

THE FILLING OF EMPTY VESSELS NO. 2063

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 13, 1889,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Even empty vessels; borrow not a few.”
2 Kings 4:3.*

IT is necessary that we read the whole story—“Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Your servant my husband is dead. And you know that your servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house? And she said, Your handmaid has not anything in the house, save a pot of oil. Then he said, Go, borrow vessels abroad of all your neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when you are come in, you shall shut the door upon you, and upon your sons, and shall pour out into all those vessels and you shall set aside that which is full. So she went from him and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her. And she poured out; and it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her sons, Bring me yet a vessel. And they said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stopped. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil and pay your debt, and live, you and your children on the rest.”

The best of men may die in poverty—here is the widow of a prophet left in destitution. We must not hastily censure those who leave their families unprovided for—circumstances may have rendered it impossible for the breadwinner to do more than supply the pressing needs of the hour. Yet assuredly it is sad to see the widow of so worthy a man in such straits! A widow, and especially the widow of a prophet of the Lord—our concern for her is tender. Her husband had been among the persecuted, and having been by oppression, deprived of all that he had, it came to pass that when he died he left his wife and children in distress—from which I gather that holy men may be in the worst of circumstances, and yet it will be no proof that the Lord has forsaken them. We may not judge a person's character by his position in life! Certainly, poverty is no sign of divine grace, for there are many who bring themselves to it by their own wickedness; but on the other hand, wealth is no sign of divine favor—for many there are who will have their portion in this life, only, and have no inheritance in the life everlasting!

As a general rule, piety is more often found among the poor than among the rich—and in persecuting times it is almost of absolute necessity that a clean conscience should involve poverty. Let this encourage any here who are just now very low in circumstances. You are where prophets and saints have been! God can lift you up, and would do so if it were really for your good. Be more concerned to act like a Christian in your present condition than to escape from it. Remember, however poor you are, your Master was poorer, and that whatever else you have not, you still have a share in His love! Seek to be rich in faith if you are poor in all besides; you can honor God much in your present condition; you can learn much in it; you can prove much the divine faithfulness, and you can exercise much sympathy towards others. Therefore be not impatient. Since other men both greater and better than you have trod this rough road, bow before the determination of God's providence and ask for divine grace to be patient under your affliction.

This sorrowing widow, when she found herself in great poverty, and likely to lose her two sons, went to God in her trouble. She hastened to God's prophet, for that was the way in which broken hearts would then speak to God in special trials. And it was a way with which, as a prophet's widow, she was well acquainted. But now we have another Mediator, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and every Christian in trouble should take his burden to his God in Christ Jesus. We readily enough tell our friends and neighbors, and it is natural we should, for the human mind needs sympathy. But faith would teach us that

there is no sympathy equal to that of the man, Christ Jesus, and there is no power to help equal to that of the heavenly Father. Let us, therefore, never forget to unload our burden at the foot of the cross. We should first tell our troubles to our best Friend; we should go to Jesus first, to Jesus with child-like reliance upon His power to help. The woman went to the prophet. Let us go to our greater Prophet, even Jesus our Lord, without hesitation or delay.

God was pleased to ordain by His servant a way of escape for the poor woman. The little oil that she had in the house was to be multiplied till there should be enough, when sold, to pay her debts—from which I gather that if in our distress we take our trouble to God, He will deliver us. This woman is not a solitary instance—she is one of a great multitude for whom the Lord has worked graciously. It is the rule of God’s providence that His children should cry to Him in the day of trouble, and that He should be gracious to them and deliver them! Rest assured that the Lord, who daily provides for the millions of fish in the sea, and the myriads of birds in the air will not allow His own children to perish for lack of the things of this life. He cares for a glowworm on a damp bank, and for a fly in a lone forest, and He will never neglect the children of His own house! “I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me,” said one of old, and so may the most humble still say! Whether your trouble is about temporal things or spiritual things, if you leave that trouble with God—cry to Him in prayer, walk in His fear, and trust in His name—sooner or later, in some way or other, He must make a way of escape for you! Other friends may fail you, but the Lord God never can; other promises may turn out to be mere wind, but faithful is He that has promised this to you, and He also will do it! In six troubles He will be with you, and in seven there shall no evil touch you. You shall dwell in the land and verily you shall be fed. No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. How happy might we be if we really and practically believed this, and acted upon it.

Yet the Lord allowed His handmaid to be very sorely pressed. She could not secure delay nor make any fair terms with the hard creditor. He was already in the house, and he would be satisfied with nothing less than both her sons. She was so reduced that she had nothing in the house but a single pot of oil—what could she do? She had hoped for deliverance, but now the night of utter misery was coming on, and she saw no light. Beloved, it has been the same with many of the Lord’s tried ones, and it may be the same with you. The Lord does not promise to rescue us in *our* time, or to save us from waiting; rather does He see it to be right to try our faith and patience for our good, and for His own glory. Therefore, I say to you whose turn seems to come last—be strong to wait, and do not dishonor the Lord by unbelief. Waiting in faith is a high form of worship which in some respects excels the adoration of the shining ones above.

But the way in which this woman was delivered was one which proved, and exercised, and strengthened her faith. She had to go and borrow empty vessels from her neighbors. That was a strange proceeding; empty oil jars would seem to be useless lumber in her house. Her neighbors, also, might make remarks upon her singular conduct. She had to shut the door that no curious eyes might watch her, and she had then, with full confidence in God, to take her one pot of oil, and go on pouring out from it into the empty vessels till they were all filled! Unbelief might have said to her, “That is a wild proceeding! How can you fill these vessels out of that one little jar? There is but very little oil to begin with, and certainly that cannot be enough to fill all these borrowed jars! The prophet has mocked you! He is exposing you to the jests and jeers of all your neighbors!” But her faith, when exercised, was equal to the emergency; she did what she was commanded to do! She did it in faith, and the result answered the end.

God takes care to deliver His servants in ways that exercise their faith. He would not have them be little in faith, for faith is the wealth of the heavenly life. He desires that the trial of faith should be carried on till faith grows strong and comes to full assurance. The sycamore fig never ripens into sweetness unless it is bruised, and the same is true of faith! Expect, O tried believer, that God will bring you through, but do not expect Him to bring you through in the way that human reason would suggest, for that would provide no development for faith. Be not laying tracks for God—

*“He plants His footsteps in the sea,
Provides no chariots for the Eternal One—
“He rides upon the storm.”*

God has a way of His own. He does His wonders as He pleases. Be content often to stand still and see the salvation of God! Be ready to obey Him, and that will be far more in accordance with your position as a finite creature than the vain attempt to map out a course for your Creator. Keep to the *obeying*, and rest assured He will not be behind with the *providing*.

These are the general lessons which we learn from the history. Now I intend to take the narrative and especially the two or three words I have culled out of it, and use it for instructive purposes as the Holy Spirit shall help me. We will speak first, in reference to the divine grace that is in Christ Jesus; secondly, in reference to the mercy seat; and thirdly in reference to the Holy Spirit.

I. There is teaching in this narrative, first of all IN REFERENCE TO THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS. Let me show you this. The woman was to get together empty vessels—these were to be set in her room. All these empty vessels were filled. As long as there were any empty vessels left, the oil kept flowing in till they were all filled to the brim. When they were all filled she asked for one more but there was not another empty one. And then the oil stopped, but not till then. We will use this as an emblem of spiritual things and this one verse shall interpret our symbol—

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

As long as there is one of God’s people unsaved, as long as there is a seeking, repenting, sinner yet unpardoned, there will be found to be merit in the Savior still to flow out—till every vessel that needs to be filled with mercy shall be filled, and that to the very brim!

Now in this case notice first of all what was required. In this miracle, all that was required was empty vessels! This is precisely all that Jesus Christ requires of us—that we be to Him and His divine fullness as empty vessels! The grace is with *Him*, not with *us*, just as the oil was in the woman’s one pot and not in the empty vessels. Suppose that one of her neighbors had said to herself when the boy came to borrow the vessels, “Poor woman, she modestly asks for an empty oil jar, but I will send her a full one to help her”? The lad joyfully accepts the offer and takes home a jar full of oil! When his mother is pouring out the oil, the boy brings the vessel. She looks at it, and it is full. “My child,” says she, “this is of no use to me; it is full and we cannot fill again what is full already.” It might have been a great loss to her, for the oil might have been of poor quality, and you may be sure that what the Lord made was the best oil that ever was known! So, if there is one person in this world who is by nature full of merit; if there is a man in the world that does not need mercy—that has enough natural goodness to save himself; why Christ cannot do anything for him, and he cannot be of any use as a receiver of divine grace! As long as the man is full of himself, there is no room for Jesus Christ. It is well said by our hymn—

*“None are excluded hence
But those who do themselves exclude.”*

Our own supposed fullness shuts us out from receiving Christ’s fullness. It must be so. You will remember the story of the plowman and Mr. Hervey. The plowman asked Mr. Hervey what he thought was the greatest hindrance to men’s salvation. Mr. Hervey replied, “Sinful self.” “No,” said the plowman, “I think righteous self is a greater hindrance to men’s salvation than sinful self. They that are sinful will come to Christ for pardon, but they that *think* they are righteous never will.” The full oil jar can hold no more. A deserving sinner (if such a person could exist) would be of no use to the Savior, and the Savior could be of no use to him. Another jar is brought and the boy, as he looks into it, finds that his mother’s oil does not flow into it. She is holding the miraculous jar over the vessel, just as she did with the rest, but the oil does not flow. “What ails this vessel, my child?” asks she. And they begin to shake it. There is some oil left at the bottom. The neighbor thought who sent it, “Well, I won’t pour it all out. Poor souls, it will be a good thing for them if I leave a little in it.” The mother says to the boy, “The oil won’t run in because there is some oil in the jar already. Pour it out, my son, pour out the last drop, for I was bid to use empty vessels, and this is not empty so nothing can be done with it.” When that is done, the oil begins to flow freely, till the pot is full to the brim. Now, as long as there is anything good left in any of you upon which you place your trust, the divine grace of our Lord Jesus will not run into you.

Empty vessels! Remember this. Emptiness is eligibility! Want of natural goodness proves your need of God's grace, and that need is your capacity to receive.

Some will say, "Truly, I have no good works in the past. But then, I have good resolves for the future. I am going to be what I should be." Are these resolutions formed in your own strength? These, also, will impede the inflow of the heavenly oil! It is when we are without strength that salvation comes to us. Ah, friend, if you can save yourself, Christ will not save you! Again I remind you that you must be emptied of self in all forms before divine grace can fill you. "No," says one, "I don't trust altogether to my good resolutions, but I am going to pledge myself to this, and make a bond to the other, and that will help me." My Lord Jesus does not need your help! Abstain, resolve, repent, advance—do what you will, but do not join these poor things to His great salvation! Give up once and for all depending upon what *you* have done, even when you have done all; as an unprofitable servant quit all claims of wage and appeal to *mercy* only! Dismiss the proud notion of containing anything in yourself which comes of your fallen nature, and yet can be acceptable with God. Do you think there is some good thing in you, some strength, something that you can do, or be, that will help Jesus Christ? I assure you nothing can check the flow of divine grace like such a notion! Empty buckets are most fit for the well of grace—these shall be filled, while the full ones stand idle at the well's mouth.

But there is another oil jar that is empty, quite empty. Smell it. There is not a trace of oil. It is a long time since it had anything in it. You put your finger round the rim but nothing adheres to it. It is dry, very dry; it is a long time since there was any oil there. Look! As soon as the woman begins to hold the pot over it, the oil runs into the empty jar, and it fills to the brim, large as it is! O poor soul, if you feel tonight that you are a lost, ruined, empty, undone sinner—that is just what Jesus wants! There is a full Christ for empty sinners, but none for those who are full of themselves; if you are so empty as to have no trace of good about you, Jesus will not therefore leave you unblest. If you are saying, "But I don't *feel* as I should; I don't *think* as I should; I don't *weep* as I should," this only proves how empty you are. And into all this natural emptiness of yours, the super abounding grace of the Lord Jesus Christ will flow till it fills you and overflows to His praise! Oh, that by an act of faith you would receive what Jesus so freely gives to as many as will receive Him! That is all the empty sinner has to do—"as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." All that the Savior wants of us is our need of being saved, and our acceptance of His salvation. Come along with you! O Lord, I pray You bring them under the silent but copious flow of the holy oil even now!

Now observe what followed. In this miracle, as soon as the empty vessels were brought, the oil flowed till they were full, of whatever size they might be. One neighbor lent a little jar; another a large one; but they were all filled. So, when a sinner receives Jesus, he shall receive all the divine grace he wants till he is full. "You are complete in Him." "Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." O soul, if you believe in Jesus, you shall find in Him grace to pardon you, grace to change your nature, grace to *keep* that nature changed, grace to preserve you till you are perfect, grace to help you till you are brought home to glory! Christ freely gives everything a sinner needs between the gates of hell and the gates of paradise. He does not half fill, but He makes the soul say, "My cup runs over." He is no half Savior—He is a perfect Redeemer from the ruin of the Fall! O you empty, needy sinner, come and take a full and all-sufficient Savior and be blessed forever!

What was the space in which the miracle endured? How long did this oil continue to flow? That is a point worth noticing. It flowed as long as any empty vessel could be brought. And the command was, "borrow not a few." I know tonight how many souls Christ will bless. He will bless as many souls as are empty, and are placed beneath the flow of His divine grace. That He fills the hungry with good things is always the rule; and the other rule is equally sure—the rich He sends away empty! We know how long Christ will continue to save sinners; it is as long as any needy sinner comes to Him to be saved! If there were no sinners on earth there would be no room for the Savior on earth; if there were no guilty ones, there would be no need for His pardoning blood. If there were no filthy ones, there would be no need of the fountain in which they might be cleansed. But as long as there exists an empty, penniless, poverty-stricken soul that longs and yearns after a precious Christ—there is a precious Christ for that poor, longing, needy soul! I feel inclined to cry with the woman in the narrative, "Bring me yet another vessel." There are many here whom Christ has filled with His grace—glory be to His name for it! But is there

not yet another vessel before me? Oh, it is sweet preaching to the sinner who is made to feel he is a sinner! There is no such successful preaching in the world!

We would be content to preach till midnight if we knew we preached to those who greatly needed a Savior, and were longing for Him—for such hearts are like the wax that is ready for the seal. When you want Jesus, you shall have Jesus. And the deeper your needs become, the more ready will you be to accept the finished salvation which He freely gives to all who need it! “Bring me yet a vessel.” Don’t tell me, “There is not a vessel more,” for I am sure there must be many more. Our Lord has not come to the end of the vessels yet; there are many more to be filled! We do not live in an age when all the elect are gathered in, or when all the redeemed are brought home. There are plenty of empty vessels still about. I pray that they may be brought to the fullness of our Redeemer, and be filled to the brim!

I have used a very simple method of preaching the gospel in thus talking. But simple as it is, there are a great many who will not understand it. Let me just rehearse it again. You have broken God’s law and you are lost. The only way in which you can get forgiveness is through the merit of Jesus, and that He will freely give you if you simply come and confess your sin and take Him to be your all in all. Adore His mercy, magnify His love, accept His grace—yield to the working of His Holy Spirit, and you are saved! May you be an empty vessel beneath the out-flowing of a full Christ! Do not try to be a full one, nor a half-full one, but be an *empty vessel* and Christ will fill you! He will not miss one of you that is empty, for His desire is to bless you. He delights in it—He longs for it! Be *dead*, and let Him be your life; be the beggar and let Him be your riches; be sick and let Him be your health; be lost and let Him be your Savior! Be nothing and let Him be your all in all. This, indeed, is faith—to sink the creature in the Creator; to sink self in a Savior; to be lost in ourselves and to be saved in His righteousness.

Oh, that I could lead your hearts into the truth of God that we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God! Come, empty pitcher, stand beneath the flowing fountain, and it will surely fill you. Do you understand me? The Lord make you to prove that you do so by your practical compliance with my exhortation!

II. I shall further use the text in another way, IN REFERENCE TO ANSWERS TO PRAYER. My conviction is, brethren that we do not pray enough. I do not, by this remark, measure our prayers by *time*, but I mean that we do not ask enough of God. We are not straitened in Him, but we are often straitened in ourselves. The prophet’s advice to the woman was, “Borrow empty vessels”—notice the next word—“borrow not a few.” It was necessary thus to urge her to large things. Covetous men need restraining, but in asking of the Lord, our hearts need enlarging.

This godly widow had the blessing now at her disposal to increase or diminish. If she borrowed few vessels, she would have but little oil; if she borrowed many vessels they should all be filled, and she would have much oil. She was herself to measure out what she should have, and I believe that you and I, in the matter of spiritual blessings from God, have more to do with the measurement of our mercies than we think. We make our blessings little, because our prayers are little. I will take two points—prayers about ourselves, and prayers about others. Concerning ourselves, brethren, some have never brought their sins and prevalent temptations before God. One man has a hasty temper which he says he cannot overcome. He must overcome it if he is to be saved from sin, and what he should do is to treat his wretched temper like an empty vessel, and bring it before the Lord! He needs that his temper should be cured. Let him bring it to the healer, whose cooling touch can remove this fever. I say again, his quick temper is an empty vessel for him to set before the Giver of all divine grace, that *He* may fill it with sweetness and meekness!

I know one whom I trust is a child of God. But, alas, he has been carried away by folly, and has dishonored the Christian name! He is now in deep despair, and thinks he can never be saved. I fear his despair is only another form of rebellion against divine love; if he could have faith to bring his peculiar temptation before God as well as every other, it would be overcome for him. There is no sin which the grace of God cannot subdue in us! We must not say that such-and-such a sin is constitutional, and therefore we cannot overcome it. It *must* be overcome, and the grace of God can do it. Bring this empty vessel and set it down where Jesus can come into contact with it. Perhaps with some of you, your special trial is not so much a sin as a lack of spiritual attainment. You are still only babes in Christ. You hear of some that have gained high degrees of divine grace; that have become matrons in the church, or champi-

ons in Israel. My dear friends do not suppose that these attainments are beyond your reach! Do you want them? Would they not be honorable to God, and a blessing to you? Well, then, *ask* for them! Set these empty vessels beneath the dropping of the divine oil, and you shall have these gifts granted to you. In the matter of divine grace, he is poor that will be poor—but he that desires to be rich, and has faith in God may be rich. “To him that has shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.”

Oh, if we do not get from God’s fullness great supplies, it is because we are not greatly receptive or greatly expectant. But if, like this woman, we get many empty vessels, we shall have them all filled! Suppose she had brought a number of empty vessels into the house, but she had not used them, and the oil had stopped? She would have been a very foolish woman; but are not many of us quite as foolish? We have a great many cares; cares about our boys and girls; cares about our business; cares about household concerns! But we do not bring these cares to God—we feel as if they were too little to mention to Him. This is so absurd that I will have no more to do with such a sinful silence! Let us tell it all to Jesus! Or else the case stands thus—you have your empty vessels, and you will not bring them to be filled; why will you be so wickedly foolish? When the Lord bids you cast your care upon Him, for He cares for you, why not cast it there? Why will you carry your sin, your need, your care? These cares are different sets of empty vessels for the grace of God to fill! Oh, why, my brethren, why have we not larger desires and broader expectations, that according to our faith it may be done unto us?

The angel of mercy sometimes flies around the tents of God’s people, and he bears with him a cornucopia full of the precious blessings. Oftentimes he stays at a tent, hovering on soft wings, while the sleeper rests—he looks around the tent, but does not see a single empty vessel into which to pour the benediction, and he goes on his way. Soon he lights on another tent, where, before the dwellers went to sleep, they set out in their evening prayer a number of empty vessels. He takes his horn of plenteous mercy, and he fills one vessel, and then another. And when they wake, they are surprised with the rich grace which has abounded towards them! Some have feeble wishes, small desires, slender prayers—hardly any prayers at all—and “they have not, because they ask not.” Others have large desires, earnest prayers, great faith, large expectations, and God gives them according to their faith, and they are enriched! Oh, for many empty vessels to be set forth in this church, both night and day, that God’s mercy may abound in the congregation!

The same is true with regard to prayers for others. We ought to treat others as if they were empty vessels for us to use, so as to glorify God in their salvation. I wish you would take me and treat me as an empty vessel, and pray that I may be filled with heaven’s own oil. It is of no use hoping to get good out of a ministry if you do not pray for it. As a rule I believe congregations get out of a minister what they put into him. That is to say, if they pray much for him, God will give him much blessing for them. Those persons who come up to the house of God and take their seats—and expect their souls to be filled when they have never prayed that God will help the minister, and bless the sermon—may not expect to be visited with divine grace. Pray for all ministers, and all workers for Christ—make them like empty vessels, and ask the Lord to fill them. Christian people should do the same with their children and relatives. If our children are not converted, is it not, in some cases, the fact that we have not prayed for them as we should? We have not brought them before God in supplication, and if they remain unconverted and worldly, how can we wonder? Let us not leave the empty vessels unfilled! Come friends, think of the unconverted at home! You have still some unsaved ones—mention them again and again in prayer by name, and cease not to pray!

Christ’s grace ceases not to flow, and the efficacy of prayer is not stayed. Do not cease to pray till all the family is converted, till there is not another vessel left! Let us do the same with our neighbors. Are we sufficiently earnest before God with regard to them? Might we not expect to see a great change in London if the districts wherein we dwell were more often on our hearts in prayer? You have heard of the great revival which followed Jonathan Edwards’ marvelous sermon upon “Sinners in the hand of an angry God.” That sermon was marvelous in its effects; the power of that sermon may be traced to this fact—that a number of Christian people had met together some days before, and prayed that God would send a blessing with the minister who was to preach on that occasion. Their prayer put power into Jonathan Edwards’ sermon, and so sinners were converted! If we were to take up villages, and hamlets, and towns and pray for them with earnest, believing faith, God might prosper instrumentalities that are now

unblessed; and ministers who are now sowing seed that never springs up, God might bless with a joyful harvest!

They might not know the reason, but those who prevailed with God would be able to solve the riddle. Prayer to the Most High would be a quiet setting of the empty vessel under the running oil, and without noise it would be filled! Let us see what we can do in this matter. Do you hesitate? When you have the keys of heaven at your belt will you not use them? When God puts the whole treasury of His grace into the keeping of our *faith*, shall we let that grace be unused for lack of earnestness? When He says to us—“Here is carte-blanc for you—ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you”—shall we not open our mouths wide? If the Lord promises that when two agree as touching anything concerning His kingdom, He will grant it to us—why, let us agree at once! What? Will you not fill up these checks which God has signed and left blank for you? Will you fill them up for pennies, or for trifling sums, when the infinite checkbook of God is laid open to you? O saints of God be not straitened in yourselves since God does not straiten you! Bring in the empty vessels, and bring in not a few!

III. Once more. I shall use the text in a third way of application IN REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. There was a time in certain churches when, if there were a few converted to God, say thirty or forty at a time, the older friends would hold up their hands, not in astonishment exactly, but in utter unbelief, for they thought some undue influence or improper excitement must have been present to bring out such a crowd! I recollect having to deal with those who would say, “We had one baptism in ten years under the solid doctrinal teaching of our former pastor; we had a sound divine, and we were sound ourselves (and sound asleep, too)! But see what a hurry we are now in! There have been twenty persons professing to be converted in one month!” The good brethren have added, “We hope you will be very cautious; don’t receive them too fast; there is a great deal of excitement abroad, and we must be judicious and watchful, for when the excitement passes away, a terrible reaction may set in!” One good old lady I know of used to say sarcastically that she hoped the church would take care that the back door was easy to open, for she was quite sure that if so many came in at the front, there would be a good number who would soon have to be turned out at the back. I am half afraid that she hoped it would be so to justify her criticisms. When there were only two or three in a year, our friends ascribed the work to the Holy Spirit—anything little was of the Holy Spirit. But if the number of converts rose to thirty or forty, and especially if it came to three hundred, that was mere excitement! When the minister had to ransack the congregation to find a few who could be drawn into the church to make his work look decent—that was the Holy Spirit—but when converts came pouring in by hundreds, oh, then everyone was frightened lest it should be fleshly excitement!

Dear brethren, is not this absurd? Do not these people act on the very reverse principle of the prophet’s widow? They say, “Bring very few vessels; vessels very few. Suppose some of them should not be filled! There is oil enough for one or two—do not bring more, for fear of failure in such cases. If we see the oil filling hundreds of vessels, then we say it cannot be oil; it must be some vile imitation of it. We cannot expect it can all be good oil if so many vessels are filled with it.” The fact is, there are some who do not believe the Holy Spirit to be great—nor even to be good. They have an idea that He is not God after all, for if they believed Him to be God, surely they would expect Him to do great things in this world, and they would look to see another Pentecost, in which thousands would cry out, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Instead of thinking that the period of revival through which we may have passed was anything in its greatness beyond what the Holy Spirit was likely to do, I believe, brethren, it was insignificant compared with what the Holy Spirit is *able and willing* to accomplish! If we should live to see a genuine revival of the best kind, we should see greater things than these! I hope that when the Holy Spirit comes with power, and works with His truth—as He will when we fully believe in Him, and obey Him—we shall then hear sermons preached which shall be the means of conversion of a whole Tabernacle full at once!

I hope to hear that in every chapel—in every place of worship in London—that the Word of God has had free course, and has been glorified! I hope to hear of places crowded first with one congregation, and then with another which had been waiting to come in! I hope that thousands will be in hot haste to find the Savior. Why not? You are settling down to think that this congregation is very great and very wonderful; and so indeed it is! Where else will you see these thousands constantly assembled? I trust the

day will come when hundreds of houses like this shall be crowded from floor to ceiling, and the cry shall be heard from tens of thousands, “Come over and help us, and tell us what the blood of Christ can do for us.” God grant this not in England only! We must not fancy that the heathen are to be converted at the slow pace they have been. The population of heathendom has increased at a far greater rate than the number of converts to Christianity! When the increase does come, it will come in a different style from this—in a Godlike way. Shall a nation be born at once? Perhaps it shall be so. Why not? The Spirit of God is not straitened, and when faith comes back to the church, and she brings her many empty vessels, then the Spirit of God that is in her shall graciously multiply His divine work, and all the empty nations shall be filled. England, the United States, France, Prussia, Russia, Italy, Spain, India, China, Arabia shall all be filled to the brim with the outpouring of God’s eternal Spirit, and myriads shall be saved by the precious blood of Jesus!

I would encourage my brother and sister workers here to look for great things, and go to work vigorously because they have an omnipotent God behind them. Brethren, push forward, undeterred by discouragement. You do not know, my dear sister, what you can do! But make a bold attempt, for your tiny spark may set a county on a blaze. My dear young brother, you do not know what you can accomplish. Put it to the test in all earnestness, and you will be surprised at yourself. The Lord can make use of poor nothings to achieve glorious purposes! It is not *your* strength; it is *His* strength that is to do the work. That strength can lay hold of but what shall turn out to be divine strength. Have faith in God. Believe Him to be true and omnipotent, and we shall see greater things than these. Alas, we fail because we do not believe! If the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth? I fear He would discover, but here and there, a grain of mustard seed. May He grant to many of us that heroic faith which, believing in God, thinks nothing of difficulties, and does not believe in impossibilities, but does right, and preaches the truth of God, and expects God to bless it above what we can ask or even think!

May God bless you, and may the first part of my subject be last in your recollection. If you are empty vessels, come to Christ and be filled. May He fill you with His grace tonight for His mercy sake! Amen and Amen.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

DEAR FRIENDS, I cannot write a letter to go with the sermon today, for I am too full of pain to command my thoughts—but I send this painful line. I was getting on admirably, but last Sunday afternoon I slipped upon a marble staircase, and fell a considerable distance. I thought I had escaped with the loss of two teeth and a bruised knee—but the knee is a more serious business than I thought. I am a close prisoner, and my pain is by no means a trifle. Please ask that I may have a full share of patience and praise God that it is not worse. I hope soon to be restored, not only to health, but also to my beloved people and my happy work. At present I am helpless and much bruised. Even this is among the “all things” which work together for good.

Yours most heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON.

MENTONE, JANUARY 3, 1889.

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

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