger than the devil and all your enemies! Then they came out and there was the Red Sea before them, and how could they get through the sea? "The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You, they were afraid." You have many troubles and many sins—they will fly before the presence of God! Then they came into the wilderness—how could they ever traverse that? Then the Lord was pleased to send them their bread each morning, and to continually give them their water. Whereas their clothes could not be very speedily replenished, their garments grew not old, so to speak. They had no guide, no one with them that could well conduct them through the wilderness, but the fiery, cloudy pillar went before them! They never went a step awry, for that fiery, cloudy pillar led them all the way. Now your condition is the same as theirs—and you shall have the same supplies. Be not cast down! Rejoice in the Lord and go forward. "He led His people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron"—so the Psalm closes—and He will lead you, and lead you safely! They set out to go to the land of Canaan, and to the land of Canaan they came. And if you are resting upon the blood of Christ, and depending upon His eternal merit, He shall surely bring you in and you shall stand in your lot in the end of the days! Therefore comfort one another with these words and be of good cheer!

But as for those who have no Savior, I know of no comfort for them in the time of trouble. Unbeliever, you shall live without consolation. You shall die without consolation, and live forever after—without consolation! May you turn. "Turn you, turn you! Why will you die?" May the Lord bring you to see that in Christ, alone, is your help found. Get Him to be your comfort from this day forth, and forever! Amen, amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
ACTS 26:1-28.

Three times we have in Holy Writ a graphic report of the conversion of Paul. This may be accounted for partly from its being one of the most remarkable events of early sacred history, Paul having had a greater effect upon the Christian church than any other living man. At the same time I think it teaches us that the Holy Spirit sets especial store by the facts connected with this very remarkable conversion. If He gives it three times in the sacred Volume, we ought to give it a triple attention and see if we cannot learn from it.

Verses 1-3. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, You are permitted to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched forth his hand and answered for himself: I think myself happy, King Agrippa. Because I shall answer for myself this day before you touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews. Especially because I know you to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: therefore I beseech you to hear me patiently.* With what courtesy does he speak! Paul is bold, but see how he is all things to all men! And he begins an address for his life with great adroitness and skill—teaching us that we are to use all the courtesies of life to those to whom they belong, and never to cause needless irritation. There is enough offense in the cross of itself, without our being offensive when uplifting it.

4-7. *My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among my own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers. Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly setting God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.* For the Pharisees did hold very firmly the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and Paul often instances this, as being the very thing, though no longer a Pharisee, to which he was glad to give witness.

8-11. *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.* He had the courage of his convictions. Believing a thing, he did not let it lie idle. He regarded the Christians as a pestilent sect and, therefore, he hunted them down. He abhorred the name of Jesus of Nazareth as that of an impostor and, therefore, he determined that no stone should be left unturned to overthrow His power.

12-14. *Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests. At midday, O King, I saw in the way a light from Heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, Why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.* Not, "It is hard for Me to bear it," but, "It is hard for you*,"* as if, though conscious of being persecuted, our Lord, in that divine unselfishness which is so natural to Him, forgot the kicks that were given to Him and only thought of the injury which Saul was doing to

himself, when, like an ox that strikes out against the goad, he injured himself.

15-28. *And I said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom you persecute. But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in the which I will yet reveal to you: delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send you, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus spoke for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, you are beside yourself; much learning has made you mad! But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the King knows of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believe you the prophets? I know that you believe. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost you persuade me to be a Christian.*

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LITTLE, BUT LOVELY
NO. 3549

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."
Luke 12:32.

How kind and tender Jesus was towards His disciples! When He spoke sternly, it was to the outside multitude. Many a time was His spirit moved to rebuke them sharply. Very familiarly, however, did He unbend Himself in the presence of the few attached followers who were gathered round Him and drew near to Him—His chosen, His beloved. To them He unveiled His heart. To them He disclosed the things which He had received of the Father. From then, He kept back nothing that pertained to their welfare. "If it were not so, I would have told you," was once, at least, His confidential expression. He thus abode with them as a friend, as an elder brother, as a loving Father. It is really pleasant to observe how much He thought of them—how deeply He sympathized with them—how far He was from despising them. The great ones of the earth would have shrugged their shoulders and sneered at the poor helpless band that gathered around the prophet of Nazareth. Not so the divine Master. Without for a moment concealing the fact that they were a little flock, He looks upon them fondly and applies to them invitingly the very epithet their enemies would have used resentfully—"little"—as He says, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Few in number they were, He calls them a flock. Thus He takes upon Himself the office of a shepherd and by implication He guarantees to them feeding and folding, solace and safeguard! And He speaks of "little" with a liking. As we often employ diminutive words to express endearment, calling those we love by little names, so does the Savior here seem to dwell upon the littleness of those He loves. The original word might be properly rendered, "very little." "Fear not, tiny flock." There is a double diminutive on which He seems to harp, although it had a pleasant ring about it. So mothers are known to call their baby children by bantling names in their fondness for the wee creatures. But far

surpassing woman's love, our Savior's strong affection can no rival know. In mild accents, He seems to say, "Never mind how few you are, or how despised. Your feebleness gives you a warmer place in My heart and makes Me press you more closely to My bosom. Hush, hush. Be still. Fear not, little flock."

And, oh, how ready He is with a reason to revive their confidence! "It is your Father's good pleasure." Thus does our beloved Lord recognize His own intimate relation with His disciples. "It is your Father's good pleasure." And who was their Father but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? He might have said, "It is My Father's good pleasure"—but then this was the sweeter way of putting it—"It is your Father's good pleasure." They would know that their Father was His Father when He thus said, "your Father." But had He said, "My Father," they might not have so quickly recollected that He was also their Father or, pondering it, they might have had some doubt on the subject. What He does, therefore, is, in effect, to call Himself their Brother, for if His Father is their Father, then He, Himself, must be their Brother. They are near kinsmen! He puts Himself on an equal footing with them when so speaking! At once He lifts them up to Himself while He goes down to them. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Must it not have been delightful to be on such friendly terms with the blessed Lord of life when He was incarnate here on earth—to have been able to say with John, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory—the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"? Not that we have any need to fret because we have not that privilege, for we have a higher one, inasmuch as Jesus said, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." It was better, therefore, for us that Jesus should go in order that we might have the abiding Presence of the Holy Spirit, not only to dwell with us, but also to be in us! Oh, that we might realize and enjoy the Comforter's presence at this time! It were ill for us to miss the Savior's company without having the consolation of the Spirit! To be without the bodily presence of the Lord and without the spiritual presence of the Holy Spirit were a double loss! Rather let us rejoice that He is in us, and shall be with us evermore. In the presence of the Comforter we have a higher grade of communion with God than even in the solacing society of the Son of man. He has gone from us, but He has left the words of His comfort to cheer us. In the power of the Holy Spirit, then, let us talk with one another concerning these words, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Our attention is here drawn, first, to a little flock and a Great Shepherd. And then to a great fear—what if I say a variety of fears—and a still greater consolation.

I. IT WAS A LITTLE FLOCK to whom the Savior spoke. Did He mean, by so designating them, that they were few in point of number? Our Savior's ministry, so far as conversion was concerned, was far from being prolific in its immediate results. The zeal of the great preacher painfully contrasted with the apathy of the hearers. The prophet had foreseen the haze that would overhang the mental atmosphere. "Who has believed our report?" He exclaimed! How few out of Israel were gathered to Him as the fruit of words such as never man spoke, and works such as none but God ever did! It is not recorded of our Savior that He ever preached a sermon through which three thousand were converted. He left that to one of His servants, as if He meant to fulfill that word, "Greater things than these shall you do, because I go unto My Father." He would put that honor on His servants and take the disappointment, as He did the shame and the suffering, to Himself. Such is always His loving way. He will take the bleak side of the hill and the rough part of the battle for Himself. If there is any softer road to take, or any higher honors to win, He will give them to His servants. His converts were few—they were a little flock. Some of you may be residing in localities where there are but a few believers meeting together. The company looks slender. Do not, I pray you, give place to despondency. You can surely worship God in sincerity and truth, though you may lack the excitement of a crowd. Perhaps you live where there are so few that you can hardly assemble a congregation. Why think yourself denied the privilege of communion with Christ because there are only one or two gathered together in His name? Some of the happiest days believers have ever known have been alone with Christ! The richest displays of Christ's love have been unfolded to the twos and threes and the small family gatherings. He has kept His word to the letter, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Should you happen to belong to a larger company, you are not, therefore, shut out from the promise bequeathed to the few. A church of five or 5,000 brothers and sisters is still a little flock! Compared with the vast outlying mass of unbelievers, it is positively infinitesimal! Think of the millions that know not God—the hundreds of millions that are content to worship idol gods that their own hands have made! Take all Christendom into account and assume for the moment that every nominal professor were a true convert to Christ—the Church would form but a feeble minority—it would be but a little flock. Though the day shall come when the Lord will multiply us and increase

us greatly in the earth beyond all present computation, yet to this hour the Church of God is only a little flock—and this is sometimes an excuse for distrust and a cause of fear.

Not merely in their number were our Lord's immediate followers little. They did not represent much of this world's wealth. They had left all that they had. But their little all did not count for much. An old boat or two upon the lake, some nets, a little fishing tackle, and a few etceteras—surely they were not much to leave! Their capital and their income were alike limited. Their treasurer never had a heavy purse to carry, though he took care to help himself out of its contents. The disciples of Jesus were poor, very poor. They were somewhat akin to their Master, who had not where to lay His head.

Nor from their social position could they exert much influence. Most of them were Galileans—countrymen from the most countrified part of the whole country and as such, little esteemed. They spoke, no doubt, broad country dialects, and were looked upon as unlearned and ignorant men by those who heard them. When the Holy Spirit was on them, they spoke with great power, but there was not a "D. D." among them, nor yet a professor from any university! They had not a solitary rabbi that could be put in the front, neither was there one that could have been called rabbi, if others had chosen to call him so. No prestige did they derive from rank or title, no princes of the blood, no knights or esquires were associated with them—they were all common peasants and fishermen. And I daresay many fears would cross their minds and many gloomy apprehensions would haunt them as they contemplated the strange adventure on which they were called to go forth. They were to preach the Christ of God, and to convert the world to Him—yet see what lowly people they were! Had they been brought up in the schools of philosophers, had they been the sons of kings or princes, had they the wealth of Croesus at their control, they might have said, "We can do something!" But poverty, ignorance and obscurity combined to make them seem little in the eyes of their fellow men! Therefore, the Savior says, "Fear not, little flock!" Against all adverse circumstances, there stands the actual promise! Be sure of this—the kingdom of God is yours and you will win the day! Your father in heaven can do without the dignity, the wealth and the learning of this world. He has resolved to give you the kingdom, so you shall assuredly have it!

Now the Church of God has not much improved in those respects; the aristocracy of the age and the celebrities of the time, those who occupy high places in fashion or in talent, look down contemptuously on the followers of Jesus. We are not put out of countenance. We know full well

that not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are chosen. Still, God has chosen the poor of this world. Meek and lowly though they are, He enriches them with the gifts of His kingdom. The Church in the aggregate, like its individual members, is small—small in number and in influence—a "little flock." And there is another littleness which is common among Christ's followers. They are very little in matters of grace. They think and know themselves to be little. The greatest among them generally think themselves the least. One who came not behind the chief of apostles thought himself not worthy to be called an apostle, such was his sense of unworthiness. Little and little worth the Lord's people account themselves to be; but in point of age, of growth, of experience, some of them are little—very little. They have only lately been born-again. They are babes in grace. Jesus meant them when He said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"—yes, you—you who are new-born sons and daughters! Some too, are little, not so much because they have been recently converted, as because they have made slow progress. They are of a desponding spirit, and their faith is very feeble. Perhaps they have not walked with God as they should and yet, although they may have little love, little hope, and little joy, little usefulness, and little holiness, compared with what they ought to have, still if they are believers, if they are the sheep that hear Christ's voice, know their Shepherd and follow Him—even to them He says, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." He will not destroy you because you are not what you should be in point of attainment! What, though you are as smoking flax when you ought to be a burning and a shining light, He will not quench you! Though you are a broken reed in the music when you ought to be a full pipe organ, pouring forth volumes of praise, He will not break you, but He will make something of you yet! Though you have such little faith that you do not know whether you have any or not, He knows! A drop of water is as much water as the whole volume of water in the sea, and a particle of grace is as truly grace as the great store of grace laid up in the everlasting covenant! A diamond as small as a pin's head is as much a diamond as the Koh-i-noor, so the smallest faith, though it is like a grain of mustard seed, is faith which can move mountains! Jesus knew this—hence He would speak comfortably to those who are little as yet, "Fear not, you weak and trembling ones! It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Your weakness shall not witness against you."

Now is not this very precious, that little as the flock may be, the Great Shepherd speaks to them so kindly? "Fear not, little flock," He says. And, oh, how His greatness must have struck them as He thus spoke! They

looked on Him and saw that He was not little. He had become like themselves in poverty and obscurity, but still there was a divinity in His character that could not be eclipsed. He was not little in His birth. "Where is He," asked the wise men from the East, "who is born King of the Jews?" Nor was He little in His wisdom, for when but 12 years old, the doctors in the temple were astonished at His understanding and answers! He was not little in His power. Did He not teach as one having authority? Did He not heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease as though no symptom could baffle His skill or resist His fiat? He was not little in His influence over men's hearts—He could turn their current like rivers of water whichever way He would. They had a Great Shepherd—He could protect them, He could provide for them, He could lead them on—He could give them the victory and surely bring them into the rest which He had promised them! I feel just now as though the Master stood among us and we were the little flock, conscious that we could do nothing, devise nothing, develop nothing apart from Him. Are there great destinies before us? Is the world to be converted? Surely we are the last people that could ever be able to accomplish it! His presence is our encouragement. Looking up here and seeing Him standing in the midst, hard by these emblems of His body and blood, we hear His voice saying, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go you, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Behold the baptized Christ giving to His own baptized disciples His own commission! "Go, preach the gospel to every creature." He vouchsafes, moreover His own authority, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; He that believes not shall be condemned." He is the Commander-in-Chief of the little company of nonconformists to the world's religion, the leader of the little band of those who desire to follow the Lamb wherever He goes, the Lord and Master of all those who espouse His cross, rejoice in His name and are not ashamed to bear His reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation! The Lord grant that the sweetness of these words may come home to the hearts of all of you who are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Let us turn our attention to—

II. THE GREAT FEAR AND THE GREAT CONSOLATION IMPLIED IN OUR text. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

One fear which often agitates God's servants is that which is alluded to in the foregoing paragraph—an undue anxiety about temporal things. A fretfulness that distracts one's own mind and greatly dishonors God—a disposition utterly unworthy of the sincere believer! Christ deals with it

in these words, “Seek not what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; neither be you of a doubtful mind. Why child, know this, it is not only your Father’s good pleasure to give you bread and water, but the kingdom!” You ask, “Will His bounty provide me with food convenient and raiment fit?” No, question it not, since He thus promises to put a crown upon your head and give you a mansion in the skies! Surely He who takes the trouble to give you a kingdom hereafter will not let you starve on the road to it! When Saul went out to seek his father’s donkeys, Samuel met him and anointed him to be king, and after that Saul never fretted about his father’s donkeys anymore! Are you worrying yourselves about the losses you have had, and the best way of trying to recover them? Here are tidings for you. It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Does not that awaken a new and nobler ambition in your breasts? Never mind the donkeys now, we have other aims and other prospects to engage our thoughts! Affairs of high estate have drawn my mind away from paltry things. Oh, heir of heaven, you cannot afford to pine and chafe over the little annoyances of this fleeting life! I remember hearing of a crossing-sweeper who was pursuing his humble avocation with great diligence. He had a valuable broom, which he would not have lost or spoiled without much grief. To him the few pence that purchased it were of great importance. But someone—a solicitor of the town tapped him on the shoulder and said, “My good friend, is your name So-and-So?” “Yes.” “Did your father live in such a place?” “He did.” “Does your brother live in such a place?” “He does.” “Then I have the pleasure to tell you that you have come into an estate worth £10,000 a year.” I have been told he walked away without his broom! And I can hardly doubt it, for I do not think I would have shouldered the broom myself, if I had been in his position! Oh, Christians, let me pluck you by the sleeve and tell you of princely possessions for which you may well turn aside from your present paltry pickings! They are not worthy to be compared! Jesus Christ informs you that “your Father has given you a kingdom which is infinitely more than all the gold of this world.” You may well say—“Let those who will, fret about these earthly things—I will not. I have a kingdom in waiting! I will look out for that inheritance and I will begin to rejoice in it.” Thus does Christ put to sleep one of His people’s fears!

Another fear we have arises from watching the clouds, forecasting storms and anticipating trouble. Some of us must confess that we have our desponding moments. One is vexed because he sees his trade gradually slipping away and he anxiously asks, “What shall I do in future years?” Another, with a large family growing up around him, perplexes

himself with the question, "What shall I do with those boys and girls of mine?" As he watches the various tendencies in the young people, he wonders which way they will go, and he begins to fret. He does not commit his cause to God, but he disquiets himself in vain. This is unwise. Others find that their health declines—symptoms of consumption or some other fell disease alarm them, and they say, "What shall I do when this gets worse? How shall I bear it?" "Perhaps I may have painful operations to endure," says one. "Perhaps," says another, "I may have to lie bedridden by the year, together—what shall I do—oh, what shall I do?" Our Lord Jesus Christ counsels you what to do. He says, "Let not your heart be troubled." Don't fear. Have you not always found up to now that God has helped and succored you in every grievous plight? You have been foolish enough to dread a thousand dreary ills that never happened to destroy your peace, save in your dreams—like boys in a fog, before whose eyes huge monsters seem to rise, till they come up to the objects of their dread surprise—and find they are not monstrous scares, but modest friends who come to greet them. You have often been the victims of your own credulity in the past, cheated by your fears! May it not be the same in the dilemma to which just now your gloomy fancy points? This I know—when we are in our right mind, we cast our care on God. Let the Lord do as He wills to us! He will never be unkind to us! He has always been our friend—He will never be our foe! He will never put us into the furnace unless He means to purge the dross out of us. Nor will there be one degree more heat in that furnace than is absolutely necessary—there will always be mercy to balance the misery—and strength supplied to support the burden to be borne. Cheer up, then! "Fear not, little flock." Let us, for the time being at any rate, shake off all these fears and let us revel in our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. Rough may be the road, but sure will be the end—we are going to the kingdom! When they fetch a foreign princess over to this land to be married to a princely husband, the ship may be tossed on the sea and the tempest rage with fury, but doubtless the bride would say, "I may well bear this slight inconvenience with equanimity—I am on the way to be made a queen." We are on-board ship today. We are going to a land where we shall all be princes and kings—as many as believe in Jesus! Come, let us pluck up heart! What though the accommodation are sparse, the passage rough and the wind boisterous, there is a kingdom in prospect! So let us make the best of the voyage. Be not faint-hearted yourself, but help others to be cheerful. With a pilgrimage, rather than a voyage in his view, our sacred songster has helped our mirth in his hymn as he sings—

"With a scrip on my back and a staff in my hand,
I march on in haste through an enemy's land—
The way may be rough, but it cannot be long,
So I'll smooth it with hope, and I'll cheer it with song!"

And somewhere or other in this congregation, I think I can hear the hoarse voice of a desponding believer saying, "Ah, I am not troubled about worldly things! I am not distressed about any trials that may or may not happen to me here below. I have a worse fear haunting me! My terror is more terrible. Suppose I should not be in Christ after all?" The fear lest I have not really believed in Jesus, that I have not experienced a saving repentance, that I have not laid hold upon eternal life, distracts me. Well, precaution is better than presumption—it is better to go fearing to heaven than to go presuming to hell! I would rather be haunted with fears all my life and yet found, at length, when the shadows flee, among those who are God's delight, than I would be inflated with a dauntless confidence all my days, but undeceived at last when the light breaks in and be left in lonely horror, the victim of despair! Tell me now, dear friend, what it is you fear. Do you fear hell? Let me ask you another question—Do you fear sin? If you fear sin, the Lord takes pleasure in you. The Lord takes pleasure in them who fear Him, and in them who hope in His mercy. Your doubts are very painful to bear, no doubt, but for all the distress they cause they will not destroy your soul! Doubting, like a toothache, is more distracting than dangerous. I never heard of its proving fatal to anybody yet. There are fluids of the body which serve as safety valves to the constitution. They ward off worse ills. An anxious solicitude whether you are, indeed, a child of God, of which we would by all means have you relieved as soon as possible, may have a salutary effect, nevertheless, upon your mind. It may make you walk more carefully, pray more fervently and live more scrupulously as one who pines for communion with God! I think I have a commission to say to everyone here who fears sin, and trembles lest he or she should not be found at God's right hand when He gathers His saints together to Himself, "Fear not, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." If you fear because you feel your unworthiness, it is a blessed fear! Trust in the worthiness of Christ and your fear shall give place to faith! Of if you fear because you perceive your feebleness, I am not surprised. Look to Christ's strength and His succor shall be your solace! Your heavenly Father will, of His own good pleasure, give you the kingdom of God.

Or do I hear anyone say, "Well, sir, my fear is not as to the sincerity of my present profession. I trust I am a Christian. I know that I have

believed in Jesus, and I do believe in Him. But my serious misgiving is lest I should not hold on to the end." Beloved friend that is a fear you ought not to entertain! Never fear it again as long as you live! If there is anything taught in Scripture for certain, it is the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints! I am as sure that doctrine is as plainly taught as the doctrine of the Deity of Christ. Words cannot put it more distinctly than God has graciously revealed it. Hear what Christ says. "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"—cast not, I beseech you, any suspicion upon the fidelity of our Lord! A question may be raised whether the work is begun by Him, but if He has begun it, there can be no question about His completing it! He never forsakes the work of His hands, or begins to build, and then proves unable or unwilling to rear the superstructure. Lay that fear aside and account it a folly! Do you doubt—whether you are now saved, or whether you shall hold out to the end? Then I counsel you to go back to the cross and begin again as a penitent sinner, to put your trust in a pardoning Savior. Full many a time I have to do that. I see my evidence cut down like the grass, wither like hay and perish like the green herb. What else then, can I do, but hurry off to the foot of the cross, there to stand, and thus to say, "Here I come, a sinner, seeking succor from You, my Lord, from You. I come afresh as though I had never come to You before. If You have never washed me, wash me now! If I have never rested in You, here do I lay me down beneath Your shadow. To Your cross I cling." You will find your fears vanish when you come to the cross anew. Do this, I pray you, brothers and sisters, as often as you get into the dark for a while, for, notwithstanding all fears to the contrary, it really is "your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." You have not to earn it by your labor, or merit it as a prize—else you might despond, or even despair. What is now amiss, I cannot guess, since He will give it to you freely of His own grace; it is not the judge's good pleasure to award you the kingdom, but it is "your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Therefore, repose in the grace of God, rely on the precious blood of Christ and cast your fears to the winds!

I think I hear a sigh. It is a sickly thought, and it comes from one who has a sickly frame. "My fear is about dying. How shall I stand the last dread hour of parting life? Shall I bear up in the weakness of that mortal agony? Perhaps after all, I shall sink as one who is vanquished in the fray." Beloved brother, there is a peril more perilous than death! "What is that?" you ask. Why, I answer, Life! To live! To live well! There is the

point—to live well. If you do succeed in this, you shall find that to die is nothing but just closing up your life's story. Be it your main care to run the race with honor, then you shall finish your course with joy! You may leave the dying till the time to die comes, if you will see to the living while the time to live lasts! There is one kind of grace of which we have no immediate need of today, and that is dying grace. We shall not require the timely succor till the time of our departure is at hand. Or if we crave it we shall not have it. Does any one of you put himself on his dying bed in imagination, to forestall the terrors that his fancy paints? He does a very foolish thing. You cannot know what sort of summons you will get to quit your fleshly tabernacle—what sharp pains you may be called to bear—or what sweet comfort may be provided to cheer your spirit when heart and flesh shall fail. Serve God now with all your strength! Rest in the precious blood now! Seek present communion with your living, loving Lord. Doubt not that He will supply you with sufficient grace for all your future needs! You know not of the good He has in store. As time and space contract, your mind will expand to survey the eternity beyond. As the film comes over these dull organs of sight, the eyes of your understanding will be opened. As you near the banks of Jordan, the fair fields on yonder side will break on your ravished view. You know nothing of them yet. Full many I guarantee you, who depart this life hear the songs of angels long before their ears are closed to the sounds of earth! And oh, how precious Christ becomes to them! We have seen the flush of glory on their faces! I should think they hardly knew at what moment they entered heaven, for before they left earth, the radiance of that bright realm dawned upon them in such visions of glory! They were lifted up to Pisgah's summit and they looked down on this poor earth from an elevation at which we who still sojourn in the valley do greatly marvel—

"Jesus can make a dying bed
Seem soft as downy pillows are!
While on His breast I lean my head,
And breathe my life out sweetly there."

Why, some of us have known believers who, after trembling all their days, triumphed in their last hours! In the prime of their strength they were frightened of a mouse—but in the extremity of their weakness they became so strong that they could face a legion of foes! Nothing could dismay them. Mr. Fearing, who fell over a straw, and said he should never reach the celestial city, was the very man who died like a giant, singing and shouting with all his might! God is pleased to let some of His servants live in the dark—and die in the light. I think some of us have our candle lit at one watch of the night, some at another. You may have

begun your spiritual life in the dark and your path has grown brighter and brighter. Or you may have begun in the light and have since passed through seasons in which darkness has prevailed, or the lamp that guides your feet has dimly burned. God puts some of His bravest servants to bed in the dark because they can bear it, but others cannot. They cross over the river and angels come to meet them. Do not darken your days with direful dreams of dreaded death! Perhaps you will die in your sleep and never know a pang. Perhaps you never will die—Christ may come and take you to Himself. It may prove such a glorious thing to die, that you may say, with Halliday, "Call this dying? Then it is worthwhile to live, to die like this!" Death may have more of translation than of dissolution in it. If the dogs of hell howl at you, bid them hold their tongue. Your Father's good pleasure will not be frustrated—your fair prospects will not be disappointed. Does conscience accuse you of slips and falls? Tell conscience of the precious blood, and say, "My Father's good pleasure will rescue His ransomed child from all his sins." Do doubts and fears come up like a swelling torrent? Stem them all with this blessed assurance—"God's counsel will stand, and He will do all His pleasure. We who have put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ shall assuredly possess the kingdom of God forever and ever!"

Oh, how I wish you, all of you, belonged to the number of Christ's sheep! Oh, that everyone of you had the promise of the kingdom! The Lord bring you to the feet of Jesus! May the Lord show you what sinners you are and what a Savior He is! Would to God you might all believe in Him and pass from death unto life! The fearless transgressor shall fail without help, while the fearful disciple shall be fondled with Fatherly care. Herd together, you little ones, as a flock—the heritage is reserved for you. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

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AN EARNEST ENTREATY
NO. 3550

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"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."
Psalm 2:12.

LET us have a little quiet talk tonight. I have known a simple, earnest conversation turn the whole current of a man's life. I recollect a good man, who lived at a certain market town in Suffolk. He was no preacher, as far as I know. He had never tried to preach, yet he was a mighty soul-winner. He had noticed how commonly it happened in that town, as in most of our smaller towns, that the lads, as they grew up, sought employment in London, or in some other large center of industry and, consequently, they left their home, their parents, guardians and the associations amidst which they had been trained, to enter a new sphere—where they would lack much of the oversight that had hitherto checked them when prone to wander. His watchful eyes and ever-listening ears having ascertained within a little when any young man was going, he sent a polite invitation to tea. And at that tea table the words he used to speak, the cautions he gave, and the necessity he urged of being decided for Christ before leaving, and especially the earnest prayer with which he concluded the evening—these things have been remembered by scores of young men who, on removing to the larger towns, could never shake off the impression which his quiet, devout conversation had made! Some of them even traced their conversion to God, and their subsequent perseverance in the paths of righteousness, to the evening they had spent with that humble, but wise and earnest individual! I wonder whether any of us remember, in our young days, any such talk as that which exerted an influence upon us? I wonder more if, instead of trying to preach anything great tonight which is not much in my line, I try to talk very seriously and pointedly to all present who are unconverted, whether God will not bless it by His Holy Spirit and make it a turning point to decide the present course and eternal destiny of some of my hearers?

Our text contains some very sound advice. Let us ask—to whom was it originally addressed? And to whom is it appropriately addressed now?

I. TO WHOM WAS IT ADDRESSED.

"Kiss the Son, lest He be angry." Look at the 10th verse, "Be wise now, therefore, O you kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth." Thus to monarchs and potentates of this world—to those who made and those who administered the laws, in whose hands were the liberties, if not the lives of their subjects—were these words spoken! People make a great fuss about a sermon preached before Her Majesty. I must confess to having wasted a shilling once or twice over those productions. I could never make out why they should not have been sold for a halfpenny, for I think better sermons could have been bought for a penny. But, somehow, there is always an interest attached to anything that is preached before a king or a queen, and still more so if it is pointedly preached to a king. Now this was a little private advice given to kings and judges. Still, it offers counsel by which persons of inferior rank may profit. You sir, are not so great in station but this advice may be good enough for you! If it was meant for those who sat on thrones, wielded scepters and exercised authority, you will not have to humble yourself much to listen earnestly, and receive gratefully this admonition of wisdom!

Let me take you by your coat, and hold you for a minute, and say, be wise now. This is the day for reason. Exercise a little judgment—put on your considering cap—do not spurn the monition, or put it on one side with a huff and a puff, as though it were not discreet or urgent. This was language meant for kings—listen to it—it may be a royal word to you! Perhaps—for strange things happen—it may help to make you a king too, according to that saying which is written, "He has made us kings and priests unto God." The language which would command the attention of kings would certainly claim heed of such humble and obscure persons as are here assembled! Surely, when the expostulation proceeds from the mouth of God, and when it is spoken to the highest in the world, you might account it a privilege to have the matter made privy to yourselves! And as it intimately concerns you, there is the more cause that you take heed thereunto.

The words were spoken to those who had willfully opposed the reign of our Savior, the Son of God, the Lord's anointed. They had determined to reject Him. They said, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." A terrible, a disastrous course to resolve upon in the teeth of a destiny that no plot can hinder, no confederacy can avert! Hence, the caution and the counsel appeal to all or to any who have been opposers of Christ and of true religion. I do not suppose there are many such here, who are actively and ostensibly revolting against the gospel, yet there may be some such and, if there are, I would sound an alarm and ring loudly the warning, "Be wise now, therefore! Be instructed! Do listen a little!" It is good to be zealous in a good cause. But suppose it is a bad cause? Saul of Tarsus was vehement against Christ, but after some consideration, he became quite as enthusiastic for Him. It may cost you

many regrets another day to have been so violent against that which you will find out to have been worthy of your love rather than of your fierce opposition! Every wise man, before he commits himself to defend or withstand a policy, should make quite sure, as far as human judgment can, whether it is right or wrong—to be desired, or to be deprecated! Surely I do not speak to any who would willfully oppose that which is good. Or, if prejudice has prompted you, there is all the more reason why your judgment should now be impartial. Stop, therefore, and give ear! It may be your relenting will be kindled, and wisdom will enlighten your heart. These words were spoken to those who ought to have been wise—to kings and judges of the earth. Those mighty ones had been mistaken, otherwise the rebuke would have been untimely and superfluous—"Be wise now, therefore, O you kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth." It appears they had rebelled—partly through ignorance, but mainly through jealousy and malice—they had rebelled and revolted against the Christ of God. Doubtless they did not rightly understand Him. Perhaps they thought His way was hard, His laws severe, His government tyrannical. But He meets your wild rage with His mild reasoning! To the gusts of your passion, He responds with the gentle voice of His mercy, "Be wise, O you kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth." Learn a little more. Get a little more knowledge—it may correct your vain imaginations. A ray of light shining into your minds might make you shudder at the darkness in the midst of which you dwell! A view of the right might perhaps, show you that you have been wrong. It might take the tiller of your soul and turn the vessel around into another course. We are, none of us, so wise but we could profit by a little more instruction! He that cannot learn from a fool, is a fool himself. When a man says, "I know enough," he knows nothing! He who thinks that his education is "finished," had need begin his schooling afresh, for a fair start he has never yet made. With a sound basis, the edifice of education may proceed satisfactorily, but it never can be completed. Excelsior is the student's motto. He sees higher and higher altitudes as he rises in attainment—and as long as he sojourns in this world, fresh fields of enquiry will continue to open up before him!

Once again, I believe the words of our text leave an especial reference to those who are thoughtless and careless about their best interests. The kings of the earth were deliberating how they might successfully oppose Christ, but they were strangely and culpably negligent of their real interest. Hence the remonstrance, "Be wise now; be instructed, you judges of the earth." The general lack of intelligence in the present day with respect to religion is, to my mind, appalling. The knowledge with which most men are content is superficial in the extreme. They do not think! They do not take the pains to make reflections and draw inferences from the facts within their reach, but they allow themselves to

drift with the tide of what is called "public opinion." Were it the fashion for people to carry brains in their heads, some religions which are now very rife would soon come to an end! I have stood aghast with wonder and with awe at the sublime folly of mankind, when I have seen how eagerly and devoutly they will bow down before baubles and street shows, while they vainly imagine that they are worshiping God! Have they no brains within their skulls? Have they no faculty of thought? Have they no reasoning power? What singular defect can be traced to their birth, or with what fatal folly have they renounced their common sense? Ought we to pity, to chide, or to scorn them? In indictments for witchcraft, I suppose, you punish the impostor as a knave, while you laugh at the victim as a dupe. But in cases of priestcraft, you divide the scandal more equally. So the Sunday theatricals run their course till the force of thought, the voice of conscience, and I might add, the love of liberty, shall pronounce their doom! People do not think; some of them are of the religion of their ancestors, whatever that may be! You hear of Roman Catholic families and Quaker families; not conviction, but tradition shapes their ends. Others are of the religion of the circle in which they live, whatever that may be. They are good Protestants, they say, but had they been born in Naples, they would have been as good Papists! Or had they been born at Timbuktu, they would have been as good heathens—just about as good in any case! Thought, reason, or judgment never entered into their reckoning. They go up to their place of worship—they pray as others do, or they say, "Amen," in the service. Thought, they have none. They sing without thought, hear without thought and as the thing is to be done, I suppose, they preach without thought!

Talk of preaching, I have specimens at home of sermons which can be bought for nine pence each. They are underlined, so that the proper emphasis is apparent—and the pauses to be made between the sentences are fairly indicated. Preaching made easy! We shall be favored, one of these days, with preaching machines—we have already got down to hearing machines. The mass of our hearers is not much more animated than an automaton figure. Life and liveliness are lacking in both. Preaching and hearing may both perhaps, be done by steam! I would it were not so. Men are evidently thoughtful about other things. Bring up a sanitary problem and there are men that will work it out somehow. Is some new invention needed, say, a gun or a torpedo, to effect wholesale destruction of life? You shall find competitors in the arena, vying, one with another, in their study of the murderous science! Man seems to think of everything but of his God—to read everything but his Bible—to feel the influence of everything but the love of Christ, and to see reason and argument in everything except in the inviolable truth of divine revelation. Oh, when will men consider? Why are they bent upon dashing into eternity thoughtlessly? Is dying and passing into another

world of no more account than passing from the parlor to the drawing room? Is there no hereafter? Is heaven a dream and hell a bugbear? Well, then, cease to play with shadows! No longer foster such delusions! Be these things true or false, your insincerity is alike glaring. Like honest men, repudiate the Scriptures if you will not accept their counsel. Do not pretend to believe the solemnities of God's Word and yet trifle with them! This is to stultify yourselves, while you insult your Maker! I appeal to the conscience of every thoughtless person here, if reason or common sense would justify such vacillation. Having thus tried to find out the people to whom my text applies, let me now direct your attention to the advice it gives them.

II. THE ADVICE WHICH IS GIVEN.

The advice is this—*rebel no more against God.* You have done so, some of you actively and willfully. Others of you, by ignoring His claims and utterly neglecting His will. It is not right to continue in this rebellious state! To have become entangled in such iniquity is grievous enough, but to continue therein any longer were an outrageous folly and a terrible crime. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Do you say, "We hear of advice, and are willing to take it—our anxiety now is to find out the way in which we can become reconciled to God. How can we be restored to friendship with Him whom we have so bitterly wronged, and so grossly offended?" Here is the pith of the advice. "Kiss the Son, pay Him homage, yield the affectionate fealty of your hearts to the Son of God." Between you and the great King, there is an awful breach. You can obtain no audience of Him. So grievous has been your revolt, that He will not see you; He has shut the door and there cannot be any communication between you and Himself. He has hung up a thick veil, through which your prayers cannot penetrate. But He refers you to His Son. That Son is His other self—one with Himself in essential Deity, who has condescended to become man, has taken your nature into union with Himself, and in that nature has offered unto divine justice an expiatory Sacrifice for human guilt. Now, therefore, God will deal with you through His Son. *You must have an advocate*—as many a client cannot plead in court, but must have some counselor to plead for him who is infinitely more versed in the law and better able to defend his cause than he is—so the Lord appoints that you, if you would see the face of your God, must see it in the face of Jesus Christ! The short way of being at peace with God is not to try and mend your ways, or excuse yourself, or perform certain works, or go through certain ceremonies, but to repair to Christ, the one and only Mediator, who once was fastened to the cross, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. He is now at the right hand of God, and you are required to worship Him, to trust in Him, to love Him. Thus do, and the reconciliation between you and God is effected in a moment! The blessed Jesus will wash you from

your guilt, and the righteousness of Christ will cover you with beauty which will make you acceptable in the sight of God. "Kiss the Son." It means render Him homage, just as in our own country they speak of kissing the Queen's hands when certain offices are taken and homage is required. So come and kiss the Savior! No hard work this! Some of us would gladly forever kiss His blessed feet! It would be heaven enough for us. Oh, come and pay your homage to Him! Acknowledge that Christ is your King! Give up your life to His service. Consecrate all your powers and faculties to do His will. But do trust Him. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." That is the true kiss! Trust Him, rely upon Him, depend upon Him—leave off depending upon yourself, and rely upon Jesus! Throw yourself flat down upon the finished work of Christ! When you have so done your faith has reconciled you to God, and you may go your way in peace. Only go your way henceforth to serve that King whose hand you have kissed, and to be the willing subject of that dear Redeemer who ought to have you because He bought you with His precious blood!

This advice is urgent. *Do it at once.* I am not speaking, now, after the fashion of the orator, but I am talking to you as a friend. I wish I could pass along those aisles, or over the tops of those pews, and gently take the hand of each one, and say, "Friend, God would gladly have you reconciled to Him, and it only needs the simple act of trusting Jesus and accepting Him to be your leader and your King." Do it now. If it is ever worth doing, it is worth doing at once! It is a blessed thing to do. Why delay? It is a simple thing to do! Why hesitate? It is the very least thing God could ask of you, and even that He will not require you to do in your own strength. Are you willing, but weak? He will help you to do what He commands you to do! Now, as you sit in your pew, what say you to this? "I will think it over," says one. Does it need any thinking over? If I had offended my father, I should wish to be at peace with him immediately—and if my father said to me, "My son, I will be reconciled to you if you will go and speak to your brother about it," well, I would not think it difficult, for I love my brother as well as my father, and I would go to him at once—and so all would be well. God says, "Go to Jesus. I am in Him. You can reach Me there—go round by His cross—you will find Me reconciled there. Away from the cross I am a Judge and my terrors will consume you. With the cross between you and Me, I am a Father, and you shall behold My face beaming with love to you." "But how am I to get to Jesus?" you ask. Why, have I not told you?—simply to trust Him—to rely upon Him! Faith is trusting Christ. This is the gospel, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Put your entire trust in Him. Renounce all lordship that has ever been exercised over you by any other master and become Christ's servant! Rely on Him to land you safely at the right hand of God, and He will do it. "Kiss the Son." Oh, friend, I cannot make you do it—it must be done of your own will. God alone can

lead that will of yours to yield itself up to Christ's will! But I pray you do it—kiss the Son, and do it now! Pursuing our quiet talk, I come to my third point, which is—

III. HOW IS THIS ADVICE PRESSED HOME UPON US?

The vanity of any other course is made palpable. Be reconciled to God because *t*here is no use in *being at enmity with Him.* The kings of the earth opposed God, but while they were plotting and planning, God was laughing. "Yet," says He, "have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." I think if I were a king and had the misfortune to be driven to go to war, I would not like to fight one that had ten times my own strength! I would rather engage in a somewhat equal combat, with a prospect that by dint of valor and good generalship, victory might be gained. To contend against Omnipotence is insanity! For any man, I care not who he may be, to put himself in opposition to God is utter folly! I have often watched, as doubtless you have done, the foolish moth attracted by the glare of the candle or the gas. He plunges at it, as though he would put it out, and he drops, full of exquisite pain, upon the table. He has enough wing left to make another dash at the flame, and again he is filled with another pain, and unless you mercifully kill him outright, he will continue as long as he has any strength to fight with the fire which destroys him! That is an apt picture of the sinner's life—and such will be the sinner's death! Oh, do not so, dear friend—do not so! Speak I not with voice of reason when I thus dissuade you? If you must fight, let it be with someone that you can overcome. But sit down now and reckon whether you can hope to win a victory against an Almighty God! End the quarrel, man, for the quarrel will otherwise end in your death and eternal destruction!

We are further pressed to the duty commanded by the claims of the Son. "Kiss the Son." As I read the words, they seem to me to have a force of argument in them which explains itself and vindicates its own claims. Kiss! Kiss whom? "Kiss the Son." And who is He? Why, He is Jesus, the well-beloved of the Father! And among the sons of men, the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely! Surely Christ is such a princely one that He ought to receive homage of mankind! He has done such great things for us and He has shown such good will towards us, that to pay Him reverence seems not so much the call of duty as the natural impulse of love! The worship which is His due should flow spontaneously from the instincts of grace rather than be exacted by the fiat of law! Even those who have denied the authenticity of inspiration have always been charmed with the character of our Lord, and you will notice that the most astute opponents of Christianity have had little, if anything, to say against the Founder of it, so transparent His virtue, so charming His humility. Oh, Kiss the Son, then! He is God—trust Him. He is man, a perfect man—confide in His friendship. He has finished the work of human redemption, therefore, hail Him as your King and pay your

homage to Him now! Oh, that God's eternal Spirit may lead you so to do without hesitation or objection!

Were I talking to some of you in a quiet corner I might gather an argument from the *simplicity of the promise here offered you.* "Kiss the Son." Is that all? Pay Jesus homage. Is that all? The Emperor of Germany, in the olden times when Popes were Popes, had offended his Unholiness—and before he could be restored to favor, he had to stand for three days (I think it was) outside the castle gate, in the deep snow, in the depth of winter, and do penance. I have seen, myself, in Rome and elsewhere, outside of the older churches, places uncovered and exposed to wind and rain, to the heat of summer and the frost of winter, where backsliders were made to stand, sometimes for years, even, before they were restored, if they had committed some offense against ecclesiastical statutes! You will sometimes see in old country churches of England little windows that run slanting and just look toward the communion table, through which poor offenders who professed repentance, after some months of standing in the church yard, or perhaps outside of it, were at last allowed to take a peep at the altar, at the expiration of their weary term of penance! All this is contrary to the spirit of the gospel, for the spirit of the Gospel is, "Come, now, and let us reason together; though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool." The spirit of my text is, "Kiss the Son, now"—and that is all. Though those lips were once blaspheming, let them kiss the Son! Though these lips have uttered high words and proud words, or perhaps lying and lascivious words, "Kiss the Son." Bow down at those dear pierced feet and trust Emmanuel, and acknowledge yourself His servant, and you shall be forgiven—forgiven at once, without delay and this night you shall be accepted in Christ! I am right glad I have got so good a message to tell! I would that you would receive it with gladness. May it drop like the snowflakes on the sea, which sink into the waves. May each invitation sink into your soul, there to bless you henceforth and forever!

Moreover, the exhortation of our text is backed up with *felicitations for those who yield to it.* "Blessed are all they who put their trust in Him." Those of you who do not know anything about trusting in Christ must have noticed how joyously we sang that hymn just now—

"Oh, happy day that fixed my choice
On You, my Savior and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad."

Don't you think there was some fervor in our tones? Was it not sung as if we meant it? If nobody else meant it, I did! And I could see by the look of your eyes that a good many of you were stirred with grateful recollections. It was the happiest day in all our lives when Jesus washed our sins away! Far be it from us to deceive any of you by saying that to be a Christian will save you from the sorrows of the world, or from trials

and tribulations, from physical pain or from natural death. Nothing of the kind! You will be liable to sickness and adversity in their manifold forms, as other men are, but you will have this to comfort you in every dark, distressing hour—that these light afflictions, which are but for a season—will come to you from a loving Father's gentle hand, with a gracious purpose, and they will be dealt out to you in weight and measure according to His judgment, while some sweet consolations will always be sent with them. And, above all, there is perpetual joy and perennial satisfaction in that man's heart who knows that he is right with God. Although his house may not be as he would have it, yet he has accepted God's way of reconciliation—he is reconciled by the blood of Christ! God loves him and he loves God! He is confident, therefore, that whether he lives or dies, he must be blessed, because he is at peace with God! Oh, happy day, happy day, thrice happy day, when a man comes into this blessed state! I have heard many regret that they have pursued the pleasures of sense and been fascinated with them, but I never yet heard of one who had found the dear delights of faith pall on his taste! It has never fallen to my lot yet to attend a dying bed where I have heard a Christian regret that he put his trust in his Savior! Neither have I ever heard at any time of anyone who died believing in Jesus who has had to say, "Had I but served the world with half the zeal I served my God I should have been a happier man." Oh, no! Such bitter reflections on misspent and misused talents befit the worldling, and the world's poet put it into the dying man's mouth in another form from that in which I gave it, for, "what we might have been," and, "what we might have done," make the sum of life's bewailing when death in view makes such repentance unavailing! The Christian's satisfaction is, on the other hand, only shaded by the wish all feel that they had loved the Savior more intensely, trusted Him more confidently and served Him more diligently! Never have I heard any other kind of compunction and self-reproach.

"Come along, then, friend, Come along," they say to us! "What matters so long as you are happy?" I have often heard them say so. And let me say to you, if that is one of your slogans and *y*ou really do seek after happiness, you cannot do better than pay homage to the Son of God, end the awful rupture between you and your Creator, and henceforth put your trust in Him. One other motive I must mention. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." A striking expression! If Christ gets a little angry, men perish from the way! Then what must His great anger be? If His anger, kindled but a little, burns like a devouring fire, and men perish from the way of life, and from all hope of salvation, what must His great wrath be? Is there a fear suggested here that anybody will provoke Christ to fiercer anger? There is. Alas, there is! Shall I tell you the likeliest person to do it? Not, I think, that abandoned sinner who was born and bred in an

immoral atmosphere and has followed a vicious course to the present hour. To him I would say, "Come to Jesus, and He will wash you now, and cleanse you from all your pollution." But the man I tremble for as most likely to make Him swear in His wrath is such a one as I was—privileged with godly parents, watched with jealous eyes, scarcely ever permitted to mingle with questionable associates, warned not to listen to anything profane or licentious—taught the way of God from his youth up! In my case there came a time when the solemnities of eternity pressed upon me for a decision and when a mother's tears and a father's supplications were offered to heaven on my behalf. At such a time, had I not been helped by the grace of God, but had I been left alone to do violence to conscience, and to struggle against conviction, I might have been at this moment perhaps dead, buried, and doomed, having, through a course of vice, brought myself to my grave! Or I might have been as earnest a ringleader among the ungodly as I desire to be for Christ and His truth! When there is light given, when one is not left to grope in darkness, when conscience is kept tender, a little provocation may then very much anger Christ!

I am afraid some of you young people that are growing up here stand in deep need of remonstrance. You have got good parents. You have been instructed in the Scriptures from your infancy and you have had great many deep impressions while sitting in these pews listening to the sound of the gospel—and yet you are playing with them, you are trifling with them! Nothing bad about you, so you think. You are not conscious of having grossly violated any moral law. But have you never heard of a gentleman in India who had a tame leopard that went about his house? It was as playful as a cat, and did no one any harm till one day, as he lay asleep, the leopard licked his hand and licked until it had licked a sore place and tasted blood. After that there was nothing for it but to destroy it—for all the leopard-nature was aroused by that taste of blood! And some of you young people, with all the godly associations that are round about you, will—I am always afraid—get a taste of the devilry outside, of the world's vice and sin. And then there is the leopard's nature in you. If you once get the taste and flavor of it, you will be prone to be always thirsting for it. Then, instead of the hope we now cherish, that we shall soon see you at your parents' side, serving Christ—see you take your father's place, young man, in later years—see you, young woman, grow up to be a matron in the Church of God, bringing many others to the Savior—we may have to lament that the children are not as the parents, and cry, "Woe is the day that ever they were born." I, therefore, want you to decide, lest you perish from the way—from the way of God and the way of righteousness—while His wrath is kindled but a little, lest He say, "Let them alone," and throw the reins on your neck, for if He should once do that, woe the day! Nothing can happen worse to a man than to be left to himself. Kiss the Son, then!

Affectionately and earnestly do I entreat you—not standing here ex-officio to deliver pious platitudes, but from my very soul, as though I were your brother or father, I would say, Young man, young woman, kiss the Son now! Yield your heart up to Jesus now! Blessed are they who trust in Him now. Oh, tonight, tonight, tonight—your first night in grace, or else your last night in hope! Tonight, tonight! The clock has just struck. It seemed to say, "Tonight." God help you to say, "Yes, it shall be tonight, for God and for Christ!"—

"Songs of triumph then resounding
From your happy lips shall flow!
In the knowledge of salvation
You true happiness shall know,
Through Christ Jesus,
Who alone can life bestow."

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
LUKE 7:36-48.

Verse 36. *And one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.* They sat according to the Eastern custom of sitting, which was rather lying at length, with the feet far out upon the couch or sofa.

37. *And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner.* In a particular sense, a sinner—one whose very trade was sin.

37, 38. *When she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment and stood at His feet, behind Him, weeping.* As she could do, you see, without coming into the room, except for a few yards, especially if the Savior's feet were close against the door.

38. *And began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment.* For water she gives her tears, for a towel, her hair—to heal the blisters of His weary pilgrimage, there are her soft lips for liniment and then, for ointment, comes this precious salve.

39. *Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying, This Man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is who touches Him; for she is a sinner.* "She is a sinner, and does He let her touch Him, kiss His feet and show such tokens of affection? What man must He be who allows a harlot's kiss, even though it is upon His feet?" Ah, poor foolish Pharisee! He judged according to the sight of the eyes, or else he might have known that the best of men would never be angry at a harlot's tears, for the tears of repentance, come from whatever heart they may, are always like diamonds in the esteem of those who judge rightly.

40-42. *And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have something to say unto you. And he said, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay*—and were, therefore, likely to be cast into prison, and to be sold as slaves.

42-43. *He frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most. Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, You have rightly judged.* There were no bonds, no promises of what they would do in the future, but he frankly forgave them both.

44. *And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, See you this woman? I entered into your house*—and it was, therefore, your duty to attend to Me.

44. *You gave Me no water for My feet.* Though that was the common custom.

44, 45. *But she has washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head you gave Me no kiss.* Which was the customary welcome to every honored guest—a kiss upon the cheek or upon the forehead.

45. *But this women, since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss My feet.* She has done what you ought to have done; she has done it better than you could have done it; she has done it when there was no claim upon her to do it, except that she has been forgiven much, and, therefore, loved much.

46. *My head with oil you did not anoint.* This, too, was the usual custom.

46-48. *But this woman has anointed My feet with ointment. Therefore I say unto you, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. And He said unto her, Your sins are forgiven.*

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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THE GOSPEL IN POWER
NO. 3551

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, APRIL 28, 1872.

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only," etc.,* [down to] *"from the wrath to come"
1 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

A WORKMAN likes to see that he has been doing something. It is very dispiriting if he has spent much toil and can see no result. God's workmen by faith would continue still to labor, even if they saw nothing come of it, but it is much more comforting, much more easy for them to continue in service when they see that God is blessing them. Now it is not wrong for a Christian minister to speak about the conversions that have been worked under his ministry, for Paul says that he would have done so, only that others did it so constantly that there was no need of it. Paul, however, would not, under any circumstances, have done a wrong thing and, therefore, we gather that it is sometimes most allowable that we should see what has been done and should speak of it—and the more especially because if any good is done by any ministry, it is God that has done it—and all the glory is due to Him and to Him, alone!

Not to speak of what God has done would be ingratitude. It might have a semblance of humility, but in reality it would be disloyalty to the Most High. Paul, therefore, did not hesitate to speak of his converts at Thessalonica and of their good character—and of the good fruit which they had borne and the way in which they had spread abroad the gospel. He did not boast—he gave God the glory of it, but he did speak of what had been done. And we think we may do the same in any measure in which God shall bless our work—any one of us may tell of it to the praise and glory of God and to the encouragement of our fellow laborers. Now the apostle in this passage tells us what God had done at Thessalonica. We will proceed at once, for our text is long—we will proceed at once to the handling of it.

And you will note that he tells us, first, what he had preached at Thessalonica. Then how it had come to the people. And thirdly, what had been the result of this to themselves. And fourthly, what had been the result of it to other people. First, the apostle tells us—

I. WHAT WAS PREACHED AT THESSALONICA. He says, "Our gospel"—(note that word)—"Our gospel came not unto you in word only."

Why does Paul call it, "our gospel"? He did not invent it! He did not think it out and make it fresh every Sunday. No, it was Christ's gospel long before it was Paul's gospel. Yet he calls it our gospel by way of distinction, for there were other gospels. There were those who came and said, "This is the good news!" And others, on the other hand, who said, "*This* is the good news," but Paul says that there was another gospel and he adds, "Yet not another, but there are some that trouble you." He, therefore, put down his foot and he said, "Bring what gospels you like, each of you, but I have a gospel which I preach, distinct from yours, and that gospel it is which I have preached to the Thessalonians and which has not come to them in word only." In these times, beloved, there must be made a distinction between men's gospel and God's gospel, for nowadays man's gospel is popular enough. Somebody thinks until his head aches and he gets into nonsense—and then he comes and brings this forward as something fresh. Men go to the bottom of a subject until they stir the mud at the bottom and cannot see their own way, themselves, and nobody else can either—and then forthwith they come out with something marvelous! And, having used some words that are hard to pronounce and harder still to understand, they earn a cheap name for being great scholars and profound divines. Well, let such go their way—that is their gospel, but we have another gospel from that—one which we have gained in another way and which we desire to propagate in another fashion! Paul said, "our gospel," then, by way of distinction.

But he also meant this—it was his gospel because it had been committed to him. He had received it as a sacred deposit. He was, as it were, a steward for God—put into commission to preserve and keep alive the truth of God in the world—and Paul did keep it unadulterated, so that when he closed his life he could say, "I have fought a good fight. I have kept the faith." Whoever may have adulterated the gospel, Paul did not. He gave it forth as Christ gave it to him. Oh, that each one of us who is called to preach the gospel and, indeed, every church member would feel that the truth of God is committed to us to keep it in the world! Our grandfathers kept it at the stake and on the cruel rack—and when they went in their chariots of fire to heaven, they left the truth to their sons to preserve. Handed down to us in the long line of martyrs and confessors, Covenanters and Puritans, what will we do with it now? Will we not feel that all the cost expended on it in the centuries past demands of us that we should spend the same—if there is a necessity for it—even our blood and that, while we live, it shall never be said that in our life, in our prayer, in our conversation, or in our preaching, the gospel suffered anything at our hands? "I know whom I have believed," said Paul, and, "I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him." Or rather, as some read it, "He is able to keep my deposit, that

which He committed to me to keep. Christ also will keep and preserve the gospel pure and clear, even until time's latest hour." The Lord grant it, for His name's sake!

But I think the Apostle used the term, "our gospel," not only for distinction and because he felt it was committed to his trust, but because he had enjoyed it himself, and had experienced it. What right has any man to preach that which he has not himself enjoyed and made his own? I have heard of a certain physician who usually tried his own medicines upon himself—and surely this should always be the practice of those who serve the heavenly physician. How shall we come and preach of the balm of Gilead, which is to heal all wounds, if our wounds are unhealed? What a wretched case must that man be in who talks of regeneration, but is not born-again! Who preaches faith, but has never believed! Who talks of pardon, but has never been washed in the precious blood! Who speaks of the righteousness of Christ, but is shivering in the nakedness of his own corruption! Ah, wretched man, to be a herald of good news while he, himself, partakes not therein! Ezekiel, before he had to go and speak of the message of God, had that message given to him, and what was said? "Son of man, eat this roll." He had to take the message written on the roll and eat it—and when it was in his own body—then it was that he could tell it out with great power! It is a good old saying, "If your preaching is to go to the heart, it must come from the heart." It must first have moved our souls before we can ever hope to move the souls of others!

The Lord is my witness that in preaching to you here, beloved, these many years, I have preached to you what I have tasted and handled of the good Word of God. I have preached the doctrine of human sin, for I have felt its power, felt its bitterness and shame, and lain in the dust before God, even in despair. I have preached to you the power of the precious blood to cleanse from sin, for I have looked to Christ's dear wounds and found cleansing there. We have only spoken to you what we have, ourselves, known and felt, and proved to be true—and I would go to my chamber this night wretched, indeed, if I had no other assurance of the truth of God of my message than that which I could find in the experience of other men! Now many of you are engaged in preaching Christ to others and in teaching Christ to the children in the schools. Always speak out of the fullness of your own hearts, for when you can say, "I have tried this. I am rejoicing in this," then your words will be pretty sure to come with power to the hearts of those that hear you. The man who desires to bring others to Christ should imitate Elisha, the prophet, who, when he found the child dead in the bed and that it could not be raised to life by any other means, went and put his mouth upon the child's mouth, his hands upon the child's hands and his feet upon

the child's feet—and then, by-and-by, the life was restored to the child. We must feel an inward sympathy with those whom we would bring to Christ! And then we must tell out from our own soul what we know about the Savior and it will be sure to come with freshness and with power, God, the Holy Spirit, blessing it! This, then, I think, was Paul's reason for calling it, "our gospel"—the gospel committed to him and the gospel which he had tasted and handled personally. Now I shall want you to observe in the second place—

II. HOW THE GOSPEL CAME TO THE THESSALONIANS. He describes it as coming in four degrees. First, he says, "It came not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit, and, fourthly, in much assurance." Now these four words enable me to divide the present audience. To all who have been here present, who have been sitting in these pews for any length of time, our gospel has certainly come in the Word of God. They have all heard it—heard it, too, so as to understand the run, the gist of it. They have heard it in many forms and shapes commending itself to their attention. But, oh, it is to be feared that there are some to whom it has come in word only and it is, indeed, to the preacher (and more still it should be to those who are in such plight) sad that this life-giving word should be only a word. There was the gospel feast and the message was sent, but they who were invited came not to the feast. They heard the message—that was all. Here are sick men lying at Bethesda's pool—they see the water and that is all—but they step not in and are not healed. Oh, to lie sick, with healing within reach! To be hungry and bread hard by! To be thirsty, with the stream flowing at one's feet and not to drink! Remember dear hearers, that if the Word of God comes to you as word only, today, it will one day be something more than that, for it is an undoubted truth of Scripture that hearers are responsible for what they hear. "Take heed how you hear!" shall have to be answered for at the day of judgment. "You heard the gospel, but you rejected it!"—shall be one of the charges brought against those who listened to it—and it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than it shall be for such an one! I would now like to divide the congregation upon this question, "How many are now here to whom the gospel has come in word, only?" Let conscience speak! Let each man put his hand upon his heart and answer, "Is that my case?" If so, may it not be your case any longer, no, not a single day longer, but may the Word of God come to you in another way!

But there were, secondly, some to whom it came in power. Now there are hearers to whom the gospel comes with an awakening power. They used to be careless, but they cannot be, now! They hear the words, "Eternity! Eternity! Eternity," ringing in their ears and it startles and awakens them. They cannot be at ease while they are at enmity with God! They feel that their nest is stirred up. It has come with power to

them. More than that, there are some to whom the Word has come with crushing effect—it has struck them down! It has bruised their righteousness. It has dashed to shivers their hopes of themselves and though they have not looked to Christ for the true hope, yet they feel the power of the gospel which lays all other hopes in the dust! Ah, I know some of you have felt the power of the gospel, for you went home and prayed, perhaps dozens of times—after hearing the sermon! You have gone up to your chambers and you have begun to pray, but the next morning you have forgotten. Your goodness has been like the morning dew and has melted when the heat of the day's cares have come upon it. Alas! Alas! Alas! In many a furrow we have sown in vain! We have cast the seed on stony ground, we have thrown it on the highway side and we have lost our pains—nevertheless, we are to continue to preach the gospel, for in some it will come with a greater power than this!

Again, I would entreat another division of the house. I know there are some who will come under this head. They are not saved, but still they cannot ridicule it—they cannot pass it off with indifference. It is like a sharp two-edged sword—it pierces, cuts and wounds. I pray God it may kill them spiritually, that they may yet be made alive!

Now the third degree of the coming of the Word to Thessalonica was that it came in the Holy Spirit. Ah, here is the blessed way, for if it shall come in any other power than this, it will come in vain! But if it comes in the Holy Spirit, oh, then—then its end is achieved, for the Holy Spirit quickens men by a mysterious operation which we cannot describe—but which some of us have felt! It comes upon men and creates in them a new life and whereas they were dead in sin, they begin to live as they never lived before! That same Spirit then enlightens them, showing them a thousand truths of God in a light in which they never saw them before. They find they have entered into a new world. They have passed from darkness into marvelous light! Then the Spirit of God begins to purify them. He purges them from this sin and that and He refines and renews them. He is in them as a Spirit of burning—consuming sin—a cleansing Spirit purging them from unrighteousness! Then He comes as a consoling Spirit and gives them joy and peace, lifts them up above their cares, their temptations, their doubts and fills them with a preface of eternal bless! Oh, blessed is that man to whom our gospel comes with the Holy Spirit! Beloved, we do not wonder if persons sneer at the gospel in itself, or if others hear it and are unaffected by it, for the gospel, in itself, is like a sword without a warrior's arm to wield it. But when the Spirit of God comes, man is a doubter no longer! When He lays home the truth of God, He cuts so to the dividing of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, so that men are convinced, converted, saved—and the truth is to them, indeed a living thing! Pray, O beloved members of this church,

pray that the Word of God, even our gospel, may come with the Holy Spirit!

But there was a fourth class to whom the Word came in a yet higher degree, for it is added, "and with much assurance." To all Christians it comes with the Holy Spirit, but to some with a still greater degree of spiritual power! They believe the gospel, but they do not believe it timidly—they accept it as a matter of firm, solid, indisputable fact! They grasp it as with an iron hand and their own interest in it does not remain a question. No, they know whom they believe and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which they have committed to Him. They believe in Christ with the faith of Abraham, which staggered not at the promise through unbelief. Clouds and darkness have gone away from their sky and they see the clear blue ether of God's own presence above them. They rejoice in the Lord always, and again they do rejoice. There are some such in this house. I bless God for every one of them. May there be many more, for you that possess full assurance are the men who are strong for service! Having the joy of the Lord in your souls, it becomes your strength as you go forth to fight the Master's battles because you feel the Master's Love! The Lord give us many, many such in the church, to whom the Word of God shall come with the Holy Spirit and with much assurance! Now this is how the Word of God came to them. I must pass on to the third point, and that is—

III. WHAT HAD BEEN THE RESULT OF THIS IN THEMSELVES?

You will kindly observe that the Apostle first says, "You became followers of us and of the Lord." A man, when he is first converted, is not fit to be a leader—he has to be a follower. We do not take recruits and make them captains! They must be drilled. They must go into the rank and file a bit. So one of the first things that divine grace does is to make a man a disciple, that is, a learner—and then he sees in God's Word what his life and conduct should be and, looking about him, he sees some whom God has blessed with His grace whose life and conduct is according to the Word—and he follows God's servants, but not slavishly. He draws a distinction between them and their Master and only follows them as long as they keep company with their Lord. "You became followers of us and of the Lord." Brothers and sisters, I know that many of you here present, when the Word of God came to you, became followers of holy men. If you heard of any good action, you desired to imitate it. If you read any biography that told of noble deeds, you aspired to emulate such deeds. And when you read the character of your Lord and Master in the four evangelists, you asked that you might have grace to live a life of self-sacrifice, of devotion to God and of philanthropy to men. Well, this is no mean work of divine grace when a man is brought to be a follower of that which is good.

At the same time he tells us that these people received the Word of God "in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit." I know that there are some in this house who, when they received the gospel, had to suffer for it, but they rejoiced to do so! From the day in which they publicly put on Christ, they were jeered—they became subjects of derision. Some have gone back from us because they could not bear the perpetual taunt, but others of you have been kept by the grace of God and made able to bear any stigma or any sneer! And, indeed, is it not a small thing to bear the jests and jeers of men if the heart is right towards God? What do we care—what should we care though all men point the finger and should hiss because of it? Be true to God, believer, and to your conscience, too, and you may well receive the Word "with joy of the Holy Spirit," even "in much affliction"! This is one proof of every Christian minister's ministry, when he can point to a people who have become followers of that which is good and have continued to follow when they have been made to suffer for it!

But it appears that these people at Thessalonica went farther. They grew out of being followers in some sense and, therefore, became leaders. "So that you were examples to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia." Now it is a very easy thing for a Christian to be an example to a sinner. He ought to be—and he is not a Christian if he is not. I won't give two pence for your religion if you do not set a fair example to the ungodly. But it is a higher degree of divine grace when a man becomes an example even to Christians—when he is such a believer that others may look upon him as the typical Christian, for that is the word used here—may regard him as the type of what a Christian ought to be! Paul says that some of those degraded idolaters to whom he had preached the gospel, first followed him and the Lord, and afterwards grew in grace so that they stood in the front rank and became an example to believers! Let me hold this up, beloved, to your emulation. Let none of us be content to be according to the ordinary cold Christianity of this age! What cold, poor stuff it is! If the Lord, Himself, should come, would He find faith in the earth? Where is the zeal of the days gone by? Where is the ardor, where is the courage of the ages that have gone? If these things are found nowhere else, O my brother, seek to have them in your own soul! Ask God, if you are compelled to see others decline, that you may not decline, for God's grace can make you an example to the rest of His people! There are such here tonight of whom I might speak—only the Lord bless them and keep them as they are—for I have seen apostolic Christianity here! If I have seen it nowhere else, I have seen it here among some of my brothers and sisters here present, whose service for the Lord shall be remembered in the day of account! They wish it not to be known here,

nor will it be, but they have, with tears and prayers, devoted themselves to Christ and served Him well—and He will remember them in that day.

Further, the apostle goes on to tell us what was done by these Thessalonians—that they turned from idols. Oh, that God might turn all of us from every idol that we have! We do not worship gods of wood and stone, but how many professors are there still who worship learning? Let them seek it, but let them not worship it! There are some that worship fame, others that worship pleasure. This city is full of idolaters from end to end! When the grace of God comes, it makes men worship the unseen God and leave their idols to those that choose them. Turning from idols, it appears that these people served the living God. They did not merely acknowledge that He was the living God, but they began to serve Him! They put forth their strength in His cause. So will it be among us wherever the Word has come with the Holy Spirit—we shall spend and be spent in the service of our Creator and Redeemer! And he adds that they waited for the coming of the Lord. Oh, this is a high mark of grace, when the Christian expects his Lord to come—and lives like one that expects Him every moment! If you and I knew tonight that the Lord would come before this service was over, in what state of heart should we sit in these pews? In that state of heart we ought to be! If I knew that I would see my Lord before another sun should rise, how would I preach? I ought to preach just in that way as though He were sure to come at once and there could be no doubt about it! We would hold very loosely the things of this world if we knew that Christ was speedily coming—and so loose we ought to hold them! We would care but little for the discomforts of life if we knew that it would all be over and Christ would come very shortly—so little ought we to think of life's discomforts. Blessed is that man whose soul is always looking for the coming of the Lord! He may not study texts of Scripture to know the times and seasons, but if he is always expecting that his Lord may come at any time, and shall live under the feeling of that belief and in the power of it, he will be the holy man! "What manner of persons," says Peter, "ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" Such we desire to be by the power of the Holy Spirit! Thus we have noticed what the grace of God did for the Thessalonians themselves. Now let us mark—

IV. WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THIS TO OTHERS?

And here I wish to speak practically to the members of this church. Thessalonica was a seaport. It was also a principal town in Macedonia. Therefore, whatever was done in Thessalonica was pretty sure to be known throughout Macedonia and the rest of Greece. If the church at Thessalonica had been a dull, sleepy church, as some Christian Churches are, it would have lost a fine opportunity of doing good—but being a thoroughly awake church, really full of God's own power—from that church was sounded forth the Word of God throughout all Greece!

And when the ships left that port they carried the tidings to Asia Minor and to other lands, so that Thessalonica became the starting point for the heralds of the cross. Now if there is any place in the world that ought to feel its responsibility, it is London. We are not egotistical, I think, when we say that it is the very heart of the world! Whatever is done here is sure to be known and an earnest church in London is only what it should be! A church in London of any prominence that is sleepy, dull, and cold will have a very heavy account to render when the great Master shall come! The church at Thessalonica sounded forth the gospel involuntarily, and also voluntarily. They did it involuntarily, for their very lives spoke! If they did not preach, they were so full of faith, good works and holiness, that other people talked about it. And the matter was known and the work of God in the hearts of the church could be perceived in the lives of the members—and so it went out. Oh, how happy would any pastor be whose people should be so godly, so united, so generous, so persevering, so prayerful, so full of faith and of the Holy Spirit that everywhere they should be spoken of and through them, through their conduct, the Word of God should be sounded abroad! See to that, my brothers and sisters—see to it. God has placed us where we are observed by many. Give them something to observe worth seeing! With the eyes of a multitude of witnesses upon us, let us run with patience the race that is set before us!

But then the church at Thessalonica sent out the Word voluntarily. I have no doubt that if they had any men among them that could preach the gospel, they bade them go and preach it! And if any went on their travels, whether they were sea captains or merchants who went from place to place, or persons of influence, or whatever they might be—they said to them, "Wherever you go, keep up the propaganda. Preach the gospel! Tell of Jesus Christ! Be, all of you, missionaries." Now in this I can rejoice and will rejoice that it has been so among us. At this present moment I suppose that not less than 300 of our sons that have been borne upon our knees are preaching the gospel while I am preaching here—I mean ministers of Christ preaching the gospel! Besides that, all round these streets are our evangelists preaching at street corners. There ought to be more of them. Some of you that come to hear me on Sunday nights ought not to come. If you have got the grace of God in your heart, come and get enough spiritual meat to feed you, but remember that London is perishing for the lack of the gospel! How dare you, then, sit still to enjoy the gospel while men are perishing? There are lodging houses that are accessible! There are halls, large and small! There are the street corners! There are all sorts of places where Jesus can be preached! Oh, let us labor with all our might to make Him known throughout the length and breadth of this great city!

At this moment we have our sons, the sons of this church, preaching in Australia, in America—an abundance of them there, preaching the gospel of Christ—in the islands of the Pacific—all through every portion of our dominions. God be thanked that there are so many, but there ought to be many more. I propound as a theory, not that a Christian man ought to say, "Am I called to preach the gospel?" but that he ought to say, "Am I excused from preaching the gospel?" The old plan was for young men to preach before the church to see if they could preach. I think we must bring them all up to make them prove that they cannot preach. Now Mr. Oncken has been blessed in Germany, as you knew, to the raising of many Baptist churches, and he always works upon this theory—every member of the church must say, when he comes in, what he can do. If he says he cannot do anything, and he is old, and infirm, and bed-ridden, very well, he can serve God by patiently suffering. But if he has any ability and says, "I cannot do anything," then the reply is, "You cannot come into the church." We cannot have any drones—we must have all working bees in the hive. I think it would be a good resolution for the Tabernacle to expel every member that is not doing something or other for the Lord Jesus Christ. I am afraid some of you would have to go!

Well, we won't move that resolution, but we will move another—that every member who has been a drone up till now shall pray to be a bee! That everyone who has done nothing shall ask the Lord to help him to begin! That those who have done half as much as they could, will do the other half! And that those who are doing all they can will always try to do a little more, for it is always that point of doing more than you can do that, in the long run, is the best kind of doing—for then you have to lean upon God's strength when you have gone to the limit of your own—and there is the point where the results are pretty sure to follow! I ask the prayers of the dear brothers and sisters who have been with us—some of them 16 and 17 years in this service—that God would not stay His hand in our midst. That as He has multiplied us to an unexampled company of some 4,500 persons or thereabouts in membership, that He may give us unexampled grace! That our zeal and earnestness, and enthusiasm may be in proportion to the number, and that the success achieved for God may be commensurate with the responsibilities laid upon us. I sound the clarion again tonight! As God said, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward," so would I speak to you. Forward in God's name! Forward! The world still lies in the wicked one. Forward, you light-bearers! Scatter the darkness! Satan still laughs at God! Forward, with the invincible weapon of the cross and put him to flight!

Now sound your trumpets around the walls of Jericho—continue still to compass it. Now let the trumpet sound and the wall shall fall flat to the ground by the power of the eternal God. Forward! I hear the angels

say it! Forward! I seem to hear innumerable spirits say, beckoning us like the man of Macedonia, who beckoned Paul across the sea, Forward! The very powers of hell behind us might well drive us on. Forward! The love of Christ within us shall impel us and let each man and women here that has been redeemed by blood, resolve tonight, in Jehovah's strength, to do for God and for His truth something more than yet we have thought of—to the praise of the glory of His grace! God bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
1 THESSALONIANS 1.

Verse 1. *Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.* Paul is very full of Christ. His heart is full of love to God our Father and, therefore, it is that twice over in as many lines he mentions both names. He uses no vain repetitions, as the heathen do—his inmost soul is taken up with communion with the Father and with the Son—and so in one single verse he twice gives us their names!

2-4. *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father. Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.* Paul had a very high opinion of the church in Thessalonica and no doubt it deserved it. See how he speaks of it—with such confidence. "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." Their character was such that he felt sure that he saw the mark of God's elect about them and he speaks most positively of them—perhaps more positively than he does of any other church. Well, there were three grand signs. There was the work of faith, the labor of love and the patience of hope. And where we see three works of the Spirit, we may be fully persuaded that electing love is there.

5. *For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit. And in much assurance; as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.* Paul never had a happier time in preaching, it would seem, than when he preached to these Thessalonians! He felt a power resting upon him. He spoke the gospel with great positiveness and assurance and, consequently, the people received it in power—and the assurance of the hearer made the assurance of the speaker! It is a great mercy when it is so.

6. *And you became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.* Ah, dear friends, we read of one that he was more honorable than his brethren because his

mother bore him with sorrow. And so when faith is born in the heart in the midst of affliction, it is a very precious faith. It is faith, indeed. "Having received the word in much affliction with joy." I seem to see that joy of theirs floating, like Noah's ark, above the floods of their affliction. It seems to be a contradiction that we can be in affliction and yet be full of joy. But many a believer will tell you that there is no contradiction in it. He knows what it is to be sorrowful and yet to be always rejoicing!

7. *So that you were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.* Brothers and sisters, let us not only be Christians, but let us be examples of Christians! They are sure to pick out the best for an example. Oh, that we might be such that if God, Himself, were to select Christians to show what they are like, He might select us to be examples!

8-10. *For from you the word of the Lord has sounded out, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had unto you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.* Paul here states that all the churches abroad knew what a wonderful time he had had with the Thessalonians and with what alacrity they had received the gospel—and how they had turned away from their idols in thorough earnest to become worshipers of the living God! This was a great comfort to Paul and he speaks about them here with great joy!

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THE SOUL'S DESERTION
NO. 3552

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone."
Solomon's Song 5:6.

The happiest condition of a Christian out of heaven is to live in the conscious enjoyment of the presence of the Lord Jesus. When the love of Christ is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit, the believer need not envy an angel his harp of gold! It matters not what may be his outward trial, the Holy Spirit is able to make the heart live above all surrounding circumstances, so that we can have summer in the midst of winter and pluck our ripest fruits when there are neither leaves nor fruits upon the tree. But the Christian is unhappy—unhappy to the utmost degree—whenever he loses the sense of the presence of his Lord. Then the pillars of his house are made to tremble, his fresh springs are dried up, the sun is hid from his eyes and the sky is so dark overhead that he walks, rather wanders, about a world which cannot render to his soul any substantial comfort. Were he a worldling, he could live upon the world, but having been taught by divine grace to aspire after something nobler and better, the loss is exceedingly grievous to his spirit. I question whether the most of Christians do not sometimes lose the enjoyment of the Lord's company. I question yet further whether there are not very many professors who live contentedly under that loss—nor can I account for this, except on the supposition that they can have known but little of that presence in their best estate. Otherwise, they must be in a most sickly and slumbering condition of soul, gradually becoming worse and worse—or else they never could bear to have things as they are with them. It seems to me that a real believer in a sound state of health no sooner loses the presence of his Lord than he begins to cry for Him. Where has Christ gone? Why have I lost sight of Him? The sounds of His footsteps still linger in the ear. The believer wakens and starts, and asks himself, "How is this? Where has my beloved gone? What is it that has chased Him from me? I cannot live if He leaves me, therefore, let me speedily seek Him and never rest until once more I am restored to full communion with Him." Let me, then, talk a little with such believers as

have lost, for a while, the comfortable presence of their Lord. The first question shall be—

I. WHY WAS THE BELOVED GONE?

According to the text, He was gone. Read the preceding verses, or perhaps you have them upon your memories. The spouse had been asleep. This was the beginning of the mischief. "I sleep, but my heart wakes." If we begin to fall asleep, we must not wonder if we miss the quickening and comforting influences of our Lord's presence. Jesus Christ did not put us in His Church that we might sleep away our time on earth. Do not fancy that such an active spirit as that which burned and blazed in our Savior's flesh can be content to hold communion with lazy sluggards who toss upon their bed and say, "Yet a little more sleep and a little more folding of the arms to slumber." It is the active Christian who keeps pace with Christ! Christ is a quick walker—if you crawl along the path of duty, He will soon leave you behind—until you begin to inquire, "Where is He gone," and quicken your pace to overtake Him. Are there any here who have missed Christ's presence, and who may trace it to the fact that they have been drowsy in prayer of late, heavy in all the exercises of study and duty, and, in fact, altogether sleepy? Have they been without care for the conversion of others, having scarcely any concern, even, about their own children? Are they, perhaps, indifferent to the welfare of Christ's Church, feeding little upon the Word and resorting but little to the assemblies of the saints? Marvel not if the beloved withdraws Himself when His spouse does nothing but nod and sleep, instead of keeping company with Him in active service!

After the spouse had fallen asleep, her beloved came and knocked at the door, saying, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled, for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Yet she refused to open the door to him. Surely this is another sin which drives Christ away—when admonished for falling into a drowsy state, not to regard it. Depend upon it, there is extreme peril to a soul that does not accept the warning. Awful as it is to sin when unwarned, it is still more horrible to persevere in sin in the teeth of rebuke and after gentle, loving expostulations. What? Did conscience prick me and will I not be scrupulous? After having seen my fault and smarted for it, do I still persist in it? Have I been lukewarm and indifferent? Does the Holy Spirit visit me, remonstrate with me, and make me feel that I am gradually backsliding and little by little declining? Have I vowed and resolved that I would seek spiritual recovery and am I still as dull, careless, and unconcerned as ever? This argues ill and argues ill for my soul! The beloved will not put up with these rebuffs forever. Out of love to us, He

will hide His face. If we grieve Him, He will go. If we walk towards Him, He will soon walk towards us. These are God-provoking sins! It is a defying of His Spirit when you thus spurn His gentle admonitions!

Note, further, that the spouse, when her beloved knocked at the door, made idle excuses that she had taken off her cloak and her sandals, and could not put them on. She was taking her rest upon her couch and could not bring herself to come to the door to let him in. Ah, how often self-indulgence lies at the bottom of the sin that drives Christ away! A believer cannot let his lower nature get the uppermost and yet find that he is walking agreeably to the Lord's mind. Your spiritual nature ought to keep your mental nature under control—and your mental nature ought to keep your bodily or animal nature entirely in check. A man who is a thinker and a philosopher will scorn to let the mere passions govern him, but a true Christian, having a yet higher spirit within him than the mere mind, having that new living seed within himself which comes from God, and leads him to God, should not and must not allow his baser nature to reign supreme! If we indulge the flesh, depend upon it, Christ will not be with us! He does not come to dwell with swine, but with men—but not with men of the earth, earthy, except in order to renew them and make them like Himself, who is the second man, the Lord from heaven—to make them heavenly. If your conversation is to be with Christ, your conversation must be in heaven! If you would enjoy the sunlight, you must not bow your face down to the earth. If you seek to be enriched in the things of God, you must not be forever groping among the dark pits and bogs, and morasses of earth. Oh, soul, are you indulging yourself and taking things easy? Carnal security is one of your worst enemies! Do I hear any man say, "It is enough, my soul—you have much spiritual goods laid up for many years—take your ease"? Do you think that there is no need for you to watch? Do you think you have become so experienced that there is no occasion for you to be much in prayer, for a word with you is as an hour with some? Do you imagine that there is no cause for you to be continually striving against your besetting sin because you have got such complete mastery over these infirmities? Oh, when we talk so, we betray the darkness in which we are living, the self-deception we are fostering, the corruption we are degenerating into and the desertion we are provoking! Such backsliding as this will soon make Jesus hide His face from us!

Beloved, the simple reason of Christ's conscious absence from our souls is, in most cases, sin. I say in most cases, for sometimes Christ may hide Himself in absolute sovereignty, but I am always jealous lest we should charge God foolishly. You are so apt to put too many saddles on

that stalking horse! There are such multitudes of professors who would even excuse their sins upon the plea of a divine sovereignty which exposed them to temptation, that I scarcely like to mention it. I believe that God does not afflict willingly or arbitrarily the children of men. Neither does Christ hide His face from His people for nothing—but your sins have separated between you and your God. He chastises us, not as silly parents may do, out of mere spleen or caprice, or to please themselves, as the apostle seemed to think some fathers did in his day, for he says, "They verily chastened us after their own pleasure." But when God chastens us, it is for our profit. Our good is His aim and His end in using the rod of correction. He makes us smart for the sin which seemed sweet. He nauseates our palate with the bitter fruits of disobedience, that we may afterwards relish the peaceable fruits of righteousness!

Now, beloved, in each individual case, the hiding of the Lord's face may be occasioned by a different sin. It is very probable that my Lord thinks that to be a high sin in me which He would take little notice of in you. It is equally possible that He may think that to be peculiarly offensive in you which He would not visit in my case with stripes, for according to our constitution, our office, our experience, our light and our several circumstances, our transgressions may be estimated. You are not provoked, perhaps, by a good deal of noise from one of your children, but half that noise from another of your children would exceedingly vex you. Because the one happens to be of a quick, impetuous temperament, you set it down to natural disposition, but the other, being of gentler habit and quieter mood, you upbraid him for his excitement, as if it were of evil prepense and intended to aggravate and annoy! So you may have a confidential servant in your family, from whom you may reasonably expect more care, thoughtfulness and circumspection than you look for in any of the other servants. The more trust you repose, the more scrupulousness you require. Let us, then, each one according to his position, seek grace to walk uprightly, carefully, tenderly. It has been well said that what an ordinary subject might do or say, one of the Cabinet Council must not even think. The favorite of kings has a dangerous path to walk—and though it is a blessed privilege to be the favorite of heaven, it involves a very solemn responsibility. "You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for your iniquities." You can see defilement on a white slab which you would not have noticed on the common soil—and so there are sins which spoil the character of saints that would hardly be observed in ordinary society. The presence of Christ can only be preserved with incessant

watchfulness and inviolate fidelity. The sacred Dove is soon disturbed. The beloved is soon awakened and made to stir. Hence it should be our cry, "I charge you by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love until he please." Having thus considered the cause why the beloved is gone, let us inquire—

II. WHAT ENSUES UPON THE WITHDRAWAL OF HIS PRESENCE?

Great mistakes have been made upon this subject. Some have supposed that believers suddenly cease to be followers of Christ, go back into the world, apostatize and perish! But the Lord does not desert His people after this fashion. He has not cast away His people whom He did foreknow, and He never will! Has He put His hand to the work of their salvation? He will not permanently turn away from them! When he turns away, it is always with a gracious motive—hence the consequences, though often very sad—are not fatal. The withdrawal of His conscious presence is not intended to slay us, though it brings us very low and would leave us a prey to destruction were it not that He stays His hand in time, and gives grace to keep the soul alive under His desertion!

As soon as Christ is gone, there is a suspension of those influences that once made the Christian happy and strong. The Holy Spirit no longer comforts the soul. The Word does not enliven or invigorate. The sweetest sermons fail to cheer the heart. Even the promises of God's Holy Book are like lanterns without candles—they bring no light. When Christ hides His face from a disciple, his spirits flag and he feels a general depression. He cannot pray as it was his habit to do—he cannot preach as he once did. The holy duties to which he tenaciously clings become rather a burden than a pleasure. Instead of those delightful walks he had alone when his soul went up to God in quiet meditation, he finds his thoughts all dissipated, scattered here and there. Nor can he by any means concentrate—far less can he make his thoughts soar and mount towards Christ. He goes to his Bible—not as often as he did, nor yet so solemnly as he did—but the book does not speak to him. God answers him neither by Urim nor by Thummim, nor by open voice. And now he does not seem to have the illuminations of God's Spirit. He does not dive into the meaning of the Word as once he did. Providence, again, seems dark. The secret of the Lord does not appear to be with him as it formerly was. He has no enjoyment. The soul follows after God after a fashion, but, alas, he has to cry, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?" Thus divine influences are, for a while suspended.

Then it follows that he loses much of his assurance. He used to know he was a Christian. Now he begins to sing, "'Tis a point I long to know."

So he has to furbish up his old evidences and eat some of the stale food that he used to care little for when he used to live upon a daily portion from the King, even a portion from the King's table. He sits down in the ashes and is glad to sit there. Sometimes he mourns because he cannot mourn, and frets because he cannot fret. While he sees his sin, he is afraid he has not a true feeling of it. Though he still looks to the cross of Christ and to the precious blood of atonement, he does not seem to have the power of looking that he once had, nor to derive that comfort from casting himself upon the finished work which before he did when Jesus Christ was manifestly with Him.

But perhaps it will aid you in realizing the dark features of this desertion if I use a little simile. You see full often a house that is left by its former tenant and is shut up. Jesus Christ never altogether leaves a heart of which He has once taken possession. There is one room in a believer's soul which the Holy Spirit never quits. Where He comes, He comes to abide and to abide forever! Still, that room is so secret that while He resides there, the whole house may look as if it was deserted. Compare that empty house with a cheerful home. What a contrast between its previous and present condition! Why, the joy has gone from it! The blinds are drawn down—or, perhaps, the windows stare at you in their desolation. The house looks unfurnished. It is no longer an ornament to the street. Its decorations have vanished since its inhabitants have fled. The house is there, with all its capacities, but the home, with all its vivacities, is lacking. The life and the loveliness have gone from it! And so a child of God soon loses all his joy and comfort when the tenant of his soul is withdrawn. No sparkling of the eyes, no singing of the great hallelujahs, no sounding of the cymbals, even the high-sounding cymbals. He will be glad enough to get a note out of the harp, now! He cannot get up to those glorious songs which once made his spirit keep tune with the angels because the joys of heaven had come down to earth!

Then the house, being empty, is sure to get into a state of filth. There is nobody to clean the dust—all sorts of spiders and foul things get into the corners and crannies—and the longer the house is shut up, the more these creatures multiply. Down in the cellar there is a little vegetation—long yellow stalks and roots trying to live—left there by some old inhabitant. But there is nothing fair, nor beautiful. All is uncomfortable. So it gets to be in our hearts! All sorts of evils spring up. Evils we little suspected, which would have been kept in check by the presence of Christ, begin to multiply and increase upon us, and the little good that is

in us seems to be an unhealthy sprout bringing forth nothing unto perfection!

Then a house with nobody in it decays. How the metal rusts! How the paint gets stained! How the wood begins to rot! How the whole thing has a damp kind of smell! It is all going to ruin. Why, 10 years of habitation would not do so much mischief as these 12 months of shutting up. When Jesus Christ is gone, everything is amiss—love nearly expires, hope scarcely glimmers, faith is well-nigh paralyzed, no grace is in lively exercise! Without the life of God in the soul, there is a total collapse and a chill strikes right through the spirit. Has the house been long empty? The boys outside are pretty sure to mark it for their sport, and to break the windows. In fact, it stands exposed to all sorts of outward damage. So, too, with malice and mischief, the devil will come upon a man when he knows that he has lost the light of God's countenance. What a horrible old coward he is! When the child of God is rejoicing in the company of Christ, he has not often to encounter Satan. The accuser of the brethren well knows how to time his tactics and his temptations! But when he sees that the Lord has departed, then Satan takes courage and attacks the child of God to his serious damage and hurt! I heard the other day of a good country plowman who told a story of victory over temptation in his own simple style. He was a man who feared God above his neighbors and seemed to live above the world in spiritual things. A minister asked him if he did not get tempted and worried sometimes by Satan. "Yes," he said, "I have known much about being tempted by Satan in my time. Why, sir, 10 years ago I was threshing in this barn, here, and the devil came upon me with a strong temptation. It plagued and worried me so, that I could not get rid of it—till at length I put down my flail and got away into a corner, just beyond the wheat there—and I wrestled with God against Satan until I gained such a victory that I came back to my place rejoicing! Many a time since that," said the old man, "he has lurked about my path, but I never stop to parley. I repeat the promise by which I found a way of escape that day in this barn, and I feel myself made strong by the remembrance of that victory." Yes, and just so when we can remember some of those occasions when we seemed to overcome temptation by private communion with God, then we get strong, but—

"Let the Lord be once withdrawn
And we attempt the work alone,
When new temptations spring and rise—
We find how great our weakness is."

Like Samson, when his hair was lost, we think we shall defeat Satan as at other times, but we—

"Shake our limbs with vain surprise,
Make feeble fight and lose our eyes."

When houses have been long left without tenants and look deserted, they get up a rumor that *t*hey are haunted. And I am sure that when a heart has been left by Christ and there have been no comfortable enjoyments of His presence, our souls do get haunted with strange, mysterious doubts and fears, vexations and forebodings which you cannot grapple with—horrors that do not take any shape, troubles that ought not to be distressing, alarms that are made up of shadows—dangers that have not any real existence! Oh, that Christ were there! As phantoms would all vanish in the sunlight, so would all these dreary doubts and dismal dilemmas be chased away if Christ returned! Oh, that our poor empty house could once more have its gates flung wide open and that the King would come to dwell in His own palace and make it all bright and lustrous with His presence! Master, see how sick we are without You! Come, blessed Physician! Jesus, see what wretched beings we are if You withdraw! Come, our Beloved, come to us! Let the sad effects of Your departure quicken Your footsteps and bring You over the mountains of division to the longing spirits of Your fainting children! Passing on, let us inquire—

III. WHAT COMFORT IS THERE FOR A SOUL WHEN THE BELOVED HAS WITHDRAWN HIMSELF AND IS GONE?

Let me reply, there is no comfort at all that will be of any service to you unless you get Him back. Ah, but if a wife loves her husband, and he is gone, we may quote the old song—

"There is nae luck about the house
When the gude man's awa'."

The dear man, the joy of her heart, being gone, she could not make anything go well. And so, where the loving heart has lost its beloved, its best beloved, there seems to be no joy anywhere! Nothing can make up to a regenerate soul for the loss of the society of her Lord. And yet some considerations may help to stay us while we are seeking for it. Though He is gone, He is still our Beloved. Though we cannot see Him, yet we love Him! And if we cannot enjoy Him, we thirst after Him! And that is some consolation, though it is a poor consolation, to think it has not quite lost all its life, for it has got life enough to smart, life enough to be in pain and life enough to feel itself in exile until Christ's return! I think, too, there is some comfort in this—that though He is gone, He is gone out of love. Was it in a tiff of anger? Yet it was rather a rebuke of our sins than a rejection of our persons. Christ withdraws because He wants to bring us to our senses and to draw us more closely to Himself. He knows that if we were to have enjoyments and yet walk in sin, this would be

highly dangerous and, therefore, these enjoyments must be withheld till the heart is broken and the soul abhors itself in dust and ashes!

It is some comfort also, that though He is gone, He is not gone out of earshot. Jesus Christ can still hear the cry of His people. No, He is not gone beyond the reach of His eyesight. He is looking upon His poor deserted one to see what the effect of His hiding Himself is.

And there is this to be said, that He is not so far gone but that at any moment He can return, and His return can at once make our souls like the chariots of Amminadab! He can rise upon our darkness and that in the next instant if so it pleased Him. He is gone, but He is not altogether gone. He has not taken His love from us, nor shall His loving kindness utterly fail. Still on His hands He bears the marks of His passion for our salvation. Still on His breastplate glitter the jewels that bear our names. He cannot forget us, though He hides Himself! He may be asleep, but it is in the same vessel with us—and near the helm. He may appear to have utterly deserted us, but, "can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" Yes, they may forget, but Christ shall never forget His saints! But now, lastly—

IV. WHAT IS OUR DUTY IN SUCH A PLIGHT?

If he is gone, what then? I answer—our duty is to repent of that which has driven Him away. We must institute a search at once! Bunyan describes the citizens of Mansoul as searching for the cause why Immanuel had withdrawn Himself, and they took Master Carnal-Security and burned his house, and hanged him on a gallows on the site where the house stood, for it was through feasting with him that the Prince was angered, and His subjects lost His presence. Search yourselves if you are not as happy as you were—if you are not living as near heaven-gate as you were, search yourselves.

And having done so, and found out the evil, ask for divine grace to be purged of it. Oh, you will fall into that evil, again, if you trust to your own strength! But in reliance upon the Holy Spirit's power, you can overcome it—you can put your foot upon the neck of this evil and so destroy it that it shall not molest you again!

And then, beloved, let me earnestly entreat you—and I am speaking more to myself, perhaps, than I am to any of you—to stir up your whole soul to recover lost ground. Be ashamed that there is any lost ground to recover. Oh, it is easier to lose Christ than it is to find Him after we have lost Him. It is easier to go straight on in the strength of grace than it is to have to go back to find your roll which you have lost under the settle in the harbor of ease, and then, after going back, to have to go over the same ground again! When you have got the wings of an eagle, what

blessed work it is to soar and to pass over long tracks of country! But when the eagle wing is gone and you have to limp painfully along, like David, with broken bones, it is hard work. But, beloved, if you have slipped at all, ask for grace to recover now! For my own part, I feel I have so little grace that I have none to lose. As to falling back—oh, what should we be if we fell at all back, for we are back enough now! We are nowhere at all in comparison with the saints of God in the olden times. We are but beginners and babes, but where, where, where shall we be if we are to go still farther back? No, no, sovereign grace, prevent so dreadful a catastrophe! Press forward!

And, brethren, will it not be a great thing and a right thing for us to endeavor to set apart much time for special prayer that we may have lost Grace restored? Should we not set ourselves to this one thing—that we must get back, by the simplicity of faith, to the foot of the cross? And by the earnestness of love, unto the bosom of the Master once more—and that we will not be satisfied with preaching, and praying, and going to places of worship, or with ordinances, or with anything—until we get Christ back again? Oh, my soul, I charge you be content with nothing till you get your Lord again! Say, with the good housewife I spoke of just now, whose husband was away from home, "Yes, this room shall be decorated, and every part of the house shall be cleansed, but, ah, the joy of my heart will be to see him return! And until he comes, the house cannot be cheerful and joyous." It is so with our souls. We must have the King back, and back soon! And when He does come back, we must hold Him fast and not let Him go. Charge your souls to be more careful in the future, lest you again provoke Him to jealousy.

Alas, for those who never knew my Lord! Oh, may they seek Him early and find Him speedily! If it is sad to lose His presence for a while, what must it be to live and die without Christ? Oh, that is a black word for anyone to have written on his brow, "Without Christ." If you are in that condition, dear hearer, may divine grace bring you to Christ, and Christ to you, that you may enjoy the fellowship of His love! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
SONG OF SOLOMON 2:1-7; 3:1-5.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2.

Verses 1, 2. *I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.* It is the nature of love to make the thing beloved like itself. If Christ is a lily, He makes His people lilies, too. Certainly He is the lily of the valley, and before long His

Church is able to say, "As the lily among the thorns, so am I," while for the present, Jesus says it. She is among the thorns, thorns that hurt and vex her. The people of God are still in the tents of Kedar, still among the wicked, having their ears vexed with their filthy conversation. But the lily is all the more beautiful on account of the thorns that make the background—and so your piety may be all the more resplendent because of the evil men among whom you sojourn.

3. *As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons.* The citron tree towered aloft in the midst of the forest and it was covered with its golden apples. Such is Jesus Christ, the loveliest of all objects, and though there are some that pretend to contend with Him, yet to the believer, rivals are left in the distance—no—they are altogether forgotten! "As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, the most distinguished and the loveliest, so is my beloved among the sons." How do you know?

3. *I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.* I know his loveliness, for I have felt it, and I not only have comfort without, but I have food within.

4, 5. *He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.* A strange thing is this love of Christ, for, as Erskine puts it—

"When well, it makes me sick;
When sick, it makes me well."

There is no infirmity which this love of Christ cannot care, no conflicting passion which it cannot remove and, on the other hand, a great amount of this love shed abroad in the heart will often prostrate the Christian with excess of delight, till he is ready to cry out, with good Mr. Welsh, the Scotch pastor, "Hold, Lord! Hold! It is enough! Remember I am but an earthen vessel and if I have too much of glory, I shall not live." I am afraid we shall not often have to say this, yet there are times when the believer's joy knows no bounds and his hallowed delight in his God is so excessive that he needs to have some supernatural support to enable him to endure the delight which his Father gives him!

6. *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand does embrace me.* The hand with which He smites His enemies cannot smite me, for it is under my head, my sweet support. And His right hand, the hand with which He blesses, the hand of His power and His glory, does embrace each one of His people.

7. *I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.* The next passage we shall read is at the commencement of the third

chapter, and presents quite a different scene. Perhaps you will scarcely think it is the same person that writes it, but, oh, we are very variable! See now how that sunshine has just gilded that side of the house and, in another minute—see—it melts away and has gone again! Just so is it with our experience. We rejoice for a few moments, but soon the clouds hang heavy over us and we scarcely know what and where we are! The spouse has now altered, but her husband never does alter, for the Lord, the King, abides still the same, and herein is our joy.

SONG OF SOLOMON 3.

Verses 1-3. *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loves: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loves: I sought him but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw you him whom my soul loves?* The same question over and over again—only that one thought, "Where is He?" Ministers were nothing. Streets of ordinances were nothing. What the soul needed was to find a personal Christ, and to have personal fellowship with Him.

4. *It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loves; I held him and would not let him go.* Jacob's wrestling is succeeded by Jacob's vows.

4. *Until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.* Fellowship that is sweet to me must be sweet to others of my brethren, therefore will I bring Him to the church, and tell to all the assembled people how sweet, how delightful He is to my soul!

5. *I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*

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THE FULLNESS AND THE FILLING
NO. 3553

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And of His fullness have we all received, and grace for grace"
John 1:16.

ONE Sabbath I was staying in an Italian town on the other side of the Alps. Of course, the whole population was Romish. Two or three of us, therefore, being Protestants, held a little service for the worship of God in the simple manner that is our habit. After this, I went out for a walk. The weather being hot and sultry, I sought the outskirts of the town to get to as quiet and cool a spot as possible. Presently I came to an archway at the foot of a hill where there was an announcement that any person who would climb the hill with proper intentions should receive the pardon of his sins, and five days' indulgence. I thought I might as well have five days' indulgence as anybody else, and if it were of any advantage, to have it laid by in store! I cannot tell you all I saw as I went, first one way, and then another, up that hill. Suffice it to say that there was a series of little churches, through the windows of which you might look, as one in his boyish days looked through a peepshow. The whole scene and circumstance of the passion and death of Christ were thus modeled, beginning with His agony in the garden, where He was represented in a figure as large as life, with the drops of bloody sweat falling to the ground. The three disciples were a stone's throw off, and the rest of the apostles outside the garden wall. Every feature looked as real as if one had been standing upon the spot! I scrutinized each group narrowly and carefully read the Latin text which served as an index, till I reached the top of the hill, where I saw a garden, just like an English garden, and as I pushed open the door I faced these words, "Now there was a garden, and in the garden there was a new sepulcher." Walking down a path I came to a sepulcher—so I stooped down and looked in—as Peter had done. There, instead of seeing a picture of the corpse of Christ, I read in gilded letters these words—of course, in the Latin tongue—"He is not here, for He is risen! Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Passing on, I came to a place where His ascension was represented. On the summit was a large church, into which I entered. No one was there, yet the place for me had a marvelous interest. High up in the ceiling there swung a rude representation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and round it were statues of the prophets, all with their fingers pointing up to Him. There was Isaiah,

with a scroll in his left hand, on which was written, "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Further on stood Jeremiah, and on his scroll was written, "Behold and see if there was ever sorrow like unto My sorrow, which was done unto Me." All round the church I read in great words, that were large enough to be seen, though they were blazoned on the top of the ceiling, "Moses and all the prophets spoke and wrote concerning Him."

Now, though I cannot take you to see that remarkable sight, which I shall never forget, I would gladly bring before your mind's eye something like it. Suppose that all the saints who lived from the days of Adam, down to the times when Malachi closed the Old Testament—all the saints who lived in Christ's time and then on through the early ages of the church in the days of Chrysostom, and Augustine, and all the holy men who afterwards gathered around the Reformers, and all who in every place have served God since then—suppose they all stood in one vast circle? To whom do you suppose they would, every one, point? To whom would they all bear witness? Why, with outstretched arm, every one of them would turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and speak His praise! Could you then enquire into their individual history, you would find among them characters exceedingly diverse, though all remarkably beautiful. Some renowned for courage, others for gentleness. Some for patient endurance, others for diligent labor—and yet all inspired by a common faith—all of them aglow with fervent gratitude! All of them looking with steadfast gaze and intense love towards ONE from whom they had received every gift that profited them—and that One, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of men! The rule would admit of not a single exception. From each man in his own proper position, from every man in his own particular calling, from all the individuals severally in their own personal experience, the innumerable voices—distinct, but blending in chorus—would go up from earth to heaven, saying, "Of His fullness have we all received, and grace for grace." Then I think from the excellent glory would come a response. The inhabitants of heaven would echo back the strain, "Of His fullness have we all, the glorified spirits, received, and grace for grace." This is the testimony of the church militant, and of the church triumphant! Yes, it is the testimony of all who in every place and at every time have come and put their trust under the shadow of His wings!

Our text seems to suggest two thoughts—the fullness and the filling—upon each of which I will attempt to say a little, a very little. With so infinite a theme, we can do no more than children do when they take up a little seawater in a shell—their tiny scoop cannot embrace the ocean. I stand on the narrow edge of a vast expanse and leave the boundless depths to your contemplation! His fullness! An inexhaustible reservoir! Our filling! An illimitable endowment! Beloved, the river of God, which is

full of water, can well supply the little canals that are fed from such a fountain with grace for grace!

I. I said THE FULLNESS. It is His fullness, the fullness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Oh, what a fullness He has! The fullness which belongs to Him personally! Note this well! Forget it not! Our Redeemer is essentially God. By nature He is divine. He has condescendingly taken upon Himself our nature and He is most truly and assuredly man. Very God! For to Him belong all be attributes of Jehovah. Very man! For when He took our flesh and blood, He accepted the entire sympathies of our creatureship. In His complex nature, He possesses fullness. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He has the fullness of omnipotence and all power is given unto Him as Mediator in heaven and in earth. Omnipresence is His to perfection, "for where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I (He said) in the midst of them." He has essential wisdom. Even when on earth, "He did not commit Himself, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." In Him is fullness of justice. The Father has given all judgment unto the Son. "Shall not God judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He has ordained, whereof He has given assurance unto all men in that He has raised Him from the dead?" In Him is fullness of mercy, for, "through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." The attributes of God make up a perfect total. The unity, with all its uniqueness, is His! Divisions and sub-divisions are ours. The fractional parts of which we take account are but the breaking up of a great fact to our weak understanding. Think as you may, your thoughts cannot describe or compass God, for God is all that is good and blessed! And as is God, so is Christ—all the divine attributes are contained and represented in Christ Jesus in their fullness—not diminished by His humiliation, but resplendent by His triumph!

"In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead." He is the express image of the Father's person, the brightness of His Father's glory—not more glory—but the brightness of His Father's glory. What confidence this ought to inspire in our hearts! The fullness from which you and I derive the divine grace we receive is none other than the infinite fullness of God over all, blessed forever, whose name is Immanuel, God with us! There was also fullness in Christ in respect to His manhood. Nothing was lacking to Him that is involved in being by nature and constitution a perfect man. He was pure. He did not inherit any sin. His disposition did not tend towards any evil. Still, all that pertains to the original creatureship of man as created by God did Christ possess in the fullness of development. Hence, my brothers and sisters, there is in Him at this moment a fullness of sympathy. He is not such a High Priest as cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but He was tempted in all

points like as we are, yet without sin! Do not suppose that Jesus is less human than you are, yourselves—He is fully human. Do not imagine that He is less tender than you would be towards the weak and suffering—He is full of tenderness. His heart melts with love. A mother has often a tenderness that we do not find in a father. Masculine strength and courage do not always blend with the gentle, sympathetic qualities of woman. Howbeit when God created man in His own image, male and female He created them. The virtues, if I may say so, of both sexes were combined in our Lord—the suavity as well as the staunchness—the feminine as well as the masculine of our common humanity! Human nature in its totality and completeness was fully possessed and thoroughly represented by Him. The sympathetic nature which melts at a tear and smiles at the joy of others, was as truly His as the heroic nature that parleys not with fear, but acts with promptitude and suffers with fortitude, like a warrior in the hosts of the Lord! There is thus a fullness of humanity as well as a fullness of divinity in Christ Jesus, our Savior—a fullness of perfection in His blessed person which may well fix your trust and rivet your admiration!

In our Lord, likewise, there is what I may venture to call, for lack of a better word, an acquired fullness. He has sojourned on earth and rendered entire and undeviating obedience to the law of God, having taken upon Himself the form of a servant, and by His righteousness earned wages—a fullness, an everlasting wellspring of merit! Throughout His whole life He honored the divine law and glorified God on the earth. In doing His Father's will, His action was so voluntary and so vicarious, that He has accumulated an inexhaustible fund of merit which all of us who believe in His name may plead before the Father's throne. More especially did His death consummate the obedience and constitute its sterling worth, its intrinsic virtue. His death, with all its surroundings—from the bloody sweat in the Olive Garden to the last cry, "Into Your hands I commend My spirit"—was sublime. All through the scourging and the spitting, the shame, the wounding, the crucifixion, the thirst, the desertion and the death, itself, He was working out an atonement for us—

"Bearing, that we might never bear
His Father's righteous ire."

And now with Him risen from the dead, raised to the right hand of the Majesty on high, there is a fullness of prevalence in His intercession when He pleads His blood—a fullness of cleansing power when the Spirit applies the blood to the guilty conscience—a fullness of peace to the heart when His blood speaks better things than that of Abel! In that fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins there is a fullness that never can be exhausted by all the sin of man! He has finished the work which His Father gave Him to do. Now the covenant is ratified with Him that He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be

satisfied. In these respects we are convinced that there is an acquired as well as a personal fullness in our precious Lord!

No less has He a fullness of dignity, of high prerogative. He is a Prophet. By Him are all His people taught, warned, counseled and encouraged with a blessed hope. He is a Priest, and by Him they are cleansed from sin and consecrated to God. Moreover, He is also a King, spreading the patronage of protection over all His liege subjects and ordaining peace for them. Under His beneficent rule, they prosper! You good Shepherd! You great Shepherd of the sheep! There is no office or obligation that was necessary for our welfare, but You have taken it and undertaken it on our behalf! You are to us all that we require and all that we could desire! Join all the qualities involved in name or fame that commend themselves most closely to your heart, because they meet your necessities, or draw forth your sympathies, and you shall find that He comprises them all in liberal, lavish fullness! Nor has His prerogative any limit. As a priest, who has once offered a sacrifice of everlasting prevalence, His absolution or His benediction is final and irrevocable! As a prophet, His authority is unimpeachable—the authority with which He teaches allows of no appeal. As a king, He has right as well as might on His side. In the midst of Zion, willing subjects yield to His beneficent sway! In the outer world, reluctant rebels must submit themselves to His scepter! He is no priest whose vain pretense has no valid prescript. He is no prophet whose teaching is uncertain in its tone, or limited in its range. He is no King whose prerogative is not sanctioned by His wisdom and whose government awakens no fealty of love. But in the administration of all His offices, our Lord Jesus Christ shows a fullness of qualification and gives a fullness of satisfaction! In such respects He has no rival—nor is there any room for a rival to arise!

And let me say here that the power with which our Lord exercises these offices may well command our devout confidence. Do you need to learn the truth? Oh, come to the prophet of Nazareth, and you shall find that there is a satiety of truth in His teaching such as was never found in heathen groups, or even to the same extent in Hebrew seers! Or do you need acceptance before God. Oh, then, come you to the Priest who is not of the tribe of Levi, but a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, whose royalty confers dignity on His sacerdotal office! He can present your sacrifice with the much incense of His merit that is acceptable before the throne of God. Or do you need strength? Do you need one to fight your battles, to take hold of the shield and the buckler, draw out the spear and handle the bow? Behold, the Hero of Israel, whose exploits are told in your songs—Jesus, the King by right of conquest, as well as by right divine—has a fullness of power and majesty with which no adversary can overcome! He reigns! His reign is the consolation of His people, the guarantee of their peace! These are bare outlines. Time would fail me to

enumerate all His offices. They are very numerous but, however numerous, Christ possesses them all! He enjoys the prerogatives peculiar to them all in the fullest degree. He possesses the power to exercise them all to the fullest extent!

But in Christ there is verily a blessed fullness of every kind of perfection. Whatever there may be that is lovely or of good repute is to be found in Christ. All that is virtuous or amiable in the character of men; all that is noble and illustrious in the endowments that heaven bestows on the most privileged of creatures, our Lord possessed. It was said of Henry the Eighth that if all the likenesses of tyrants had been lost out of history, they might have been reproduced out of the one character of that monstrous tyrant-king! So if all the holy features of patriarchs and prophets, of saints and martyrs that ever lived were blotted from the canvas of history, they all might be painted afresh from the one life of the divine person of our ever-adorable Lord Jesus Christ! In Him there was not just one perfection, but all perfections meet and blend to make up one matchless perfection! There was not one sweet alone in Him, but in Him all sweets combine in a perfect sweetness! John has love, Peter courage, Paul zeal—each saint has his own peculiarity, but in Christ all the qualities of goodness and grace converge! He exhibits them in the highest degree and the purest harmony. After such manner are they incorporated in Him as to produce a character the like of which was never known before, nor ever shall be witnessed again!

And never forget that a fullness of the Holy Spirit abides in Christ. The Lord gives not the Spirit by measure unto Him. He has the residue of the Spirit. His is the head upon which the anointing oil is fully poured. We, who are but as the skirts of His garments, are favored with some droppings thereof, but the fullness of the anointing of the Spirit was bestowed upon Jesus Christ our Lord—and from Him, His members must receive the portion they enjoy!

His fullness! I linger on the word, for I revel in the meditation. Such a fullness as admits of no diminution, for it is an abiding fullness! What though all the saints of every age have come to Christ, and drawn their supplies from Him, He is just as full as ever! Think not that those who first came drank of a copious fountain that has been partly drained by the myriads who have since slaked their thirst; the apostles received of His fullness and so do we; they without prejudice to us—we without prejudice to those who shall follow after us. When I came to Christ 1800 years after the apostles came, yet I received of the fullness at just the same rate as when Peter, John, or Paul received it. Should this dispensation last another thousand years, and some poor, trembling wretch should come to the foot of the cross to receive mercy, he will not receive Christ half-full, but He shall receive of Christ's fullness, for it is an abiding fullness! It is never less than full—never can be more than

full. In Him there is an infinity of grace and truth. Such fullness is there in Him at all times, under all your circumstances of trial, yes, and under all conditions of sin, too! The fullness of Christ to supply will always exceed the faith of the believer to seek. And when you feel your emptiness more than you ever did before, then you will set the most store upon His abounding towards us in all wisdom and prudence. Considering, then, His abiding fullness, His inexhaustible fullness, His available fullness, I entreat you to avail yourself of this fullness now without demur, without delay! As there is a fullness, so there is—

II. A FILLING.

This is to be our second part. I must speak of it with brevity. "Of His fullness have we all received." Surely, then, all the saints were empty before! You are empty, my brother, and so was Abraham, so was Paul. Grace, the free grace of God, has made all the difference between Peter and Judas, though the one repented and the other despaired—the one traveled the heavenly road—the other went down quickly to hell. They stood on equal footing in transgression, till grace made them to differ! What radical difference is there between one man and another from a legal point of view?

"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." All alike have to come to Christ, empty of merit, or they would never come at all! That was a pretty tale we heard the other day, and it points to a right good moral. A worthy, consistent, industrious woman was married to a low, worthless, dissipated husband. Both of them, however, were alike ignorant of the gospel. They came together to the house of prayer. They heard together the tidings of mercy. They each believed and each of them received the Savior—and they both were saved the same way—they both found mercy on the same terms! To the rich, free, sovereign grace of God they cried with one another in ascribing the praise. That is a fact. It occurred last week. I do not know whether this makes it more convincing to you, but I might say, as Elihu said to Job, "Lo, all these things works God oftentimes with men, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living!"

Observe that the filling is universal. All the saints partake of it. "Of His fullness have we all received." There are manifold diversities of experience among the Lord's people, but in some things they share and share alike. Some saints do not undergo the stress of trial and tribulation that others pass through. Here, however, there is no partiality. They have, every one of them, received out of Christ's fullness! Not one of them could do without receiving it! Not one of them could receive it from any other hand than that of the divine benefactor! They earned it not. They accepted it. They received it from Jesus Christ!

This is peculiar to the saints. While it says, "Of His fullness have we all received," manifestly a certain body of people have become partakers

of a privilege which it is no less evident that all men have not received. What thousands and tens of thousands there are who, when invited to the gospel feast, reject the call, "make a wretched choice, and rather starve than come." "We all!" That is, all of those who have believed! And who are, "we," or what are "we," that such grace should be given to us in preference to anybody else? Ah, brothers and sisters, little cause enough have we for self-satisfaction! On the score of deserving, no choice had ever fallen on us! We were the vilest, the least worthy, the least attractive and, in some respects, the least hopeful! Oh, grace, it is your practice to come into the unlikeliest hearts, and it is the glory of divine love to find in darkest spots a home! "We all"—we who were once dead in trespasses and sins; we who were once lost like the prodigal son, lost like the wandering sheep, lost like the piece of money; we who needed seeking, needed finding, need saving—yet of His fullness have we all received! Recollect that the reception is peculiar to believers—it does not go beyond them.

Be it clear, however, that there is, and must be, a personal reception in every case. "Of His fullness have we all received." No one of us can receive it transmitted from another, but each one of us receives it directly from Him. Your father's grace cannot save you! It was a wise speech of the wise virgins. When the foolish virgins said to them, "Give us of your oil," they replied, "Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; go rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." Family piety involves responsibilities, but it cannot stand in the place of personal godliness! Dear hearer, you must go to Christ for yourself! All who ever were saved have done so, and you certainly will not be saved unless you are led to do the same! It is a personal filling. "Of His fullness have we all received."

The bounty is gratuitous. Notice the next words, "and grace for grace." It is not said, "Of His fullness have we all purchased," nor, "Of His fullness have we all earned a share." It is all passive. We have received. What does the vessel do to fit itself for the water that flows into it? Why, it does nothing! All its doing can fit it to recede is an undoing—that is to say, it empties itself to prepare itself to be filled. Oh, if any of you desire to find Jesus Christ, the doing must be in the way of undoing! You must be emptied to be filled! The preparation is a consciousness that you are not prepared! In such unpreparedness you are prepared for Christ! This is an enigma and a riddle. Those who think themselves prepared for Him are not—but those who know that they are not prepared are just the souls upon whom His grace will come! Poverty, not riches; blindness, not sight; emptiness, not fullness; sinfulness, not virtue—these are the things Christ looks for. He is come to seek and to save that which was lost—not that which had won victories! Not that which was splendid in its esteem, but that which was defeated, ruined, lost! If you are lost, He

comes to seek and to save such as you are! Oh, you who were once lost, but now are found, bless His name that you have received of His fullness!

"And grace for grace!" What do these words mean? We can only just touch them as a swallow with its wing touches the pool—we cannot pretend to enter into their depth. "grace for grace." Does that mean that those who receive grace under the old dispensation were afterwards led to receive the grace of the new dispensation? Does it mean that we who have the grace of conviction, with the Holy Spirit as a spirit of bondage, shall receive, by-and-by, the spirit of liberty, and get out of conviction, through conversion, into full pardon and enjoyment of peace with God? Is that the grace, when grace turns into glory and we come before the throne of God? Does it mean grace by degrees—grace upon grace—a little grace to begin with, and more grace afterwards? "He gives more grace." Grace following on grace and, further on, super bounding grace, when grace turns into glory, and we come before the throne of grace forever and ever? Does it mean that God leads us on, step by step, adding to our spiritual wealth, initiating us first into simple things and afterwards leading us into deeper matters? "Grace for grace."

Yes, it means that, but it means more! God gives grace in preparation for further grace—the grace of a broken heart—to make room for deep repentance and abhorrence of sin! The grace of hatred of sin to make way for the grace of holy and careful walking, humiliation and faith in Jesus! The grace of careful walking to make room for the grace of close communion with Christ! The grace of close communion with the Lord Jesus Christ to make room for the grace of full conformity to His image! Perhaps the grace of conformity to His image to make room for the higher grace of brighter views of Himself and still closer incomings into the very heart of the Lord Jesus! It is grace that helps us on in grace. When a beggar asks you for a penny, and you give him one, he does not ask you for a sixpence. Or if you give him a shilling, he would not consider that an argument why you should give him a sovereign! But you may deal thus with God—if you have only got, as it were, an ounce of grace, that is a reason why you should then pray God for a greater weight of grace—and afterwards for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! Believe that He gives grace for grace—that is, grace that you may open your mouth for more grace! The grace you have expands your heart and gives you capacity for receiving yet more grace. Do you not send your child to school to learn his ABCs? You may call that the grace of learning his alphabet. Yes, but it is preparatory to his learning to read the spelling book. Well, but why does he learn to read the spelling book? Why, that is a preparation for something else! So one grace gives us a preparation for another grace, and thus as we have more grace, we realize the blessedness of this divine filling out of His fullness!

Or, suppose we read the passage thus—grace answerable to grace? Even this will admit of two constructions. Let God give me grace to be a preacher—He will surely give me grace to discharge the office! Perhaps He has given you grace to teach in a Sunday school? Then you need a further supply of grace to enable you to be an efficient teacher! Perhaps you have the grace of resignation to suffer for Christ's sake. You will need the grace of patience to support you in the midst of pain or persecution! You are called to pray, and you yield yourself up to be a wrestler with God in prayer. This is a great grace. Oh, may you have grace answerable to that grace, that when you get with the angel by the brook Jabbok, you may take hold of His strength, plead His promise, His covenant, His oath and never let Him go until He blesses you! Thus, a halt and fainting Jacob comes off as a prevailing Israel! May we thus always have grace answerable to grace! "Grace for grace" may imply grace received by us answerable to the grace that is in Christ. Oh, that we Christians had grace in some measure commensurate with the grace that is treasured up for us in Him! All that is in Him belongs to you. Then the degree of your daily supplies ought to be proportionate to His ample, unlimited wealth and fullness!

A young heir to a large estate, though not of full age, generally gets an allowance made to him by the executors, or the trustees, or the Court of Chancery, suitable to the position he is presently to occupy. If he has £100,000 a year in prospect, he would hardly be limited to a penny a week, like a poor man's child. We cannot suppose that he would have a mean allowance made him such as would barely enable him to live in a humble cottage on the rich domain he is entitled to. Oh, no, that would be a meager pittance out of all proportion to his position. When I see one child of God always mourning, another always doubting, and yet another always scheming—I feel a kind of disappointment—I see they are living below their privileges! They do not seem to have grace in possession answerable to the grace they have had. We always advocate propriety, on the part of all our people, of living within their incomes, but I will defy the child of God to live beyond his income in a spiritual sense! You that have but little spending money are like the elder brother in the parable. You say, "You never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." And your Father replies, "Son, you are always with Me and all that I have is yours." If you do not have it, it is your own fault—it is all there and is freely yours! You have but to ask, and you shall receive—to seek, and you shall find. Oh, could we once get grace in us at all like the grace that is in Christ, what Christians we would be! No longer starlight Christians and moonlight Christians, but sunlight believers, letting our light shine before the sons of men! Oh, to be among the three Mighties of our royal David! May each of us covet such a position as this and God grant it to us for His love's sake!

"Grace for grace" obviously means grace in abundance. Like the waves of the sea, when one comes, there is another close behind it. Before you can say that one is gone, there is another coming to fill its place. There they come. Who shall count them? In long succession, wave follows wave. So is God's grace. "Grace for grace." One grace has hardly come into your soul but there is another one! You have heard the story of Rowland Hill having a hundred pounds entrusted to him for the benefit of a poor minister. He thought that if he sent him the hundred pounds, it would be too large a sum to give him all at once—he would scarcely know how to handle it and, perhaps, he would not be as thankful for it as if he had it doled out in smaller amounts. So he sent him five pounds, and wrote in the letter, "More to follow." Letters did not come often in those days of nine penny or eighteen penny postage, but in about another week he forwarded another five pounds, and a note with it, "More to follow." After a short interval he did the same, again, still saying, "More to follow." So it went on for a long time, always with, "More to follow," till the dear good man, I should think, must have been at his wits' end to know what could follow when so many good presents came to one who needed them so much!

Now that is just how God has done with me, and I believe He is doing the same with all of you who are His people. He has sent you a mercy and when He has sent it, you might have seen, if you had looked at the envelope, that it was an earnest of further benefits and benefactions—"More to follow." The mercy you have received today has written upon it legibly, "More to follow," and that which will come tomorrow will have upon it, "More to follow." "Grace for grace." Oh, sing unto Him a new song! Let Him have fresh songs for fresh mercies and, as He multiplies the mercy, so do you multiply the praises you ascribe to His name!

"Grace for grace!" Does it not mean grace from Him to produce grace in us? We receive from the fullness of Christ, of His grace, in order that it may be a living seed that shall produce grace in us as its natural fruit! The grace of gratitude should be produced in us by the grace of generosity from God. We ought to be gracious with a holy joyfulness for all His goodness. I hope we shall have the grace of patience under all sufferings and the grace of zeal in all our labors. At a time like this, my brothers and sisters, when we are seeking the conversion of sinners with special efforts, may we have grace from Jesus that shall make all the graces fruitful and fragrant in us! So shall we be to the Savior as a garden of olives and pomegranates, of lilies and sweet flowers—and may He take a delight in us! When Cyrus took the Greek Ambassador through his garden, he challenged him to admire its charms. The Spartan approved all he saw, but still his admiration was cool and critical. "This garden," said its master, "yields me more pleasure and satisfaction than you can imagine, or I can express." "And why?" asked the visitor.

"Because," replied Cyrus, "I planted every tree in it myself. I planned all the paths and all the flowers have I reared. No hand but mine has dug the soil, tended the plants, pruned the trees, or done anything but my own." As toil and his trouble thus endeared the place to the king, so, truly, Christ can say when He looks upon His people, "There is a fruitful branch there—I pruned that. He was sick, long laid aside from business. He feared his family would be starved—I was pruning him, then, but I love the fruit that is on him because I know how it came there. That plant yonder which is blooming now and shedding such a sweet perfume of love, well do I recollect when it was drooping and ready to die. I came and watered it. She, timid disciple, would say, 'Blessed be the gentle hand that shed the dew and poured nourishment on my poor, parched and withered root!'" Yes, the Savior gives us "grace for grace" that we may produce grace! I leave the thought with you for meditation, and the issues for your edification, only praying that His Holy Spirit may work in you "grace for grace."

Oh, that all of you might receive grace from Him. You will never get grace anywhere else! Go to Him at once by faith, with humble prayer. Plenteous grace with Him is found—all the grace you shall ever require between now and glory, you shall find stored up in Him! His grace is our benediction. Of it may you one and all partake! Amen.

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A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JANUARY 28, 1872.

"He shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities." Isaiah 53:11.

EVERY word of the text is peculiarly full of meaning. There are passages of Scripture which are like the rooms of a royal palace which may not have in them gold and silver, though there are precious things; but this text is the strong-room of the King's house—the richest, rarest treasures are here! When we preach the doctrine of our text, we are preaching the very marrow of all theology—the very pith of the gospel—the essential oil of the good news which brings salvation! I shall not, tonight, therefore, have any time to give you illustrations, nor shall we have any time for anything like oratory—but simply to speak right on, in explaining the deep truths of God which lie before us. May God open our ears and may every heart receive the truth which is able to save your souls, for I may truly say when preaching upon this text, "Incline your ears and come unto me. Hear, and your soul shall live," for we are upon the main business of your souls, and treating upon that which God sets forth as the only way of redemption for the sons of men!

There are two points in the text. You observe there are two persons. There is the Lord Christ, and there are the many. We will take these two persons in order and you will perceive in a moment that these are both represented in a threefold character. And our first point will be the Lord Jesus in His threefold character. And the second will be the many in their threefold character. To begin, then, where all must begin—

I. OUR BLESSED LORD HIMSELF IN HIS THREEFOLD CHARACTER.

You have Him here in a threefold character. First, *the servant*—"My righteous servant"; secondly, *the sin-bearer*—"He shall bear their iniquities"; thirdly, *the justifier*—"He shall justify many."

To begin, then—*Christ, the servant*—"My righteous servant." Be astonished, O you heavens! He that distributes crowns and thrones, and is, "God over all, blessed forever," designs to become a servant! He came into this world and "was made in fashion as a man and, being found in

fashion as a man, He became obedient"—obedient to His Father's will, "obedient even unto death."

Think of Christ for a few minutes and you perceive that first, He is a servant unto God. In a certain sense He became the servus servorum—the servant of servants—washing our feet and wiping them with a towel. But now in the text He is represented as serving God. Whereas we were servants that ran away from our Master, Christ came to take our place! Whereas we were disobedient servants, He came to fulfill our obedience for us—took our position of service of which we had proved ourselves to be unworthy. He served His Father and did His will. According to the verse which precedes the text, He served God not only with His body, but—with His soul—and yet again in the verse in which our text is found, "He shall see of the travail of His soul." The service that Christ rendered to God was partly that of His body, for He suffered weariness in the diligent obedience to His Father's will. But His mind went with it—every power and every passion of His nature was sweetly obedient to the divine will! The zeal which He had for God's glory ate up not only His body, but His very soul! He served God, as alas, we do not as we should—with all His heart, and soul, and strength!

And note He was an *ardent servant,* for the text speaks of the travail of His soul. Read it as the labor of His soul, as if He threw His soul so fully into it that His soul labored in the service of God! Or read it, if you will, as travail, and you know the meaning of that word, which we will cover with a veil. The whole of His powers and faculties were full of pain that He might serve His God. He suffered in His service and He served in His suffering—not only with all the power He had, but bowing the fullness of His strength into the service which He rendered unto God. In the text He is called a righteous servant, as if He had rendered an account unto God, and God had found it in every jot and tittle to be correct—a righteous servant, fulfilling all righteousness, carefully doing so—a righteous servant without any need to add a word about some little slips or failings, for in Him was no sin—no sin in His life and no sin in Himself. The prince of this world searched Him, but he found nothing in Him—He was without the slightest offense—"holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners." Christ, then, as a servant to God was an accepted servant. We know He was, for God Himself calls Him, "My righteous servant." Now think—I will not enlarge further—think, beloved, of this. This is your Lord, whom angels worship, become an obedient servant unto God for your sake and discharging His work so as to get the reward of, "Well done, good and righteous servant!" His merits are yours, believer! All that He has done is yours! You are "accepted in the Beloved." The Lord

receives you for Jesus' sake and in Christ He is well-pleased with you. There is a sweet truth of God to begin with! Roll it under your tongue as a dainty morsel. "He is My righteous servant."

But the text takes Christ in His second character and we must be brief on each—as the Sin-Bearer. "He shall bear their iniquity." The most wonderful thing in all this book of wonders is this—that God should become man and then, as man, should bear the sin of His people. We have heard, sometimes, foolish persons ask, "Where is the doctrine of substitution in Scripture?" to which I would answer, "Where is it not?" Take it out of the Scriptures and there is positively nothing left! It is the main and cardinal doctrine of revelation that Christ stood in the sinner's place! And throughout this chapter it is the wonderful teaching, over and over, and over and over again. "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him." "He was numbered with the transgressors." "He bore the sin of many," or, as in our text, "He shall bear their iniquity." It does not say, "He shall bear the punishment of their iniquity"—that is true and follows as a matter of course—but the iniquities of His people were in very truth laid upon Him! And as in type upon the scapegoat, the sins of Israel were laid, so in truth, and not in type, nor metaphor, nor figure, but in very deed and of a truth—the sins of God's people were transferred from them and laid upon the head of Christ, the Son of God, who stood in their place. Words cannot be plainer! "He shall bear their iniquities." When did He bear their iniquities? I answer, in a certain sense He bore them from of old, for He was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world—but in actual fact He bore them through His painful life. Read these words—"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." That thirst, that hunger, those pangs He felt often throughout His life of weariness and woe—those were caused by sin being laid upon Him! It was not possible that He should be perfectly happy while sin was upon Him—it would have been impossible for Him to have been unhappy had not sin been imputed to Him.

He bore our sins, next, at the judgment seat of Pilate and of Herod. I beg you to follow the words of the text, "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the living." And why? "For the transgression of My people was He stricken." He was numbered with the transgressors when He stood at Pilate's bar. He was condemned to die a malefactor's death and on the Roman records there

stood the name of Jesus of Nazareth, condemned to die because He had been accused of saying that there was another king, and that another kingdom was about to be set up. He was bearing our sins before Pilate's bar.

But especially upon the tree, for there we have it, "When You shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed." "He, His own Self, bore our sins in His own body up to the tree," and on the tree, always being a Sin-Bearer up to that moment when He said, "It is finished"—for then He bore sin no longer. He cast it all away into His own sepulcher! Into the wilderness of forgetfulness did He hurl it—and now the sin of His people cannot be found! It has ceased to be. Christ has "finished transgression." He has made an end of sin and brought in everlasting righteousness for His people.

Now let us pause here a little and think over this wondrous mystery. The way in which God is pleased to save us from our sin is by laying our sins on His own Son and making Him suffer for those sins as if those sins had been His own! Why, do you think, did He choose such a method? Was is not thus? First, thus He satisfied His own justice. Why, brothers and sisters, if we had lain in hell forever, yet divine justice would not have been fully justified, for after thousands of years of suffering, there would still remain an eternity of debt due to God's justice, and the debt would not be paid! And let me say, if God had annihilated all the sinners that ever lived in one stroke, He would not have so honored His justice as He did when He took sin and laid it on His Son—and His Son bore divine wrath which was due to that sin! For now there has been rendered unto divine justice a full equivalent, a complete recompense for all the dishonor which it suffered—and I know of no other conceivable way by which such a recompense could have been rendered—

"He to the utmost farthing paid
Whatever His people owed."

He suffered what they should have suffered, and now God's law stands in all its integrity. It has not dismissed the penalty. The penalty has been executed! The sword has awakened against the Shepherd, although the stroke was due to the flock!

Moreover, God, in choosing Christ to suffer in our place has been pleased to lay help upon one that is mighty, upon one that is mighty to save. O my soul, delight in the thought that Christ was my Substitute! If I had been told that an angel had done his best to save me, I would feel unsafe. If I had been told that all the holy men in all the world had striven to save me, I would have felt insecure. But if the very Christ of

God, Himself, the Eternal one, has deigned to bear my iniquities, why, then, should I fear? The mighty Savior, the Almighty Savior, can surely put away my sins! There is help laid upon one that is mighty!

The Lord also laid our sins upon Christ because it was Christ's desire that it should be so. Do you remember how He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with"? It was the baptism of His sufferings! "And how am I straitened till it is accomplished!" And long before that He had said, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Your will, O God, yes, Your law is in My heart." And then He adds, "Sacrifice and offering You would not, but a body have You prepared Me." And He longed to come, and in that body, bear His people's sins! And in that body prove that He had a love for them which many waters could not quench, and floods could not drown, for down into the deeps He would go with His beloved church and never come up again until He could bring her up with Him, as He has done, to the praise of the glory of His grace! Therefore, you see, God is honored, His grace is honored, we ourselves are comforted by a mighty Savior, and Christ's own longings are contented by having sin laid upon Him.

Moreover, beloved, the forgiveness of sin, through laying it upon Christ, is made to show to all mankind and to all other created intelligences the tremendous evil of sin. Here were a people whom God desired to save, but He could not. His justice did, as it were, tie the hands of His mercy. Sin was so hateful to Him that He could not blot it out and forget it. He must punish it and I know not of any way by which He could have shown His abhorrence of sin so greatly as when He bruised His own Son! A man may show his indignation about a crime in many ways, but surely in none so much as when he sees that crime upon his son, and he says, "No, I cannot reveal my love to you. While that crime is upon you, you must suffer for it," and—

"Heaven's eternal darling bleeds."

Because sin was laid on Him and the Father would not smile! He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" A greater Abraham unsheathed His knife to slay a greater Isaac, and no angel intervened! The Savior died the death! These are words that we speak. Do we know their meaning? When you are racked with pain, you begin to guess the pain the Savior suffered and, perhaps, when we are, ourselves, in the pains of death, we shall begin to have a little more fellowship with Jesus. But all for our sakes the blessed Lord bore the wrath of God that God might show that sin, even when laid upon His Son by imputation, was so horrible to Him that He would not let Him escape! He must be bruised. "It pleased the Father to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief."

And don't you think, beloved, that God chose this way of pardoning sin to show His great love as well as His great abhorrence of sin? Behold how He loves us! What manner of love is this that God has shown to us—that when we were yet enemies, He gave His Son to die for us? There is one sweet reason that Jesus gives why He died for His people. You remember it. He loved His church and gave Himself for it, that He might present it to Himself, "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." There is no washing for His church like the washing in His blood! Even if you, believer, should wash your face in your tears, you would stain your face in the washing! But washed in the blood of Jesus, there remains no trace or speck of sin! Surely the very angels are not as comely as the church is now that Christ has cleansed her. The heavens are not pure in His sight and He charged His angels with folly—but the blood-washed Church is pure and no folly is charged on her! Her righteousness is the righteousness of her Creator, and her purity is the holiness of God, Himself!

Surely the Lord was pleased to adopt this way of pardon for one other reason—that you and I might have strong consolation and that, having strong consolation, we might also have strong reason for devoting ourselves to Christ's service! There are those who think that pardon through atoning blood will make men live in sin. They little know what is in the heart of the redeemed, for, being bought with such a price, we would be perfect if we could! So much has been done for us that if we could do for Christ ten thousand times more than we have ever done, we would only rejoice to do it, cost what it may! You know when a man is under burden of sin, he cannot serve his God well, because, he says, "I would serve Him but my sins are so many." But when his sins are laid on Christ, then he says, "Now I can give all my strength to the glory of God. I have no sin to fret about, now—it is laid on Jesus. There is nothing, now, to make me dread an angry God, for the anger of God is turned away and in Jesus Christ I am a justified man." This I might enlarge, but I must not. You see Christ as the sin-bearer, bearing our sins on the cross.

Now the third aspect under which He appears is this—He is seen in the text as a justifier. "By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities." Christ is Himself just, and yet the justifier. Jesus Christ needed not to have worked out righteousness! He needed not to have become man! He needed not to have been obedient to the Father. "God over all, blessed forever." He has, therefore, a righteousness to give away—one which He does not need for Himself. This is the root and bottom of it—He has a righteousness which He does not need for Himself and He, therefore, gives it to us and

becomes the Lord, our righteousness! And every soul to whom Jesus gives His righteousness is righteous at once! This is God's way of making men righteous, not by their own deeds, but by the deeds of Jesus. He imputes to us what Christ has done! He takes the righteousness of the Lord Christ and gives it to the sinner, blots out the sinner's sin and makes the sinner righteous in a moment before His sight! The text says He shall do this to many—not to all, for, alas, tens of thousands die condemned—but to many. Blessed word is that! Why not to me? If it is God's decree that Christ shall justify many, why should not I be one among them? And if He will justify all who know Him—(by His knowledge shall He justify them)—O my soul, study Christ! Endeavor to be His disciple! Sit at His feet! Learn of Him! Know Him, for then He will justify you and make you just in the sight of God!

Remember, beloved, that this is the reward that Christ has for His death. "He shall see of the travail of His soul." How? Why, "by His knowledge shall He justify many"! It is Christ's delight to take a sinner and to make him just. This is the spoil which He divides with the strong! Because He poured out His soul unto death and was numbered with the transgressors, and bore the sin of many, He makes men just! And this is His sure reward—He asks no better—He who believes on Him who justifies the ungodly is saved by that belief! This is Christ's glory, Christ's delight, the fullness of Christ's satisfaction—that He justifies many! Oh, that He might get that satisfaction in this house tonight that many poor condemned souls might know Him and be made just by Him! Then would His heart leap for joy! The joy that was set before Him when He died would then come to Him!

I have thus briefly set forward Christ in His threefold capacity—a servant, a sin-bearer and a justifier. Now, with brevity, we are to look at—

II. THE MANY IN THEIR THREEFOLD CHARACTER.

And in the text we see them, first, as needing justification; secondly, as receiving knowledge; and thirdly, as justified. Now we begin, tonight, this second head where God began with us. We see the many needing justification. Christ would not have come to justify the just—they do not need it. The whole have no need of a physician. Suppose a man is brought up before a court of justice. He is justified, or reckoned to be just, if he is proved not guilty. But we, before the court of God, are all guilty! Therefore, justification cannot come in that way to us. Our only hope of justification lies in this—God says, "That man's sins I laid upon Christ. I punished Christ for that man. He is not guilty. Christ was obedient in that man's behalf. Christ's obedience is that man's

obedience. He is just in Christ's righteousness. I take him not as what he is, but as what his sponsor is, even Christ; what his surety is, what his substitute is." As, for instance, in the old ballot days, when men had to go to war, if the number was called out, and a substitute was provided, the person providing the substitute was said, by the law, to discharge his duty to his country. I believe that some time ago in the Northern States a person who had found a substitute to go to fight in the South, heard after a while that his substitute was dead. On a second drawing being made, this man was drawn, but he said, "No, I am dead. Number so-and-so went to the war and is dead. That is me. My substitute is dead." So when God's justice calls to me, a sinner, I do not answer to it! Why? Christ answered on my behalf long ago and died for me! I am dead with Christ. "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." There is no legal charge that can be brought because Christ has stood in my place, been punished in my place, been reckoned as if He were I, and now, this day, I am reckoned as if I were in Christ's place, even as He was reckoned to be in my place. You see where we begin, then. We begin needing justification, for we have, first of all, the sin of our first parents. "All we like sheep have gone astray." We have, next, our own sins. "We have turned, everyone, to his own way." We have many sins of omission and of commission. "The Lord has laid on Him our iniquities." Whether they are iniquities of excess or of shortcoming, they are both laid upon Jesus Christ's head. We were guilty—we were so guilty, that by ourselves considered, we were under condemnation! "He that believes not is condemned already," and if we had remained as we were, we were heirs of wrath, even as others! And our sin deserved the same punishment as others.

O you who are guilty, hear tonight what good news there is in this for you! Christ came to justify the ungodly. The Redeemer died for those who have no righteousness of their own. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." Christ came to bring a righteousness to those who have none—to save the sinful, the vile, the hell-deserving—He came to give them His righteousness, and to take upon Himself their sins. Oh, the wonders of divine grace—that whereas we need justification, we are the very people He came to justify!

And now note, in the second place, these people in their second stage. They are instructed—they are made to know. The text says, "By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many." That is to say—(you may read it as you have it in our version, if you like, but you will

understand it better if you read it—and it will be quite as correct — thus)—"by the knowledge of Him shall My righteous servant justify many." That is to say, when the soul knows Christ, knows Him, believes Him, learns Him and trusts Him, then it is justified! You see there are no doings in the process—there are no feelings in the matter. It is knowing, which is another word for believing—for we know Him when we believe Him! And we inevitably believe Him when we truly and really know Him. The heart understands Christ through hearing—and through the hearing of Him, it comes to believe Him! And when the heart knows Christ and believes Him, it is then justified. But suppose the text means this, "By His knowledge"—(that is, the knowledge which He gives)—"He justifies many." That knowledge is contained in His Word—it fell from His own lips—you have heard it tonight! We have preached it to you! It is not the knowledge Moses brought—it is the knowledge that Christ brought. "Whoever believes on Him is not condemned." May it be knowledge to your soul by His teaching it to your soul! By His divine spirit, He teaches to profit. But, dear hearer, do see this—the whole way of my getting the result of Christ's Sacrifice is by knowing and believing—not by doing! We are justified by faith, and not by the works of the law. "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." "By the law is the knowledge of sin." "Grace and peace come by Jesus Christ," and they come to us through believing or through knowing—by knowing Him, by being made to know, through Him, that we are justified!

And please notice the peculiar character in which Christ is known to the justified. They know Him as God's servant and they know Him as bearing their iniquities. Some persons think a great deal of Christ in His glory, and of Christ in His second advent. God forbid that I should have you forget Him in those characters, or in any other! But the soul-saving aspect of Christ is not His glory, nor His second advent, but Christ the servant and Christ the sin-bearer. It is from the cross that the words come, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all you ends of the earth." "I, if I am lifted up"—not on the throne, but on the cross—"I, if I am lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let who will preach Christ exalted, "we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but unto us who are saved, the wisdom of God and the power of God." Do let me make this very clear, for, perhaps, some soul might get the light of God tonight! You have many sins upon you, man. You can never get them off by any doings of your own! No obedience, or tears, or anything else which you can do, can make one spot of sin stir an inch! You are black as night, black as hell, and you cannot make

yourself white! But here it is—if you will know Jesus, if you will hear of Jesus, if you will believe on Him—believe what He teaches. If you will believe that He is God's sent servant, that He is the propitiation for sin, that He is the sin-bearer—and if you will trust Him with your sin, and with your soul—you are saved! No spot of sin remains on you! This moment you are saved, for He shall justify, that is, make just, and that is an instantaneous work! A man may have been a condemned sinner five minutes ago, but the moment that he knows Christ, he is a justified soul! By that very knowledge, or, as I have said, by that faith, by that simple dependence on the Christ whom he has learned to know, the man is just and he may go on his way rejoicing!

So I shall close with that third aspect of the many. It is said, *"*He shall justify them.*"* What a grand word it is! "He shall justify them." He shall make them just. It is a forensic, legal term. He shall make them just before the court of God. Now notice in the text the sins mentioned were real. The bearing of sin by Christ was real. Therefore the justification in the text is real. You see that thief on the cross? What a wretch he is! He has been guilty of every crime. His sins are real. But he believes in Jesus, Jesus the dying Savior, and his sins are forgiven! Now listen. That thief is a just man. "Why," you say, "He has done no just action." I grant you that. He would if he could. He is now willing to confess the Master, for he speaks a word of rebuke to the thief on the other side of the cross. But I do not say he is just because of that. He is just because of nothing that he has done, but he is just because he believes in the dying Savior! And you, poor sinner, though you have never done a good work in your life, though you deserve to be damned to all eternity, though you have lived in everything that is vile, if you, this night, trust your soul to Jesus, and know Him, Jesus justifies you and you are really just!

And, what is more, you are forever just. You have a justification that will never wear out, a righteousness that will outlast time itself! The tooth of decay shall never harm it, nor rust corrupt it, nor moth consume it. You are just and just forever! Do you understand me? I will make it plain, and put it in words that cannot be misunderstood. The soul that believes in Jesus is so justified that none can even lay anything to his charge. "Why," says one, "the man has been a very guilty man and lived a horrible life." So had Paul. He had been a foaming persecutor, raging against God's saints. But listen to Paul—"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Is not he afraid to say that? No, because he goes on to say, "It is God who justifies." Suppose the judge says in court, "That man is clear." It is no use anybody getting up and saying, "Let me come into the witness box—I have something against him." You are out

of order, sir. The judge says he is clear and that is enough. God says of the guiltiest soul, "I laid that man's sins on Christ. I punished Christ for that man and that man is clear." And if God says you are clear, who shall lay anything to your charge? Listen again. A believer cannot be condemned. Do you doubt it? Paul shall speak again "Who is he that condemns?" Why, Paul, you have done much that you deserve to be condemned for! Oh, but here it is. "It is Christ who died; yes, rather, that is risen again, who sits at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." He means this—"How can you condemn me? Christ was condemned for me! He died. He rose again. That proved that I, myself, am not condemned! He had paid the debt, otherwise He had not been allowed to rise! He has gone into heaven to plead for me, and He will be the judge. And if He died for me, do you think that He who alone can condemn will condemn those whom He died for? Will He cast away His own chosen—condemn a limb of His own body and reject out of His own mouth the very soul to whom He said, 'I have forgiven you, and blotted out your sin.'"? It cannot be!

The believer, then, cannot be accused. He cannot be condemned and, consequently, he cannot be punished. What shall he be punished for? "For his sins," says one. He has not any! He has not any—they were laid on Christ! "He shall bear their iniquities." Can a sin be in two places at once? If my sins are on Christ, they cannot be on me. If God has laid the weight of my guilt on Christ and Christ bore it and made an end of it, then I am clear of it as though I never sinned! Glory be to God for such a gospel as this—to think that a soul, condemned and lost by nature, should be made completely clean through the purging of the great atoning Sacrifice of our dear Lord and Master! For, mark you, there is more than that, for when Christ justifies a man, He not only blots out his sin, but he is a just man, and the man is treated henceforth as if he were just! Now the just shall be rewarded—the just shall have the favor of God! The just shall enter heaven—and so shall you, poor guilty sinner! If you trust Christ, that righteousness of Christ becomes yours! I could preach all night upon such a subject, but I should weary you. I should not weary myself in thinking it over, though, nor should you in meditating upon it! It is enough to make heaven ring again and again with melody! I am sure it is God's gospel, for nobody could have invented it—a plan so just to God, so safe to man!

And I am all the more sure it is God's gospel because there are many that hate it! They cannot bear it! How can they? They are righteous in themselves and hope to enter heaven by their own works! They go about to establish their own righteousness, but this is as it always has been. As

it was in Paul's day, so it is now—and this only confirms our confidence in the gospel that we preach! Believing this, I can go to my bed and fall asleep in peace, not caring whether I wake again or not this side heaven. Believing this, doubts and fears prevail not, for my soul flies to the atoning Sacrifice, again, and tells the devil that my sins are no longer mine, but Christ's, or rather that they were imputed to Him, and laid upon Him and that He was punished for them in my place, and I am clear for Christ has suffered for me! Believe this, dear heart—believe it! You have never heard a better gospel! You have heard it better preached—but never better news came to your ears than this! And until you get to heaven, you will never hear music that can beat this—the music of a Savior's wounds, groans and death in a poor sinner's place! I know what you will do if you believe it. You will go home glad of heart and the moment you get home you will say, "I am a saved soul, for I have done with my former sins."

"'Now for the love I bear His name,
What was my gain I count my loss,
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to His cross.'"

Oh, you will have done with your old companions! The love of Christ will constrain you. Nothing cleanses the Augean stable of human nature like a stream of love and blood made to run through it! When Christ's sacrifice comes to a soul, it casts out sin and Satan, sets the man working at once—and none can work so vigorously as those who feel that they owe all to the grace of God, who feel that they have nothing to do to save themselves—they are saved! That work is all done forever! And now, out of gratitude, they give their whole life, and soul, and strength to spread abroad the gospel of Jesus, now, and make God's names famous, even to the end of time! God bless you, dear hearers. May this all be yours, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST!

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WITH GOLDEN BAND GIRDED
NO. 3555

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He was girded about the chest with a golden band."
Revelation 1:13 (NKJV)

[The original title of this sermon was WITH GOLDEN GIRDLE GIRT.]

BE assured, my brethren, the more real Jesus Christ is to us, the more power there will be in our religion. Those men whose religion lies in believing certain doctrines and contending for certain modes of expression, may be strong enough in bigotry, but they often fail entirely in developing the spirit of true Christianity. There may be minds so constituted that they can live under the power of an idea and they might possibly be able to die for it. But these, I think, must be comparatively few. To draw out enthusiasm among men, there must generally be a man as leader and commander in whom the people can implicitly trust, to whom they will voluntarily tender obedience. *Individual men* have worked wonders. The thoughts which they incarnated may have been, in themselves, strong, yet their strength was never so forcible as when the men who represented those thoughts were present to give them currency. Then the blood of the many was stirred and every man's heart beat high. The presence of Oliver Cromwell in a regiment was equal to any ten thousand men. He had only to appear and all his soldiers felt so sure of victory, they would dash upon the cavaliers as some mighty tornado, driving them like chaff before the wind! The presence of Napoleon at any moment in a battle was almost always sufficient to turn the scale. Let but "the little corporal" appear and wave his sword, and men seemed to lose all sense of their own personal danger and rushed into the very mouth of death to gain the victory! In those old days of the Huguenots when they were warring for their liberties, what shouts there were, what beating of hearts, what glamour of trumpets, what exultation, when Henry of Navarre came riding down the ranks! Then each man felt he had a giant's arm and, as he rode to battle, struck home for God and for the truth as he gave out his watchword, "Remember St. Bartholomew!"

Now the force of the religion of Jesus, under God the Holy Spirit, it seems to me, is never fully brought out except when our faith greets the Lord Jesus Christ as a person and holds to Him as a personal leader and commander, loving Him and devoting ourselves to Him as an ever-living, ever-gracious friend. It is not by believing a set of ideas and trying to be enthusiastic over *them*, that our courage rises or our prowess succeeds.

Rather let us feel His presence, though we cannot see His face, and remembering that there is such an one as Jesus of Nazareth, who became a baby in Bethlehem for us—who lived, and toiled, and suffered for us—then laid bare His chest to the spear and gave up His life for us. We grow strong when we thus think of Him as our Savior, when His thorn-crowned head rises before our mind's eye, when we look into that face so marred with shame, and pain, and cruelty, till we are compelled to cry out, "Oh, my Savior, I love You, and for the love I bear Your name would gladly learn what I can do to honor You, and I will do it! Point out to me how much of my substance I should place upon Your altar, and I will be glad to place it there! Put me into the place of suffering, if necessary, and I will account it a place of honor, for if You are there, I can look into Your dear face and think that I am suffering for You—fire shall be then like a bed of roses to me—and death, itself, seem far sweeter than life!"

We need to have more open testimony concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ! I am persuaded of that and we have need, private Christians, to live more in fellowship with Him, the Son of God, the man, Christ Jesus, who has redeemed us from wrath, and through whose life we live! To Him now—to Him exclusively let all your thoughts be turned. Oh, that you may discern the image which stood on that Lord's Day clearly before the view of John, the eyes of your understanding being opened, and your whole soul being attentive to the Revelation! It is but one part of John's description of our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven to which I propose to direct your attention. "He was girded about the chest with a golden band." What did this golden band signify? And what are the golden lessons to be gathered from it?

I. THE GOLDEN BAND.

What did it mean? It was designed, first, *to set forth our Lord's excellence in all His offices.* He is a prophet. The prophets of old were often girded about with leather bands, but our Savior wears a golden band, for He, above all other prophets, is vested with authority! What He declares and testifies is true. Yes, it is the pure truth of God, unalloyed with tradition or superstition. He makes no mistakes. There is no treachery to taint His teaching. Sitting at His feet, you may accept every word He utters as infallible. You need not raise a question about it. The band of golden truth is round about Him. He is also a priest. The high priest of old wore a band of many colors for glory and for beauty. Our Lord Jesus Christ wears a band superior to this. It is of the pure gold, for among the priests He has no peer. Of all the sons of Aaron, none could vie with Him. They must first offer a sacrifice for their own sins. They needed to wash their feet in the laver, and to be touched with the cleansing blood. But Jesus Christ is without spot, or blemish, or any such thing—

"Their priesthood ran through several bands
For mortal was their race."

But Jesus is immortal and about Him, He wears the golden band to show that He excels all the priests of Aaron's line. As for those persons who, in modern times, pretend to be priests, our Lord Jesus Christ is not to be mentioned in the same day with them. They are all deceivers! If they knew the truth of God, they would understand that there is no class of priests now. All caste of priesthood is forever abolished! Every man that fears God, and every woman, too, is a priest according to the Word of God which is written, "He has made us kings and priests unto God." The priesthood is common to all the saints—not confined to some! But He wears a golden band among them. Their priesthood would be nothing without His. He has made them priests. They derive their priesthood entirely from Him, neither could they be acceptable before God if they were not accepted in the beloved. He is a King as well as a prophet and a priest, and that band, being made of gold, signifies His supremacy over all other kings! He is mightier far than they—"the Lord mighty in battle." "King of kings" is His name, and the burden of the music of heaven is this, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." The day shall come when He shall grasp His scepter and break the kingdoms of earth like a potters' vessels with His rod of iron! He is this day King of the Jews, but He shall openly be so proclaimed. In that day kings shall bow down before Him and He shall gather up sheaves of scepters, while many crowns shall be upon His glorious brow! There is no kingdom like the kingdom of Christ. Other kingdoms come and go like the hoar-frost of the morning, or the sheen upon the midnight waves, but His kingdom stands forever and ever! It shall endure from everlasting to everlasting! As Prophet, Priest and King, He wears a band of gold to show His supremacy in office above all others!

The golden band, moreover, bears witness to His power and authority. Men were often girded with bands when they received office. The prophet Isaiah said of Eliakim that he received a band of power and dominion. Keys were hung upon the band. The housewife's band with her keys signified her authority over her servants. The keys at the band of great men signified their power in their various offices, and when we sometimes sing—

"Lo, in His hand the sovereign keys
Of heaven, and death, and hell,"

we recognize this meaning of Christ's golden band, that all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth. He is the universal Lord. Up in heaven He enjoys an authority that is undisputed. Angels bow before Him—and on the sea of glass they cast down their crowns and cry, "Hallelujah!" Here on earth all Providence is ruled by the man whose hands were pierced. All this dispensation is an economy of mediatorial government, over which Jesus Christ presides. He puts down one and sets up another; He makes the wheels of Providence revolve. Everything occurs according to His decree and purpose. In all things He rules and He overrules them for the good of His Church, even as Joseph governed Egypt for the good of the seed of Abraham! What a comfort it is, beloved,

for us to think of the authority and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ! He who had not where to lay His head; He who was despised and rejected of men; He who was a working man—the carpenter's Son; He who felt the pangs of hunger, endured the pains of weariness, was neglected, condemned, opposed, and cast out by His countrymen and His kinsmen—it is He who is now undisputed Master and unrivaled Lord everywhere! No name is as famous as that one once branded with infamy—the name of Jesus—whom sinful men rejected, holy angels now adore! On earth He was condemned and crucified. In heaven He is hailed with highest honor. Look up to that golden band! See how He descended, step by step, into the meanest depths of humiliation. Then mark how He ascended with rapid flight to the towering heights of exaltation! Follow Him. With Him take your lot. Be willing to be made of no repute in this day of reproach that you may be a partaker of His glory in the day of His appearing!

Girded thus about with a golden band, we have a vivid representation of *His activity*. The band was used by the Easterns to bind up their long flowing robes. The Hebrew did not usually wear a band indoors. It was only when on a journey, or when engaged in some manual labor that he thus adjusted his attire. So our Lord's having a golden band signifies that He is still ready to serve His servants, to engage on their behalf. You remember how He once took a towel and girded Himself. That was with kind intent to wash their feet. Now it is no more with a linen towel, but with a band of gold that He prepares Himself to work on the behalf of His beloved! He stands not in heaven with flowing garments, as though all work were done, but He stands there girded about the chest that He may be still ready and show Himself strong on behalf of His people. Be this your comfort—Jesus has not forgotten to plead for you before His Father's throne. He never holds His peace, and never will. As long as you have a cause to plead, Christ will be your intercessor! Whatever you need, He is waiting to supply. As long as you have a sin to confess, Christ will be your advocate with the Father to purge your guilt and purify your souls. As long as you are persecuted on earth, there will be a Christ to represent you in heaven. As long as you are in this vale of tears, He, girded with a golden band, will be the angel of God's presence to succor and to save you! In all your afflictions He was afflicted, and He will still bear and carry you as in the days of old.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, how people do sometimes talk about the Christian Church, as if Jesus Christ, who died for us, were still dead! What gloomy forebodings I have read during the last few months! Not that I have believed a word, or taken dreams for disasters. I have not even credited their sadness with too much sincerity! I rather thought they wrote for a party purpose, with motives of policy. Were we to believe half we read, Protestantism, in a few years, would become no more! We might have the Pope preaching in St. Paul's Cathedral! Not a few would be doomed to burn in Smithfield, and we know not what pains and

penalties we shall be subject to! Evidently the Church of Christ is quite unable to take care of herself. Unless she is provided with so many hundreds or thousands of pounds, she must go to the dogs—for money, the love of which used to be the root of all evil—somehow or other, is now found out to be the root of all good! As for the good men who have prayed earnestly and worked so zealously, they are all going to leave off praying and preaching, too, when the State pay is stopped! So all the piety towards God and all the good will towards men will come to an end! Well, I suppose this *would be very likely if Jesus Christ were dead*, but as long as He is alive, I think He is quite able to take care of the golden candlesticks Himself! And the Church of God will probably be no worse in the next few years than it has been in the years that have passed. No, I will venture to prophesy that the less help she seeks from the world, and the more she leans upon her God, the brighter will be her future! Should the very foundations of society be shaken and the worst calamities befall us—such as we hope will never come—yet over the ashes of all earthly renown and government patronage, the supernal splendor of the immortal Church of God would glow forth with clearer brilliance and brighter glory! She has long been like a ship tossed in the tempest and not comforted. She has plowed her way, and the spray that has broken over her has been blood-red with martyr's gore—but she has still kept on her course towards her desired haven! He that is with her is greater than all they that are against her! So shall it be till the world's end!

Then look, beloved, to the golden band of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as you perceive that He is still active to maintain His own cause, to deliver His people, and to prosper His Church, you need not be afraid! And does not the golden band imply His enduring love? The heart was, in old times, and still is among ourselves, supposed to be the dwelling place of the affections. What, do you think, is the ruling passion in the heart of Christ? What is it that inflames the bosom of Him who was once the Man of Sorrows, but now is King of kings and Lord of lords? He is girded about the chest with a band of gold. He never ceases to love His people. The band is an endless thing—it goes right around a man. Christ's heart always keeps within the sacred circle of undiminished, unchanging, undying affection for all whom His Father gave Him, for all whom He bought with His precious blood! Never doubt the faithfulness of Christ to you, beloved, since faithfulness is the band of His loins. Never think that a promise will fail, or that the covenant will be broken. Trusting in Him, you will never be allowed to perish. It cannot be! While He wears that golden band, He cannot prove faithless. That heavenly decoration is a goodly order. Invested therewith, He cannot forget or prove untrue to those whom He has engaged to protect. Though heaven and earth shall pass away, not one Word of grace shall fall to the ground. The sun and moon shall expire—dim with age, they will cease to shed their light

abroad—but the love of Jesus Christ shall be as fresh and new as in the day of His espousals, and as delicious as when you first tasted of it! Yours shall it be forever and ever to inherit and enjoy!

In days of yore, moreover, *the band was the place where the Eastern kept his money.* It was his wallet. Some of the Orientals keep their cash in their turbans—in our Savior's day it was carried in the band. When our Lord speaks in Matthew about His disciples going without purse or scrip, He mentions there that they are not to carry silver or gold in their bands; this golden band, then, to use a simple word, may represent the wallet of the Lord Jesus, and we infer from its being golden that it is full of unequaled wealth and unsurpassed riches. Jesus Christ bears about Him all the available supplies that can be needed by His people. What a multitude of people He has to support, for on Him all His saints depend! They have been drawing upon Him all their lives and so they always will. They are "gentlemen commoners," as one used to say, upon the bounty of God's providence. We are pensioners upon the beneficence of our Lord Jesus Christ! He has supplied us until now. Oh, how much grace you and I have needed to keep us from starving, from sinking, from going down to the pit of hell! And we have had all we needed! In fearful temptations our foot has not slipped. We have passed through many trials, but without being crushed. Arduous has been our service, but as our day, our strength has been. We should long ago have broken any earthly bank and drained the contents, but Christ has been to us like an ever-flowing fountain, a wellhead, a redundant source communicating enough and to spare! What a source! What ready relief for every emergency Christ has at His command! Oh, brothers and sisters, have you but little grace? Whose fault is it? Not your Lord's! Oh, you who have no spending money! You who are full of doubts and fears! You who have slender comfort and little joy! You who are saying, like the elder son in the parable, "You never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends"!—whose fault is it? Does not your Father say, "Son, you are always with Me, and all that I have is yours"? It you are poor in spiritual things, you made yourselves poor, since Christ is yours and with Him all things are yours! Do enjoy what God has given you! Take the good that God provides! Seek to live up to your privileges. Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice! As that golden band gleams from afar, say in your spirit—

"Since Christ is rich, can I be poor?
What can I need besides?"

And now let me briefly point out to you—

II. THE GOLDEN LESSONS to be gathered from these five meanings of the golden band.

It will refresh your memories if I remind you that we showed how the golden band set forth the excellence of Christ in all His offices. The golden lesson is—*we must admire Him in all His offices!* He who loves Christ will never be tired of hearing about Him. Doubtless when Jacob's

sons came back and told him that Joseph was lord over all Egypt, after hearing the story once, the old man would be sure to say, "Oh, tell me that again!" I will be bound to say that as he sat in that tent of his, he would ask first one, and then another, to tell the tale—and so he would try to pump them with questions. "Tell me, Judah, now how did he look? Has he grown stouter or thinner since the day he left me and I never thought to see or hear of him anymore? Tell me, Simeon, did he sit on a throne? Was he really like a king? Tell me, Levi, what did the Egyptians seem to think of him? Had they a high estimation of his character? Tell me, Zebulon, how did he speak? In what terms did he speak of his old father? Was there a tear in his eyes when he referred to Benjamin, your other brother, the little one whom his father would not spare?" Surely I might draw that picture without being suspected of exaggeration. It would be all true. He loved his son so dearly and doted upon him so fondly that he could not know too much—no, he could not know enough about Joseph! Anybody that had anything to tell about Joseph would be sure to be welcome! So with every renewed heart—if there is anything to be learned about Jesus, you will want to know it! Dear brothers and sisters, let us cultivate this spirit more and more. Let us live in the study of the life of Jesus. These are things the angels desire to look into. Do you not desire to look into them, too? Watch your Master. Let your experience, as it alters and ripens, reveal to you fresh beauties in your Lord. As you turn over page, after page, of Scripture, search after Jesus in it as men search after gold—and be not content unless you see your Savior's face revealed on every page!

Does the golden band indicate His power and authority? The golden lesson is that you *trust* Him. If all power is His, lean on Him! We do not lean on Christ enough. The remark of the Church was, "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" Lean on Him! He will never sink under your weight. All the burdens that men ever had to carry, Christ carried, and He certainly will carry yours. There can be no wars and lighting that perplex you which did not perplex Him, for in the great fight which comprehended all of you, and the great warfare for all His saints, He overcame. Nothing, then, can be difficult to Him. How often we weary ourselves with walking when we might ride—I mean, we carry our troubles when we might take them to Christ! We fret, and groan, and cry—and our difficulties do not get any the less. But when we leave them with Him who cares for us, and begin to trust, like a child trusts its father, how light of heart and how strong of spirit we become! The Lord give us to watch that golden band carefully, and as we see the power of Jesus Christ may we come to lean upon that power and trust Him at all times.

Or did the golden band signify His activity? The golden lesson is that we *imitate* Him. Christ is in heaven, and yet He wears a band. Christian, always keep your band round your loins. "Stand, therefore, with your

loins girded about," says the Apostle, "and your lamps trimmed." This is not the place for the Christian to unbind. Heaven is the place of rest for us—not this world of temptation and of sin. Always stand ready to suffer or to serve! At the Master's gate, watch and wait to do His bidding. Never, on weekdays, and much less on Sabbath days, let your spirits be out of order for Christian service! We ought so to live that if called to die at any minute, we would not need to say a prayer—ready for heaven, ready for a life of service or for a death of glory! The true way for a Christian to live in this world is to be always as he would wish to be if Christ came at that moment. And there is a way of living that style—simply depending upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ—and then going out into daily service for Him, moved by love to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, show me what You would have me do." I wish we always were as I have thus said we always should be. The Lord can teach us! Let us ask Him to teach us the lesson.

We told you, moreover, that the golden band indicated His enduring love, inasmuch as it is girded about His chest. Well, then, the golden lesson is, *let us love Him in return*. Let us wear the golden band, too. Oh, beloved, love Him with all your heart, and soul, and strength! Let no rival come between you and Jesus. Keep your heart chaste for the Well-Beloved. My greatest longing is that I may present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ, that there may be nothing by way of error in respect to doctrine or to holiness of life that may disturb the full union of your souls with Jesus. Oh, to see that golden band, and as we see it, to feel that He has belted us about after the same manner! "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." I am not the world's, nor is the world for me—I belong to Jesus, and Jesus belongs to me! May that be the deep feeling and the truthful expression of every one of you.

And then does the golden band suggest to us the wealth of Christ, as being His wallet, let it be our golden lesson *to rejoice in Him*. If He is so rich, and all that He is and all that He has belongs to us, bring here your choicest music and let your souls be glad in the name of the Lord! Why are you bowed down? Why distressed? Has your Lord withdrawn, or has He changed? Is He deaf, or is His arm shortened that He cannot deliver? No, but let the children of God be joyful in their King. If you cannot be glad in what is created, be glad in the Creator Himself! If you cannot drink of the streams, go and drink of the fountainhead—the water is sweeter and better there. Blessed wreck which makes us lose everything and cling to our God, for the loss will be a gain if we get nearer to God, love Him better and prize His friendship more!

Ah, me, the day will come when those of you who do not love Christ will have to look on Him and you will see that golden band, then, but it will bring no comfort to you! You despised Him, therefore in that band there will be no love to you, no blessing for you, no power for you! But what will there be? Why, that very band, since it is made of faithfulness, will show Him faithful to His threats! Those who hear Christ preached

and reject Him will find that word true, "He that believes not shall be damned." Nothing but condemnation can be the lot of the man or woman who despises pardon and treats forgiveness with contempt. When simply to trust Christ saves the soul, to distrust Him is the direst and most damnable of sins! It is suicidal! Unbeliever, you refuse to pass through the only door that can lead you to heaven! Well, if you never enter there, your blood be on your own head. Oh, that grace may lead you just now to seek salvation! The man with the golden band can save you, and none but He! Look to Him. Behold Him as He hangs upon the tree with hands and feet fastened there. Look and trust—trust and live! The Lord incline your hearts to espouse and not eschew His rich mercy, for His own dear name's sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 11.

Verse 1. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding His twelve disciples, He departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.* Whatever He commanded, He Himself did. He was always the example as well as the legislator of His people. How well it will be for us who are called upon to teach others, if we can teach them as much by what we do as by what we say! "When Jesus had made an end of commanding His twelve disciples, He departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities."

2, 3. *Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples. And said unto Him, Are You He that should come, or do we look for another?* Poor John! His spirit was brave enough amid the wilds when he was by the riverside, but shut up in prison, it was probably otherwise with him. Those bold spirits, when they lose liberty, are apt to be depressed. Perhaps, too, John sent the disciples as much for their sakes as for his own. At any rate, what a question it was to put to our Lord, "Are You He that should come, or do we look for another?" I would call your attention to the quietness of our Savior's mind—the absence of anything like anger. See how He answers them.

4-6. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.* Now if it had been the very least of us who had been attempting to do such service for God, and we had been questioned about what we were doing, should we not have felt hurt and grieved? And maybe there are some who would not have given an answer, especially if they were dignified with the name of an office. But our blessed Lord does not take a huff at it. He is not vexed, but He answers with the utmost gentleness, not by a word of authority

commanding John to believe, but by an exposition of those blessed seals of grace which were the best evidence that He was, indeed, the Messiah. He pointed to the very miracles which prophecy declared the Messiah would perform—and He did this with that graciousness of temper which was always about our divine Master, in which let us copy Him.

7-11. *And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went you out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went you out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, which shall prepare Your way before You. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* Never did our Savior bear a more emphatic testimony to John than on this occasion! And it is remarkable that it should have followed upon the heels of John's doubt and John's question! How generously the Master repays His servant—not in his own coin, but in the heavenly coin of love! He seems to say, "Through the infirmity of your flesh you have been half-inclined to question Me, but through the strength of My grace I turn round and extol you. Time was when you could say, 'He must increase, but I must decrease,' and now I turn round and say to those whom you have sent, and to those who saw your messengers, that there is none like you." Not even Moses, himself, is greater than John the Baptist! Though he who has entered into the light and the glory of the kingdom of grace since the coming of the Master is greater than he!

12-15. *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you will receive it, he is Elijah, who is to come. He that has ears to hear, let him hear.* But how many there are that have ears and do not hear! The external organ is affected, but the internal ear of the soul is not reached at all! Blessed are they who, having ears, do in very truth, hear.

16, 17. *But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows and saying, We have piped unto you, and you have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and you have not lamented.* The children would not agree! Whatever game was proposed, some of them would not follow it. At one time they imitated the pipers, and then the others would not dance. Then they imitated the lamentations of a funeral, and then the others would not join them.

18, 19. *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He has a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.* There was no pleasing them! And now there is no pleasing

people, whoever it is that God sends. One man is much too homely. In fact, he is vulgar. Another is much too rhetorical. In fact, his rhetoric runs away with him. One man is doctrinal. Oh, he is dogmatic! Another man is practical. He is much too censorious. Another man is full of experience. He is mystical. Oh, surely God, Himself, cannot please the evil tempers of ungodly men! One thing is that He does not try to do so, nor do His servants, if they are truly sent of Him. That is a matter about which they have small concern.

19. *But wisdom is justified of her children.* Whoever Christ sends, He sends in wisdom, and there is an adaptation about each of His servants, even if men do not perceive it. The day shall come when wisdom shall be justified of her children.

20-24. *Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto you, Chorazin! Woe unto you Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to Hades: for if the mighty works which have been done in you, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.* There was a tenderness about the tone of Christ when He spoke thus. The words are burning, but the eyes were full of tears. He could not contemplate the possibility of the gospel being rejected without a broken heart. He sighed and cried as He bore testimony against those who refused eternal life. With what tenderness must Christ regard some that are present here tonight, whose privileges from their childhood until now have been so great that they could scarcely be greater—and yet they seem determined to reject the admonitions of love and trample over tenderness in their desperate resolve to perish! God have mercy upon such.

25. *At that time Jesus answered*—He seemed to answer Himself. He answered to the thoughts that passed through His own mind. "At that time Jesus answered."

25-27. *And said, I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things are delivered unto Me of My father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomever the Son will reveal Him.* Did the Lord Jesus Christ, in His address to Bethsaida and Capernaum awaken in His own mind all those difficulties that hover round about the doctrine of predestination? Did it not seem strange that God should send the gospel to people who rejected it, and did not send the gospel to a people who would have received it?

How can these things be? And the dear Savior answers the question to His own mind by falling back upon that other sublime truth and to Him, full of thanksgiving—the infinite sovereignty of God! I do not know what some of us would do if we did not believe that truth of God. There are so many things which puzzle us—so many questions, but the judge of all the earth must be right. He must! He will do as He pleases with His own, and it is not for us to question the prerogatives of the Most High. Now the Savior at last seems to give vent to His soul in one grand burst of gospel preaching! And whenever you and I get worried about any doctrine, it is always well to come back to the simplicity of the gospel and proclaim it again.

28. *Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* There is no rest in the difficulties of metaphysics! There is no rest in the labors of human merit! "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

29. *Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls.* First He gives rest to all who come. But afterwards there is a second rest which they find who become obedient and bear His yoke. The rest that comes of pardoned sin is sweet, but the rest that comes of *conquered* sin through obedience is sweeter still. The rest He gives is precious, but there is rest upon rest, as there is grace upon grace, and let us go in for the highest form of that rest! "You shall find rest unto your souls." The very innermost part of your being shall be full of peace.

30. *For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.* Blessed be His name, we have found it so!

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ABSCONDING AND APOSTASY
NO. 3556

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON.

"Will you also go away?"
John 6:67.

NO mischief that ever befalls our Christian communities is more lamentable than that which comes from the defection of the members. The heaviest sorrow that can wring a pastor's heart is such as comes from the treachery of his most familiar friend. The direst calamity the Church can dread is not such as will arise from the assault of enemies outside, but from false brothers and sisters within the camp. My eminent predecessor, Benjamin Keach, though arrested, brought before the magistrates, imprisoned, pilloried and otherwise made to suffer by the government of the times for the gospel doctrines that he preached and published, found it easier to brook the rough usage of open foes than to bear the griefs of wounded love, or sustain the shock of outraged confidence. I should not think his experience was very exceptional. Other saints would have preferred the rotten eggs of the villagers to the rooted animosities of slanderers! Troy could never be taken by the assaults of the Greeks outside her walls. Only when, by stratagem, the enemy had been admitted within the citadel, was that brave city compelled to yield. The devil, himself, is not such a subtle foe to the Church as Judas, when, after the supper, Satan entered into him. Judas was a friend of Jesus. Jesus addressed him as such. And Judas said, "Hail, Master," and kissed Him. And it was Judas who betrayed Him! That is a picture which may well appall you—that is a peril which may well admonish you! In all our churches, among the many who enlist, there are some who desert. They continue awhile, and then they go back to the world. The radical reason why they retract is an obvious disagreement. "They went out from us because they were not of us, for if they had been of us, doubtless they would have continued with us." The unconverted adherents to our fellowship are no loss to the Church when they depart. They are not a real loss, any more than the scattering of the chaff from the threshing floor is a detriment to the wheat. Christ keeps the winnowing fan always going. His own preaching constantly sifted His hearers. Some were blown away because they were chaff. They did not really believe. By the ministry of the gospel, by the order of providence, by all the arrangements of divine government, the precious are separated from the vile, the dross is purged away from the silver that the good seed

and the pure metal may remain and be preserved! The process is always painful. It causes great searching of heart among those who abide faithful—and occasions deep anxiety to gentle spirits of tender, sympathetic mold.

I trust, dear friends, that you will not think I harbor any ungenerous suspicions of your fidelity because my text contains so pointed and so personal an appeal to your conscience. There is more of pathos than of pardon in the question as our Lord put it, "Will you also go away?" He addressed the favored twelve. I put it to myself. I put it to those who are the officers of the Church. I put it to every member without exception—Will you also go away? But should there be one to whom it is peculiarly applicable, I do not desire to flinch from putting the question most personally to that one, "What? Are you going? Do you mean to turn back? Do you mean to go away?"

Let us approach the enquiry sideways. Will you *also* go away? "Also" means as well as other people. Why do others go? If they have any good reason, perhaps we may see cause to follow their example. Look narrowly, then, at the various causes or excuses for defection. Why do they renounce the religious profession they once espoused? The fundamental reason is lack of grace, a lack of true faith, an absence of vital godliness. It is, however, the outward reasons which expose the inward apostasy of the heart from Christ of which I am anxious to treat.

I. WHY SOME LEAVE CHRIST

Some there are in these days, as there were in our Lord's own day, who depart from Christ because *they cannot bear His doctrine*. Our Lord had more explicitly than on any former occasion declared the necessity of the soul's feeding upon Himself. They probably misunderstood His language, but they certainly took offense at His statement. Hence there were those who said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" So they walked no more with Him.

There are many points and particulars in which the gospel is offensive to human nature and revolting to the pride of the creature. It was not intended to please man. How can we attribute such a purpose to God? Why should He devise a gospel to suit the whims of our poor fallen human nature? He intended to save men, but He never intended to gratify their depraved tastes. Rather does He lay the axe to the root of the tree and cut down human pride. When God's servants are led to set forth some humbling doctrine, there are those who say, "Ah, I will not assent to that!" They kick against any truth of God which wounds their prejudices! What say you, brothers and sisters, to the claims of the gospel on your allegiance? Should you discover that God's Word rebukes your favorite pleasure, or contradicts your cherished convictions, will you forthwith take offense and go away? No, but if your hearts are right with Christ, you will be prepared to welcome all His teaching and yield

obedience to all His precepts. Only prove it to be Christ's teaching and the right-minded professor is ready to receive it. That which is transparent on the face of Scripture, he will cordially accept, as he says, "To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." As for that which is merely inferred and argued from the general drift of Scripture, the true heart will not be hasty to reject, but patient to investigate, like the Bereans, who, "were more noble than the Jews of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures to see whether these things were so." Oh, that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly! God forbid that any of us should ever turn aside offended because of Him—His blessed person, His holy example, or His sacred teaching! May we be always ready to believe what He says and prompt to do what He commands!

Remember, brothers and sisters, that the gospel commission has three parts to which the minister has to attend. We are first, to go and preach the gospel. *"Go you, and disciple all nations."* The second thing is "baptizing them." And the third thing is "teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you." As willing disciples of Jesus, let us press forward, listening to His voice, following in His footsteps and accounting His revealed will as our supreme law! Far be it from us to go back, to repine, or to desert Him, then, because we are offended at His doctrines!

Others there are who desert the Savior for *the sake of gain*. Many have been entangled in that snare. Mr. By-ends originally went on pilgrimage because he thought it would pay. There was a silver mine on the road and he purposed to survey that and see whether silver might not be obtained, as well as the golden city beyond! He came, if I remember rightly, of a family that got its living by the waterman's business—looking one way and pulling another. He was apparently striving for religion, though he had his eyes all the while on the world! He was for holding with the hare, and running with the hounds. So when he came to a point where he must part with one or the other, he considered upon which the whole would be most profitable—and he gave up that which appeared to involve loss and self-sacrifice—and kept to that which would, as he called it, help him in the "main chance," and assist him to get on in the present life. Sincerely do I trust there is no one among us but what despises Mr. By-ends and all of his class! If you would make money—and there need be nothing sinful in that—do let it be made honestly! Never let riches be pursued under the pretense of religion! Sell your wares and find a market for your merchandise, but do not sell Christ, nor barter a heavenly birthright for a worthless bribe. Put what goods you please into your shop window, but do not put a canting, hypocritical expression on your face, or "wear a holy look," with a view of turning godliness into

gain! God save us from that arrant villainy! May it never have a footing in our midst!—

"Neither man nor angel can discern
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone."

Does any man join a church for the sake of the respectability it implies, or for the standing it may give him, or for the credit he may get? He will soon find that it does not answer his purpose. Then away he will go! But the graver probability is that he will be thrust out with shame!

Some leave Christ and go away *terrified by persecution*. Nowadays it is supposed that there is no such thing. But that is a mistake, for though martyrs are not burned at Smithfield, and the Lollards' Tower is now a place for show (a memorial of times long ago), the harass, the cruelty and the oppression are far enough from being obsolete! Godless husbands play the part of petty tyrants and will not permit their wives the enjoyment of religion, but make their lives bitter with a galling bondage. Employers full often wreak malice on servants whose piety towards God is their sole cause of offense. Worse still, there are working men who consider themselves intelligent who cannot allow their fellow workman liberty to go to a place of worship without sneers, jeers, and cruel mocking! In many cases the mirth of the workshop is never louder than when it is turned against a believer in Christ. They count it rare fun to hunt a man who cares for the salvation of His soul. They call themselves, "Englishmen," but certainly they are no credit to their country! Look at the base-born, ill-bred cowards! Yonder is an atheist! He is raving about his rights because the magistrate will not believe him on his oath—he claims liberty of conscience to be a heathen, but denies his comrade's right to be a Christian! Look at that little party of British workmen—they belong to the Sabbath desecration society. They are petitioning Parliament to open museums and theaters on Sundays, and at the same time they are hounding to death a poor fellow who prefers going to chapel. They air their own self-respect by the oaths they utter, while they betray their self-abasement by the scorn they vent on those who presume to sing a hymn! They hail the drunk as a chum and scorn the sober man as a fiend! I wonder that there is not more honorable feeling, more good faith and true fellowship among our skilled workmen than to allow of one man being made the butt of a whole community! God give you grace to bear such persecutions as these! If they cut us to the quick, may we learn to bear them with equanimity, and even to rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for the Savior's sake!

Some of us have had to run the gauntlet for many years. What we have said has been constantly misrepresented. What we have endeavored to do has been misjudged and our motives have been misunderstood. Yet here we are, as happy as anybody out of heaven! We have not been injured by any or all the calumnies that have been heaped upon us. Our

foes would have crushed us but, blessed be God, He cheered us often when we were cast down. The Lord give you, in like manner, strength of mind and courage of heart to bear the trial manfully! Then you will care no more for the laughter and the sneers of men than you do for the noise of those migratory birds high overhead which you hear on an autumn evening as they are making their weary journey to a distant clime! Take heart, brothers and sisters! Fear God and face your accusers. True courage grows strong on opposition. Never think of deserting the army of Christ; least of all should you play the coward because the insolence of some ill-mannered bully. Let not your faith be vanquished by such scoffing. Alas, that so many a cowardly spirit has gone away for the sake of carnal ease—and deserted Christ when His dear name had become the drunk's jest and the derision of fools!

And there are people who forsake true religion *out of sheer levity*. I know not how to account for some men's defections. If you take up the list of wrecks, you will notice some that have gone down through collisions, and others through striking rocks—but sometimes you meet with a vessel "foundered at sea." How it happened, no one knows. The owner, himself, cannot understand it. It was a calm day and there was a cloudless sky when the vessel sank. There are some professors who, concerning faith, have made shipwreck under such apparently easy circumstances, so free from trial, so exempt from temptation, that we have not seen anything to awaken anxiety on their behalf, yet all of a sudden they have foundered! We are startled and amazed. I remember one that fell into a gross sin, of whom a brother unwisely said, "If that man is not a Christian, I am not." His prayers had certainly been sweet. Many a time they have melted me down before the throne of grace and yet the life of God could not have been in his soul, for he lived and died in flagrant vice—and was impenitent to the last! Such cases I can only attribute to a sort of levity which can be charmed with a sermon or a play. They can take a pew at the chapel or a box at the opera with equal nonchalance and eagerly follow the excitement of the hour, "everything by turns, and nothing long." "Unstable as water, they shall not excel." At the spur of a moment they profess Christianity, they do not espouse it—and then, without troubling themselves to renounce it—they drop off into infidelity. They are soft and malleable enough to be hammered into any shape. Made of wax, they can be molded by any hand that is strong enough to grip them! The Lord have mercy upon any of you who may happen to be of that species! You spring up soon, and suddenly you wither! Hardly is the seed sown before the sprout appears. What a wonderful harvest you promise! But ah, no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than, because there is no earth, the good seed withers away! Pray God that you may be plowed deep, that the iron pan of rock underneath may be broken right up, that you may have plenty of subsoil

and root—that the verdure you produce may be permanent! Want of principle is deadly, but the lack is far too common. Never cease to pray that you may be rooted and grounded, established and built up in Christ, so that when the floods come and the winds blow, you may not fall with a great destruction, as that house fell which was built upon the sand!

And, oh, how many leave Christ for *the sake of sensual enjoyments*! I will not enlarge upon this. Certain, however, it is that the pleasures of sin for a season fascinate their minds till they sacrifice their souls at the shrine of sordid vanity! For a merry dance, a wanton amusement, or a transient joy that would not bear reflection, they have renounced the pleasures that never pall, the immortal hopes that never fail—and turned their backs upon that blessed Savior who gives and feeds the tastes for unspeakable joys, for joys full of glory! In our pastoral oversight of a church like this, we have painful evidence that a considerable number gradually grow cold. The elders' reports of the absentees reiterate the vain excuses for nonattendance. One has so many children. The distance is too great for another. When they joined the church their family was just as large, and the distance was just the same! But the household cares become more irksome when the concern for religion begins to flag—and the fatigue of traveling increases when their zeal for the house of God falters. The elders fear they are growing cold. No actual transgression can we detect, but there is a gradual declension over which we grieve. I dread that cold-heartedness! It steals so insensibly, yet so surely over the entire frame. I do not say that it is worse than open sin. It cannot be. Yet it is more insidious. A flagrant delinquency would startle one as a fit does a patient, but a slow process of backsliding may steal like paralysis over a person without awakening suspicion. Like the sleep which comes over men in the frozen regions, if they yield to it, they will never wake again! You must be awakened, or else this laziness will surely end in death! "Gray hairs were upon him here and there, and he knew it not." Is it so with any of you, dear friends? Are you going aside by slow degrees? He who loses his substance little by little presently becomes a bankrupt, and painful is the discovery when the end comes! How miserable must a spiritual bankruptcy be to him who wastes by degrees his heavenly estate, if he ever had any! No words can describe it. God preserve us from such a catastrophe!

Some have turned aside, who allege that they did so *through change of circumstances*. They were with us when their means of livelihood were competent, if not affluent. From reverses in business, they have sunk in their social position. Hence they do not like to come into fellowship with us as they were known to do. Now from my inmost soul I can say if there are any persons that grew poor, I, for one, do not think one atom the less of them, or hold them in less esteem, however impoverished they may

have become! Do not tell me that you have no clothes fit to come in, for any clothes that you have paid for are creditable. If you have not paid for them, I cannot make excuses for you. Be honest. Wool or fustian need not shame you, but for fineness or fashion I should certainly blame you! I am always glad to see brothers and sisters sitting here, as I sometimes do, in their smock frocks. One good friend is rather conspicuous in that line. The wholesome whiteness of his rural garb is rather attractive. If he has paid for it, he is a far more respectable man than anyone that has run into debt for a suit of broadcloth that he cannot pay for! And I rejoice to think that I am not merely expressing my own feeling, but that which is shared by the whole community! We all delight to see our poor brothers and sisters. If there are any of you suffering from a sensitiveness of your own, or a suspicion of our reflections, the sooner you get rid of such foolish pride, the happier you will be! You are jealous of being thought respectable? Don't you know that a man is respectable for his *character*—not for the money he has got in his pocket?

Others forsake Christ because they have become rich and increased in goods. They did not scorn the little conventicle when they were plain, plodding people—but since fortune has smiled on them and they have moved their residence from a terrace to a mansion, and they have taken to keep a carriage—they feel bound to move in another circle! To the parish church, or to some ritualistic church in their neighborhood, they go once on the Sunday. They patronize the place by their presence—they show themselves among the elite of that locality. They bow and bend, and face about to the east, as though they had been to the manner born. They are too respectable to go into the little Baptist chapel. They receive visitors in the afternoon, dine late, and dissipate Sabbath hours in the frivolous presence of showing off their gentility! Well, I think their departure is not to be lamented. When gone they are certainly no loss to anybody. We sigh for them as we would for Judas or Demas! They have fallen foul of what they thought their good fortune but of what has proved to be their ruin! Those who have true principles, when they rise in the world, see more reason why they should spend their wealth and their influence in aiding a good cause. Principle would prevail over policy to the end, if in their hearts they believed the truth of God as it is in Jesus! It were no dishonor to a prince to go and sit down side by side with a pauper, were they both true followers of Jesus Christ! In old times, when our sires met in caves and dens of the earth, they met the liege and the lowly, the bond and free. Or when, in even earlier ages, the Christians gathered in the catacombs, men out of Caesar's household, now a chief, then a senator, soon a prince of the blood, came and sat down in those caves, lighted up with the dim candle, to listen while some unshod but heaven-taught man declared the gospel of Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit! That they were illiterate, I am quite sure, for on looking over

the monuments that are found in the catacombs, it is rare to find one inscription that is thoroughly well spelt. Though it is evident enough that the early Christians were an illiterate company of men, yet those that were great and noble did not disdain to join with them, nor will they if the light of heaven shines and the love of God burns in their hearts!

Unsound doctrine occasions many to apostatize. There is always plenty of that about. Deceivers will beguile the weak and some have been led aside by modern doubt—and modest infidelity has its partisans. They begin cautiously by reading works with a view to answer scientific or intellectual skepticism. They read a little more and dive a little deeper into the turbid stream, because they feel well able to stand against the insidious influence. They go on till, at last, they are staggered. They do not go to those who could help their scruples, but they continue to flounder on till at last they have lost their footing—and he that said he was a believer has ended in stark atheism, doubting even the existence of a God! Oh, that those who are well taught would be content with their teaching! Why meddle with heresies? What can they do but pollute your minds? Were I to get black, I imagine that I could wash away all the soils, but I would be sorry to black myself for the sake of washing! Why should you be so unwise as to go through pools of foul teaching merely because you think it easy to cleanse yourself of its pollution? Such trifling is dangerous! When you begin to read a book and find it pernicious, put it aside. Someone may upbraid you for not reading it all through, but why should you? If I have a roast on my table of which the smell and the taste at once convince me that it is putrid and unwholesome, should I show my discretion by *fairly* eating it all before giving my judgment that it is not fit for food? One mouthful is quite enough! And one sentence of some books ought to be quite enough for a sensible man to reject the whole mass! Let those who can relish such meat have it, but I have a taste for better food. If it is your duty to expose these evils, encounter them bravely, with prayer to God to help you. But if not, as a humble believer in Jesus, what business have you to taste and test such noxious fare when it is exposed in the market? Keep to the study of the Word of God!

I will not continue in this strain. It is painful to me, if not to you. I will condense into a few sentences my answer to the second enquiry—

II. WHAT BECOMES OF THEM?

Those who go aside—what becomes of them? Well, if they are God's children, I will tell you what becomes of them, for I have seen it scores of times. Though they go aside, *they are not happy*. They cannot rest, for they are miserable even when they try to be cheerful. After a while they begin to remember their first husband, for then it was better with them than now. They return, but there are scores and scores, to say nothing of the shame which they have to carry with them to their grave, who are never the men they were before! They have to take a second place among

their comrades. And even should sovereign grace so wonderfully bless their painful experience that they are fully restored, they can never mention the past without bitter regret. Their by-path serving for others' beacon, they will say to young people, "Never do as I have done. Nothing good, all mischief, comes of it." In the vast majority of cases, however, they are not the Lord's people. So this is what comes of it. Those who prove traitors to a profession they once made are the hardest people in the world to impress. Doubtless some of you, when you lived in the country, used always to be punctual at your usual places of worship, but since you have come to London, where your absence from any sanctuary is unnoticed, you rarely enter the courts of the Lord's house—nor would you have been here tonight but for some special inducement—some country cousin or some particular friend having brought you. Though unknown to me, God scans your path. Well, here you are, and yet it may be for little profit. You have had counsels and cautions in such profusion that it is like pouring oil down a slab of marble to admonish you. May God in His omnipotent mercy break your stubborn heart, or there will be no hope for you! Such people frequently lose all conscience. They can go a deal further in talking against religion than anybody else. They will sometimes venture to say they know so much about it that they could expose it. Their boasts and their threats are alike unmeaning—but as boys whistle while they walk through the churchyard to keep their courage up, so do their vain talk and their senseless stories betray their stifled fear. They speak contemptuously of God while they justify themselves in a course of which their own conscience upbraids them! They go back—alas, some of them to prove themselves the most abandoned sinners in the world! The raw material out of which the devil constructs the deadliest fabric is that which was presumed to be the most saintly substance.

There could not have been a Judas to betray Christ had he not first been distinguished as an apostle, who ventured to kiss his Master. You must pick him from among the apostles to make an apostate. As the ringleaders of riotous transgression, when converted, often make the best revivalist preachers, so those who seem to be the most loyal subjects of Christ, when they become renegades, prove to be the bitterest foes and the blackest sinners! Painful reminiscences rush over one's mind. Standing here now in the midst of a great church, I call to mind things that have harrowed up my soul. God grant I may not see the likes of them again! They go away! Ah, me, full many of them go away to die in blank despair. Did you ever read the life of Francis Spiera? If you want to sleep tonight, do not take up that memoir! Did you ever read the life of John Child, a Baptist minister of about 200 years ago? Mr. Keach gives it in one of his works. He was a man who knew the truth of God and, to a great extent, had felt its power. But he went aside from it and before he

came to die, his expressions were too terrible to listen to. The remorse and despair of his spirit chased everyone away. At last he laid violent hands upon himself. For a man, after having once looked Christ in the face and kissed Him, to betray Him and crucify Him afresh, to hang himself is not to be wondered at! To eat at the Lord's table, to drink of that cup of blessing, to mingle with the saints, join in their prayers and their hymns, professing to be a disciple of Christ and then to go back and walk no more with Him, is to venture on a course of no ordinary danger! The swing of the pendulum, if it has been lifted high and let go, is so much the greater on the other side. I marvel not that any man should be precipitated into flagrant sin who willfully renounces his vows of consecration to Jesus!

And oh, when his eyes are opened and his conscience is awakened, how he wishes that he had never been born! Could he terminate his existence and annihilate his anguish-smitten soul, then the direst act of desperation by which he could end a life he could not mend, might be accounted wise. But no, that is impossible! The relief he seeks, he cannot find when he takes the dreadful leap from suffering here to an aggravated form of misery hereafter, ten thousand times worse to endure! He seals his doom and makes his own damnation sure, as he raises against himself a murdering hand. Do I address anyone here bereft of every ray of hope and shivering on the brink of cold despair? Hold now, I would cry in your ears— do yourself no harm! You can do yourself no good! Think not to cure your woes by committing another crime—

"It were madness thus to shun the living light,
And plunge your guilty soul in endless night."

While there is life there is hope! Jesus Christ can forgive you. Return to Him. He can wash you in His blood. He can make you clean, though your sin is as scarlet. But, oh, do not trifle, make no delay! Tarry no longer in your present condition, otherwise maybe you will fill up the measure of your iniquities before you are aware, and you may taste, even in this world, some beginning of the wrath to come! If not rescued as a trophy of grace right speedily, you may become a monument of God's wrath—a beacon to deter others from daring to turn aside! I speak solemnly, but I cannot help it. So intensely do I feel the terror of that woe, and so confident am I that some of you are making light of it, that I would go down on my knees and entreat you with tears to remind you what you are doing. You are on a steep plane and you are going down, down, down! Your feet are even now on the slippery places from which multitudes have been cast down into destruction! How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! The Lord make haste to deliver you! May He stretch out His hand and receive you! I can only call out to you. You seem to have got where I cannot reach you. Do not venture a footstep further on that dangerous road. Look to Jesus, look to Jesus! He can redeem your life from the pit of hell by His sovereign grace, but He alone!

Then as a wandering sheep, brought back to the fold, you shall adore His name!

Our third point is this—

III. WHY SHOULD WE NOT GO AWAY AS THEY HAVE GONE?

Were we left to ourselves, I cannot tell you any reason why we should not go as they have gone. Nor, indeed, could I tell you why the best man here would not be the worst before tomorrow morning, if the grace of God left him. John Bradford, you know, as he saw the poor criminals taken away to Tyburn to be executed, used to say, "There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God." Verily each one of us might say the same! To abide with Christ, however, is our only security—and we trust we shall never depart from Him. But how can we make sure of this? The great thing is to have a real foundation in Christ to begin with—genuine faith, vital godliness. The foundation is the first matter to be attended to in building a house. With a bad foundation there cannot be a substantial house. You require a firm bottom, a sound groundwork, before you proceed to the superstructure. Do pray God that if your religion is a sham, you may find it out now! Unless your hearts are deeply plowed with genuine repentance, and unless you are thoroughly rooted and grounded in the faith, you may have some cause to suspect the reality of your conversion and the verity of the Holy Spirit's operation in you. May the Lord work in you a good beginning, and then you may rely upon it, He will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ!

Then remember, dear brothers and sisters, if you would be preserved from falling, you must be schooled in humility and keep very low before the Lord. When you are half an inch above the ground, you are that half-inch too high. Your place is to be nothing! Trust Christ, but do not trust yourself. Rely on the Spirit of God, but do not rely on anything that is in yourself—no, not on a grace you have received, or on a gift you possess! Those do not slide who walk humbly with God. They are always safe whose entire dependence is upon God. Be jealous of your obedience! Be circumspect! Be careful! Take heed to yourselves—your walk and conversation cannot be too cautious. Many are lost through being too remiss, but none through being too scrupulous. The statutes of the Lord are so right that you cannot neglect them without diverging from the path of rectitude. Watch and pray! God help you to watch, or else you will get drowsy. Never neglect prayer. That is at the root of every defection. Retrogression commonly begins at the closet. To restrain prayer is to deaden the very pulse of life! "Watch unto prayer."

And I beseech you, dear Friends, do shun that company which has led other people astray. Parley not with those whose jokes are profane. Keep right away from them. It is not for you to be seen standing, much less to be found sitting down with men of loose manners and lewd converse! They can do you no good, but the evil they can bring upon you, it would

not be easy to estimate. You may have heard the story—but it is so good it will bear repeating—of the lady who advertised for a coachman, and was waited upon by three candidates for the situation. She put to the first one, this question, "I want a really good coachman to drive my pair of horses and, therefore, I ask you how near you can drive to danger and yet be safe?" "Well," he said, "I could drive very near, indeed! I could go within a foot of a precipice without fear of any accident so long as I had the reins." She dismissed him with the remark that he would not do. To the next one who came, she put the same question. "How near could you drive to danger?" Being determined to get the position, he said, "I could drive within a hair's breadth, and yet skillfully avoid any mishap." "You will not do," she said. When the third one came in, his mind was cast in another mold, so when the question was put to him, "How near could you drive to danger?" he said, "Madam, I never tried. It has always been a rule with me to drive as far off from danger as I possibly can." The lady engaged him at once!

In like manner, I believe that the man who is careful to run no risks and to refrain from all equivocal conduct, having the fear of God in his heart, is most to be relied upon. If you are really built upon the Rock of Ages, you may meet the question without dismay, "Will you also go away?" and you can reply without presumption, "No, Lord, I cannot, and I will not go, for to whom should I go? You have the words of eternal life." And may the very God of peace wholly sanctify you! And I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calls you, who also will do it! Amen.

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AN URGENT NECESSITY
NO. 3557

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JULY 31, 1870.

"It is time to seek the Lord till He comes and rains righteousness upon you." Hosea 10:12.

HOSEA uses a great many figures taken from farming. He describe the seeking of the Lord in the former part of this verse as plowing, and sowing, and breaking up fallow ground. I suppose he intends by this to describe conviction of sin, humiliation of soul as the work that plows, the reception of the truth of the gospel by faith in Jesus Christ as sowing, for this introduces the living seed into the soul. And he here gives two reasons why this matter of seeking the Lord should be attended to at once. His first reason is the season. "*It is time* to seek the Lord." The second is a *very gracious expectation* that God will rain righteousness upon us. First, then, the prophet reasons that we should seek after the Lord because it is—

I. THE TIME TO SEEK GOD.

"It is time to seek the Lord." I wish you to reflect, first, that we yet have time. It might have been otherwise. We might have been cut down in our sins. Many of our neighbors and acquaintances have died. Some of them, we have reason to fear, died in their iniquities and were taken away with a stroke. We, too, have passed through dangers. Some have escaped in shipwreck. Some have been in imminent peril in accidents—some of us have come into the very jaws of death in serious sickness. We might almost sing, or quite sing—

"Lord, and am I yet alive?
Not in torment, not in hell?
Still does Your good Spirit strive
With the chief of sinners dwell?"

We yet have time. Let no person living say he has not time, for while life lasts, hope lasts. The sentence, "Depart, you cursed," is not yet pronounced by Christ's lips on you. Pronounce it not on yourselves! Do not conclude your case to be hopeless and make it hopeless, but rather believe that being in the assembly of God's people, listening to the testimony of His grace, you are still on praying ground and pleading terms with God—and you yet have time given you to seek the Lord! The

most aged need not despair! The guiltiest need not conclude that their day of grace is over! Until that iron bar shall fasten the door and you are shut in the pit of hell forever, let not Satan persuade you that you are beyond all hope! While the gospel note rings from the silver trumpet of gracious invitation, "He that has ears to hear let him hear," you yet have time—time to seek the Lord!

This time is given you *for this very purpose*. You think, perhaps, that your prolonged life is given you that you may mature your plans, that you may rectify mistakes of business, that you may accumulate more money, or perhaps you are gross enough to think that the best way of using time is to get earthly pleasure out of it—and indulge animal passions and appetites! Ah, sirs, it is not so! To whatever use you put this talent of time, God's long-suffering has been your salvation. By it God teaches you to repent while He permits you to live! His long-suffering is not that you may provoke Him further, but that you may cease to provoke Him! He cuts not down the tree that it may spread its useless branches and cumber the ground yet worse, but if, perhaps, being dug about a little longer, it may bring forth fruit! It is the very motive why the Intercessor pleads, "Spare it yet another year." He spares you that you may not depart hence till you are ready to depart. He gives you space, not for sin, but for repenting opportunity! Not for perpetrating worse offenses, but for turning from your evil ways! Your time has this mark on it, if you would but see it, "Repent! I give you space. Repent! Take heed you waste it not." There is encouragement to every unconverted person in this thought! If this time is given you to repent in, then rest assured that, repenting and believing in Jesus, you will be accepted! If the judge stands at the criminal's door and waits, and says he waits there until he is willing to receive the pardon he grants, and if the criminal is anxious to receive the pardon, there can be no difficulty in the way! The very waiting of the judge at the door proves that he does not want to execute the sentence—only desires to see some symptom of contrition, some tokens of turning from the evil way and gives space if, perhaps, these token may become apparent. Hear you, then, oh, unconverted ones! Hear you then, and trifle not with the space allowed you!

It is time to seek the Lord, says the text. Surely it is *high* time! Not only *the* time, but *high* time; it is high time, you young ones, that you seek the Lord, for Satan is on the watch for you if, perhaps, your unwary footsteps may be decoyed into the paths of evil—evil which, if you are not delivered from, you will have to regret ever having trodden to life's latest hour! Oh, if you would be kept from the snare of the fowler, you young ones, it is time you seek the Lord—high time! Now when you are leaving your mother's roof—going away from a father's gentle guidance, it is time

to seek the Lord. I would press this on any young man here just launching into life, or that marriage, or that business he entered upon—it is time to seek the Lord! Set up God's altar when you set up a house, and before you trade for yourself, consecrate yourself and your substance to God, who can bless you and will!

But, oh, you that have passed now into middle life; have you spent forty years in sin? It is high time you sought the Lord! Your best days have been given to provoking Him. Will you not give the rest, such as they are, to His service? Oh, that His Spirit might compel you to do so. And you that lean upon the staff, you who have come to the verge of human life, is it not high time to seek the Lord? I see your sun going down—the sky is scarcely bright, the red rays betoken that the sun is hiding itself. Oh, before the dark, dark, endless night comes on, seek the Lord while yet He may be found! Be grateful for having been spared so long. Oh, be not so ungrateful as to use so long a life all for sin, for remember, it will be then all used for your own destruction! You have been a fool long enough! Gray hairs and foolery are not well matched. You have long enough sported on the brink of hell—will you not start back from it? By God's long-suffering and patience, I beseech you remember it is high time for you to seek the Lord.

And you in whom I mark that treacherous spot upon the cheek that marks the worm beneath, and you with the preternaturally bright eyes that indicate the fire of consumption within, it is time you sought the Lord! And you whose crumbling frames, or aching bones or relaxed sinews, or trembling nerves, all betoken how weak your body is and how readily it may be crumbled back into the dust—these tokens from the Lord are upon you—it is time you sought Him! He knocks gently as yet, and gives you warning. Take heed, He will soon come and remove the house of the wicked, and the tabernacle of the ungodly, and your souls must appear before His judgment seat! It is high time you sought the Lord. And, oh, all of you ungodly ones who listen to my voice, and have listened to it so long, I have asked the Lord to teach me how to preach that I may somehow get at your hearts. I seem not to have learned the art as yet. May His Spirit come and give the right word with a barbed shaft that shall plow its way right through your armor and pierce its way through all the hardness of your heart until it breaks the conscience and wounds you—and compels you to cry for mercy! What? All the years at Park Street, Exeter Hall and the time at the Surrey Gardens—and ever since this Tabernacle has been built—and yet unsaved? It is time to seek the Lord! The very seats you sit on cry out against you, some of you, and I, unwilling as I am to speak it, I must be a swift witness against some of you, for to the best of my ability I have pointed you to Christ, I have

warned you of danger, I have told you of your great peril, I have warned you of the terrible punishment of sin, I have entreated you to fly to Jesus! It is time, you gospel-hardened ones, that you sought the Lord! If your lusts are gods, serve them! But decide and choose this day—and may God choose for you whom you will serve! It is high time as well as time to seek the Lord!

Remember, too—and here is something solemn, but something sweet as well—*it is God's time*, for these are God's words put into the prophet's mouth—it is time to seek the Lord! God says, "It is time." When God says it is time, why, then, when I come, I cannot be denied! God says, "It is time." Then if I do not come, I provoke Him! Hear you these words, you that are dull of hearing, and you whose hearts have a thick crust! Hear you, for Jehovah speaks to you this day. "Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation." "Today"—He limits the time—"Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, for if you do so, the day will come when He will deal with you as He did with His people, Israel, who, having long provoked Him, received this as His answer to their face, "He swore in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest." Not yet has He spoken, but He may, and that awful voice which comes from Solomon's Proverbs may come to you. "Because I have called and you refused, I stretched out My hand and no man regarded it, I also will mock at your calamity; I will laugh when your fear comes." "Today is the accepted time; today is the day of salvation."

Once more only; it is time to seek the Lord, and *it is but time*. It is but a time. You have not been given eternity in which to seek the Lord. It is *the* time, and the time is limited. It is *still* time, but *it is limited*. To some of you it is most limited. It is time to seek the Lord. The vessel lies in the harbor and the favorable wind would take her out to sea and bear her on to her port, but the sailor sleeps—the captain observes not the wind. The sails are furled. Tomorrow the wind has changed. Now he may do as he will, but he is land-locked, and there he must remain. He cannot put out to sea, for he cannot command the gale. So is it with you—there is a time which God appoints you. Tis now! Slight it and it may never come again! It is but a time. Oh, take this mercy at the flood—miss it not, I pray you. While God waits, come you, lest there should come an hour when you shall knock at His door and the voice shall be heard, "Too late, too late! You cannot enter now." Ah, I would I had but power to put this as I should, and so that you would feel it, but, perhaps, you will feel it when I would wish you had no need to do so—I mean on your dying bed.

The Puritans tell a story of a woman convinced of sin on her deathbed, who lived near Cambridge, who was visited by several ministers, all of whom had great skill in comforting seeking souls. When five or six of them had spoken gently and comfortingly to her, she opened her eyes

upon them with a glare, and all she said was this, "Call back the time, call back the time, for otherwise I am damned!" And so she died. And there are many, I hear, who might say that. "The time is gone! The time is gone! I cannot call it back!" Oh, take it on the wing while yet it is time to seek the Lord. You know, perhaps, the story of the traveler on the prairie, when a fire in the distance could be seen. The prairie was on a blaze, and he knew that his only hope for life was to fight fire with fire. He searched for his matches. If he could make a ring around him and burn the grass so that when the fire came up, it would have nothing to feed upon, then he might escape. He found but three matches in his box. He took one and struck it with some degree of care, but, alas, before he could light the train which he had laid, the match had gone out. He took another, and this time, very tremblingly, with much of tremulous anxiety about him, struck it. There was a light—he thought he was safe, but a gust of wind blew it out. And now all depended on the last match! He would be burnt to ashes, with no help, no pity from a friend, if that match failed him. Down he falls and breathes the prayer—"God help me, God help me! Grant this may succeed." He struck it! You may guess with what care he had laid all the grass around it, and then he struck it as though he were loath to run the terrible risk, but he praised God when he saw its success and that his life was saved!

You have but one match left, O sinner! Use it well—one light, one time—the time to seek the Lord. Oh, seek Him now—tonight! This moment in the pew say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Is that your prayer? 'Tis well. God hear and answer it! But now I must, by your patience, speak for a little while upon the second part of the text. There is another reason given for seeking the Lord—and that is—

II. THE BLESSED EXPECTATION.

It is that in due time He will rain righteousness upon us! I understand by this that the plowing and the sowing are ours, but these are nothing without the heavenly rain of grace. But God will be sure to send that in due time. In fact, our plowing and sowing are results and tokens of His grace; and the grace of comfort will come where the grace of humiliation has already come. When it says, "righteousness," I think it means to assure us that God can, in a way of righteousness, be gracious to us. Through His dear Son, who bore the punishment of our sins, God can righteously rain upon sinners. Now just a moment or two; you say you have not grace; you say you are not what you should be. 'Tis even so. But seek the Lord and He will rain righteousness upon you! Observe *all divine grace must come from Him.* Rain comes from God. He rains it. Every drop of grace comes from heaven. You, sinner, can never get any grace unless He gives it you! Remember this, and wait upon Him for it

now. It must be heavenly grace, or it will be no grace at all. It can come to you. There are some parts on earth that never could be watered if it did not rain. Nobody would ever think of watering the hilltops. But He waters His hills from His chambers. We cannot give grace to you—you are in such a desolate, lonely, mountainous place, but He can get to you and He will! See how it is He will rain righteousness upon you. Then, as there is a straight way for rain even to the wilderness, so is there a straight way for God's grace to drop into your desert heart. Rain comes sovereignly as God wills it, where He wills it, when He wills it. And in degree and duration according to His will. So does grace. Lift up your soul, then, to Him for it, and bow your head, feeling that you deserve it not!

But in the metaphor of rain there is the idea of plenteousness. He will *rain* righteousness upon you. If you have no grace, He will give you much grace if you have great needs. He will give you great supplies. He will rain it upon you. God is not stinting in His love—He will not give you a drop or two, but He will give you a sea of mercy. "I will pour water upon him who is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground." Now is not this good reason for seeking the Lord? You cannot get grace anywhere but from the Lord. God can give it to you very abundantly. It is in His hands to give or not as He wills. Oh, seek it. He holds the stars! He guides the clouds! He wings the tempest! Seek Him for His grace—He will give it to you. It can come from none besides. But it will come. There is the mercy of it. And you are told in the text to seek it until it does come. Seek Him until the grace comes! I have known a sinner cry to God once, and mercy has come immediately, but there have been many cases where souls have cried again and again, and only after a long while have they had success. I saw as I came here tonight—it all happened in a moment—I saw a little child just come home from school, I suppose. A very little child and she tapped at her mother's door, and the mother did not come, and she did what was the best thing to do under the circumstances—cried as loud as ever she could—and her mother came to her! If you have knocked at mercy's door and mercy has not come, cry for it! Oh, a groan, a tear, a cry, a sigh will quicken the steps of mercy! God cannot linger when a sinner cries. When a sinner weeps, Christ will soon have pity on him. But, anyhow, keep on till He comes. Seek till He rains righteousness upon you.

Elijah got the fire in prayer very soon, but he did not get the rain very soon. He had to say to his servant, "Go and look towards the sea." There was Elijah, with his head between his knees, in mighty prayer, but not a drop of rain or sign of a cloud. "Go again, go again," he repeated till he had commanded his servant seven times—and then there is a cloud the size of a man's hand! Sinner, have you prayed? Pray again. Have you

prayed twice? Pray again! Has it come to three times? Pray again! Has it come to four times? Pray again! Does it amount to six times? Pray again! Let there be no stint in prayer. You have kept God waiting long enough. You must not marvel if He should now tarry awhile. Pray again! Pray again! Say, "I am resolved that I will not give it up until You shall rain Your comfort, Your righteousness, Your grace, upon me." He will surely do it and you do not know how soon—you do not know how soon—you will get comfort. And when it comes it will make up for all delays. You know the woman, when the child is born, remembers no more the travail, for joy that a man is born into the world—and, oh, when Christ is yours, you will forget your travail in your joy and your rejoicing!

I am thinking just now of Columbus and his crew. They had sailed long across the Atlantic, and had not found the golden land, the El Dorado, and so the sailors talked of going back, and many a scheme he had, by which he tempted them a little further on to that unknown shore! At last it came to this, they mutinied—they would go no further! They would not seek the land again—why should they drift away and be lost forever? He said, "Give me but three days, and if between now and the third day we see not the shore, then we will reverse the helm." Within those three days there stood the fair shores of the New World before the mariners' eyes! Suppose they had turned back the second day, and had gone home and never found it? Well, I don't know that it would have mattered much *to those sailors*. Somebody else would have found it, but you are, perhaps, within three days now of being accepted in the beloved—perhaps within three hours! Pray God that it may be within three minutes! And will you not go on little farther? Will you not still cry, and will you not take the gospel step, the grand step of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ? Do it, and you shall be saved! That brings you to the El Dorado, to the land of gold, to the land of mercy, to the bosom of Christ, to the safety of the blessed, to the security of the glory that shall be revealed hereafter! Oh, sinner, be not discouraged, but seek the Lord, for you have His promise He will be found of you!

Some even of God's servants have been a good while seeking and they have not found Him. When that dear martyr of Christ, Mr. Glover, lay in prison, he was in a very sad state of heart, and he said, "I love Him, and I will burn for Him, but, oh, that I had some glimpses of His face!" And his fellow sufferer who lay in prison with him used to tell him, "He will appear to you—you shall have joy." But day after day all through that weary time spent in prison, he would constantly be saying, "Am I His? Has He forgotten to be gracious? Has He shut up the heart of His compassion?" "But," said Glover, "if He never speaks comfortably to me again, I know His truth, and I know His gospel, and I will burn for Him;

by His grace, I will never turn away!" And the morning came on which he was to be burned—and he awoke with some heaviness of his spirit; there seemed to be no comfort in any promise to which he turned, and prayer brought no relief. And they came and put the chains on him, and they led him out; he came to where the stake was, and where the firewood was; and he was about to strip, and put on his shirt for the burning—and suddenly he leapt up and said, "He is come! He is come! He is come! Glory be unto His name!" His friends had asked him to give some sign that his spirit had revived—and he stood, and burned as though he scarcely felt the fire, singing Psalms and praying!

And so it will be with every earnest seeker. If the looks of love have never come to you for years, you will have them yet, for never soul believed but what was safe! Some have believed, but not been comfortable, but they are safe—the comfort will come. Only seek sinner, for He will rain righteousness on you—

"So I must maintain my hold,
'Tis the goodness makes me bold;
I can no denial take,
For I plead for Jesus' sake."

Oh, sinner, never let go! Cling close to Christ and He cannot cast you away, for this is His promise, "Him that comes, I will in no wise cast out." Come, then, and the Lord bless you! Amen and amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
DEUTERONOMY 32:1-39.

A very marvelous Chapter it is—a song and a prophecy, in which the poet-seer seems to behold the whole future spread before him as in a map—and it is so vivid to him that he describes it rather as a matter present or past, than as a thing which is yet to be. It is the story of God's dealing His chosen and peculiar people, Israel, from the beginning to the end. The commencement is exceedingly noble.

Verses 1-3. *Give ear, O you heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe you greatness unto our God.* All through, the song is for the glorification of God! Not a syllable, indeed, in which man is held up to honor, but the Lord, alone, is exalted in His dealings with His people. He is the Rock. All other things are the mere cloud that hovers on the mountain's brow. But—

4. *He is the Rock.* Immutable; eternal.

4. *His work is perfect.* Sometimes very terrible and very mysterious, but His work is perfect,

4. *For all His ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.* But as for His people, what a contrast between them and their God!

5. *They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of His children: they are a perverse and crooked generation.* What a stoop from the God of truth, without iniquity, to a people full of iniquity—a perverse and crooked generation! We never know so much of our own vileness as when we get a clear view of the excellence of God. What said Job? "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You, therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

6. *Do you thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? Is not He your Father who has bought you? Has He not made you, and established you?* Who made the Jews to be a people? Who set Israel apart to be a nation? Who, but God, who bought them with a price when they came out of Egypt and, in his fatherly care, led them through the wilderness?

7, 8. *Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.* God's first point in the government of the world was His own people. Everything else was mapped out after He had set apart a place for them—a place sufficient, large, fruitful and in an admirable position, that there they might multiply and enjoy all the good things which He so freely gave them. And to this day dynasties rise and fall, kings reign or are scattered by defeat, only with this one point in God's eye and purpose in His mind—the upholding of the Church in the world—the spread of His glorious truth!

9-12. *For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wrings, takes them, bears them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.* This is the history of the tutoring of Israel in the wilderness. When they came out of Egypt they were a mere mob of slaves, degenerate by the debasing influence of long bondage. They had to be trained before they were fit to be a nation. Now in all this, let us try to see ourselves. What has God worked for those of us who are His people in bringing us out from the bondage of sin? And how graciously does He this day preserve us as a

man guards the apple of "his eye"? No sooner does anything come near the eye than up goes the hand instinctively to shield the eye. And let anything happen to the people of God—and the power of God is ready at once for their defense. An eagle has to teach her young eaglets to fly. She will take them on her wings, so they say, and cast them off, and let them flutter, and then dash down and come under them and bear them up again till she has taught them to use their wings. And the Lord has been doing this with many here—apparently casting them off, only that, when they fall, underneath them may be the everlasting arms. We have to be trained to faith. It is a difficult exercise for such poor creatures as we are. We are being trained for it at this day. After they had thus been tutored, they were brought into the promised land which Moses never entered, but yet in his vision of prophecy he sees it all.

13, 14. *He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields: and He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; curds from the cattle, milk of the flock, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the choicest wheat: and you did drink the pure blood of the grape.* It was a very fruitful land, abounding not merely in necessaries, but in luxuries. Palestine gave to its inhabitants all that heart could wish, and for a long time, while they were faithful to God, they lived in the midst of plenty.

15. *But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked.* "The little holy nation"—for I suppose that is the meaning of "Jeshurun." It is a diminutive word—"the little religious nation waxed fat. It abounded in prosperity. It grew stout and kicked."

15. *You are waxen fat, you are grown thick, you are covered with fatness: then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.* Alas, alas! Alas! They set up calves in Bethel. They turned aside to Ashtoreth, and worshiped the Queen of heaven!

16, 17. *They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abomination provoked they Him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils,* Demons—not to God.

17. *Not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.* There is nothing new in religion that is true. The truth is always old. But only imagine a new God! And verily we have had lately some new fashions brought up—some new styles of worship. I think they call them medieval. They certainly are no older than that—"new gods that newly came up, whom your fathers feared not."

18. *Of the Rock that begat you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten God that formed you.* Israel was nothing apart from God—a little tribe of people—nothing to be compared with the great nations of the earth. Its

only reason for existence was its God. He was its center, its light, its glory, its power. They had got away from Him that formed them.

19, 20. *And when the LORD saw it, He abhorred them, because of the provoking of His sons, and of His daughters. And He said, I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very forward generation, children in whom is no faith.* There is the mischief—lack of faith. Lack of faith leads to all manner of sin; oh, that we had a strong elastic faith to realize the unseen God, and keep to purely spiritual worship, not needing symbols, signs and outward tokens—all of which are abominable in His sight, but worshiping the unseen in spirit and in truth. But the Lord said—

21. *They have moved Me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.* And so the idolatrous nations came and conquered Judea. One after another they trampled down the holy city and let them see that God could use the nations that they despised to be a scourge upon them!

22-25. *For a fire is kindled in My anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischief upon them; I will spend My arrows upon them—they shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction. I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs.* Now read the story of the destruction of Israel and Judea—the overthrow of these two kingdoms—and you will see how, word for word, all this came true!

26, 27. *I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men. Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the LORD has not done all this.* God always looks out for some reason for mercy when He is dealing with His people—and He found it here—that the heathen nations would not admit that God had thus been chastening His erring people, but would begin to ascribe their victories to their own demon gods! Therefore He said He would scatter them.

28-30. *For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?* That little people would have

been victorious over all their enemies if God had still been with them, but they were defeated and scattered because they had grieved the Lord. Oh, what strength believers might have if they would but believe! If we could but cast ourselves upon God in simple, childlike faith, we might play the Samson over again and smite our thousands! But we, too, have little faith in God, even those who have most of it—and when the time of trial comes, we also are a stiff-necked and unbelieving generation, as our fathers were!

31-34. *For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges. For their wine is of the wine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps. Is not this laid up in store with Me, and sealed up among My treasures?* What an awful text! God lays man's sins by—seals them up among their treasures, that they should not be forgotten—and He will bring them to account.

35, 36. *To Me belongs vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the LORD shall judge His people.* He will not always let His enemies triumph over them. He will come back to His people whom He seemed to cast away. "The Lord shall judge His people."

36. *And have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left.* He seemed very angry, but how soon He comes back in love and tries His people over again.

37-39. *And He shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted? Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? Let them rise up and help you, and be your protection. See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me. I kill, and I make alive: I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand.*

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A PLEA FROM THE CROSS
NO. 3558

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, APRIL 5, 1917,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THE LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JANUARY 29, 1871.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
Luke 23:34.

TO the godly heart there is a brighter light on Calvary than anywhere else beneath the sun. He who often resorts to Golgotha, if his spirit is right, must be wise. It is the University of Saints! He who would know sin—its heinousness, its penalty—must see the Son of God making expiation for it by His death on the accursed tree. He who would know love—the love which many waters cannot quench, and which the floods cannot drown—must read it in the Savior's face—or, if you will, written in crimson lines in the Savior's heart, pierced with the spear. He who would know how he may get his sin forgiven, must resort to the cross. There, and there only, is seen the way by which sin can be pardoned and the sinner accepted with God! And he who, finding pardon there, would seek to be useful to his fellow men and bring them into the same condition, must, himself, keep near that cross, that he may speak much of it and, in the power of it, may be able to persuade and to prevail with the sons of men. Abide at the cross, beloved—there is no air so healthy and quickening as that which is breathed there! There was the birthplace of your hope! There its native air! There must be on earth, the climax of your joy! Live upon a crucified Savior as you live by a crucified Savior!

And now this word which we hear at Calvary, the first word of our Savior after He had been fastened to the cross—this word I shall not attempt to fathom, or go into the depths of it, but shall rather touch the surface of it, skimming it, and uttering a few such sentences, as it were, one after the other that have arisen to my mind while listening to the voice of our Lord in this, His plaintive cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." I will suppose that I have many here, and I fear I need not make it a supposition, who as yet are unpardoned, unreconciled to God. Will you come with me and make a pilgrimage to Calvary? Will you look at your Savior? He has just come up the hill of doom! They have thrown Him upon His back. There is the cross—the executioners have stretched out His hands and His feet—they have taken the nails—they have driven them through His hands and feet! He is fastened to the wood, and now as they are lifting Him up, before it jars into the ground, you hear Him cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." I want you to learn a few lessons out of this. And the first shall be, see here—

I. THE SAVIOR'S LOVE TO SINNERS.

It is His last hour, but He thinks of them! He had searched for them in His health and strength. He went about doing good. He came to seek and to save the rebellious and He had spent His active life in their service. He is about to die, but the ruling passion is strong in death. He is still seeking sinners and if He can preach no more, yet He can pray! And if He will not speak to them, yet He can speak to God *for* them, and so He continues to show which way His heart runs, by the prayer for those that nailed Him to the wood, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He had been 30 years in their midst and His holy soul had been much vexed by them. He had endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, but you see He has not cast them off—He has not turned His love to wrath. He is not weary of them, but He still pleads, "Father, oh, forgive them." What love is this! One would suppose that the pain which He then felt might have distracted His mind from others, and His prayer might have been for Himself, that patience might be given, that strength might be sustained! But no, oblivious of Himself, His only care is still for those He seeks—the sinful sons of men! Just as an arrow from a bow shot forth with such force that it speeds onward to its target, His whole strength and soul speeds onward to the mark of the salvation of the sons of men! One thing, one thing only, does He do—He seeks their good! And I say again, if not now by active ministering to them, yet by ministering *for* them, He prays "Father, forgive them." It is one thing to love persons at a distance and to have philanthropic desires for their good—it is quite another thing to live with them and still have the same fondness towards them. And it is quite another thing by far to receive bad treatment from them—contumely, scorn and a worse thing even than that, to be about to receive your death from them—and still to pray for them! But such is the perseverance of Jesus' love that it cannot be turned aside. They have spit into His face, but still He prays for them. They have scourged Him with their cruel lashes. They have hounded Him along the streets. They have, at last, pierced His hands and feet, and stripped Him! And they now hang Him up upon the cross between heaven and earth—but still nothing can diminish the flame of His love, nor turn aside His heart's desire from them—it is still for them He lives, for them He dies. "Father, oh, forgive them," is the sign and proof that He is still holding to the one great work He undertook! Now I would, O sinner, I would that you would learn this lesson. Herein is love, behold what love! Will you not come and share in it? What keeps you back? Can you hold your heart from Immanuel? Can you refuse to love such a dear lover of the sons of men? I think if our hearts were not adamant or worse, they would melt at the sight of the pleading love of Jesus upon the cross. Come, soul, have done with your hardness—let a drop of Christ's blood melt that heart of yours! Have done with your carelessness—let a spark of love set your heart on fire towards Him! Are you afraid to come, afraid of Him who died for sinners, afraid of love, terrified at mercy? Oh, be not so, but come and welcome! Put your trust in Him who, with His

dying breath, proves the strength of His Almighty love by pleading for His foes! Let that stand for the first remark. Here is the strong love of Christ. Here, next, we see—

II. HOW LOVE SHOWS ITSELF.

How did Jesus prove His love in this last great moment? It was *by prayer*! Love shows itself in prayer. Prayer, alone, would not be a sufficient proof of love, but He who dies and prays, whose life is a prayer, and whose death is a prayer, proves His love by adding to His life and death the vocal utterance of both in this cry, "Father, forgive them." If Jesus Christ would prove His love to you, He does it by praying for you. Observe, then, the extreme value of prayer. It is a ripe fruit of the cross. It is, if I may call it so, a golden apple of the cross—intercessory prayer! See, then, sinner, the need there is for you to pray. If Jesus prays and proves His love by prayer, and if the saints on earth who love you pray for you, depend upon it, prayer is no light thing. Bend those knees of yours, lift your eyes to heaven and let a prayer go up from the depths of your spirit, "Father, forgive me! Your Son has prayed, so pray I. He says, 'Father, forgive them,' and I pray, 'Father, forgive me.'" Ought not this to bring every sinner to his knees? Would it not, if men were in their senses? Would not the sight of a dying Christ pleading for the guilty make the guilty plead? Oh, who can restrain prayer for himself when Jesus leads the way? When He says, "Forgive them," will you not say, "Amen"? Oh, deserve you not right well to perish if you cannot join your assent to the divine intercession of the pleading Savior! Sinner, I beseech you now, in the secret of your soul, to pray, "Father, forgive me." "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Is there no woman, is there no man, that could pray that now? You need not speak—let but your lips move. But, oh, since Jesus Christ tonight is set forth before you in the delightful attitude of an intercessor praying for the guilty, I implore you pray for yourselves—and may God send you, this night, an answer of peace—may your pardon be signed and sealed to the comfort of your spirit!

And now leaving that observation, we pass to the next. We saw the love of Jesus. We saw how that love shows itself in prayer. See next—

III. WHAT IT IS THE SAVIOR ASKS.

He asks *forgiveness*, "Father, forgive them." If the Savior should pray for all of us here present, He need not amend that prayer. It was suitable to those who nailed Him to the tree. They needed pardon for the murder of their Savior. It was suitable to the clamoring multitude, who had said, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." They needed forgiveness for that blood which they then brought upon themselves, but it is equally suitable to each one here present, "Forgive them." May I ask you to look back upon your past lives? Have you been kept from grosser sins? Thank God for it, but your sins of heart, of mind, of tongue, your sins of omission. What? Are these nothing? God grant you may feel them to be something and may you feel, tonight, that what you need is even as if you had been an open offender—you need forgiveness and if, perchance, there are some here

who have gone into open sin with a high hand and an outstretched arm, yet, my brother, yet my sister, this prayer needs no enlargement to suit you, "Father, forgive them." "Father, forgive them," forgiveness covers all! A man receipts a bill. He puts his name at the bottom. If that bill were for ten thousand pounds or ten pence, it is the same, the receipt has covered all—and Jesus' hand, when He puts it with the bloody red nail prints upon the great record of our sins, draws a red line down the page and blots out the whole—and leaves not a single sin on the page! "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they are red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow." Oh, the greatness of that word, "forgiven"! Blessed be the Lord Jesus for praying such a prayer as that! Do you know, I do not think it need be altered for the best man and the best woman here, for even our best things need forgiveness. When you have prayed the best prayer you ever prayed, you might well ask God to forgive it! If you have preached the best sermon you ever preached, you may ask to be forgiven it, for some sin has mingled with your holiest action, so forgiveness is needed at best, and always needed at the worst—needed today, tomorrow and all through life, and needed when the breath leaves the body—always needed that blessed prayer that sweeps the compass of mortal existence—that comprehends so much, "Father, forgive them." This is the great thing love asks, for the forgiveness of those for whom she pleads. But passing on you will observe—

IV. FOR WHOM IT IS THAT OUR SAVIOR, IN THIS CASE, OFFERED THE PETITION. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Now that little word, "them," is a great word because it is so little. "Father, forgive *them*." The Savior is explicit—He does not mention the names of the four soldiers who pierced His hands and feet. No. He meant them, but He meant more. He does not mention the names of these in the crowd who were gazing upon Him with insolent stare—He meant them. He does not mention those that had cried, "Crucify Him, crucify Him"—He had meant them. He does not say, "Father, forgive them, for they knew not what they *did*"—for that would look as if He only prayed for sins that had already been committed. He does not say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they *shall do*," for that would look as if He only prayed for sins that would be committed! But He says, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they *do*." And putting it thus in the present, it seems as though the petition had one hand to reach out to the past sins of mankind before He died, and another hand to the sins to come of mankind after He had offered the sacrifice. "They know not what they do." It is put so indefinitely, the, "them," and the, "do," the tense of the verb and the pronoun—they are so indefinite that I bless God for the wide extent of their range! "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Who, then, is included in that word, "them"? I venture to say every man that is willing to be included—every man that feels he is included! Did you slay Christ? Have your sins caused Him to die? Do you know, tonight, that your sins fastened Him to

the cruel tree? Could you join in the hymn we sung just now? Then, when Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," He included *you* in that prayer, and *me* in that prayer, and tens of thousands besides in that word, "them."

Yet, yet you will observe in that word He put it specially. He does not exclude any, but He does include some more peculiarly than others, for His prayer is for those who *knew not what they did*. Can I get in there? I think I can. I believe that most here present can. I do not think all the sons of men can—Judas, for instance, I fear he did know what he did, and deliberately sold his Lord and Master. I am half afraid that Pilate, to a great extent, knew what he did, and there are some of whom it is written, "There is a sin unto death; I do not say that you shall pray for it." A great doctrine, but it is in the Word—a terrible doctrine, but there it stands! You know how Peter put it in that first sermon. He said, "I know, my brethren, that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers"—as if he felt that had they known what they did, their sin had been unpardonable. And the Apostle Paul, himself, speaking of his own persecution, said, "Because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief." There is a deliberate crucifixion of Christ as Christ, knowing what you are doing—doing it out of sheer malice to the Christ of God, out of intense hatred to Him, to Him personally—which is unpardonable, for this reason, that the man who commits it never repents. Could he repent, the pardon were sure, but the capacity to do that argues incapacity to ever be made penitent. The man is given over, hardened—he perishes in his sin!

But the Lord Jesus in this prayer felt that those around Him did not know what they were doing—the most of them did not know He was God's Son. They would not have crucified Him had they known—they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. They did know—most of them knew—that He was a righteous man and they must have felt they were doing very wrong in putting Him to death, but they did not recognize Him as the Messiah and as the Son of God—otherwise the most of them would have held back their hand. Now, though I have sinned against light and knowledge, and you have done the same, my brothers and sisters, yet in our past sin we did not deliberately intend to put Christ to death. We did not, like Satan of *malice prepense*, desire to overthrow the kingdom of God and Christ. Blessed be God, He saved us from that! We went far, very far, horribly far, but restraining grace kept us back from that, and the Savior puts it there—makes such the object of His prayer. I do not say He excludes those who did it knowingly, but He does include peculiarly those who did not know what they did—whose sin, to a great extent, as to its far-reaching heinousness was wrapped in ignorance. He says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Then the prayer of love is offered for a vast company of sinners in darkness and ignorance, who have sinned, but who have not been allowed utterly, knowingly, willfully, viciously to crucify the Son of God and put Him to an open shame!

Now I want you to notice what this prayer of love admits. There is something in it that ought never to be forgotten. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." You see, then, this prayer, even of a patient, loving, gentle Savior, who wishes to plead all He can on the behalf of those for whom He prays—*this prayer admits that they need to be forgiven who have sinned ignorantly*. Some people have thought, "If I did not know it to be sin to the full extent, then it was not sin." Ah, not so! It *was* sin, for Christ asks to have it forgiven! If I, doing what I did not fully understand, yet did wrong, I am not excused the wrong because I did not know to the fullest extent how wrong it was. I am just as guilty as if I did know, from some points of view, though not from others, but from any point of view, I still need to be forgiven. Ignorance of the law does not prevent the guilt of him who breaks it. As you know, my brothers and sisters, human law, the law of the land, for instance—never takes ignorance of the law as a complete excuse for the breach of the law! The laws of England always assume that every man knows the law. The law is made—it is a public law and he who breaks it cannot go before the Magistrate and say—"I did not know it was the law; you must discharge me." The Magistrate may, as a *man*, say, "Well, if you did not know it was law, there is some excuse for you." As a Magistrate, he must not say that, for the law judges the man on its own self as publicly known, and does not allow for the excuse of not knowing the law.

If the Savior, in His infinite mercy, said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," it was a plea—of course, but not a plea of law. Sinai has no room for that excuse, for Sinai says, "If you don't know, you ought to have known." And in this particular case, especially, if they did not know Christ to be God, they ought to have known it. The prophecies were so clear. The person of Christ so exactly fitted in to every type and every prophetic declaration, that it was "a willful blindness that had happened unto Israel." They ought to have known it. One sin is never an excuse for another sin. It was a sin for them not to know! That sin, therefore, did not excuse them for committing the other. It is only sovereign grace that brought that in as a plea—it is not justice, nor is it law—it the heart of mercy that pleads that.

What I want you to notice, now, then, is though I did not know when I sinned as child and as a young man all that was meant by sin, though I especially did not know that I was crucifying Christ, yet the guilt is just the same as before God, and I need to be forgiven for it, or else it will be laid to my charge and I shall be punished as surely as God's law stands fast. Do you think the Savior would say, "Father, forgive them," if it were not a wrong? He never prayed a superfluous prayer! The prayer, "Forgive," is a sentence in itself, teaching us that sins of ignorance are sins. Oh, my dear hearers, there are none of us who know to the full extent the sin of our sin! The tenderest heart here does not know the blackness of its sin! I have sometimes talked with persons under conviction who have told me what dreadful sinners they were, and they have looked a little surprised when I have said, "But you are ten times

worse than you think you are." No, they scarcely thought that could be possible, yet I would venture to say that to the most tender-hearted penitent that ever lived, you have no idea, my friend, of the aggravation of your sin, nor is it possible you should have, nor do I know that it is desirable. So long as you know enough of your sin to hate it, and to flee to Christ for the pardon of it, that will suffice. But, oh, the scholarship that would be needed to understand all the depths of sin, it were the scholarship of the cross over again—you would have need to die like Christ to know what sin means in its infinite, its boundless guilt! Do not ask to know that, but do pray that the Lord would search you and forgive you your sins. You did not know of pardoned sins you have committed, manifold sins that have passed by your notice, that you have not observed and, consequently, could not have confessed in particular. Beseech the Savior, whose cry is, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," to pray for unknown mercy by His unknown agony for your unknown sin! It is a wondrous prayer, this, but we cannot stay much longer on it.

We make yet another remark, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

V. THIS PRAYER WARNS US.

I have felt intense pleasure in thinking it over, but at the same time that pleasure has been mingled with great bitterness. There is such a warning there, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" It does not say, as I have already said, that if they *did* know, Christ would not pray for them, but it does seem to hint that. In the background I see a something—not that every sin committed against light is unpardonable—God be thanked that is not so, but some sins committed against light and knowledge so harden the heart that the man never repents! He never will, he will go to hell hardened like steel! And I am afraid some of you are in great likelihood of committing it. Those who have not heard the gospel cannot very readily commit this, unless their conscience has been desperately violated, but some of you who have been hearers often, and perhaps were once professors—who have knowingly chosen the wrong path and have deliberately sacrificed your character for drink or gain or lust—I will not say that you have passed that boundary, but I do tremble as I hear the booming of that text, "There is a sin unto death; I do not say that you shall pray for it," even as I hear the Master's words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But these persons knew what they did, did it deliberately, did it over again and again, and again—perhaps went to the Lord's table and deliberately went to their uncleanness, stood up in public, it may be, and then deliberately went to their filthiness. Or they listened to the sermon on Sunday and they said, "I'll do better"—and then deliberately went on Monday to their drunken companions again! Oh, man, you may have stood in the street, perhaps, and said to yourself, "Now, which shall it be? I feel as if I were called to serve God, but yet how can I give up such-

and-such a darling lust?" There is a point in men's lives wherein if they deliberately choose the wrong, knowing it is wrong, with the light of God shining on their eyeballs—yet they deliberately give up Christ, heaven, pardon and they choose hell and their own delusions—I fear that with many from that hour the wax is cooled upon their death warrant and it will never be reversed, for this text, though it gently flows from the Savior's lips and drops like dew, has about it the lightning flash and thunderbolt that startles, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

But there are some who know what they do and take the hammer and nail Christ up to the cross! They take a spear and pierce His side and do it knowing what they are doing! And all the while they are glibly talking of religion, taking the Bible to make jokes out of it, taking the very ministers they once professed to love and scoffing them, taking the doctrines of the gospel and making these a cloak for their sins—these men—what will I say of them? God have mercy upon them, but I fear, I fear, that He never will, for they will never seek it, and He will never grant it! Could they seek it, He would give it. While a man can seek, he shall find. While a heart can melt, God will pity. There is never a contrite soul but what God looks with love upon it. But here is the mischief, for these men, who know what they do, repent not, but are seared as with a hot iron—they become wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever!

But I must close here. This shall be a closing word. At the same time, you see the text woos. It warns, but it woos. How it woos the ignorant, especially! "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Oh, some of you have dropped in here tonight who, perhaps, don't often listen to the gospel. You have been living a life of sin. You knew it was sin, You knew it was sin, but you did not know that you were nailing Christ to the cross. You sought your own pleasure, you sought your own gratifications. You have been very guilty. You have lived a careless, Godless, Christless life, but still you did not mean to sin against God so as to crucify Christ. You see you have done so—now you feel you are guilty of it—but before, you had not that light of God that you now have. Then Jesus says, "Come to Me, come to Me! My prayer goes up to heaven for you, you ignorant one." Sinful, but without light, Jesus intercedes! Oh, join your prayer with the prayer of Jesus, and say, "Father, forgive Your ignorant child, Your sinful, wayward child. I do not plead, 'I knew not what I did,' but Christ pleads it for me! I plead that Jesus died. Oh, for His sake, have pity! Hear His blood as it drops from His hands and feet; hear it and plead for me, 'Father, forgive them.'"

Oh if you will seek the Lord, you shall have Him! If you will but turn your eyes to Him upon the cross, you shall live! Whoever among you in this house will but trust Him, shall find Him able and willing to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. Oh, come and welcome, come and welcome! And may God grant that you may come tonight—

"But if your ears refuse

The language of His grace,
And hearts grow gross 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 bless you. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 27:32-49.

Verse 32. *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear His cross.* Perhaps they were afraid that Christ would die from exhaustion, so they compelled Simon to bear His cross. Any one of Christ's followers might have wished to have been this man of Cyrene, but we need not envy him, for there is a cross for each of us to carry. Oh, that we were as willing to bear Christ's cross as Christ was to bear our sins on His cross! If anything happens to us by way of persecution or ridicule for our Lord's sake, and the gospel's, let us cheerfully endure it! As knights are made by a stroke from the sovereign's sword, so shall we become princes in Christ's realm as He lays His cross on our shoulders.

33, 34. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a Place of a Skull, they gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink.* Golgotha was the common place of execution for malefactors, the Tyburn or Old Bailey of Jerusalem, outside the gate of the city. There was a special symbolical reason for Christ's suffering outside the gate, and His followers are bid to "go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb 13:11-13). A stupefying draught was given to the condemned, to take away something of the agony of crucifixion—but our Lord came to suffer—and He would not take anything that would at all impair His faculties. He did not forbid His fellow sufferers drinking the vinegar mingled with gall ("wine mingled with myrrh," Mark 15:23), but He would not drink thereof. Jesus did not refuse this draught because of its bitterness, for He was prepared to drink even to the last dreadful dregs the bitter cup of wrath which was His people's due.

35. *And they crucified Him, and parted His garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots.* There is a world of meaning in that short sentence, "and they crucified Him," driving their bolts of iron through His blessed hands and feet, fastening Him to the cross and lifting Him up to hang there upon a gallows reserved for felons. We can scarcely realize all that the crucifixion meant to our dear Lord, but we can join in Faber's prayer—

"Lord Jesus! May we love and weep,
Since You, for us, are crucified."

Then was fulfilled all that our Lord had foretold in Chapter 20:17-19, except His resurrection, the time for which had not arrived.

The criminals' clothes were the executioners' profits. The Roman soldiers who crucified Christ had no thought of fulfilling the Scriptures when they parted His garments, casting lots, yet their action was exactly that which had been foretold in Psalm 22:18! The seamless robe would have been spoiled if it had been torn, so the soldiers raffled for the vesture, while they shared the other garments of our Lord. The dice would be almost stained with the blood of Christ, yet the gamblers played on beneath the shadow of His cross. Gambling is the most hardening of all vices. Beware of it in any form! No games of chance should be played by Christians, for the blood of Christ seems to have bespattered them all.

36. *And sitting down they watched Him there.* Some watched Him from curiosity, some to make sure that He really did die, some even delighted their cruel eyes with His sufferings—and there were some, hard by the cross, who wept and bewailed, a sword passing through their own hearts while the Son of man was agonizing even unto death!

37. *And set up over His head His accusation written, THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.* What a marvelous providence it was that moved Pilate's pen! The representative of the Roman Emperor was little likely to concede kingship to any man, yet he deliberately wrote, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews," and nothing would induce him to alter what he had written! Even on His cross, Christ was proclaimed King, in the sacerdotal Hebrew, the classical Greek, and the common Latin, so that everybody in the crowd could read the inscription! When will the Jews admit Jesus as their King? They will do so one day, looking on Him whom they pierced. Perhaps they will think more of Christ when Christians think more of them—when our hardness of heart towards them has gone, possibly their hardness of heart towards Christ may also disappear.

38. *Then were there two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.* As if to show that they regarded Christ as the worst of the three criminals, they put Him between the two thieves, giving Him the place of dishonor. Thus was the prophecy fulfilled, "He was numbered with the transgressors." The two malefactors deserved to die, as one of them admitted (Luke 23:40, 41), but a greater load of guilt vested upon Christ, for, "He bore the sin of many," and, therefore, He was rightly distinguished as the King of sufferers, who could truly ask—"Was ever grief like Mine?"

Verses 39, 40. *And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, You who destroys the temple, and builds it in three days, save Yourself. If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.* Nothing torments a man when in pain more than mockery. When Jesus Christ most needed words of pity, and looks of kindness, they who passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads. Perhaps the most painful part of ridicule is to have one's most solemn sayings turned to scorn, as were our Lord's words about the temple of His body—"You who destroys

the temple, and builds it in three days, save Yourself." He might have saved Himself—He might have "come down from the cross"—but if He had done so, we could never have become the sons of God! It was because He was the Son of God that He did not come down from the cross, but hung there until He had completed the sacrifice for His people's sin. Christ's cross is the Jacob's ladder by which we mount up to heaven! This is the cry of the Socinian today, "Come down from the cross. Give up the atoning sacrifice and we will be Christians!" Many are willing to believe in Christ, but not in Christ crucified. They admit that He was a good man and a great teacher, but by rejecting His vicarious atonement, they practically un-Christ the Christ, as these mockers at Golgotha did.

41-43. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe Him. He trusted in God: let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God.* The chief priests, with the scribes and elders, forgetting their high station and rank, joined the ribald crew in mocking Jesus in His death pangs! Every word was emphatic—every syllable cut and pierced our Lord to the heart. They mocked Him as a Savior—"He saved others; Himself He cannot save." They mocked Him as a King—"If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." They mocked Him as a believer—"He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him." They mocked Him as the Son of God—"For He said, I am the Son of God." Those who say that Christ was a good man, virtually admit His Deity, for He claimed to be the Son of God. If He was not what He professed to be, He was an impostor. Notice the testimony that Christ's bitterest enemies bore even as they reviled Him—"He saved others." "He is the King of Israel" (R. V.) "He trusted in God."

44. *The thieves, also, who were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth.* The sharers of His misery, the wretches who were crucified with Him, joined in reviling Jesus. Nothing was lacking to fill up His cup of suffering and shame. The conversion of the penitent thief was all the more remarkable because he had but a little while before been among the mockers of his Savior! What a trophy of divine grace he became!

45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.* Some have thought that this darkness covered the whole world, and so caused even a heathen to exclaim, "Either the world is about to expire, or the God who made the world is in anguish." This darkness was supernatural—it was not an eclipse. The sun could no longer look upon its Maker surrounded by these who mocked Him. He covered his face and traveled on in tenfold night, in very shame that the great Sun of righteousness should, Himself, be in such terrible darkness.

46. *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, My God, why have You*

forsaken Me? In order that the sacrifice of Christ might be complete, it pleased the Father to forsake His well-beloved Son. Sin was laid on Christ, so God must turn away His face from the Sin-bearer. To be deserted of His God was the climax of Christ's grief, the quintessence of His sorrow! See here the distinction between the martyrs and their Lord—in their dying agonies they have been divinely sustained—but Jesus, suffering as the Substitute for sinners, was forsaken of God! The saints who *have* known what it is to have their Father's face hidden from them, even for a brief space, can scarcely imagine the suffering that wrung from our Savior the agonizing cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

47. *Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, this man calls for Elijah.* They knew better, yet they jested at the Savior's prayer. Wickedly, willfully and scornfully, they turned His death shriek into ridicule!

48, 49. *And straightway one of them ran and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. The rest said Let Him be, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him.* A person in such agony as Jesus was suffering might have mentioned many pangs that He was enduring, but it was necessary for Him to say, "I thirst," in order that another Scripture might be fulfilled. One of them, more compassionate than his companions, ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, from the vessel probably brought by the soldiers for their own use, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. It always seems to me very remarkable that the sponge, which is the very lowest form of animal life, should have been brought into contact with Christ, who is at the top of all life. In His death the whole circle of creation was completed. As the sponge brought refreshment to the lips of our dying Lord, so may the least of God's living ones help to refresh Him, now that He has ascended from the cross to the throne!

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THE PIERCED HEART OF JESUS
NO. 3559

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, APRIL 12, 1917.

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

"Then came the soldiers and broke the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was dead already, they broke not His legs, but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith there came out blood and water. And he that saw it bares record that his record is true: and he knows that he is telling the truth, that you might believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled. A bone of Him shall not be broken. And again another Scripture says, They shall look on Him whom they have pierced." John 19:32-37.

WHAT a wonderful conjunction of Prophecy and Providence! I want you to behold it, and admire it. Two texts of Scripture predict, the one in Exodus the other in Zechariah (such a long interval having occurred between the distinct records), the former that not a bone of the Paschal Lamb should be broken—the latter that He should be pierced. How were these two to be fulfilled in the minuteness of one incident? The rough Roman soldier comes with the iron bar to break the bones of the three prisoners who have been crucified. He has orders to break their legs. The well-disciplined soldier acts almost mechanically, according to orders. Roman discipline was of the very sternest kind. Will not the soldier, therefore, break the legs of Jesus? No! Moved by some strange impulse, he marks that one of the three, Jesus, who is called Christ, is already dead. Though commanded to break His legs, he forbears—but, most likely to clear himself of all doubt on that point, he pierces His side with a spear! The willfulness of the soldier, wavering though wanton, thus fulfilled both the prophecies of which he must have been, himself, totally ignorant! And this was brought about, first, by his not doing what he was ordered to do and, secondly, by doing what he had not been ordered to do! Oh, how inscrutable the mystery of Providence! How marvelously does God rule the sons of men while He leaves them to their own free will! Did not this soldier act altogether as a free agent, whether following the dictates of his reason or the impulse of his temper, when he thus unwittingly, by his singular conduct, verified to the letter the words of Prophecy as precisely and entirely as if he had been a mere puppet

moved with wires at the instigation of another mind and another hand than his own? This was not an accidental circumstance, or a singular coincidence—it was Providence—a sublime purpose of God brought to pass by simple means. Irregularities among men do not disorganize the ordained purposes of Heaven, and what we think to be chaos is a well-ordered system far beyond our imagination, into which we vainly attempt to peer.

I need not detain you with any speculations arising out of the piercing of our Savior by the spear. It has been, I think, very soberly argued that in all probability the physical cause of our Savior's death was a broken heart. In a scientific treatise by one who had studied the anatomy of the subject, and investigated cases which appeared, after death, to bear some resemblance to our Savior's case, it has been shown that when, on the heart being pierced, a small portion of blood and water has flowed, death has been traceable to a broken heart with intense grief. So, if we may assign a physical cause to the death of our Lord, it appears most probable to have been so occasioned. It was anguish that, in the first stage, produced a bloody sweat in Gethsemane, and in the last stage ruptured His heart. Not, however, that I am inclined to attach any importance to such arguments or speculations. For my part I do not see that there is any analogy, or that analogy need be sought between the case of the Savior and the case of any common man. The anatomist would be baffled with an analysis! The body of any ordinary person would exhibit symptoms of corruption. From this, He that hung upon the Cross was exempt. When death comes, and the vital spark quits the human frame, the process of decomposition speedily begins. But our Lord saw no corruption! Overshadowed as was His virgin mother by the Spirit at her conception, His birth was predicted as "*that holy thing* which shall be born of you." Through the entire course of His life on earth, the Spirit rested upon Him in a special manner. And even after His soul had left His body, the Spirit preserved and kept that body so that the prophecy was fulfilled, "Neither will You suffer *Your Holy One* to see corruption." Hence you search in vain for a parallel. The disparity of any instances that might be sought for is so palpable that you really have not any data to start with, or any premises to reason upon in the effort to judge of what happened in the anatomy of the sacred body of our blessed Lord. Instead of following speculations which rather belong to the physician than the theologian, I desire the Spirit of God to conduct us into some spiritual reflections arising out of the piercing of the heart of Jesus Christ by the soldier's spear. One observation, I think, lies upon the very surface of the narrative.

I. EVEN AFTER OUR LORD'S DEATH, MEN RUDELY ASSAILED HIM.

Was it not enough that they had scourged His back? Did it not suffice that they had put a crown of thorns on His head? Was it not sufficient that they had nailed His feet and His hands to the Cross? And yet after they were satisfied that the life had been forfeited to the law, and the body was already dead, nothing could content human cruelty till His heart was pierced with the lance! Say, now, was not this man who pierced Christ's heart a fair, though a foul, sample of our sinful race? His heartless act a type of our headstrong profanity? We, too, after the Savior's death, have pierced Him! Shall I show you how? The crime is so common that you come to condone it. His Godhead is His Glory. *Deny His Deity* and you not only detract from His dignity, but you make Him unworthy of our confidence! This is to thrust the spear into His very heart! Your tone is treacherous when you say, "He is but a Man. Though an admirable Teacher, I can only regard Him as a finite creature." Oh, how many people go up and down among us professing to be members of a Protestant Church and Believers in the Scripture, who yet will not acknowledge the miracles of Christ to be authentic, worked in token of His own Personal authority, bearing the witness of His Father, and conveying a clear proof that He was the Son of God? The Lord have mercy upon those who in this respect pierce our dear Redeemer afresh! If any of us have been guilty of this sin, may we be converted from our dangerous error, and led to avow Him, like Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

They pierce Him, too, who *attack the Doctrines which He taught*, and the testimony which He delivered. The Truth of God was in Christ's heart—it was written there. Whatever He preached with His lips, He sanctified with His life. His heart was a fountain whence came all those Doctrines which reveal the Father to us. If men attack any Truth revealed to us by Christ, they do in effect what the soldier did in fact—they do *spiritually* as this Roman soldier did *literally*—they thrust at His heart! If you disparage the words that Jesus spoke, or call in question the Truth that He showed to His disciples and made manifest in the Word of God, what is there left of that mission in which He made known the will of God, the Father? To proclaim this Truth He came! To bear witness to this Truth He died! He witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate. If you touch those Doctrines, you touch the apple of His eye—no, you pierce His heart again! How do they also thrust at His heart *who persecute His people!* And has He not often been wounded thus through all the centuries that have transpired since He ascended up on high to the Father's right hand? Saul of Tarsus pierced His heart, for Jesus said, "Why do you persecute Me?" The sufferings of the men and women, hauled to prison, and beaten in the synagogue, and compelled to blaspheme, were injuries wantonly and wickedly done to Christ, Himself! And what shall we say of the martyrs, their groans in the prisons, their cries at the rack,

their pangs at the stake, their blood so cruelly shed—have not all these touched the Savior's heart?

So, too, every rude jeer and ribald jest, every hard word and bitter taunt aimed at a follower of Christ is a reproach of the dear Lord and Master for whose sake it is meekly borne. But on their part, "who whet their tongue like a sword," it is aimed at the heart of Jesus, on whom they cannot otherwise wreak their vengeance, now, for He cannot henceforth suffer, except in sympathy with the sufferings of His saints!

And there is yet another class of persons who, although Christ's sufferings are over, still continue to pierce Him. They are such us pretend to be His disciples, but they lie and practice a foul hypocrisy! Are there any such present? I tremble as I ask the question. As there were false apostles of yore, so there are foul apostates in these days! Their profession is only the prelude to their perfidy. They make solemn pledge to obey Him, but, like Judas, they only wait for a suited opportunity to betray Him. They will sell the Savior for silver—only let the price be high enough—their principle is low enough! Their conscience will not hesitate to "crucify the Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame." Oh, you inconsistent professors! Oh, you graceless men and women! How dare you come to the Table of His fellowship? You have a name to live, and yet you are dead! You are crucifying Him! You are piercing Him! The guilt of the Roman soldier clings to you!

I fear, too, there is another class that pierces His heart—it includes *those who refuse to believe in His willingness to forgive them*. When under conviction of sin, it may be difficult to believe that one can be pardoned, but when the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to us and His infinite condescension that brought Him to suffer for us—it does seem unbelievable that any should doubt Him! Yet there are some who link their chains, sit down in despair, and say, "He is not willing to forgive." So unkind, ungenerous a thought as that—that He is unwilling to forgive—pierces Him to the heart and cuts Him to the quick! I know some of you do not mean this. You are startled, now that you think what you are doing. I pray the Lord you may humbly trust Him! Oh, do not doubt Him—the Son of God, who suffered for His enemies, surrendering His life, even for the ungodly! Will you, *can* you still distrust Him? Will you doubt the testimony which God has given concerning His Son? Were it not far better that you honored Him by casting yourselves at His feet? Angels that sing His praises night and day unceasingly do not honor Him more than you will do, if, all black and defiled as you are, you will come and trust Him that He can wash you and make you whiter than snow! Oh, do this and pierce His heart no more!

Some men pierce the heart of Christ *through their carelessness*. They trifle and even scoff because they have not known Him, or sought by any

means to learn what claims He has upon their homage. They disparage those Divine features of His ministry which they have never properly understood. So they pierce the heart of Christ out of ignorant prejudice! They are unacquainted with the Gospel. All that they have heard or read about it has been from the tongue or pen of opponent or satirist, and then, catching their temper, they have joined in reviling it! Alas, too, there are some who malign the Savior out of mere malice. Though they know better, yet they willfully blaspheme His name. Stop, oh, stop, and pierce Him no more, I pray you, lest He that has meekly endured so long as the Lamb of God, should suddenly stir Himself up as the lion of the tribe of Judah and make you feel the terror of His Power, who will not feel the majesty of His love! So much for our first point. Even after Jesus' death, there are those who still pierce Him. Our second thought is such as I am charmed to give you.

II. THESE ATTACKS UPON THE SAVIOR ARE OVERRULED TO DISPLAY HIS GRACE THE BETTER.

His heart is pierced, it is true, but with what result, my Brothers and Sisters? Does there flash from it fire? Does the peal of thundering wrath roll over the sinner's head? Ah, no! It is like the sandal tree that perfumes the axe that wounds it. That spear, no sooner is it withdrawn from the wound, than there gushes a fountain of blood and water. *The attacks that are made upon Jesus Christ only display His virtues*. Observe how this is brought about. If the Truth of God is attacked, and the Gospel is assailed, what is the immediate consequence? Why, then, the saints search deeper into it, so they come to understand the Doctrine better! They learn the arguments by which it is sustained and they love the Truth of God with fonder, as well as stronger convictions, till they feel moved to sacrifice themselves for it! The heart of Christ was opened by the spear, and often the heart of the Truth of God is revealed by the opposition brought to bear against it. They think to confute our Doctrines—they do but confirm our faith in their verity! Where they think they shall prove us fools, they help to make us sages! They drive us to the root of the matter and they rather establish us in the precious Truth! The March wind tears not up the oak, but roots it more firmly in its native soil. So shall it ever be with attacks made upon our Lord and Master! We shall understand Him the better and discover more of the Scriptures that were fulfilled in Him!

Moreover, it often happens that when Christ is opposed by persecution, *the Gospel is proclaimed with more zeal*, and diffused with more rapidity. The saints who were, in early days, persecuted in Jerusalem, went everywhere preaching the Word of God. What if I say the spear of persecution does, as it were, set the atoning blood flowing more freely among the sons of men, and make the purifying water of the Savior's Sacrifice to

be dispersed over a wider area, and among a larger population? Shall I compare the persecuted Church to an oppressed nation, and remind you that, like Israel in Egypt, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew? The spear let loose the blood and water from the heart of Jesus, and the spear of persecution lets loose the Gospel—and compels Christian men who might have rested in inglorious ease to go forward and laboriously dispense the Gospel of salvation, telling the Grace of God to perishing men! So, too (but let no man turn this into evil), the very sin of men which does wound Christ becomes the means of magnifying God's Grace! Though it is a vile thing to say, "Let us sin that Grace may abound," yet is it a most glorious Truth of God that where sin abounds, Grace does much more abound! Thus the cleansing power of the blood becomes more renowned by reason of the sin that made this wondrous Sacrifice necessary. Perhaps we had never known the Savior so well if we had not seen sin so clearly in the lives of the pardoned ones, who afterwards were washed, cleansed and sanctified by His purifying energy. The very opposition that comes forth is overruled for His triumph! The stronger His foes, the louder the shout of victory when He returns from the strife!

And when the Church is assailed (which is one way of piercing Christ) she gets *some immediate benefit from the grievous trial,* for persecution acts like a great winnowing fan that drives the chaff away from the floor on which the pure grain is housed. It is to the Church like a refiner's fire. The mere dross is separated. The faithless, who are found among the faithful, soon apostatize, while the sterling gold and silver, the genuine lovers of Christ, are purged and purified by the ordeal through which they are compelled to pass! Oh, blessed Savior, they do pierce You, and pierce You they may, but You are honored, for their bitter reviling elicits Your sweet virtue! They may thrust their spears into Your very heart, but by giving forth Your own energy of love and mercy, and greeting them with salvation, You do conquer those who thought to conquer You! Put these two things together Brothers and Sisters—man still continuing to wound the Savior—and the more redundant display of the Savior's Grace as the consequence! Then find a total if you can.

Another thought, which diverges a little from the last, may help us to pursue our meditation. Since the soldier sent His spear into the Savior's heart—

III. THE WAY TO THAT HEART IS OPEN.

It was always open, in fact, for He always loved the sons of men, but now you can see it open! It was no little wound that was made by the lance, for into it, we read, Thomas put His hand. What a gaping fissure must that have been into which the Apostle might put his palm! "Reach here, your hand, and thrust it into My side." He still lives, as no one of

us could live, with a passage to the heart always open! In His very flesh He testifies to us today that His heart is ready to receive any message that His children may choose to send—and equally ready to respond with the love that has its fountain there! Behold the open heart of Jesus! It is open that all the Divine Grace that is within it may freely flow to undeserving sinners. Think not, Sinner, that you have need to open Jesus' side. The blood has flown freely. Say now, will you come and wash in it? You have not to beg for cleansing, as though it were a gift hardly to be obtained by importunity—it flows, it still flows! He is willing—as willing as He is able, and as able as He is willing—to cleanse you from your guilt! Whatever there may be in the heart of Christ, it all flows out! The precious liquid is kept within, but set loose for every needy, thirsty soul. His heart is open!

It is open for the doubter to put his hand into it now. Where are you, Thomas? Do you ask some hard thing and say, "Except I see this and that, I will not believe"? Oh, Trembler, weighed down by your sins and your weakness, do you not see Him this day in Glory, with His heart still open towards you? Put your hand into the wound and say, "My Lord and my God." Accept your Savior without hesitation or delay! Come and find rest in Him. His side is open for your hand to reach His heart. It is open—that side is open—for those who pierced Him to look in to see what they have done, and lament it. But see how tender is His heart, and go to Him without fear. You pierced Him—look at Him and mourn because you did so. You sinners, though you did put your Lord to death, His heart is open to you! He invites you to come and receive His mercy that He has treasured up for you. Oh, come, come! He will receive you now. His heart is open to sympathize with the griefs and woes, the prayers and pleadings, the desires and longings of all His people!

You know we have to get to some men's hearts through their ears, and through their eyes. In not a few of our callous race, these passages are choked up. You show them sorrow, and they see it without emotion. You cannot reach their heart. If you tell them a pitiful tale of deep distress, they hear it with indifference, for somehow the story loses its way in the mazes of the ear—it does not reach the heart. Far otherwise is it with your Lord. His heart is so accessible that you need not fear He will not hear you, or that He will not heed your faintest cry! You will feel that you can come close, straight, quick to Him, by a near passage you reach His very soul at once. Say not, then, that no one sympathizes with you! Jesus does! He cannot fail to pity, solace, or to cheer. His pierced heart sympathizes far more quickly than the most tender heart that ever lived before or after. His love passes the love of women, tender as that is. There is no love like that of Him with the open heart—the love of Jesus with the opened heart—with the open side!

I cannot express to you what I see in this bare fact, this blessed Truth. I wish I could. But it would be still better if you could see the same. Oh, I can come to Him, now, and put my prayers into His side—can come and put my desires into His side! Oh, Jesus, "all my desire is before You, and my groans are not hid from You. I have but five senses, You have a new one—You have a new way to Your heart such as we poor mortals have not. I and my Brothers and Sisters may be inattentive, but You never are. You are He of the wounded heart—forever sympathetic—forever full of gentleness!"

I might linger on this thought, but I prefer leaving it to your meditation, lest I should darken it with words. So let us finish with a last reflection.

IV. A WOUND IN CHRIST'S SIDE REVEALS THE HEART OF JESUS IN ITS PRECIOUSNESS.

That spear did, as it were, break the alabaster box and let out the sweet perfume. What, then, was there in the Savior's heart? Men carry in their hearts that which is dearest. The true man is what he is at the heart's core. What was our blessed Redeemer's life-thought—the compelling motive of His life-work? Upon what did He most of all concentrate the desires and affections of His heart? See you not that when pierced, there flowed forth blood and water? Those two things, then, must have been the nearest to the purpose of His heart. Hence I discern that in my Lord's heart, there was, first, a strong determination to purge sinners from their guilt by His blood. The atoning Sacrifice is not merely the hand blood of the Savior's work, nor is it merely the foot blood of the Savior's journeying through the vale of tears—it was His heart's blood, indicative of heart-work—it was the blood of Redemption shed for us. He loved that work. He was straitened till He could accomplish it. And let me tell you it is Christ's joy to wash you from your sin! Start not back because your conscience is troubled. He has opened a fountain for your uncleanness—in the very midst of the house of David has He opened it. He delights to take away your guilt—

"Dear, dying Lamb, Your precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Is saved to sin no more."

It has not lost its power! Then let it plead for me! To me let it be precious! Let me feel its potent virtue. By it may I have boldness. Like the Apostle, may I say, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died." Oh, to have the blood applied to the conscience! Rest not till you hear it speak peace through your whole nature, till you see the curse removed and are assured that there now is, therefore, no condemnation for you because you are in Christ Jesus! It is Christ's heart-work to redeem His

people by His blood. Oh, that He may now see of the travail of His soul in your redemption!

Moreover, Beloved, in Christ's heart there was the water as well as the blood. He would have His people sanctified as well as pardoned. He would deliver them from the power as well as from the guilt of sin! I believe this is very near Christ's heart. That He may present His Church without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, is His design as well as His desire. His Spirit is working to this end. That He might not allow so much as a single stain to rest upon the nature of His people is alike the pleasure and the purpose of Christ! He has put their guilt away by the Sacrifice of Himself. This is done. Yet He continues to demand their self-sacrifice, that He may put away their evil propensities, the fruit of their first father's fall. My Soul, glorify the pierced heart of Christ! Give Him to see in yourself the effect of the water that flowed from His heart! "Be you holy," He says, "as I am holy." "Be you perfect," He says again, "even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." Deny the flesh with its affections and lusts! Separate yourselves from sinners! Avoid partaking of other men's sins! Like Christ, be you "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." This can only be effected by the Spirit's vital application of the Savior's atoning death. Stay at the foot of the Cross. Live under the influence of His Passion. Pray that you may rise out of this world's fading, failing vanity, into newness of life through His pierced heart! In other words, let us stand in penitence before the Crucified One and mourn that we pierced Him. But let us stand in His Propitiation, rejoicing that His piercing has procured our pardon!

So let us go on our way, resolved, by His help, that we will glorify Him "in all manner of holy conversation and godliness." For, "He that saw it bares record, and his record is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth, that you might believe." May you believe, may you all believe the record is true! Believing, you shall have life through His name! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 27:50-66.

Verse 50. *Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.* Christ's strength was not exhausted—His last word was uttered with a loud voice, like the shout of a conquering warrior! And what a word it was, "It is finished"! Thousands of sermons have been preached upon that little sentence, but who can tell all the meaning that lies compacted within it? It is a kind of infinite expression for breadth, and depth, and length, and height altogether immeasurable! Christ's life being finished, perfected, completed—He yielded up the ghost—willingly dying, laying down His life as He said He would! "I lay down My life for the

sheep. . .I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again."

51-53. *And, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many of the bodies which slept, arose and came out of the graves after His Resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.* Christ's death was the end of Judaism—"The veil of the Temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom." As if shocked at the sacrilegious murder of her Lord, the Temple tore her garments, like one stricken with horror at some stupendous crime. The body of Christ being rent, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. Now was there an entrance made into the Holiest of All by the blood of Jesus—and a way of access to God was opened for every sinner who trusted in Christ's atoning Sacrifice!

See what marvels accompanied and followed the death of Christ—"The earth did quake, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened." Thus did the material world pay homage to Him whom man had rejected, while Nature's convulsions foretold what will happen when Christ's voice once more shakes not the earth only, but also Heaven! These first miracles worked in connection with the death of Christ were typical of spiritual wonders that will be continued till He comes again—rocky hearts are split in two, graves of sin are opened, those who have been dead in trespasses and sins, and buried in sepulchers of lust and evil, are quickened and come out from among the dead, and go into the holy city, the New Jerusalem.

54. *Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.* These Roman soldiers had never witnessed such scenes in connection with an execution, before, and they could only come to one conclusion about the illustrious Prisoner whom they had put to death—"Truly this was the Son of God." It was strange that those men should confess what the chief priests and scribes and elders denied, yet since their day it has often happened that the most abandoned and profane have acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God, while their religious rulers have denied His Divinity.

55-56. *And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the Mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.* We have no record of any unkindness to our Lord from any woman, though we have many narratives of the loving ministry of women at various periods in His life. It was meet, therefore, that even at Calvary, "many women were there beholding afar off." The ribald crowd and the rough soldiers would not permit these timid, yet brave souls, to

come near. But we learn from John 19:25 that some of them edged their way through the throng till they "stood by the Cross of Jesus." Love will dare anything.

57, 58. *When the evening was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also, himself, was Jesus' disciple. He went to Pilate, and begged for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.* This rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, was Jesus' disciple, "but secretly for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38). Yet when his Lord was actually dead, extraordinary courage nerved his spirit and he boldly went to Pilate and begged for the body of Jesus. Joseph and Nicodemus are types of many more who have been emboldened by the Cross of Christ to do what, without that mighty magnet, they would never have attempted! When night comes, the stars appear—so in the night of Christ's death, these two bright stars shone forth with blessed radiance! Some flowers bloom only at night—such a blossom was the courage of Joseph and Nicodemus.

59, 60. *And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed.* Our King, even in the grave, must have the best of the best—His body was "wrapped in a clean linen cloth, and laid in Joseph's own new tomb, thus completing the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9. Some see in this linen shroud an allusion to the garments in which priests were to be clothed. Joseph's was a virgin sepulcher, wherein up to that time no one had been buried, so that, when Jesus rose, none could say that another came forth from the tomb instead of Him.

That rock-hewn cell in the garden sanctified every part of God's acre where saints lie buried. Instead of longing to live till Christ comes, as some do, we might rather pray to have fellowship with Jesus in His death and burial.

61. *And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher.* Love and faith were both typified by these two Marys sitting over against the sepulcher. They will be the last to leave their Lord's resting place, and the first to return to it when the Sabbath is past! Can we cling to Christ when His cause seems to be dead and buried? When the Truth of God is fallen in the streets, or is even buried in the sepulcher of skepticism or superstition, can we still believe in it and look forward to its resurrection? That is what some of us are doing at the present time. O Lord, keep us faithful!

62-64. *Now the next day, that followed the day of preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that Deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the Sepulcher be made sure until the third*

day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Those punctilious priests and Pharisees, who were so scrupulous about keeping the Sabbath, did not mind profaning the Day of Rest by holding a consultation with the Roman governor! They knew that Christ was dead and buried, but they still stood in dread of His power. They called Him a "deceiver," and they even pretended to "remember" what "He said, while He was yet alive." At His trial, their false witnesses gave another meaning to His words, but they knew all the while that He was speaking of His Resurrection, not of the Temple on Mount Zion! Now they are afraid that, even in the sepulcher, He will bring to nothing all their plans for His destruction. They must have known that the disciples of Jesus would not steal Him away and say to the people, "He is risen from the dead"—so they probably feared that he really would come forth from the tomb! Whatever conscience they had, made great cowards of them, so they begged Pilate to do what he could to prevent the rising of their Victim.

65, 66. *Pilate said unto them, You have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as you can. So they went and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.* The chief priests and Pharisees wanted Pilate to make the sepulcher sure, but he left them to secure it. There seems to have been a grim sort of irony about the governor's reply, "You have a watch; go your way, make it as sure as you can." Whether he meant it as a taunt, or as a command to secure the sepulcher, they became unconsciously witnesses that Christ's Resurrection was a supernatural act! The tomb in the rock could not be entered except by rolling away the stone, and they guarded that by sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

According to the absurd teaching of the Rabbis, rubbing ears of corn was a kind of threshing and, therefore, was unlawful on the Sabbath—yet here were these men doing what, by similar reasoning, might be called furnace and foundry work, and calling out a guard of Roman legionaries to assist them in breaking the Sabbath! Unintentionally, they did honor to the sleeping King when they obtained the representatives of the Roman emperor to watch His resting place till the third morning, when He came forth Victor over sin, and death, and the grave! Thus once more was the wrath of man made to praise the King of Glory, and the remainder of that wrath was restrained.

—Adapted from the *C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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

THE STRAIT GATE
NO. 3560

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 1917,
DELIVERED *BY C. H. SPURGEON,*
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."
Luke 13:24.

THE precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ are dictated by the soundest wisdom. He has given us divine prescriptions for the health of our souls and His commandments, though clothed with sovereign authority, are spoken in such infinite kindness that we may regard them as the advice of a true and faithful friend. This is not a legal, but a Gospel exhortation, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." He, Himself, is the only gate, or the door, by which we can find admission, and the way to enter in through Jesus Christ is not by working, but by believing! Then, as to the strife we are urged to carry on, it is an earnest endeavor to steer clear of all the rocks, shoals and quicksands of popular fallacies and deceitful traditions, and to sail in the deep waters with His covenant for our chart, and His Word for our compass, in simple obedience to His statutes, trusting to Him as our pilot, whose voice we always hear, though His face we cannot see. The storm signal may well awaken your fears, but the cry of peril had need excite your caution. The mere mention sounds like a menace. "Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Listen to that warning, lest you be among the, "many" that founder—perhaps you shall be among the few that escape. Listen to what Jesus tells you shall come to pass with the multitude, that it may never come to pass with you as individuals. Mark now—

I. A GATE WHICH IT IS MOST DESIRABLE TO ENTER.

Surely "many" would not seek to enter if they were not convinced of the desirableness of passing through it! The very fact that so many, although they fail, will at least seek to enter, proves that there is a desire, a reason and a motive why men and women should aim to enter.

This gate—that is, Christ—it is most desirable for us to pass through because it is the gate of the city of refuge. Cities of refuge were appointed for manslayers, who, when they were pursued by the avenger of blood, they might pass the gate and be secure within the sanctuary or city. The

gospel of Jesus Christ is intended as a refuge for those who have broken the law of God, whom vengeance is pursuing, who will certainly be overtaken, to their eternal destruction, unless they fly to Christ and find shelter in Him. Outside of Christ the sword of fire pursues us swift and sharp. From God's wrath there is but one escape—and that is by a simple faith in Christ. Believe in Him and the sword is sheathed, and the energy and the love of God will become your everlasting portion! But refuse to believe in Jesus and your innumerable sins, written in His book, shall be laid at your door in that day when the pillars of Heaven shall reel and the stars shall fall like withered fig leaves from the tree! Oh, who would not wish to escape from the wrath to come! Mr. Whitefield, when preaching, would often hold up his hands and cry, "Oh, the wrath to come! The wrath to come! The wrath to come!" There is more weight and meaning in these words than tongue can tell or heart conceive. The wrath to come! the wrath to come! When past that Gate, like Noah after he had passed into the ark, you are safe from the overwhelming deluge—you are sheltered from the devouring conflagration which shall consume the earth—you are rescued from the death and the doom that await the countless multitudes of the impenitent! Who would not wish to enter where there is salvation, the only place where salvation can be found?

It is desirable to enter this gate because it is the gate of a home. There is sweet music in that word, "home." Jesus is the home of His people's hearts. We are at rest when we get to Christ. We have all we need when we have Jesus. Happiness is the portion of the Christian in this life while he lives upon his Savior. I have seen outside in the night refugee crowds of persons waiting an hour beforehand, till the doors were opened. Poor souls; shivering in the cold, but in expectation of being warmed and comforted in a little time, for a little while when they would be admitted. What do you think, O homeless men and women—were there a permanent home for you, a home from which you never could be banished, a home into which you could be introduced as dear children—would it not be worth your while to wait for a long time at the door, and to knock again and again right vehemently, could you but ultimately gain admission? Jesus is a home for the homeless, a rest for the weary, a comfort for the comfortless. Is your heart broken—Jesus can comfort you! Have you been banished from your family, or one by one have the dear ones been taken to their last resting place? Do you feel solitary, friendless, cheerless, accounting "the black flowing river" to be preferred before this troubled stream of life, and that pitiless society of men and women, all eager for gain and gaiety, reckoning nothing of your griefs or

your groans? Oh, come to Jesus! Trust in Him and He will light up a star in the black midnight sky! He will kindle a fire in your hearts that shall make them glow with joy and comfort, even now! It were worthwhile to be a Christian, irrespective of the hereafter. Such present comfort as a belief in Jesus imparts is an inestimable compensation! This is the gate of refuge, and it is the gate of a home.

Moreover, it leads to a blessed feast. We read just now of the supper that was spread. Jesus does not feed our bodies, but He does what is better—He feeds our minds. A hungry stomach is terrible, but a hungry heart is far more dreadful, for a loaf of bread will fill the one, but what can satisfy the other? Oh, when the heart gets to craving, and pining, and yearning after something it cannot get, it is like the sea that cannot rest; it is like the grave that never can be filled; it is like the horseleech whose daughters cry "Give, give, give!" Happy is the man who believes in Jesus, for he becomes at once a contented man. Not only does he find rest in Christ, but joy and gladness, peace and abiding satisfaction are the portion of his lot. I tell you what I do know—and I would not lie, even for the Lord, Himself—I tell you that there is mirth to be found in faith in Christ which cannot be matched! Speak of their buoyant spirits who make merry in the dance, or of the festive glee of those that are filled with wine? It is but the crackling of a handful of thorns under a pot—how soon it is gone! But the joy of the man who meditates on the love of Christ which embraces him; on the blood of Christ which cleanses him; on the arm of Christ which upholds him; on the hand of Christ which leads him; on the crown of Christ which is to be his portion—the joy of such a man is constant, deep, overflowing, beyond the power of expression! The poorest Christian in the entire world—bedridden, living on parish allowance, full of pains and ready to die—when his heart is stayed upon Christ, would not change places with the youngest, brightest, richest, noblest spirit to be found outside the Church of God! No, kings and emperors boast no more of your beggarly crowns—their glitter will soon fade! Your purple robes will soon be moth eaten! Your silver shall soon be cankered—of your palace, not a stone shall be left upon its fellow! Bitter shall be the dregs of your wine cups and all your music shall end in discord! I tell you that the poorest of all the company of the faithful in Christ Jesus excel you, and "would not change their blest estate for all that earth calls good or great." So abundantly worthwhile is it to come to Christ for the happiness, as well as the repose, which we find in Him.

Well likewise, dear friends, may men desire to pass through the strait gate, knowing it is the gate which leads to Paradise. There was one gate

of Paradise through which our father—Adam—and our mother—Eve—went weeping as they left the garden all behind them to wander into the desert world. Can you picture them to yourselves, with the cherubim behind them and the flaming sword bidding them be gone, for Paradise was no place for rebels? Men have wandered up and down the world since then to find the gate of Paradise, that they might enter yet again. They have scaled the peaks of Sinai, but they have not found it there. They have traversed the tracks of the wilderness, weary and footsore, jaded and faint, but they have found no gate to Paradise anywhere in all their expeditions. The scholar has searched for it in the ancient books. The astronomer has hunted for it among the stars. Sages, as they were called, have sought to find it by studying their arts—and fools have tried to find it among their viols and their bowls. But there is only one gate! Look, there it is! It is in the form of a cross, and he that will find the gate of heaven finds the cross and the Man that did hang thereon! Happy he who can come up to it and pass through it, reposing all his confidence in the atonement once made by the Man of Suffering on Calvary's tree. On earth he is saved, and in the article of death he shall pass through that gate of pearl unchallenged, walk the streets of gold unabashed and bow before the excellent glory without a fear! He is free in heaven. The cross is a mark of a citizen of the skies! Having truly believed in Jesus, everlasting happiness is his beyond all doubt! Who, then, would not pass through the strait gate?

And who would not wish to pass through it when he considers what will be the lot of those outside the gate? How we tremble at the thought of that outer darkness where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! There are many enquiries, nowadays, about eternal punishment. Oh, brothers and sisters, do not rashly or carelessly challenge the bitter experience of such condemnation! Speculate as you will about the doctrine, but I pray you do not trifle with the reality. To be lost forever, let that mean what it may, will be more than you can bear though your ribs were iron and your bones were brass. Tempt not the avenging angel! Beware that you forget not God, lest He tear you in pieces and there be no one to deliver you! By the living God, I pray you fear and tremble, lest you be found out of Christ in the day of His appearing. Rest not, be not patient, much less merry, till you are saved! To be in danger of the fire of hell is a peril that no heart can adequately realize, no language fitly paint! Oh, I beseech you, halt not, give yourself no rest till you have got beyond that danger! Flee for your lives, for the fiery shower will soon descend! Escape! God, in His mercy, quicken your pace that you may escape soon, lest the hour of mercy cease and the Day

of Judgment come! Surely these are reasons enough for wanting to pass in at the strait gate! Observe still further what our Lord tells us.

II. THERE IS A CROWD OF PEOPLE WHO WILL SEEK TO ENTER AND WILL NOT BE ABLE.

Who are these? If you look closely at the crowd who seek to pass, I think you will see a considerable difference between seeking and striving. You are not merely advised to seek—you are urgently bid to strive. Striving is a more vehement exercise than seeking. Are you among those who coolly seek admission because, forsooth, they suppose it is the proper thing? Many there are who come up to the gate of mercy and seek to enter, not striving, not particularly anxious, certainly far enough from being agitated. And when they look at the gate, they object to the lintel because it is too low, nor will they deign to stoop. There is no believing in Jesus with a proud heart! He that trusts Christ must feel himself to be guilty, and acknowledge it. He never will savingly believe till he has been thoroughly convinced of sin. But many say, "I will never stoop to that. Unless I have something to do in the work, and share some of the merit, I cannot enter." No, sirs, some of you are quite unable to believe in Christ because you believe in yourselves! As long as a man thinks himself a fine fellow, how can he think well of Jesus? You eclipse the sun! You hold up your own little hands before the sunlight—how can you expect to see? You are too good to go to heaven, or, at least, too good in your own apprehension. Oh, man, I pray God will prick that bubble, that blown-up bladder, and let out the gas so that you may discern what you really are, for you are nothing, after all, but a poor worm, contemptible, notwithstanding your conceit and pride, in spite of your poverty, an arrogant worm, that dares to lift up its head when it has nothing to glory in! Oh, bow yourself in lowly self-abhorrence, otherwise you may seek to enter, but shall not be able!

Some are unable to enter because the pride of life will not let them. They come to this gate in their carriage and pair, and expect to drive in, but they cannot get admission. There is no different way of salvation for a peer of the realm than for a pauper in the workhouse! The greatest prince that ever lived must trust Jesus just as the poorest peasant does. I recollect a minister once telling me that he attended the bedside of a very proud woman, of considerable wealth, and she said to him, "Do you think, sir, that when I am in heaven, such a person as Betty—my maid—will be in the same place as I am? I never could endure her company here. She is a good servant in her way, but I am sure I could not put up with her in heaven." "No, Madam," he said, "I do not suppose you will ever be where Betty will be." He knew Betty to be one of the humblest

and most consistent of Christian women anywhere—and he might have told her proud mistress that in the sight of God, meekness is preferable to majesty. The Lord Jesus, in the day of His coming, will wipe out all such distinctions as may very properly exist on earth, though they cannot be recognized beyond the skies. Oh, rich man, glory not in your richest! All your wealth, if you could take it with you, would not buy a single paving stone in the streets of heaven! Do not trust in this poor stuff! Oh, lay it aside as a crown of glorying, and pass humbly through the gate with Lazarus!

Some are unable to enter because they carry contraband goods with them. When you land in France, there stands the gendarme who wants to see what you are carrying in that basket. If you attempt to push by, you will soon find yourself in custody. He must know what is there—contraband cannot be taken in. So at the gate of mercy which is Christ, no man can be saved if he desires to keep his sins. He must give up every false way. "Oh," says the drunk, "I'd like to get to heaven, but I must smuggle in this bottle somehow." "I would like to be a Christian," says another. "I do not mind taking Dr. Watts' hymns with me, but I should like, sometimes, to sing a Bacchanalian song, or a light serenade." "Well," cries another, "I enjoy myself on Sunday with God's people, but you must not deny me the amusements of the world during the week—I cannot give them up." Well then you cannot enter, for Jesus Christ never saves us in our sins—He saves us from our sins. "Doctor," says the fool, "make me well, but I'd like to keep my fever." "No," says the doctor, "how can you be well while you keep the fever?" How can a man be saved from his sins while he clings to his sins? What is salvation but to be delivered from sin? Sin lovers may seek to be saved, but they shall not be able—while they hug their sins—they cannot have Christ! Some of you are in this grievous predicament. You have been attending this house of prayer a good long time. I do not know what hinders you, but this I do know, there is a worm somewhere eating out the heart of that fair looking apple. Some private sin that you pamper is destroying your souls! Oh, that you had grace to give it up and to come in by the strait gate, trusting in Jesus Christ!

Not a few are unable to enter in because they want to postpone the matter until tomorrow. Today, at any rate, you are engaged with other plans and projects. "A little longer let me revel in some of the sensual enjoyments of life, and afterwards I will come in." Procrastinators are among the most hopeless of people! He that has "tomorrow" quivering on his lips is never likely to have grace reigning in his heart.

Others, and these are in the worst plight of all, think that they are in and that they have entered. They mistake the outside of the gate for the inside! A strange mistake to fall into, but many do thus delude themselves. They rub their backs against the posts and then they tell us they are as near heaven as anybody else. They have never passed the threshold—they have never found shelter in Christ—albeit they may have felt wonderfully excited at a revival meeting, and sung as loudly and lustily as any of the congregation—

"I do believe, I will believe."

There is a considerable show of reformation about them. Although they have not got a new garment, they have mended up the old one. They are not new creatures, but still they are better behaved creatures than they were before! And they are, "all right." Be not deceived, my dear friends! Beware of mistaking a work of nature for the operation of God's grace. Do not be taken in by the devil's counterfeits. They are well made—they look genuine—when they are brand new they shine and glitter like fine gold, but they will not stand the test! Every one of them will have a nail driven through them one day—they will never pass current with God. If you have a religion, let it be real and true, not feigned and hypocritical! Of all cheats, the man who cheats himself is certainly the least wise and, I think he is the least honest. Do not play the knave with your own soul! Suspect yourself too much rather than too little. Better journey to heaven in terror of Hell than dream of the happy land while drifting in the other direction. "Ah, that deceit should steal such gentle shapes!" Be on your guard, every one of you. Let not anyone deceive himself!

Thus it is that a crowd—I had almost said a countless crowd—of people nowadays seek to enter in, but for manifold reasons they are not able to do so. And yet there is a more appalling aspect to the same fact. "Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." The dying are not able. Panic-stricken, the dying man sends for the minister whom he never went to hear when his health was good and hours hung heavy in his hands. The charm of Sundays lay in their dissipation—an excursion up the river, or a cheap trip to Brighton and back—anything, everything, sooner than hear the gospel! He never read his Bible. He never prayed. Now the doctor shakes his head and the nurse suggests that they "fetch a clergyman." Poor soul! She means right, but what do you think he can do? What can we ministers do for you? What can any man do for his fellow creature? "None of us can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." He begins to seek, when, alas, he cannot think, poor fellow, for he is in articulo mortis, with the

throes of his last struggle! His head swims, pains grow at his vitals, a glassy film is over his eyes, rambling words fall from his lips. Could he think, he has got something else to think about than the dread future that awaits him! Look at his weeping wife. See those dear children, brought in to get a last kiss from their father? Were his mind more vigorous, it were not likely to be taken up with spiritual thoughts—there is too much in the solemn farewell to occupy the moments left in preparation for the future. "Pray for me, sir," he says, with fainting, failing breath. Yes, he is seeking to enter in! In 99 cases out of a 100 I fear the answer is, he shall not be able. Little hope have I for deathbed repentances. Never trust to them, I beseech you!

Such a vestibule as a deathbed you may never have. To die in the street may be your lot. Should you have a deathbed, you will have something else to think about besides religion. Oh, how often have I heard Christian men say, when they have been dying, "Ah, sir, if I had a God to seek now, what a misery it would be! What a blessing it is that, with all the cares that now come upon me, I have a sure and certain hope in Christ, for I found Him years ago." Oh, dear hearers, do not be among those who postpone and procrastinate, till, in a dying hour, after a fashion, you seek to enter and find you shall not be able!

Some years ago I was awakened about three o'clock in the morning by a sharp ring of the doorbell. I was urged without delay to visit a house not very far off London Bridge. I went and up two flights of stairs I was shown into a room, the occupants of which were a nurse and a dying man. There was nobody else. "Oh, sir," she said, "Mr. So-and-So, about half an hour ago, begged me to send for you." "What does he want?" I asked. "He is dying, sir," she replied. I said, "I see that. What sort of a man was he?" "He came home last night, sir, from Brighton. He had been out all day. I looked for a Bible, sir, but there is not one in the house. I hope you have got one with you." "Oh," I said, "a Bible would be of no use to him, now! If he could understand me, I could tell him the way of salvation in the very words of Holy Scripture." I spoke to him, but he gave me no answer. I spoke again—still there was no reply. All sense had fled. I stood a few minutes gazing at his face, till I perceived he was dead—his soul had departed. That man in his lifetime had been known to jeer at me. In strong language he had often denounced me as a hypocrite. Yet he was no sooner smitten with the darts of death than he sought my presence and my counsel, feeling in his heart, no doubt, that I was a servant of God, though he did not care to acknowledge it with his lips. There I stood, unable to help him. Promptly as I had responded to his call, what could I do but look at his corpse and go home again? He

had, when too late, sighed for the ministry of reconciliation, sought to enter in, but he was not able. There was no space left him, then, for repentance—he had wasted the opportunity. Therefore, I pray and beseech you, my dear hearers, by the near approach of death—it may be much nearer than you think—give earnest heed to these things! I look round in this building and note the pews and sittings from which hearers, whose faces were once familiar to us have gone—some to glory, some I know not where. God knows. Oh, let not the next removal, if it is yours, vacate the seat of a scoffer, or of a neglecter, or of one who, having been touched in his conscience, silenced the secret monitor and would not turn! As the Lord lives, you must turn or burn! You must either repent or be ruined forever! May God give you wisdom to choose the better part!

It appears from Scripture that even after death there will be some who will seek to enter and shall not be able. I do not attempt to explain what I cannot understand, but I find the Master represents those on the left hand asking a question, "When saw we You hungry, and fed You not?" As if they had some glimmering hope that the sentence upon them might be reversed. And I read in another place of those who will come and knock at the door, and say, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But the Master of the house, having already risen up and shut the door, will answer, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." Is there, then, such a thing as prayer in hell? When the soul has passed out of the body without hope, will it seek for hope hereafter? Perhaps so; did not the rich man pray to Abraham to send Lazarus? It is but natural to expect that, as they doubted God's promises on earth, they may doubt God's threats in hell, and may hope, perhaps, that there will be a way of escape. They will seek, they will seek, but they shall not be able, not able to enter heaven! They said they were not able on earth—they shall find they are not able in hell, either! *Non possumus* is the sinner's cry. "We are not able to leave our sins! We are not able to believe! We are not able to be serious! We are not able to be prayerful!" And then, how it will be thrown back into their teeth! Not able to enter heaven, not able to escape from torment, not able to live, not able to die—not able because the gate of heaven admits no sinner who has not been washed in the Redeemer's blood! Back with you, sir! You would not come to the fountain, you would not wash! Back with you! You are not able! Not able because heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people, and you never thought of preparation! Away with you, sir! How can you enter when you are not prepared? Heaven is a place for which a fitness is needed. Men cannot enjoy that which would be contrary to their natures. Away with you, sirs! You could not enjoy

heaven if you were admitted, for you are not changed in heart! Away with you!

What? Do you linger? Do you cry? Do you pray? Do you weep? Do you entreat? Away with you! No, the angels shall sweep you away, for is it not written—You yourselves shall be thrust out—unceremoniously driven and scourged away from the gate of glory because you would not come to the gate of grace? These are terrible things to utter. I well might shrink from speaking thus, were it not that fidelity to your souls makes such demands that I must ring the warning. If you die without faith in Christ, behold there is a gulf fixed between you and Heaven. I do not know what that means, but I know what idea it gives to me, and should give to you. Between heaven and hell there is no traffic! None ever passed from hell to heaven—

"There are no acts of pardon passed
In the cold grave to which we hasten!
But darkness, death, and long despair
Reign in eternal silence there!"

They would gladly pass the gulf—were it fire, they could be glad to pass it! Were it full of torments, many and manifold as a Spanish Inquisition could invent—they would be glad to bear them—could they but hope to cross the gulf. But no, the voice is heard—an angel's voice—"He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; he that is unjust, let him be unjust still." The wax has cooled—you cannot alter the impression. The die is cast—you cannot remold it. The tree has fallen—there it lies.

I wish I could speak now in words that would burn their way right into your inmost hearts. Alas, I cannot. I must, however, just repeat the text again, and leave it with you. "Many shall seek in that dread day to enter, but shall not be able." Oh, enter then, enter! Enter now, while yet the gate stands wide open and mercy bids you come! Make haste to enter while yet the avenging angel lingers, and the angel of mercy stands with outstretched arms and cries, "Whoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." May God, the ever-blessed Spirit, without whom no warning can be effectual, and no invitation can be attractive, sweetly compel you to trust Christ tonight! Here is the gospel in a few words—Jesus suffered the wrath and torment we justly merited. He doubtless bore the penalty of your transgressions if you penitently believe in His Sacrifice. When you trust in Him for pardon, it is proof your sins were laid on Him for judgment! You are, therefore, a forgiven man! A pardoned woman! You are saved—saved forever! If you have a simple, child-like trust, you may go home singing for joy of heart, knowing that you have already entered the strait gate! And grace on earth and glory in heaven

lie before you! May God bless you richly, and may you adore Him gratefully, for His dear name's sake. Amen.

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THE DRAWINGS OF LOVE
NO. 3561

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 1917,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The Lord has appeared of old unto me, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Jeremiah 31:3.

FROM the context it is clear that this passage primarily refers to God's ancient people, the natural descendants of Abraham. He chose them from of old and separated them from the nations of the world. Their election fills a large chapter in history and it shines with resplendent luster in prophecy. There is an interval during which they have experienced strange vicissitudes, been visited with heavy chastisements and acquired an evil reputation for the perverseness of their mind and the obstinacy of their heart. Yet a future glory awaits them when they shall turn unto the Lord their God, again, be restored to their land and acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the King of the Jews, their own anointed King. Without abating, however, a jot or tittle from the literal significance of these words as they were addressed by the Hebrew prophet to the Hebrew race, we may accept them as an oracle of God referring to the entire church of His redeemed family and pertaining to every distinct member of that sacred community. Every Christian, therefore, whose faith can grasp the testimony, may appropriate it to himself. As many a believer has heard, so every believer may hear the voice of the Holy Spirit sounding in his ears these words, "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn you."

There are two things of which we propose to speak briefly tonight—the unspeakable blessing—"I have loved you with an everlasting love." And the unmistakable evidence—"therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn you."

How exceedingly great and precious this assurance! How priceless this blessing to be embraced with the love, the everlasting love of God! Our God is a God of infinite benevolence. Towards all His creatures He shows His goodwill. His tender mercies are over all His works. He wishes well to all mankind. With what force and with what feeling he asserts it! "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" (Ezekiel 33:11). And whoever of the whole human race, penitent for past sin, will turn to Jesus, the Savior of sinners, he shall find in Him pardon for the past and grace for the future! This general truth of God, which we have always

steadfastly maintained, which we never saw any reason to doubt and which we have proclaimed as widely as our ministry could reach, is not at all inconsistent with the fact that God has a chosen people among the children of men who were beloved of Him, foreknown to Him and ordained by Him to inherit all spiritual blessings before the foundation of the world! As an elect people, they are the special objects of His love. On their behalf the covenant of grace was made. For them the blood of Christ was shed on Calvary. In them the Spirit of God works effectually to their salvation. Of them and to them it is that such words as these are spoken, "I have loved you with an everlasting love"—a love far superior to mere benevolence—towering above it as the mountain above the sea! A kinder love, deeper, far sweeter than that bounty of providence which gilds the earth with sunshine, or scatters the drops of morning dew—a love that reveals its preciousness in the drops of blood distilled from the Savior's heart and manifests its personal, immutable favor to souls beloved in the gift of the Holy Spirit which is the seal of their redemption and the sign of their adoption. So the Spirit, Himself, bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God! Now think for a little while of—

I. THIS INESTIMABLE BLESSING.

Let us consider the text word by word. "I have loved you," Who is the speaker? "I," the great "I am," Jehovah the Lord! There is but one God, and that God fills all things. "By Him all things were made, and through Him all things consist." He is not far away, to be spoken of as though He were at an infinite distance from us, though heaven is His throne—for He is here with us. We live in Him, move in Him and have our being in Him. Imagination's utmost stretch fails to grasp any true conception of what God is. The strong wing of reason, though it were stronger than that of the far-famed albatross, would utterly fail if it should attempt to find out God. Incomprehensible are you, O Jehovah, Your Being is too great for mortal mind to compass! Yet this we understand—Your voice has reached us—from the excellent glory it has broken in tones distinctly on our ears—"Yes, I have loved you." Believer in Christ, have you heard it? The love of any creature is precious. We prize the love of the beggar in the street. We are flattered by it. We cannot estimate it by silver or gold. Most men court the acquaintance or esteem the friendship of those among their fellow creatures who are in anyway distinguished for rank, for learning, or for wealth. There is a charm in living in the esteem of those who themselves are estimable, but no passion of our nature will supply me with an adequate comparison when I ask what must it be to be loved with the love of God! To be loved by Him whose dignity is beyond degree, whose power to bless is infinite, whose faithfulness never varies, whose immutability stands fast like great mountains—to be loved by Him who dies not, and who will be with us when we die, to be caressed by Him who changes not in all our cares, to be shielded by His love when we stand at the judgment seat and pass the last dread ordeal that responsible creatures have to undergo! Oh, to be loved of God! Had you

the hatred of all mankind, this honey would turn their gall into sweetness! It were enough to make you start up from the dungeon of wretchedness, from the chamber of poverty—yes, or from the bed of death! How like an angel you might feel—and know that such you are—a prince of the blood imperial! If this is true of you, my friend, in unspeakable joy you may emulate the bliss of blest spirits who see Jehovah and adore Him before His Throne!

Who is loved? "I have loved you." Drink that in if you can, Christian! Come to that wellhead—here is joy for you, indeed! Repeat the words to yourself with fitting emphasis, "Yes, I have loved you." Is it not amazing that the Mighty God should love any of the race of Adam—so insignificant, so ephemeral, so soon to pass away? Did an angel love an ant creeping on an anthill, it were strange, though the disparity is comparatively trivial between these two—but for the eternal God to love a finite man is a marvel of marvels! And yet had He loved all men everywhere, save and except myself, it had not so amazed me as when I grasp the truth in relation to myself that He has loved me! Let me hear His voice saying, "Yes, I have loved you," and forthwith I sit down abashed with humility and overwhelmed with gratitude, to exclaim with David, "What am I, and what is my father's house, that You have brought me here? Why have You loved me?" Surely there was nothing in my natural constitution, nothing in my circumstances, nothing in my transient career that could merit Your esteem or regard, O my God! Why, then, have You spoken thus unto Your servant, saying, "I have loved you"?

Oh, how well I could imagine His having rather said to one and another of us, "I have despised you!" You were, perhaps, once a drunk, yet He loved you! A swearer, yet He loved you! You had a furious temper, yet He loved you! And you have, even now, infirmities and imperfections that make you sometimes loathe yourself and lie down in shame, weary of life, chafed with the conflict in which you have to fight with such besetting sins day by day—evil thoughts and evil desires so degrading to your nature, so disgusting to yourself, so dishonoring to your God. Still, He says, "Yes, I have loved you." Come, brothers and sisters, hear the Word of God and heed it! Do not fritter away the sweetness of the text with annoying questions! Here it is. In large and legible letters it is written. Come to this wellhead and drink! Take your fill and slake your thirst with this divine love. If you believe in Jesus, what though you are poor, obscure, illiterate and compassed with infirmities which make you despise yourself, yet He who cannot lie says, "I have loved you." These words have been said to a Magdalene—they have been spoken to one possessed with seven devils—they were whispered in the heart of the dying thief! Within the tenfold darkness of despair, itself, they have sounded their note of cheer. Blessed be the name of the Lord, you and I can hear the voice of His Spirit, as He bears witness with our spirit, "Yes,

I have loved you." What a disparity by nature, what a conjunction by grace between these two, the, "I," and the, "you"—the infinite "I" and the insignificant "you"—the first person so grand, the second person so paltry!

Whenever I attempt to speak about God's love, I feel that I would rather hold my tongue, sit down to ponder, and ask believers to be kind enough to join me in meditation rather than wait upon my feeble expressions; if the love of God utterly surpasses human knowledge, how much more a mortal's speech? What is it He bestows? That God should be merciful to us is a theme for praise. That He should pity us is a cause for gratitude. But that He should love us is a subject for constant wonder, as well as praise and gratitude! Love us? Why, the beggars in the street may excite our pity, and towards the criminals in our jails we may be moved with compassion—but we feel we could not love many whom we would cheerfully help. Yet God loves those whom He has saved from their sins and delivered from the wrath to come! Between that great heart in Heaven and this poor throbbing, aching heart on earth there is love established—love of the dearest, truest, sweetest and most faithful kind! In fact, the love of woman, the mother's love, the love of the spouse—these are but the water—but the love of God is the wine! These are but the things of the earth, but the love of God is the celestial! The mother's love mirrors the love of God, as the dewdrop mirrors the sun, but as the dewdrop compasses not that mighty orb, so no love that beats in a human bosom can ever compass, as no words can express the height, length and breadth of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

"Yes, I have loved you." Oh, come near then, Christian! Your Father, He that chastened you yesterday, loves you! He whom you forget so often and whom you have offended so constantly, yet loves you! You know what it is to love. Translate the love you bear to your dearest friend and look at it and say, "God loves me better than this." Do you think there are some you could die for cheerfully, whose pain you would freely take if you could ease them of it for a while, upon whose weary bed you would cheerfully lie down if a night of suffering could be spared him? Your Father loves you better than that and Jesus proves it to you! He took your sins, your sorrows, your death, your grave, that you might be pardoned, accepted and received into divine favor—and so might live and be blessed forevermore!

Passing on with our meditation, let us observe that there is incomparable strength, as well as inexhaustible sweetness in this assurance, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." That word, "everlasting," is the very marrow of the Gospel. Take it away, and you have robbed the sacred oracle of its most divine part! The love of God is "everlasting." The word bears three ideas within it. It has never had a beginning. God never began to love His people. Before Adam fell; before man was made, or the mountains were brought forth; before the blue heavens were stretched abroad, there were thoughts of love in His heart

towards us! He began to create, He began actually to redeem—but He never began to love. It is eternal or "everlasting" love which glows in the bosom of God towards every one of His chosen people! Some of our hearers, strange to say, take no delight in this doctrine. But if you know that everlasting love is yours, you will rejoice to hear it proclaimed again and again! You will welcome the joyful sound. Ah, God's love is no mushroom growth. It sprung not up yesterday, nor will it perish tomorrow but, like the eternal hills, it stands fast. You were loved of your God before He had fashioned Adam's clay, or ever this round world was rolled from between His palm to spin in its mighty orb! Long before the stars began to shine, before time was, when God dwelt in eternity all alone, He loved you, then, with an everlasting love!

The second idea is that He loves His people without cessation. It would not be everlasting if it came now and then to a halt—if it were like the Australian rivers which flow on, become dry and flow on again. The love of God is not so. It swells and flows on like some mighty river of Europe or America, ever expanding, mighty, joyous river returning again into the eternal ocean from where it came. It never pauses. Christian, your God's love to you is always the same. He cannot love you more! He will not love you less! Never, when afflictions multiply, when terrors frighten you or when your distresses abound, does God's love falter or flag. Let the rod fall ever so heavily upon you, the hand that moves, like the heart that prompts the stroke, is full of love! Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace. Whether He brings you down into the depths of misery, or lifts you up into the seventh heaven of delight, His faithful love never varies or fluctuates—it is everlasting in its continuity.

And, being everlasting, the third thought is, it never ends. You will grow gray soon, but the love of God shall still have its locks bushy and black as a raven with the verdure of youth! You will die soon, but the love of God will not expire. Your spirit will mount and traverse unknown tracts but that love shall encompass you there! And at the bar of judgment, amidst the splendors of the resurrection morning in the millennial glory, and in the eternity that shall follow, the love of God shall be your unfailing portion! Never shall that love desert you. A destiny how splendid! For your soul an heritage, how boundless! Stand tonight on your Pisgah and lift up your eyes to the north, and the south, to the east and the west, for the infinite prospective that lies before you is all your own inheritance! God began not to love you, nor will He ever cease to love you! You are His and you shall be His when worlds shall pass away and time shall cease to be! There is infinitely more solace and satisfaction here than I can bring out. I must leave it with you and commend it to your meditation. I am sure there is no more delightful manna for the pilgrims in the wilderness to feed upon than this doctrine applied to the heart! The love of God towards us personally in Jesus

Christ is an everlasting love. Now we come to the second point, which is—

II. THE UNMISTAKABLE MANIFESTATION, the manifestation by which this love is made known. Good people often get puzzled with the doctrine of election. In their simplicity they sometimes ask, "How can we know whether we are the Lord's chosen, or ascertain if our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life?" You cannot scan that mystic roll, or pry between those folded leaves. Had you an angel's wing and a seraph's eye, you could not read what God has written in His book! The Lord knows them that are His. No man shall know by any revelation save that which the Holy Spirit gives according to my text. There is a way of knowing and it is this—"Therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Were you ever drawn? Have you been drawn with loving-kindness? If so, then there is evidence that the Lord loved you with an everlasting love! Be ready, therefore, to judge yourselves. You are challenged with this pointed question—were you ever divinely drawn? Say now, beloved, have you experienced this sacred attraction that made you willing in the day of His power? Were you ever *d*rawn from sin to holiness? You loved sin once—in it you found much pleasure. There were some forms and fashions of vice and folly which were very dear to your heart. Have your tastes been changed and your track been turned by the sovereign charm of this divine loving-kindness? Can you say, "The things I once loved, I now hate. And what gave me pleasure now causes me a pang"? Is it so? I do not ask you whether you are perfect and upright. Alas, who of us could answer this question otherwise than with blushes of shame? But I do ask if you hate sin in every shape and desire holiness in every form? Would you be perfect if you could be? If you could live as you like, how would you like to live? Is your answer, "I would live as though it were possible for me to serve God day and night in His temple, without a wandering thought or a rebellious wish"? Ah, then, if you have been thus drawn from sin to holiness by the way of the cross, no doubt He loved you with an everlasting love and you need not discredit it! You may be as sure of it as if an angel should come and drop a letter into your hands on which those words would be inscribed! Yes, still surer, for the angel might have missed his way, but God's Word cannot err! If you are thus drawn, He has loved you with an everlasting love!

Listen again. Have you ever been drawn from self to Jesus? There was a time when you thought yourself as good as other men. Had the bottom of your heart been searched, there would have been found written there, "I do not see that I am so great an offender as the most of my neighbors. I am respectable, upright, and moral. I should hope it would speed well with me at the last, for if I am not, now, all that I should be, I shall try to be good and by earnest endeavors, joined with fervent prayers and repentance, I hope to fit myself for heaven." Oh, that you may be drawn away from all such empty conceit and led to rest your hope solely on that blessed Man who sits at the right hand of God, crowned with glory,

though He was once fastened to the cross, despised and rejected of men and made to suffer as a scapegoat for our sins! This, beloved, would be a sure sign that you had renounced yourself and closed in with Christ. You must have been loved with an everlasting love. It is as impossible for any of the elect of God to come to Christ and lay hold on Him without divine drawing, as it would be for devils to feel tenderness of heart and repentance towards God! If you can say from your heart—

"Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Your cross I cling!"

Then His drawing may suffice as the proving that He loved you with an everlasting love!

Have you ever been drawn from sight to faith, from consulting your creature faculties to confidence in God? You used to depend only on what you called your common sense. You walked by the judgment of your own mind. Do you now trust in Him who truly is, though He is invisible—who speaks to you, though His voice is inaudible? Have you a sense, day by day, of the presence of one supreme whom you cannot hear nor see? Does the unseen presence of God affect you in your actions? Do motives drawn from the next world influence you? Do you, in the day of trouble, lean upon an arm of flesh, or cry and pray, and make supplication to the Almighty? Have you learned to walk in dependence upon the living God, even if His providence seems to fail you and gives a lie to His promises? Know, then, that a life of faith is a special gift of God—it is the fruit of divine protection so you are enabled to walk with God—and He deigns to befriend you so you may humbly but safely conclude that your name stands inscribed in the records of the chosen! To be drawn into a life of faith is a blessed evidence of Christ's love.

Are you, moreover, day by day being drawn from earth to heaven? Do you feel as if there were a magnet up there drawing your heart so that when you are at work in your business, in your family with all its cares, you cannot help darting a prayer up to the Most High? Do you ever feel this onward impulse of something you do not understand, which impels you to have fellowship with God beyond the skies? Oh, if this is so, rest assured that it is Christ that draws you! There is a link between you and heaven—and Christ is drawing that link, and lifting your soul forward towards Himself. I love that sweet hymn and I hope you love the sentiment of it—

"My heart is with Him on the throne.
And ill can brook delay!
Each moment listening for the voice,
'Make haste and come away!'"

If your heart is here below, then your treasure is here. But if your heart is up there—if your brightest hopes, your fondest wishes are in the heavenly places—your treasure is manifestly there and the title-deeds of that treasure will be found in the eternal purpose of God whereby He ordained you unto Himself that you might show forth His praise! Thus

have I tried to show you that those who are thus drawn may be assured that they were loved with an everlasting love. And now will you further observe that it is with loving-kindness they are drawn?

Some people are frightened into religion. Beware of any religion that depends upon exciting your terror! Some people's religion consists entirely of doing what they think they must do, though they do not like it. They are afraid of punishment, or they are anxious for a reward. Such is not the religion of Jesus Christ! It is said that the soldiers of Persia were driven into battle and that the sound of the whips of the generals could be heard even while the battle was raging— lashing on the unwilling ranks to fulfill their part in the fray! Not so went the Greeks to battle. They rushed like lions amidst a flock of sheep to tear their prey. They fought for their country, for their temples, for their lives, for all that they held dear—and right cheerily from such an impulse within did they engage in the war. The difference between the Greeks and the Persians is just the difference I want to describe among the professed followers of our Lord. The genuine Christian serves God because he loves Him, not that he fears hell, for he knows that he has been delivered from condemnation, being washed in Jesus' blood! He serves God not that he expects to earn heaven—he scorns the idea. Heaven is not to be merited by our poor paltry works. And besides, heaven is his inheritance since Christ has given it to him, having made his title sure! He serves God because he loves Him. He is drawn by a sense of the love of God towards him to love God in return. Who is the best servant? Not surely the man who only does what he is paid to do—who serves you for his wage, and who would betray your interest to benefit himself! Rather is he the true servant who would cling to you in all your fortunes or misfortunes, through good or through evil report.

Some of the old-fashioned servants were so attached to their masters that they were reckoned on and regarded as members of the family. Those are the true servants of Christ who love Him and render Him their services, not menially for the pay they count upon, but loyally because their hearts are faithful and true to Him! They love Him so that they could not turn aside from Him, or seek another Lord. Say now, are you thus drawn with loving-kindness? What a lovely word this "loving-kindness," is! "Kindness," seems to be like some huge opal or some sparkling diamond, a Koh-I-Noor, and love seems to be like fine gold to encircle it! I think I could stand and look at that word, "loving-kindness," till with sacred enchantment I burst into a song! There is such a charming sweetness and yet such an immutable stability in the grace of God which it reveals that our rapture is kindled as often as we review it! Of that loving-kindness I have tasted here below and of that loving-kindness I hope to sing in yonder skies in worthier notes than this weak voice can now compass! The loving-kindness of the Lord, as it beams from His eyes, as it is communicated by His helping hands, as it is expressed by His gentle, tender voice, quickens the soul in the path of

duty and restrains it from falling into sin! How can I do this great wickedness, how can I sin against so almighty a friend whose kindness to me is so gratuitous, so constant, and so exceedingly generous?—

"Now for the love I bear His name,
What was my gain, I count my loss!
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to His cross.
Yes, and I must and will esteem
All things but loss for Jesus' sake!
Oh, may my soul be found in Him
And of His righteousness partake!"

Thus clearly and thus surely may you judge for yourselves whether you are God's chosen or not. Are you drawn and how are you drawn? Is it with loving-kindness? These are the two points that melt and fuse in experience. As before that God whose eyes of fire search you through and through, I do conjure you to judge and righteously judge right now as to your own condition! Be not satisfied to rest peacefully until you can say, "Thanks and praise to God's eternal love, I am drawn by grace! By divine grace I am constrained. From now on I freely yield myself up to Christ to be His servant, His disciple, His friend, His brother, forever and forever. The Lord has appeared unto me, saying, 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love.'"

Do I hear a sigh come up from some in this assembly? A sigh which, being interpreted, would say, "Alas, for me this sacred solace was never mine! I was never drawn. I feel no love, no such melting favors as your description of loving-kindness ever dawned on me. But, ah, I wish I were drawn, that I had a part among that blessed throng who shall forever see His face! Oh, that I could believe that I, though the meanest of them all, should find my name written in the Lamb's Book of Life!" Why friend, with you it would seem the drawing has begun! Surely God's loving-kindness has made your mouth water! I rejoice exceedingly over those who hunger after the Bread of Life, for they shall speedily be filled! Right well I know my Master will give it to them. If you desire Christ, depend upon it, Christ desires you! No sinner was ever beforehand with Christ. When you are willing to have Him, He is evidently willing to have you! You had not put out one hand towards Him if He had not already put two hands on you! Oh, if you will but trust the bleeding Lamb—believe that He can save you—and trust in Him to save you with unfeigned confidence, then you are already drawn! This is proof positive that God has loved you from before the world's beginning!

Oh, how I would that some might be drawn tonight! Some who have been great and grievous sinners. There are many such among the chosen vessels of mercy. God grant some of you young people may be drawn. And you who, though no longer young, are still without the blessing, I cannot bear the thought that you should tarry longer uncalled by sovereign grace. May the Holy Spirit attract you! May you feel in your

heart the wish to belong to Christ—the desire to be counted among them when He makes up His jewels. Turn that wish into a prayer! Bow your head, now, and pray with this petition. God will hear your secret sighs. He does not reject sincere prayers, however badly they may be worded. If you can get no further than a sigh, it has its value in His kind esteem. The tear that fell just now upon the floor of the pew was not lost, for an angel tracked and treasured it and carried it on high. God will accept you if you will accept Christ; if you trust Jesus now, 'tis done! You are saved! The moment a sinner believes and trusts in Christ, he is saved—saved forever! In that moment his iniquity is blotted out and he is accepted in the beloved. From that moment he might sing—

"'Tis done, the great transaction's done!
I am my Lord's and He is mine!
He drew me and I followed on,
Glad to obey the voice divine!"

The Lord appear to you, speak to you and bless you, saying to you, "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 7:13-23.

13, 14. *Enter you in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are which go in there because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there are that find it.* Be up and on your journey. Enter in at the gate at the head of the way and do not stand hesitating. If it is the right road, you will find the entrance somewhat difficult and exceedingly narrow, for it demands self-denial and calls for strictness of obedience and watchfulness of spirit. Nevertheless, "enter you in at the strait gate." Whatever its drawbacks of fewness of pilgrims, or straitness of entrance, yet choose it and use it! True, there is another road, broad and much frequented—but it leads to destruction. Men go to ruin along the turnpike road but the way to heaven is a bridle path. There may come other days when the many will crowd the narrow way, but at this time, to be a popular road, it must be broad—broad in doctrine, so-called, in morals and in spirituals. But those on the strait road shall go straight to glory—and those on the broad road are all abroad. All is well that ends well! We can afford to be straitened in the right way rather than enlarged in the wrong way because the first ends in an endless life, and the second hastens down to an everlasting death! Lord, deliver me from the temptation to be "broad," and keep me in the narrow way, though few find it!

15. *Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.* We have need of our judgments and we must try the spirits of those who profess to be sent of God. There are

men of great gifts who are "false prophets." These affect the look, language and spirit of God's people, while really they long to devour souls, even as wolves thirst for the blood of sheep. "Sheep's clothing" is all very fine, but we must look beneath it and spy out the wolves! A man is what he is inwardly. We had need beware. This precept is timely at this hour. We must be careful, not only about our way, but about our leaders! They come to us—they come as prophets—they come with every outward commendation but they are very Balaams and will surely curse those they pretend to bless!

16. *You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?* Their teaching, their living and their effect upon our minds will be a sure test to us. Every doctrine and doctrinaire may thus be tried. If we gather grapes from them, they are not thorns. If they produce nothing but thistledown, they are not fig trees. Some object to this practical method of test, but wise Christians will carry it with them as the ultimate touchstone. What is the effect of modern theology upon the spirituality, the prayerfulness, the holiness of the people? Has it any good, effect?

17, 18. *Even so, every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.* Every man produces according to his nature, he cannot do otherwise. Good tree, good fruit; corrupt tree, evil fruit. There is no possibility of the effect being higher and better than the cause. The truly good does not bring forth evil—it would be contrary to its nature. The radically bad never rises to produce good, though it may seem to do so. Therefore, the one and the other may be known by the special fruit of each. Our King is a great teacher of prudence. We are not to judge, but we are to know—and the rule for this knowledge is as simple as it is safe. Such knowledge of men may save us from great mischief which would come to us through associating with bad and deceitful persons.

19. *Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.* Here is the end to which evil things are tending. The ax and the fire await the ungodly, however fine they may look with the foliage of profession. Only let time enough be given and every man on earth who bears no good fruit will meet his doom! It is not merely the wicked; the bearer of poison berries that will be cut down but the neutral, also—the man who bears no fruit of positive virtue must also be cast into the fire!

20. *Therefore by their fruits you shall know them.* It is not ours to hew or to burn, but it is ours to know. This knowledge is to save us from coming under the shadow or influence of false teachers. Who wants to build his nest upon a tree which is soon to be cut down? Who would choose a barren tree for the center of his orchard? Lord, let me remember that I am to judge myself by this rule. Make me a true fruit-bearing tree.

21. *Not everyone that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of My Father who is in heaven.* No verbal homage will suffice! "Not everyone that says." We may believe in our Lord's deity and we may take great pains to affirm it over and over again with our, "Lord, Lord"—but unless we carry out the commands of the Father, we pay no true homage to the Son! We may acknowledge our obligations to Jesus and so call Him, "Lord, Lord"—but if we never practically carry out those obligations, what is the value of our admissions? Our King receives not into His kingdom those whose religion lies in words and ceremonies, but only those whose lives display the obedience of true discipleship!

22, 23. *Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name have cast out devils? And in Your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, you who work iniquity!* An orthodox creed will not save if it stands alone, neither will it be sure to do so if accompanied by official position and service. These people said, "Lord, Lord," and, in addition, pleaded their prophesying or preaching in His name. All the preaching in the world will not save the preacher if he does not practice what he preaches! Yes, and he may have been successful—successful to a very high degree—"and in Your name have cast out devils"—and yet, without personal holiness, he who casts out devils will be cast out himself! The success boasted of many have had about it surprising circumstances of varied interest—"and in Your name done many wonderful works"—and yet the man may be unknown to Christ! Three times over the person is described as doing all "in Your name," and yet the Lord, whose name he used so freely, so boldly, knew nothing of him and would not allow him to remain in His company! The Lord cannot endure the presence of those who call Him, "Lord, Lord," and then work iniquity! They professed to Him that they knew Him, but He will "profess unto them, I never knew you." How solemn is this reminder to me and to others! Nothing will prove us to be true Christians but a sincere doing of the Father's will! We may be known by all to have great spiritual power over devils and men—yet our Lord may not acknowledge us in that great day, but may drive us out as impostors whom He cannot tolerate in His Presence!

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PETER WALKING ON THE SEA
NO. 3562

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MAY 3, 1917.

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

"And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it is You, bid me come unto You on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying Lord, save me!" Matthew 14:28-31.

A FEW reflections will be sure to cross the mind of any thoughtful reader of this narrative.

I. THE MIXED CHARACTER OF THE BELIEVER'S EXPERIENCE is here very palpably suggested to us. Peter was undoubtedly a bold believer in Jesus Christ. He addresses his Master devoutly, calling Him, "Lord"—a name of reverence, the use of which evidences the change that had been worked in his character, and the obedient spirit it had produced. But the misgivings implied in that, "if"—"if it is You"—savors rather of unbelief! And yet we find this hesitancy immediately followed by an expression of such strong confidence that we marvel at the request he uttered, "Bid me come to You on the water." Then cheered by the Lord's prompt answer, "Come," we find him showing his courage by descending from the vessel, setting foot on the sea and actually walking on the water! Thus did he participate in the wonder which Christ worked and share in the miracle of subduing the elements. His valor, however, soon evaporates. For, "when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid." The faith that buoyed him up gave place to a fear that bowed him down. He who was walking on the liquid wave, one instant, is sinking beneath the surge the next! The gallant cry, "Bid me come to You on the water," is quickly exchanged for the grievous wail, "Lord, save me!" So great his pluck, so dire his panic! And is this a common experience? Are all God's people thus subject to changes—alternating between calm trust and cowardly fear? Can they be neither one thing or the other—neither altogether believing or totally unbelieving? We think it is even so. We will not say how much frailty of the creature is mixed up with fealty to Christ in the best of men, nor how far the grace of God may protect us from the guilt of double-dealing in the conduct of our lives. But we do mournfully confess that in our own experience, the good and the evil contend for the

mastery and, sometimes it seems but the turning of a hair which shall vanquish! Fully assured though, we are that the new life which has been implanted in us will ultimately gain the victory, but not less fully conscious are we that disasters and defeats are constantly occurring on our path to triumph.

Our trophies are never won without troubles. He that knows anything, it seems to me, of what it is to live by faith, will find throughout his earthly career a continual conflict. He may never fall so low as to doubt his interest in Christ, yet he may sometimes wet his couch with tears and wonder if God has forgotten to be gracious. He may be enabled to hold on his way for years without a slur on his character, yet will he often have to engage in such terrible struggles against inbred sin—and to endure such sore pressure from troubles without—that he is compelled to cry out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" One day you may be on Tabor's summit witnessing your Master's Transfiguration, and another day you may be in the Valley of Humiliation, groaning in spirit, diminished and brought low through oppression, affliction and sorrow! One day you may be as strong as a giant and all things seem possible to you—and another day you may be as weak as a baby and weep for the joys that are fled! You may one day "surname yourself by the name of Israel" and another day call yourself, "the worm Jacob," fearing lest you should be trodden down by the common ills of life and utterly crushed! Our way to Heaven is uphill and downhill. Our life is made of checkered materials—it is not all of one fabric. Sometimes full of hope, we bound forward with elastic step—soon the sun ceases to shine, the big raindrops fall, the vapors rise and we sit down with folded arms and fixed eyes, wearing a sad, leaden cast! As in our experience, so in our nature, good and evil meet, but cannot blend—they are at constant variance. I mention this well-known fact because it may serve to comfort some of the younger sort who but of late have begun to go on the pilgrimage. They fancied that since they were born-again, and enlisted in Christ's army, they would never afterward have to fight with sin within—though, perhaps, they might be tempted—their soul would never give any consent to it. They boasted when they put on the harness, as though they had taken it off. They sowed today and they expected to reap their harvest tomorrow! They had scarcely got loose from the shore, yet they expected to soon reach the port. When the vessel is a little buffeted and heaved to and fro by contrary winds, they cannot understand it! Beloved, it is so with all of us! Those saints of God who appear to you to be favored with perpetual sunshine could tell you quite another tale. Some whom God highly honors in public, He often deeply humbles in private. He has a way of taking His children behind the door

and making them see some of the abominations within them, while at the same time He is giving them to see the beauties of Christ and enabling them to feed on Him. Do not think that yours is an extreme case because your spiritual life is one of much contest with sin. So far from being extreme, I believe it is but a specimen of the way in which the Lord deals with all His beloved ones.

There I leave that first observation. Peter is at one moment confident, another instant he is dismayed. At one moment he is treading the waves like a miracle worker, and the next instant he is sinking like an ordinary being! And so it is with us—sometimes aloft, and soon crying out of the depths, "Lord, save me!"

And for our second reflection, we observe that—

II. FAITH LOVES VENTURESOME SERVICE.

Peter, when full of faith, said to his Master, "Lord, if it is You, bid me come to You upon the water." Faith seems to have a secret instinct revealing her military and royal character. In the old wars of Troy we read of one who, being told by a prophet that the war would not be to his honor, sought to escape from the Greek ranks and hid himself among the daughters of the king. But he was discovered by Ulysses, who sent a peddler, or one disguised as such, to sell various wares—and while the maidens at the gate came to buy the various trinkets in which they delighted, there was placed in the basket a trumpet, or a sword, and the young hero, disguised as he was, yet let out his taste and chose the warlike implement. It was his nature to do so—and he was discovered by the choice! Now, amidst ten thousand allurements, faith is quite certain to choose that which appertains to boldness and to venturesomeness. John is full of love, he stays in the vessel. But Peter abounds in faith and he must be doing some high action congruous to the nature of faith and, therefore, he says, "Lord, if it is You, bid me come unto You on the water." That is the kind of thing for faith to do. Anybody can walk on the land, but faith is a water-walker! She can do, and act, and work where others fail. Remember it is not said in Scripture that faith will pluck up mustards seeds, or that it will remove molehills. These little things are not the sphere for faith, but it is written, "You shall say unto this mountain, Be you moved from here; or this sycamore tree, be plucked up by the roots." Faith loves to deal in great things, in marvelous adventures, in projects beyond human power! We are not to come to God and ask Him to do for us what we can do for ourselves. There is no room for the exercise of faith where reason and human strength will suffice. Faith is a vessel expressly built for the deep seas. She is not a coaster, to keep close to the shore—she pushes out where she can neither see the shore nor fathom the depth—for she has a compass on board, and she

looks up to the stars which God has fixed for her guidance! She has, too, a blessed Pilot, so she feels herself secure and all at home in the wild waste of waters, with no human eyes to gaze upon her, and no human hands to help.

"If it is You," said Peter, "let me come to You on the water." If you have faith in God and that faith is in active exercise, I am persuaded you will feel an instinct within you prompting you to dare something more than others have ventured to attempt, eager to honor Jesus Christ more than anyone else would think possible, who had little faith or no faith at all! What a blessed instinct it is which impels some of our brothers, as it frequently has done, to leave their native country and go out to preach the gospel in regions beyond the sea! Not building upon another man's foundation, but, like the bold apostle, seeking to extend the bounds of Immanuel's kingdom. How blessed it is when some brother or sister finds it in their heart to consecrate more of their substance than is ordinary to the Lord's work, not grudging what they can spare, but glorying over what they can sacrifice! Yes, and blessed it is when faith kindles to furnace heat and stimulates one to undertake a work for which he, alone, would be incompetent. God preserve such a man! How I rejoice at every mention of our brother Muller at Bristol! What lessons of trust in God's promise and His Providence has he taught to Christians and Christian churches! How graciously has Christ made him to walk on the water! How securely has he sped his course these many years as safe on the flowing current of subscriptions as if he were proceeding on the solid bases of a rich endowment! How wonderfully his orphanage has been supported! He walks on waves in very truth! This sole dependence upon the eternal providence of a faithful God is indispensable to us. I trust we are not entire strangers to it in our measure and degree. It is no novelty to us to put our foot down on what we thought to be a cloud, and find that God had placed a rock there, to walk right on in the dark, and see the midnight turn to noonday—to rest on the invisible and prove it to be more substantial than the visible—to depend upon the naked promise of the covenant-keeping God and reap greater riches than all the treasures that could come from relying on an arm of flesh! Faith then, is a venturesome thing and if any of you have not yet been nerved with courage because you believed, I pray that your faith may grow till you feel compelled to attempt more than of your own unaided strength you can possibly do!

Brothers and sisters, undertake something for Christ. Is there a brother here who ought to preach, but is too timid? I hope his faith will overcome his diffidence. Is there a sister here who ought to take a class in the school, but she is shy and hesitant? I hope her faith in the Savior

will get fresh impetus from her love to souls. "Such trust have we through Christ to Godward." Oh, that you may all be urged by strong convictions to attempt something in His service! And may you be taught by the Holy Spirit to set about it wisely! And may you be enabled by that sufficiency which is of God to do it effectually! Though you may often have stumbled, in plain paths, you shall be able to walk on the water in safety when and where Jesus bids you! I say this advisedly for, venturesome as Peter's faith was, he would not make a move without first having the Master's permission. "If it is You, bid me." We must not fondly imagine that we can do whatever we choose, but we may fairly expect that whenever God allots us a work, He will give us adequate grace to accomplish it. Peter walking on the sea without divine permission would be a presumption to attempt and an impossibility to perform! But Peter, with Christ's assurance, might have walked across the Atlantic, itself, if his faith had not failed!

So it is with you. If your Lord has called you to a work, rely upon Him for the power to achieve it—He will not forsake you! But if it is merely your own whim or caprice which has thrust you into a position for which you are not qualified, you have no right to reckon upon the divine aid to speed your false steps! Blessed is he who goes to his Father and asks His counsel, for he shall always find that where God gives us guidance, He will give us grace!

But—

III. FAITH REALLY DOES WORK WONDERS.

This is our third observation: Peter came down from the vessel. I think I see him bounding over the bulwarks. How strange he must have felt when that water in which he had been so often swimming became as solid marble under his feet! How elated he must have felt—a man with his temperament would naturally feel—when he began to walk and found the water like a sea of glass beneath his tread! It was a marvelous thing to do. Others have made their way through the sea, but Peter walked over it. The laws of gravitation were suspended for his support! Picture the scene. What Jesus was doing, Peter was doing. Faith made Peter to be like his Lord. There were two walking, the one by His own infinite power, the other by the power imparted to him—the power of faith!

Remember that faith will make any of us like Christ. "He that believes on Me, the works that I do shall he do also," said the Master, "and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father." It does often seem impossible in certain conditions to act in a Christ-like spirit, but faith can make you walk the waves of the sea! Your Lord was patient in poverty—faith can make you walk that wave and be patient and contented, too! Christ was loving and gentle under the most fearful

and multiplied provocations—faith can give you that same gentleness of spirit and lowliness of mind—you can walk those billows, too! Our Lord, in the midst of prosperity, refused worldly honor. When they sought to make Him a king, He hid Himself from the temptation. And you in the high places of the earth, tempted by wealth, with flattery poured into your ears, may still walk, as Jesus did, safely through it all if you have but faith in God, faith in the blessed Spirit, faith in Him who is always with you, even to the end of the world! There is nothing Christ did, except the great atoning work, which His people shall not do in and through Him, by the exercise of their faith! What a blessing it would be if God's people really believed the power that lies in them by the energy of faith! So many of us give up, succumb, lie down as if we were weak—but we are not weak. When we are weak in ourselves, then are we strong! This is no empty fiction, but a certain fact—we are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Let not, therefore, the believer think that he can only do what another man can do. He is of a nobler race! God dwells in him! Oh, what a glorious thought that is—God dwelling in a man! That wonderful word, "enthusiasm"—so often turned to ridicule and used as a term of reproach—what does it mean but God in a man? Enthusiasm! When God is thoroughly in a man and the man knows it, then he is not cowed or put back by difficulties, or daunted by sneers! He is not so mindful of his feebleness as to excuse himself from effort, or to imagine that he can do nothing. In the confidence of that power which inspires him, he marches boldly on, fully assured that victory awaits him—and for that victory he rests not till he realizes it—it is given to his confidence! So does God requite and reward the man that puts his trust in Him. May we always have enough of faith to be doing wonders. Some poor souls have enough faith to carry them to Heaven. Others have just enough faith to maintain decent character. But he shall be honored of God who has such implicit, heroic and enduring faith that he can dare jeopardize, do exploits and bear sufferings because his Lord is with him! We must attempt some things which look like impossibilities, or we shall never keep up the esprit of the true soldiers of the Cross. We pass on to make a fourth remark.

IV. INTO THE SOUL OF THE MOST FAITHFUL AND CONFIDENT DISCIPLE, UNBELIEF GENERALLY FINDS SOME DOOR OR OTHER FOR ENTRANCE.

Peter had looked at the waves and his faith was just strong enough to believe that Jesus could make him walk on the sea, but he had never taken the winds into his calculation! Had he thought of the winds as well as the waves, and reposed upon Jesus for the whole, I have no doubt his faith would have held out and not have so fearfully given way. The first

two or three steps on the water had exhilarated him and made him feel what wonders he was doing—but there came a rough blast which threatened to overthrow him—and as he could scarcely stand against so rude a wind upon so slippery a floor he began to be afraid. Something occurred which he had not foreseen and in strange surprise, he yielded to blank unbelief! Thus it often comes to pass with us. We arrange our faith according to our estimate of the perils and perplexities that lie in our path. We even plan the events that will probably happens to us and we feel sure that we can trust God in all these circumstances—but a fresh contingency arises upon which we had never reckoned, a wind which we had not thought of—and forthwith our courage fails, we do not trust God for that! I wish we had a faith which was free from arithmetic and totally independent of weights and measures—a faith that trusted God for ten thousand things as readily as for one—that would rest upon God for a century as securely as for a day! I wish we had a faith that would just cast itself, sink or swim, into the sea—believing in God that whether the winds were blowing or not, whether the waves were raging or not—everything is easy to omnipotence, and nothing can compromise the faithfulness of the Most High. But, alas, my brothers and sisters, we are always being startled by some new prodigies! Perhaps we are too fond of calculating changes, predicting probabilities and forestalling the future. Hence comes our chagrin when we are frustrated or disappointed. If we walked on, leaving everything to His divine decree and watchful providence, confiding in our heavenly Father's wisdom and His love, we need never be amazed or bewildered—our faith would be equal to any rumor or riot that might arise!

Just as unbelief introduced into Peter's mind a terror of the wind, and upset him at once, so the devil has ways of finding some point or other upon which to overthrow our faith. I have sometimes been full of joy in the Lord and I have usually noticed that depression of spirits almost invariably follows—and that from some circumstance which at other times would not have caused me the slightest disturbance! Satan knows how to use any trivial thing to spoil the luster of our faith and the placidity of our joy. With what subtlety he will assail you! A difficulty you have been laboring under may have been removed by God's providence. You may be very grateful and ready to set up your stone of thankfulness, and to praise the name of the Lord. Soon a new difficulty will be suggested. While you are blessing God for all His mercy, all of a sudden some trouble like a squall occurs! It may not be worth mentioning, but it will assume such strange proportions that it covers up all your joys and leaves you a prey to unbelief! How watchful we ought to be against unbelief, for of all sins, this is one of the most heinous! Like Jeroboam, of

whom we read that he sinned and made Israel to sin, unbelief is itself a sin and becomes the parent of all sorts of sins. We sometimes talk to one another about our doubts and fears as if they were infirmities to be pitied rather than crimes to be loathed, but we seldom talk to each other about the delinquencies of our conduct, such as angry tempers, hasty words, harsh judgments, unbecoming levity, or lax conversation. No, we would be ashamed to confess transgressions that are far too common among people professing godliness. Why is it that we do not blush to acknowledge our doubts that mistrust God and our fears that stagger at His promise? Are they not quite as much sins against the commandment of the Lord and the duty of every faithful Christian as drunkenness, or dishonesty, or any offense against the moral law? To doubt the faithfulness of God is atrocious! Who can estimate the amount of virus there is in the sin of unbelief? It would stab at the very heart of God! It would pluck the crown from the head of Jehovah! Let us hate unbelief with all our hearts and watch against it. Remember that it can attack us from any quarter of the compass unless we keep perpetual guard. Those of us who have been boldest in the Lord's battle, and foremost in His service, may yet be overtaken with this sin, succumb to its debasing influence and be left in the rear, shorn of honor and covered with shame!

And now for a fifth reflection—

V. IF AT ANY TIME FAITH SEEMS TO BE OVERTURNED BY AN INVASION OF UNBELIEF, IT THEN SHOWS ITS TRUE CONQUERING CHARACTER.

Peter was soon made to doubt, but with what ease did he begin to pray! I like to think of the spontaneous character of Peter's prayer. He begins to sink and he prays in a minute! He no sooner finds himself going down, than he says, "Lord, save me!" This shows what a living thing his faith was. It might not always walk the water, but it could always pray, and that is the better thing of the two! Your faith may not always make you rejoice, but if your faith can always make you trust the precious blood, that is all you need! Your faith may not always take you to the top of the mountain, and bathe your forehead in the sunlight of God's countenance, but if your faith enables you to keep on the straight road that leads to eternal life, you may bless God for that! To walk on water is not an essential characteristic of faith, but to pray when you begin to sink is! To do great wonders for Christ is not indispensable to your soul's being saved, but to have the faculty of always turning the heart to Him in time of distress is one of the sure marks of divine grace in the soul. I am sure Peter did not intone his prayer on that occasion. I am quite certain that he did not believe in having to search for music to which to set that prayer. It just came up from his heart. And are not

these the very best prayers that well up from the soul, freely flowing forth from the lips because the heart compels the tongue to speak? The heart, knowing its own bitterness, reveals it unto the Most High. Beloved, are you prayerful in such a respect as that? I think it is a blessed plan to set apart time for prayer, and so to take your half-hour, or your hour, as you may be able, for secret devotion, but better than the set time for prayer is the spirit of prayer. While a regular habit of prayer is a great help to piety, the spirit of prayer promotes habitual, continual communion with God!

I once asked, down at Wotton-Under-Edge, where Mr. Rowland Hill's study was, and they told me that was a question which they could not answer. "Why, how is that? Did he never study his sermons? Oh, yes, he was always studying his sermons—it did not matter whether he was in the parlor or in the paddock, attending to his correspondence, or looking after the cows, going out into the village to buy goods, or walking in the garden amidst flowers and fruits—he was always studying his sermons, so that he was one of the readiest of preachers! That is one of the best habits that a man can cultivate. So they said it was with his prayers. He was not a man who shut himself up for prayer, but he seemed to be always praying wherever he went! He would be often heard saying true prayers when others fancied his mind must be full of other thoughts. The story that is related of him at Mr. George Clayton's chapel in York Street, you will, most of you remember, for I have repeated it several times. After he had been preaching, he lingered about the building so long that the pew-opener went to him and told him that it was time to close the place. The old gentleman was found tottering round the pews singing to himself—

"And when I shall die,
'Receive me,' I'll cry!
For Jesus has loved me, I cannot tell why.
But this thing I find,
We two are so joined,
That He won't be in glory and leave me behind."

This peculiar practice of conversing, as it were, with oneself—of repeating texts of Scripture or verses of hymns, the propensity to pray with the heart and lift up the thoughts continually to God—well, it seems to me an indication of spiritual-mindedness above any common level! "Know," says David, "that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for Himself." But how should the man thus set apart behave himself? The Psalmist will tell you, "Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still." Oh, for a mind always active, never stagnant, always tranquil! Oh, for the wings of a dove! Take a pigeon. Put it away in a cage—send it a distance in the country. Keep it there awhile. Then, on a certain day,

let it loose—you will soon know where its home is, for it mounts up, flies its circuit, takes its bearings, surveys its course, and then away it pursues its trip through the air till it reaches the dear old dove-cote! Does your soul make its way to the ark, and return to its rest with a like sacred instinct? All through the day you may be taken up with many cares. The shop or the warehouse, the nursery or the kitchen, may be your cage. There comes a moment when you are let loose and you get free. Where does your soul fly? Flies it off like a dove, to its resting place? When it see the crows on the wing, if anybody asked me what trips they were taking, I could not tell them. But if they would wait till evening I would quickly solve the riddle, for then they would be quite sure to be seeking their nests. Does your heart, in the time of trouble, fly away to God? Does your spirit in the hour of distress seek the Rock of Refuge and speed to the Great Deliverer? Then are you like Peter! You may not always walk on the waves, but you can always say, "Lord, save me!" Can you say that from your very soul, resting on the Savior's mighty arm? Then you have the essence of a faith which will lead you through growth in grace up to the perfection of glory!

VI. OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IS EQUALLY KIND, BOTH TO STRONG FAITH AND TO LITTLE FAITH.

Strong faith says, "Bid me come to You on the water." Now Christ sometimes refuses to answer prayer after its own kind. The prayer of anger, in which James and John entreated that fire might come down from heaven to destroy the Samaritans, He rejected. The prayer of ambition, when the two sons of Zebedee craved a place, one on His right hand and the other on the left, in His Kingdom, was denied. But the prayer of faith, though it looked bold and venturesome, our Lord received graciously and answered speedily! "Bid me come to You on the water." "Come," said Jesus. Is strong faith represented here by any of you? If you ask a great thing of God, you shall have it! If you have but faith in Jesus, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you, for the desire of the righteous shall be granted. "Delight yourself, also, in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." Have you a great plan of usefulness! Have you an intense anxiety for soul-winning! Have you a strong yearning for the evangelization of your district! Believe; fear not to tempt fortune, for all things are possible to him who believes! The hands of Christ are pledged to faith. He will honor the trust you repose in Him. If you will but repose in Him, He cannot, will not deny you. True faith is His work. If He has worked the prayer in you, He will surely answer it. Go forth, then, in this, your might of faith, and the Lord be with you!

But perceive you not how kind He also was to little faith? No sooner does Peter begin to sink and cry, "Save me," than there is manifest good

will and quick help in the Savior's movement. "Immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught him." Our Lord did not pause to parley. He did not upbraid him, or say, "Peter, you have dishonored Me by your unbelief." He did not accuse him harshly, rebuke him sternly, or punish him severely, leaving him to go down twice, and pulling him up the third time thus inflicting in him the pangs of death without its extreme penalty. Ah, no, the prompt help was ready for the pressing emergency. The sinking one was made to stand. After that He said, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Christ gives liberally and upbraids not—or when He does upbraid, it is always after His large generosity has abated the grievance. He gives the choice portion and then chastens us for our profit. He does not make us wait till we are submerged again and again, but He listens at once to the feeble cry of His sinking servants, and not till after He has delivered them does He expostulate with them. Aesop tells a story of a man who saw a boy drowning, and sat on the shore and lectured him upon the imprudence of venturing beyond his depth. And there are some people who do the same with poor sinking souls! They tell them of what they ought to have done, of what they have not done, and of what they ought now to do, which they cannot do—but they do not stretch out their hand to help them. They observe the burden which is too heavy to be borne, but they lift not a finger to lighten it! Our Lord takes off the burden first, sets His servant on his feet, and then gives him a word of counsel or of rebuke. Go to Him, then, Little Faith! Go to Him before you retire to your rest. Tell your Savior of the grief that distracts you, of the woe that overwhelms you. Confess your sins, acknowledge your inability to rescue yourself and cast yourself, now, upon the gracious promise of the loving God! Whether you are strong or weak, my brother, my sister, repair to the same place, for Jesus stands at the gate of mercy's house willing to receive all those who come to Him!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 14:25-27.

25. *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.* Jesus is sure to come. The night wears on and the darkness thickens—the fourth watch of the night draws near, but where is He? Faith says, "He must come." Though He should stay away till almost break of day, He must come. Unbelief asks, "How can He come?" Ah, He will answer for Himself—He can make His own way. "Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea." He comes in the teeth of the wind and on the face of the wave! Never fear that He will fail to reach the storm-tossed boat—His love will find the way. Whether it is to a single disciple,

or to the Church as a whole, Jesus will appear in His own chosen hour, and His time is sure to be the timeliest!

26. *And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit: and they cried out for fear.* Yes, the disciples saw Him—they saw Jesus, their Lord, and derived no comfort from the sight! Poor human nature's sight is a blind thing compared with the vision of a spiritual faith. They saw, but knew not what they saw. What could it be but a phantom? How could a real man walk on those foaming billows? How could he stand in the teeth of such a hurricane? They were already at their wits' end and the apparition put an end to their courage. We seem to hear their shriek of alarm—"they cried out for fear." We read not that "they were troubled." Before, they were old sailors, and had no dread of natural forces! But a spirit—ah, that was too much of a terror! They were at their worst, now, and yet if they had known it, they were on the verge of their best! It is noteworthy that the nearer Jesus was to them, the greater was their fear. Lack of discernment blinds the soul to its richest consolations. Lord, be near, and let us know You! Let us not have to say with Jacob, "Surely God was in this place and I knew it not!"

27. *But straightway Jesus spoke unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.* He did not keep them in suspense—"Straightway Jesus spoke unto them." How sweetly sounded that loving and majestic voice! Above the roar of waves and howling of winds, they heard the voice of the Lord! This was His old word, also, "Be of good cheer." The most conclusive reason for courage was His presence. "It is I, be not afraid." If Jesus is near, if the spirit of the storm is, after all, the Lord of love, all room for fear is gone! Can Jesus come to us through the storm? Then we shall weather it and come to Him! He who rules the tempest is not the devil, not chance, not a malicious enemy—but Jesus! This should end all fear.

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"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered."
Psalm 32:1.

MEN have, all of them, their own ideals of blessedness. Those ideals are often altogether contrary to the sayings which our Savior uttered in His Sermon on the Mount. They count those to be blessed who are strong in health, who are abundant in riches, who are honored with fame, who are entrusted with command, who exercise power—those, in fact, who are distinguished in the eyes of their fellow creatures! Yet I find not such persons called, "blessed," in God's Word, but oftentimes humble souls who might excite pity rather than envy, are congratulated upon the blessings which they are heirs to and which they shall soon enjoy. To the penitent there is no voice so pleasant as that of pardon! God, who cannot lie—who cannot err—tells us what it is to be blessed. Here He declares that, "blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered." This is an oracle not to be disputed. Forgiven sin is better than accumulated wealth. The remission of sin is infinitely to be preferred before all the glitter and the glare of this world's prosperity. The gratification of creature passions and earthly desires is illusive—a shadow and a fiction—but the blessedness of the justified, the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness is substantial and true! How apt we are to say in our hearts, "Would God Adam had never fallen, for blessed must be the man who never sinned!" Could any man have attained to a perfect life which deserved commendation at God's hands, blessedness would surely glow around him like a halo! At his feet the earth would blossom! In his nostrils the air would breathe sweet odors and his ears would be regaled with the sweet singing of birds—"content, indeed, to sojourn while he must, below the skies, but having there his home." Such a man would feel and find the beams of brightness playing over the entire expanse of life and the thrill of gladness filling his heart with unbroken peace! The mountains and hills would break forth into singing and all the trees of the field would clap their hands, to multiply his inlets to happiness. But it is not of such imaginary bliss that our sacred Psalmist loves to sing, because, however true, it would be a mere mockery to tell us, who are so deeply fallen, of sweet delights that those, alone, could know who never fell! Our time of probation is over. We of mortal race were proved, tried and condemned long ago. It is not possible, now, for us to have the blessedness of uncorrupted innocence. And yet, thank God, blessedness

is still possible to us, sinners though we are! We may hear the voice of the ever blessed of God pronouncing us to be blessed! His mercy can secure to us what our merit could never have earned, for so it is written, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered." May every one of us partake of this blessedness and know and rejoice in the full assurance of it!

Now the observations I address to you shall be very simple. But if they come home to us as true, and we can grasp them with a lively faith, they will be none the less gratifying to us because they seem common.

I. EVIDENTLY THERE IS FORGIVENESS WITH GOD—TRANSGRESSION MAY BE FORGIVEN.

It is spoken of here, not as a flight of fancy, or a poetic dream. It is not an imaginary or a possible circumstance, but it is described as a fact that does occur, and has been the happy lot of some who knew its sweet relief and felt its strange felicity—"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." Do take the words with all their weight of meaning, for though taught in our catechisms, embodied in our creeds, and admitted in our ordinary conversation on religious subjects, the belief in the forgiveness of sins is not always sincere and hearty. When the guilt of sin is felt and the burden of sin grows heavy—and when the wound stinks and is corrupt, as the psalmist says—we are very apt to doubt the possibility of pardon, or, at least, of our own pardon. Under deep conviction of sin and a sense of the peculiar heinousness of our own guilt, there is a haze and more than a haze—a thick fog which hides the light of this doctrine from our view! We think all men pardonable except ourselves. We can believe in the doctrine of forgiveness of sin for blasphemers, for thieves, for drunkards, even for murderers—but there is some particular aggravation in the sins which we have committed that appear to us to admit of no place of repentance, to find no promise of absolution. So, writing bitter things against ourselves, we become our own accusers and our own judges—and seem as if we would even become our own executioners! In our distraction we are thus prone to doubt that our transgression can be forgiven.

And, beloved, I am not sure that those of us who are saved do not, sometimes, have misgivings about this grand truth of God. Although I know that I am saved in Christ, yet at times when I look back upon my life, and especially dwell upon some dark blots which God has forgiven, but for which I can never forgive myself—the question comes across me, "Is it so? Is that really blotted out? It was so, crimson, So scarlet—can it be that the spot is entirely gone?" We know that being washed in the blood of Christ, we are whiter than snow, but it is not always that our faith can realize the forgiveness of sins while our heart and conscience are revolving the flagrancy of their guilt. It should not be so! We ought to be able to bear, at one and the same time, a vision of sin in all its horror and a full view of the Sacrifice for sin in all its holiness and acceptance to God! We ought to be able to feel that we are guilty, weak, lost and ruined, yet to believe that Christ is not only able to save to the very uttermost,

but that He has saved us—we ought to be able to confess our crimes while we cast ourselves without a question into His blessed arms! I trust that we can do this, but, alas, a fly may find its way into the sweetest pot of ointment! A little folly may taint a good reputation and an unworthy doubt may tarnish the purest faith—so it may be profitable to remind even the forgiven man that forgiveness of sin is possible: that forgiveness of sin is presented in the gospel as a covenant blessing; that forgiveness of sin is the possession of every Believer in Jesus; that his sin has gone entirely and irreversibly; and that for him all manner of sin has been forgiven, blotted out and put away through the precious blood of Jesus, seeing that he has believed in God's great propitiatory sacrifice!

Perhaps there has strolled into this sanctuary tonight some professing Christian who, though a true child of God, has foully stained his profession. It may be, my dear friend, that in your weakness, and to your shame—and to your confusion of face—you have forsaken God and have fallen into sin. You knew better, you who have instructed others, you who would have denounced such conduct with great severity in your fellow creatures, have fallen into the transgression, yourself, and now you are conscious that both the sin and its results are very bitter. You are smarting under the rod, your bones have been sorely broken and, perhaps, while I am speaking, it seems as if my words were putting them out of joint again where there had been a little healing! Beloved brother or sister in Christ, if your sin is a public sin, a grievous sin, a black and foul sin—if it is a sin which conscience cannot for a moment tolerate, a sin which God's people must detest, even though it is in you who are dear to them, let me entreat you not to suffer the deceitfulness of sin to drive you to despair! In the anguish of remorse, do not shun the Mercy Seat! Doubt not that the Lord is still ready to pardon you. Let not Satan persuade you that you have sinned a sin which is unto death! No, come to the cross of Christ! The blood of Jesus was real and it was really shed to wash away real sin, not sin in the abstract, as we talk of it here, but sin in the concrete as you have committed it—such sin as yours—no, your sin, that special sin, that degrading sin, that sin which you are ashamed to mention! That sin which makes you now, even at the very thought of it, hang your head and blush. Know of a truth that your sin is pardonable! Do you ask me why I draw this inference from my text? I answer that it was penned by David when his crimes were complicated, his character corrupted and his case seemed beyond the possibility of a cure! "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God!" Whatever your sin may have been, it can scarcely have exceeded his in atrocity! You know how he added sin to sin—you know how high he stood and how low he sunk—and you know how sweetly he could sing, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered." It shines forth more clearly, now, than ever it shone before! Sin is pardonable! The Lord God is merciful and gracious! Hear the heavenly invitation, "Come, now, let us reason together; though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white

as wool; though they are red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow." Hear Jehovah's voice out of Heaven, "I, even I, am He that blots out your iniquities for My name's sake: I will not remember your sins."

With such a peerless proclamation of perfect pardon we leave this point. We trust, however, that you will not leave it till you have proved its preciousness and its power.

Observe now that the pardon being proved, the—

II. BLESSEDNESS MAY BE ENJOYED.

So much sadness comes from a sense of sin that it is not easy for a penitent to regard pleasure as within his reach, or for a criminal to imagine that cheerfulness can become his habitual condition. How have I heard a man say, "Were God to forgive me, I do not think I could be happy, such is my sin that though it should be put away, the memory would haunt me, the disgrace would distract me—my own conscience would confound me, I never could blend with the blessed ones." Is not this just what the prodigal said, "I am not worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants"? He could not think so well of his father as to suppose that he could receive him again into his affections as his child and, therefore, he would be content to take the yoke of service, and to be a hired servant of his father's. Not a servant born in the house, though these were common enough among the Jews—but a hired servant, willing to be even with the lowest class of servants—so that he might but live in his father's house! I know that this is often the feeling of humble souls, but look at the text and observe the blessed truth of God which it teaches. You may not only be forgiven, my dear Friends, but you may enjoy, notwithstanding your past sin, blessedness on earth! Oh, look up through those tears! They can all be wiped away! Or should they continue to flow in a long life of penitence, if they do but fall upon the Savior's feet, which you would gladly wash with the tears of your affection and wipe with the hairs of your head, you shall find those tears to be precious drops! Though evangelical repentance may be compared to bitter herbs in one respect, to be eaten lamenting, yet in another respect there is no Grace as sweet as repentance! In heaven, it is true, they do not repent, but here on earth it well becomes the saints. It is sweet here below to sit and weep one's heart away in sorrow for sin at the foot of the Cross of Christ, saying, "with my tears, His feet I bathe." And although we shall have done with it when we reach those blissful shores, until then, repentance shall be the occupation of our lives!

But, dear Friends, you may suppose that as sincere repentance always leads to great searching of heart, it cannot be blessed—yet it really is so. Repentance, as we have already said, is a sweet grace. You remember that the prodigal shed his tears, his best tears, in his father's bosom, when he put his face, as it were, close to his father's heart, and sobbed out, "Father, I have sinned!" Oh, what a place for repentance is the bosom of God, with His love shed abroad in the heart, making you contrite and moving you to say, "How could I have sinned against so good a God? How could I be an enemy to One who is so full of grace?

How could I run away and spend my substance with harlots, when here was my Father's deep care for my welfare? How could I choose their base love, when a love so pure, so true, so constant, was waiting for me?" Oh, it is a holy sorrow that has a clear life ensuing and I tell you that, however deep your repentance may be, it shall not stand in the way of your being blessed, but shall even prove to be one contributory stream to the blessedness of your experience!

Does the memory of your sins haunt you, and do you feel that you shall always hang your head as one whom pardon could not purge? Not thus did the apostle Paul reflect on his many sins. Though he bewailed the wickedness of his heart, and was ashamed of the evil he had done, yet his humility after he was converted took the form of gratitude, cheering his very soul with the most lively impulse! While confessing that he was the very chief of sinners, at the same time and in the same breath he said, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Conscious of his own infirmities, he could exclaim, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Yet, confident of his full redemption, he could add, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Moreover, hurling defiance at all his accusers, he asks, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" No bolder or more triumphant champion of divine grace than that apostle who was before a blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious—but now rejoices to bear record, "I obtained mercy that, in me, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering as a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." What? Though your past offenses are ever so rank, and your present shame should sting you with ever so much poignant sorrow, yet with thrills of bliss you shall prove the full blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!

I think I hear one say, "Few men have fallen more deeply into sin than I have. If converted, I might be pointed out as an illustrious monument of divine grace. Yet, what with vanities which have matured into vices, and passing follies which have grown into positive evil habits, it is not likely I should ever attain the same eminence in grace as those who were trained from childhood in the sanctuary and never lived a dissolute life, or risked a desperate death, as I have done." Let me assure you that this is a great fallacy! The heights of glory are now open to those who once plunged into the depths of sin. Say not, slave of Satan, that you cannot be a soldier of the cross! You can be a heroic soldier! You may win a crown of victory. Why need you be weak in faith? You cannot be languid in love. Great sinner as you are, you have in this, a sort of advantage—you will love much because you have had much forgiven you. Surely, if your love is warmer than that of others, you have the mainspring of zeal, the mightiest force within to mold your future course! Instead of being less than others, you should seek to outdo them all, not out of carnal emulation, but out of holy strife. I counsel you, poor sinner, when you

come to Christ, do not try to hide yourself in some obscure corner, but come to the light, that you may have near and intimate fellowship with your Lord. For the love you have to Him, show kindness to His lambs. By your generosity to His disciples, show your gratitude to the Master. Grudge no service. Be ready to spend and to be spent—yield yourself a living sacrifice to Him who redeemed you from your sins and restored you to His favor.

I liked what one said to me today when I was seeing enquirers who are seeking membership with us. "By God's grace," he said, "I will try to make up for lost time." Let this be your resolve, dear friends! If you are called by grace when the day is far spent and the time in which you can hope to serve your Lord is getting brief, do not waste an opportunity, but engage with all your heart and soul in the work of faith and labor of love for the Lord Jesus! Some of us were called at the first or second hour of the day and while we were yet children, we found some employment in the vineyard. Still, we cannot serve Christ as we would. Oh I wish I had a thousand tongues that I might proclaim His love, and could live a thousand lives to proclaim His grace among the sons of men! But as for you, whose time must, in the course of nature, be so short—you who have given so much of your lives to Satan—do not let Christ now be put off with the little end, but give him the very best of your love, the fat of your sacrifice, the strength and soul of your being!

And as to the matter of enjoyment, I cannot believe for a moment that when a great sinner is blessed with a great pardon, he should fail to have the fullness of joy which so divine a benefit must properly excite. My observation has been that the joy of those who have been graciously forgiven after having greatly transgressed, rather exceeds than falls short of the joy of such as are more gradually brought into gospel liberty! Oh, no, my Master will not adjudge you to take a second rank!

He, who was by birth an alien, and in open rebellion an enemy to God, shall have all the rights of citizenship and partake of all the privileges of the saints! Not he who, like Samuel, was lighted on his couch in childhood by the lamps of the sanctuary, is more welcome at the Father's board than the returning prodigal! Such blessedness is in store for some of you. You have fallen. You have lost your character. You have stifled the voice of your own conscience. You have forfeited all title to self-respect. But by Christ, redeemed, in Christ, restored, this infinite blessedness shall be your portion! Have you been put out of the Church? Have your brothers and sisters been compelled to withdraw from fellowship with you because of your flagrant sin? Have you been convicted of a crime and suffered a term of imprisonment? There is yet a blessedness possible to you! There may have strayed in here one who from the fold has wandered very far. Though you have forfeited your good name, I simply and sincerely point out to you the means whereby you may yet transform your blighted life into a blessed life! Glory to God and peace to your own soul shall immediately follow your trust in the Sacrifice of Christ! "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose

sin is covered." Seems it not to you that this is the very fountain of all blessings? You come here to the stream head, to the source of the great wide river of mercies! Those of you, therefore, who believe in the forgiveness of sins should not be satisfied till you have the title deeds, enjoy the possession, and revel in the blessedness of this reconciliation to God! "If I am a Christian," said a sister to me hesitantly. "But I do not like that ugly ,'if,'" she added—"I must get rid of it." So she prayed the Lord, "Let there be no 'if' between me and You." I would have you pray in like manner. Oh, those horrible, "ifs"! They are spiritual mosquitoes that sting and harass us—they are like stones in our shoes—you cannot travel with them. Hear what David says—"Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

Still enlarging upon our last point, rather than venturing on to anything fresh, observe—

III. THAT THE STATE OF FORGIVENESS IS EVIDENTLY A STATE OF BLESSEDNESS IF WE REMEMBER THE CONTRAST IT INVOLVES.

Ask the sinner, conscious of his guilt and its penalty, who is bemoaning himself and crying out—"God, be merciful to me a sinner!"—what would you think if your condition could be changed and your conscience cleansed by one line of the pen, or by one word of the lips that can pronounce a pardon? Would not that be blessed beyond wishful thought or wakeful dream? "Oh," you say, "I would count no penance too severe, no sacrifice too costly, if I might but get my sins canceled, forgiven and completely obliterated!" Look at poor Christian, wringing his hands, sighing and crying. Why was it? He needed to have his burden taken off. Had you spoken to him, he would have told you he was willing to go through floods and flames if he could get relief from his burden and be clean rid of it. Seeing how every anxious soul longs for forgiveness, clearly it must be a state to be greatly desired, and those who do attain it find it to be full of gladness, delight and rejoicing! It is, indeed, blessed to have sin forgiven, but, oh, how wretched to face its infamy, to feel its malignity, to fear its terrible penalty! Witness a soul in despair—that is a dreadful sight! I think I would sooner walk 50 miles than see a despairing soul! I have seen several such shut up in the iron cage. You may talk, talk, talk and try to give some cheer, but it is of no use. No promises can comfort. The gospel, itself, seems to have no charm. Were you to put the question to a despairing soul, "Would it be a blessed thing to have sin forgiven?" sharp, quick, and decided would the answer be. Not the lips only—the heart would express itself in every muscle of the face, in every limb of the body—the nerves all tingling with joy, the eyes shining with gleams of Heaven!

Ask dying sinners, stung with remorse at the memory of their lives, and filled with dread at the prospect of the future, whether it is not a blessed thing to have sins forgiven. Through they may have trifled up to now, the hour of death forbids dissembling. Now the vanities of time pass like a shadow and the realities of eternity come up like a spectra. "Too

late!" they cry. "Too late! Had we but fled to Christ before! Had we but turned our eyes to Him in years gone by, then hope would have cheered us in this extremity!" But it is not death they dread so much as the after-death—not present dissolution, but (shall I say it?) the damnation that may follow. Unforgiven sin! Who can paint the sentence it must meet? Could we peer into that world where wicked spirits are tormented always and forever, and there ask the question, "Would it be a blessed thing to be forgiven?" Ah, you can guess the answer. I pray you, friend, tempt not the terror for yourself. Trifle not with kind entreaty—know that 'tis treason to do so! The pardon spurned will recoil on your own head. You will bewail in everlasting misery the mercy that, through your willfulness, was unavailing. Blessed must he be whose sins are forgiven, for it enables him to escape from the horrible doom of the impenitent!

But you shall have a witness nearer at hand. You know, as a fact recorded in the Gospels, that the Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins. You know, too, from the testimony of the Acts of the Apostles, that His Name—by faith in His Name—is invested with the same power. By the ministry of the Holy Spirit, one may hear now, as in days of yore, a voice of divine authority saying, "Your sins are forgiven you; go in peace." It was only last week I met with one who had been forgiven on the previous Sunday. The sweet relief, the calm belief and the true blessedness of that man was such that you could see it flashing from his eyes and animating every faculty of his being! The whole man was so full of joy that he did not know how to contain himself! The drift of all his conversation was, "I have found Christ! I have laid hold on eternal life! I have trusted in Jesus! I am saved!" His joy, though uttered in part, was unutterable! I sympathized in his ecstasy, remembering that it was so with me. I wanted to tell everybody that Christ was precious—and was able to save! Oh, yes, the young convert is a good witness, though the old Christian is quite as good! It is a blessed thing to have had 50 years' enjoyment of the forgiveness of sin! I have half a mind to call some of our venerable friends up here to bear their witness. I am sure they would not stammer—or had they lost the power of ready speech through infirmity of this flesh, their testimony would be sound and vigorous—for they would tell you unhesitatingly how blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! I wish I had time to show you that forgiveness of sin is not only blessed of itself, but—

IV. ALL THE FORGIVEN HELP TO SWELL THE TIDE OF BLESSING.

A thousand felicities follow in its train! He who is forgiven is justified, acquitted, vindicated, sent forth without a stain or blemish on his reputation. He is regenerated, quickened, invigorated and brought into newness of life! More still, he is adopted, initiated into a divine family, invested with a new relationship and made heir of a heritage entailed by promise. The work of sanctification begun in him, here, will one day be completely perfected. He who is forgiven was elected from before the foundations of the world. He was redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus. For him, Christ stood as his sponsor, surety and substitute at the

bar of justice. To the forgiven man all things have become new. Our Lord Jesus Christ has raised him up and made him sit in heavenly places with Him. He is even now a son and heir, a child of God, a prince of the blood imperial, a priest and a king who shall reign with Christ forever and ever! He who is washed in the precious blood is favored beyond any words that I can find to express. Ten thousand blessings are his portion. "How precious!" such a pardoned one may exclaim. "How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!"

But the—

V. BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN WHOSE TRANSGRESSION IS FORGIVEN, WHOSE SIN IS COVERED, WILL BE MAINLY SEEN IN THE NEXT STATE.

That disembodied spirit, clear of spot or blemish, washed and whitened in the blood of the Lamb, passes without fear into the invisible world. It trembles not, though it appears before the eyes of Justice. No award can come to the forgiven soul except this, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." We commit the body of the forgiven sinner to the grave in "sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection." We give his flesh to be the food of the worms and his skin may rot to dust—but though worms destroy his body—yet in his flesh shall he see God, whom his eyes shall see for himself and not another! I was astonished some little time ago when I heard a good pastor, standing by the coffin of an honored minister, say, "There lies nothing of our brother." Not so, I thought! The bodies of the saints were purchased by Christ—though flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption, yet there will be such a marvelous change pass over the body of the forgiven sinner that the same body changed, but still the same body—shall be reunited with the disembodied spirit to dwell at God's right hand! Listen! Listen! The trumpet sounds! Oh, my brothers and sisters, we can but speak in prose. These great scenes we shall, all of us, see! We shall then think after another fashion. The trumpet sounds! The echo reaches heaven. Hell startles at the sound to its nethermost domains. This trembling earth is all attention. The sea yields up her dead. A great white cloud comes sailing forth in awful majesty. Upon it there is a throne, where Jesus sits in state! But his heart has no cause to quake whose sins are all forgiven! Well may the ransomed soul be calm amidst the pomp and pageantry of that tremendous day, for He who sits upon the throne is the Son of Man, in whose blood we have been washed. Lo! This is the same Jesus who said, "I have forgiven you." He cannot condemn us! We shall find to be our Friend whom others find to be their Judge. Blessed is that man who is forgiven! See him, as with ten thousand times ten thousand others pure as himself and like to himself, who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb! He ascends to the celestial city, a perfect man in body and in soul, to dwell forever there! Hark to the acclamations of the ten thousand times ten thousand, the sound of the

harpers harping with their harps, and the song that is like great waters. Write yes, write now, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." But doubly blessed are they, then, that they rise from the dead! Once they were sinners washed in blood, but then, in body and in soul they shall have come, through the precious blood, to see Jesus face to face!

Oh, how I wish that all of us knew this blessedness! Seek it, Friends, seek it! It is to be found. "Seek you the Lord while He may be found; call you upon Him while He is near." I am especially encouraged in preaching the Gospel this evening, because I have just been seeing some who have been recently converted. There are hearers of the Gospel among you who have been listening to me for many years. Often have I feared that, in your case, I had labored in vain. But I have great hope, now, concerning some of you. The Lord keeps bringing in the old hearers of eight, nine, and ten years' standing. Oh, I pray the Lord to save every one of you and bring you into the fold! I do long and pant that I may present you all before my Master's face with joy! Even should you go and join other churches, and serve the Lord elsewhere, that will cause me no sorrow or regret. But God forbid that any of you should despise mercy, reject the Gospel and die in your sins! May you prove the blessedness of pardon, and then shall we meet, an unbroken congregation, before the throne of God.

The Lord grant it, for His Name's sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 10:37-42.

37. *He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.* Christ must be first. He herein claims the highest place in every human breast. Could He have done so had He not been Divine? No mere prophet would talk in this fashion! Yet we are not sensible of the slightest egotism in His speech, neither does it occur to us that He goes beyond His line. We are conscious that the Son of God has a right to speak thus, and only He.

We must earnestly beware of making idols of our dearest ones by loving them more than Jesus. We must never set them near the Throne of our King. We are not worthy to dwell with Christ, above, or even to be associated with Him here, if any earthly object is judged by us to be worthy to rival the Lord Jesus.

Father and mother, son and daughter—we would do anything to please them—but, as opposed to Jesus, they stand nowhere and cannot, for an instant, be allowed to come in the way of our supreme loyalty to our Lord.

38. *And he that takes not his cross, and follows after Me, is not worthy of Me.* Here our Lord, for the second time in this gospel brings in His death. At first He spoke of being taken from them—but now of the cross. There is a cross for each one which he may regards as "his cross." It may be that the cross will not take us up, but we must take it up, by being willing to endure anything or everything for Christ's sake. We are not to drag the cross after us, but to take it up! "Dragged crosses are heavy; carried crosses grow light." Bearing the cross, we are to follow after Jesus—to bear a cross without following Christ is a poor affair. A Christian who shuns the cross is not Christian—but a cross-bearer who does not follow Jesus equally misses the mark! Is it not singular that nothing is so essential to make a man worthy of Christ as bearing his cross in His tracks? Yet it is assuredly so. Lord, You have laid a cross upon me—do not permit me to shirk it, or shrink from it!

39. *He that finds his life shall lose it: and he that loses his life for My sake shall find it.* If to escape from death, he gives up Christ, and so finds a continuance of this poor mortal life—by that very act he loses true life. He gains the temporal at the expense of the eternal! On the other hand, he who loses life for Christ's sake does in the highest sense find life, life eternal, life infinitely blessed! He makes the wisest choice who lays down his life for Jesus and finds life in Jesus!

40. *He that receives you receives Me, and he that receives Me receives Him who sent Me.* What blessed union and hallowed communion exist between the King and His servants! The words before us are especially true of the apostles to whom they were first addressed. Apostolic teaching is Christ's teaching. To receive the 12 is to receive their Lord Jesus, and to receive the Lord Jesus is to receive God, Himself. In these days certain teachers despise the epistles which were written by apostles, and they are, themselves, worthy to be despised for so doing! This is one of the sure tests of soundness in the faith. "He that is of God hears us," says John. This bears hard on modern critics who in a hypocritical manner pretend to receive Christ and then reject His inspired apostles!

Lord, teach me to receive Your people into my heart, that thus I may receive You. And as to the doctrine which I hold, be pleased to establish me in the apostolic faith.

41. *He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.* Men may receive a prophet as a patriot, or a poet—that is not the point in hand. The prophet must be received in his highest character, "in the name of a prophet," and for the sake of his Lord! And then the Lord, Himself, is received, and He will reward the receiver in the same way in which His Prophet is rewarded. If we cannot do all the good deeds of a righteous man, we can yet partake in his happiness by having fellowship with him, and by uniting with him in vindicating the faith and comforting his heart.

To receive into our homes and our hearts God's persecuted servants is to share their reward. To maintain the cause and character of good men is to be numbered with them in God's account. This is all of grace, since the deed is so little and the recompense so large!

1917
ANNOUNCEMENT CONCERNING THE SUSPENSION OF PUBLICATION:

It is with sincere regret that the Publishers announce the suspension of publication of C. H. Spurgeon's Sermons. This step is rendered necessary by the present shortage of paper and other difficulties due to war conditions. There are still a number of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon's Sermons which have never been issued in printed form, and it is hoped that when peace returns, it will be possible to publish these in some attractive form. The last issue of these Sermons, for the present, will be that of May 10th.

It is hoped that the suspension of publication will not in any way tend to lessen the world-wide ministry of these Sermons. Practically all the back numbers may still be obtained, so that those who know and appreciate the blessing which has been forthcoming from these weekly messages may still provide for their needs by selecting from the earlier issues. A Textual Index* will be found useful in making a choice of subjects and texts, free on application from Marshall Brothers, Ltd., 47, Paternoster Row, London, E. C. 4.

*** http://www.spurgeongems.org/sindex_ot.pdf (Old Testament Scripture index)**
http://www.spurgeongems.org/sindex_nt.pdf (New Testament Scripture index)

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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