

NEAR THE KINGDOM, OR IN IT? NO. 2989

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MAY 24, 1906.
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 24, 1875.

*“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”
Mark 12:34.*

IN certain respects, all men are alike—alike fallen, and alike needing the Savior. Hence we have not 20 gospels, but only one—and we have not the gospel graduated to scale to suit different classes of society, or different conditions of morality. We have the same Christ to set before sinners of every sort as their only hope—and the same message to proclaim to every one of them, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

At the same time, we would make a very great mistake if we dealt with everybody in precisely the same way, for all human beings are not exactly alike, and our Savior Himself drew distinctions concerning those who came to Him while He was upon the earth. He uttered very strong language to some of the scribes, but He used a very different tone in addressing the particular scribe to whom He said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

There is no doubt that there are some sinners who are very far from the kingdom of God—by their wicked works, they have gone away even further than they were by nature. They have added to the original sin which was theirs by birth, all the corruptions which have come of evil habits, and with their backs to the light of God, they have gone further and further into the darkness of the night of sin. There are others, who through the restraining grace of God, have never done this. They are fallen creatures, it is true, but still, there are many beautiful points in their character. Indeed, they are so amiable that even Jesus, when looking upon one such young man, loved him, though He had to say even to him—“One thing you lack.” The lack of that one thing was fatal! Still, Christ recognized the good that there was in him, and I feel sure that He would have His ministers, and all who try to bring souls to Him, act in the same way. Besides, a point is gained with a man if you frankly recognize whatever there is about him that is satisfactory—and he will be the more likely to listen to you when you point out his defects, and show him wherein his character still falls short of what it ought to be. Fully believing that I have many in this congregation who are “not far from the kingdom of God,” I shall speak especially to them, or, rather, I pray that the Holy Spirit will speak to them through me, for it is HE who speaks with power to the heart and conscience!

I shall first *describe the condition in which this man was*. Then, secondly, *point out its dangers*. And, thirdly, *note its encouragements*.

I. First, then, let me DESCRIBE THE CONDITION IN WHICH THIS MAN WAS. “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

Christ spoke thus to him, and as He was able to read the man’s heart, he could tell, with absolute accuracy, the condition in which the man was. And He is able to read all our hearts at this moment. Looking down from the throne of glory, He knows, dear friend, exactly what your position is in relation to His kingdom—how far you have come, and how far short you still fall. Trusting in His unerring knowledge, I pray Him to send His Spirit, so that the Word of God spoken may meet your particular case, and so come home to you, that you may perceive that God Himself is speaking to you, and calling you to come into the kingdom towards which you have come so near.

Let us first look at this scribe’s case, and see why it was that he was so near to the kingdom. I think the first hopeful sign about him was that *he had evidently been, and was a man of candid spirit*. He was not as prejudiced as most of the other scribes were. His mind and heart were open to conviction. When he read the ancient Scriptures, he did not read them with his eyes shut, or gazing through colored Rabbinical spectacles as so many of the scribes read them. He went to them desiring to know the truth that was in them, and when he saw the truth, he did not rebel against it, but yielded himself to it. It is

evident that he had been a candid student of the law of God, for he had arrived at the conclusion that its greatest commandment was love to God, and to one's neighbor, whereas I have no doubt that many of his fellow scribes had given the first place to matters that were purely ceremonial—something to do with circumcision, perhaps, or with the eating of unleavened bread—matters that were important enough in their proper sphere, yet not to be regarded as the weightiest things in the law. But this man had read with an evident determination to know the truth, and so far he had found it out.

He showed his candor, not only by his diligent search for the truth, but also by being a candid controversialist. He had heard the questions which had been put to Christ, and he had noted how wisely Christ had answered them. And he had also noticed that not one of the questioners had had the courtesy to say that Christ had answered them well. They were so ashamed of themselves for putting the questions to Him, that they had evidently retired into the background. But this man, as soon as he received the answer to his inquiry, seemed to recognize the wisdom of the great Teacher, and he expressed the opinion that Christ had answered him wisely. I do not know how he could have put it better than he did when he said, "Well, Master, you have said the truth." You know that when men are arguing, and their blood is hot, it very often happens that the one disputant will not admit that the other has spoken the truth. Though he is quite sure that it is so, he will not acknowledge it—and it is an evidence of a really candid spirit when, in the midst of a debate, a man confesses that his opponent has got the better of him. It shows that he is not merely fighting for the victory, but is seeking the truth. And there is always something hopeful about a man of that sort. My dear friend, I do not know where you are, nor what your particular opinions may be, but if you are firmly resolved to follow truth wherever she may lead you, I think I may say to you, as Christ said to this scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Do not be self-confident, nor rely too much upon your own judgment, but let your mind lie open to conviction. Above all, let it be open to the heavenly light of God! And if you do, I shall have hope concerning you, notwithstanding a thousand mistakes that you may make. An honest seeker after the truth will not be long before truth finds him, and he finds truth!

Another favorable point in this scribe's character was that *he evidently had some degree of spiritual perception*—not much, perhaps, but still, as things went, a good deal for that time. He had found out, through reading the law of God, that God attached more importance to matters of moral practice than to mere matters of ceremony, and much more importance to that which concerned the heart than so many outward actions. "To love the Lord with all one's heart, and soul, and strength; and to love one's neighbor as one's self," said this scribe, "is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." He had advanced further than many a Romanist has, for the Romanist would hardly say as much as he did. "The outward ceremonies of the church are so exceedingly important," he would say, "that I could not put anything else before them." But this man had been taught to feel that real heart-work, and true love to God were more important than all the ceremonies of the law, *even though they were ordained by God Himself*. He had advanced further than some of our very doctrinal friends, to whom orthodoxy seems to be both the first thing, and the last thing, though, as you very well know, what they call orthodoxy is simply their own doxy! But if people only hold that doxy, that is about all they care for—all the rest is a very secondary matter to them. This scribe, however, had advanced further than that, and he would, doubtless, have said that to love God with the whole of one's heart was more important than believing all the dogmas that were ever formulated by all the doctors of divinity in the world!

This scribe had also advanced further than the mere moralist, who teaches that if you do what *you* think is right, that is all you need trouble yourselves about. But this scribe expressly spoke of loving the Lord "with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength." He could see that the entire man must be given up to love God, for, if he were not, all the outward profession of living according to the letter of the law would not suffice. Now, dear friend, if you have been enabled to break through your former attachment to mere external ceremonies—if you have fully comprehended that true religion is not a matter of mere externals—you are "not far from the kingdom of God." You are one of those who are learning that "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him." I hope He is seeking you, and that before long, you will not only be *near* the kingdom, but actually in it! It is a grand thing when a man is brought so far as to be able, from deep inward conviction, to say with Dr. Watts—

*"Not all the outward forms of earth,
Nor rites that God has given,
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,*

Can raise a soul to heaven."

If we are to be saved, there must be the *regenerating* work of the Holy Spirit within the soul to make it spiritual and capable of spiritual worship! And he who really knows this is "not far from the kingdom of God."

Another admirable point in this scribe's character was that *he evidently had a considerable knowledge of the law*. To know the law of the Lord is the next thing to knowing the gospel. It is not everybody who understands this truth, but it really is so. Old Robby Flockhart, an evangelist who used to preach in the streets of Edinburgh, sometimes said to his hearers, "I will preach the law of God to you tonight, and nothing but the law of God, for it is the sharp needle without which I cannot get the silken thread of the gospel into your hearts." And he spoke the truth. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." When the law condemns a man, he flies to Christ to seek forgiveness—but until he has received the sentence of the law in his own soul, he will never fly to Jesus Christ, and His atoning sacrifice to be set free from sin. If the law is rightly used, it drives the sinner to the Savior—and there was hope concerning this scribe because he evidently knew the requirements of the law of God. He did not sum that up in a mere outward morality, but he knew that the law was spiritual, and that it made demands upon man of a spiritual character. It would not have taken anyone long, I should think, to convince that man that he had fallen short of those demands. And when he had been thus convinced, he was well on the way to seeing the preciousness of the atonement that could meet the demands of that broken law of God—so that his knowledge of the requirements of the law helped him to be "not far from the kingdom of God."

Once again, *this scribe was evidently teachable*. He was in such a frame of mind that he was willing to hear what the great Teacher had to say. I do not think he came to Christ as a quibbler. He probably came to test Christ, but not to quibble with Him after he had tested Him, and having tested Him, he was willing to learn more of Him. It is a hopeful sign when we are willing to sit on the children's seat, remembering our Lord's words to His disciples, "Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Some people are much too big to go through heaven's gate. They are so wise, in their own estimation, that they are not willing to be taught even by infinite wisdom. Their judgment is so accurate, their intelligence is so clear, that they will not submit to be instructed by Him who is the very wisdom of God. They think that they have within themselves the power to draw an infallible distinction between right and wrong, between the truth and error—and they will not allow even the Almighty to dictate to them, and to be the Arbiter of their lives. Ah, brothers and sisters, this is a sad state for anyone to be in! But it is a hopeful sign when we are teachable. If you are so, you are "not far from the kingdom of God."

Now I will leave this scribe, in order that I may take notice of some others who are "not far from the kingdom of God." There are many persons who, from their youth up, have always had a great horror of that which is wrong. And they have felt—not to perfection, but to a considerable extent—a delight in that which is true and good. They do not feel themselves to be true or good, but they wish they were. Their first associations in life were with godly people, and they have always loved godly things. They do not find family prayer to be irksome or, if they do, they realize how wrong they are for being in such a state of mind. They would be very sorry if the ordinances of religion were neglected in the place where they live. The Sabbath is a delight to them, and they love to go up to God's house. They hardly know why they feel thus, for they are afraid they have no part nor lot in the matter, but still, they like to go there—if there is anything good to be heard, they wish to have a share in it. If anybody speaks against good things, or good men, they are very grieved. Horror takes hold of them if they ever hear God's name blasphemed. They have had, from their very childhood, a bias in the direction of that which is right—but it is natural rather than spiritual. They are not, as yet, distinctly out and out for Christ—they have not believed in Him as their Savior, they have not yielded themselves up completely to Him. I am persuaded that we have large numbers of young people who are very accurately described by that expression, "not far from the kingdom." Of course, I am speaking of their best side, and I am well aware that there is another side to their character—but there is still much about them that is hopeful!

I know some who are even nearer to the kingdom than those whom I have been describing, for they are under a very deep sense of their sinfulness. Not one of them would ever be so foolish, and so wicked as to say, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men are." Often, while they are sitting here listening

to a sermon that is full of comfort, they feel that they are not entitled to have it for themselves. Oh, how they wish they could believe, and that they were really saved! One thing they do realize—that is they are lost, and ruined, and undone. This fact has caused them much sorrow of heart, but they are not yet sufficiently awake to make the desperate effort which decides the matter. Realizing that they are condemned, they cannot feel at ease, and sometimes floods of tears flow down from their eyes because of their transgressions. Ah, my dear friend, if that is your condition, you are, truly, “not far from the kingdom of God.”

There are others who are in this further hopeful condition; they are very attentive hearers of the Word. They come to the house of prayer on purpose, that they may hear the gospel, and after a fashion they pray that the gospel may be a blessing to them. I like preaching to people of that sort! One might wish to preach all day and all night if one could only have throngs of such hearers—every one of whom would be praying, “O my God, bless me! O my God, save me!” I remember that when I was in this condition, I used to pray all through a sermon, “O Lord, meet with me, meet with me tonight!” And, my dear friend, you are “not far from the kingdom” if that is how you are now praying.

I know some who have advanced still further, for they have kept on praying wherever they have been, though they themselves hardly know whether they have been praying rightly. You know, dear friend, that you went home last Sabbath, and fell on your knees, and cried, “Lord, save me!” And, during the past week, you have got away alone as often as you could that you might have a little time of prayer. Even when you have been at work—you do not know whether others have noticed it or not—there has been the heaving of a sigh, or the upward glancing of the eyes. Sometimes you have almost wished that you had never been born, for you have had the dreadful fear that you might never find the Savior! At other times, you have had a little hope that perhaps you might; and, at any rate, you are a true seeker—and I believe you are “not far from the kingdom.”

Besides that, I should not wonder if you read the Scriptures very earnestly to try to find out how you can obtain eternal life. And you also study good books with the same view—those very books which you once thought so dull and even horrible! You read them now at every spare moment that you can get. You would rather read them than the most fascinating romantic novel that was ever written, for you are earnestly seeking eternal life. You certainly are “not far from the kingdom of God.”

II. Now, secondly, I want you to NOTICE THE PECULIAR DANGER OF YOUR CONDITION if you are “not far from the kingdom.”

The great danger of it is that *though you are not far from the kingdom, you are not in it*. A man was in a sinking ship. He almost leaped into the lifeboat, but just missed it, and was drowned. The manslayer was fighting for his life, and the avenger of blood was close behind him. He had almost reached the City of Refuge, but he was overtaken by his adversary just outside the gate—and so was slain. Almost saved is altogether lost! There are many in hell who once were almost saved, but who are now altogether damned. Think of that, you who are not far from the kingdom. It is being *in the kingdom* that saves the soul, not being *near* the kingdom! If you are just upon the border, yet if you have not actually entered, you are not secure. Those five foolish virgins were almost in the banqueting hall—there was only the thickness of a door between them and the wedding feast—but they only heard the awful sentence, “Too late! Too late! You cannot enter now.” Your great danger is that you will get to be content with being *near* the kingdom, although not actually in it. I have known some people remain in that perilous position for months, and years till, at last, it got to be their chronic condition, and they made no effort to take the decisive step. They appeared to be in a very hopeful state, yet I fear that, by-and-by, we shall have to give them up as utterly hopeless. Oh, these hopelessly hopeful people—what can we do with them? They are, for a time, hopeful, yet never more than hopeful; and, at last, we have to admit that their apparent goodness is only superficial, and that all the hopes they raised within us are delusive. They mock us, and we also fear that they mock God!

We are also very much afraid that you who are “not far from the kingdom,” *may get into your heads the notion that there is something good in you*, and that there being something good in you, it will help to save you. If so, you will be really further away from the kingdom than if you were literally far off! I know of nothing that will more effectually keep you out of the kingdom of God than the notion that you are good enough to stay out—the idea that, surely, God will not condemn such excellent persons as you are! And, besides, you are so near that you can slip in any day. If you get that notion into your head, I am afraid you will never slip in, but that you will perish in your present lost condition. Oh, may God graciously deliver all of you from such fatal self-righteousness!

I should like to point out to you one thing, and that is this—*how very terrible it would be if you should be lost after having been so near to the kingdom of God!* The manslayer is overtaken by the avenger of blood, and falls a mangled corpse upon the very threshold of the City of Refuge—does not that seem truly dreadful? One step more, and he would have been safe! But he could not make that step, so he was slain. I always feel mortified if I got to a railway station just as the train, which I want to catch, moves from the station. If it had gone ten minutes earlier, I would not have minded missing it so much—but to be so near as to see it go seems to aggravate my disappointment; and, certainly, it will be the greatest aggravation of all to you if you are lost after having been so very near to the kingdom of God! I can almost imagine other souls that are lost speaking to you in that tone of tension which Isaiah applied to the king of Babylon, “Hell from beneath is moved for you to meet you at my coming...They shall go and say unto you, Have you also become weak as we? Have you become like we? How are you fallen!” What horror must have seized the guilty tyrant when he came into the midst of those whom he had oppressed and crushed! And if some of you who have been so near to the kingdom, are lost, I can imagine the swearer in hell saying to you, “Ah, you rebuked me for my oaths, but where are you now?” And another will say, “You used to help reclaim drunks, but where are you now? You were one of those who used to sit in the Tabernacle, and listen to sermons. I never went there, but you did—and how much the better are you for going?” And some of them will say, “Oh, if we had only had your opportunities, if we had but heard the gospel as you heard it! If we had been placed under the holy, hallowed influences which surrounded you, surely we would not have acted as foolishly as you have done!” I need not draw any fancy pictures of what may happen, for you know what our Lord Jesus Christ said to those who heard Him, and yet repented not—“I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment, than for you.” If you have heard the gospel, and the kingdom of God has come near unto you, and you have come near unto it, and yet, through lack of the decided act of faith in Jesus Christ, you perish in your sin, your doom will be more terrible even than that of Tyre and Sidon, or Sodom and Gomorrah—

*“So near to the kingdom! Yet what do you lack?
So near to the kingdom! What keeps you back?
Denounce every idol, though dear it may be,
And come to the Savior now pleading with thee!
So near, that you hear the songs that resound
From those who believing, a pardon have found!
So near, yet unwilling to give up your sin
When Jesus is waiting to welcome you in!
To die with no hope! Have you counted the cost?—
To die out of Christ, and your soul to be lost?
So near to the kingdom! Oh come, we implore!
While Jesus is pleading, come enter the door!”*

III. I will not say more upon that sad part of my subject. I feel far more at home in trying to speak, for only a minute or two, on the last point, namely, THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD. May God, in His infinite mercy, grant that you may enter the kingdom this very night! May He not allow another morning’s sun to rise from the East, and look upon you as unconverted men or women!

For, first, *think how much God has already done for you.* You might have been born in one of the back slums of London, or you might even have been born as Hottentots, or a cannibal islander! Perhaps upon that matter of your birth depends the fact that you are sitting in this house of prayer, and are not in the gin palace, the prison, or in hell itself! It may be simply the dispensation of divine providence that has made this difference between you and the very worst of men. Be very thankful to God for what He has already done for you—for this vantage ground on which His providence, and the kind instructions of Christian parents and friends have placed you.

And, next, *as He has done so much for you, should not this encourage you to ask Him for still more?* If He has, by His grace, brought you so near to the kingdom, would it not be wise for you to say to Him, “My God, You have done much for me. Will You not now give me that which will make all this end in my salvation? Will You not give me a new heart, and a right spirit? Will You not give me the new birth which will enable me to believe in Jesus Christ this very night, so that I may pass from death unto life?”

Do you not think that the message of the gospel should very much commend itself to you? You are a candid hearer, if I understand you rightly, and you have some love to good things. Now, was there ever a more divine message than this? God has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into this world. He took upon Himself the sin of guilty man. He suffered in the place of the guilty, and He bids us now proclaim this gospel of free, sovereign grace, that “whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” Christ has endured the full penalty of sin. Jesus has bowed His back to carry the intolerable burden of human guilt, and He *has* carried it, and cast it into the depths of the sea, where it shall never be found, to be again laid by the charge of any soul that believes in Him. You are not asked to do anything, you are not even asked to *feel* anything—you are simply asked to trust yourself in the hands of the incarnate God. Was anything ever simpler, or more full of grace, or of compassion to your lost and helpless condition? It is all put into this simple message, “Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth.” This is the message from Christ in the highest heavens! “Look, look, look,” is all He bids you do—simply look unto Him, Trust in Him, depend upon Him! Surely you cannot desire anything that is more worthy of God than this gospel of His grace which we proclaim unto you in His name!

Well, my dear friend, you have come near to the kingdom, *but is it not very clear to you that you need something more than you can find in yourself?* You have come as far as you can, yet, as far as that is compared with where others are, how little it really is! I said that you had begun to pray, but what sort of prayer is yours? I said that you were an attentive hearer of the Word—so you are—yet how small a thing will take you off from the pursuit of the blessed realities of grace! You know that although you are somewhat softened, your heart is still hard. There is still much unbelief in your soul, though there is a gleam of what looks like faith now and then. In fact, to put the matter very plainly, you are in such a condition that you will be in hell unless the mercy of God shall prevent it, for you are certainly not yet saved! Do you know that it is so? Do you really feel this? Then, can you not, (may God help you to do it), by one desperate effort of faith, throw yourself at the feet of Jesus, and say to Him, “Never will I go from You, O You blessed Savior, till You pronounce me clean! I now put out the tip of my finger, feeble and weak as my faith is, and I touch You. If You can save a sinner, Jesus, save me! I trust You to do so!” Friend, you are saved! That simple touch of the finger has brought virtue out of Christ unto you, and He has bid you go in peace!

I remember how it seemed to me, when I was under conviction of sin—as though Christ stood before me with a sharp sword in each of His hands! And I felt, “I can but be lost. I will fling myself into His arms notwithstanding those swords.” And so I did, by a desperate plunge! I felt, “I have done with all attempts at self-salvation! Christ is my only Savior. I see that He finished my salvation on the accursed tree. I depend upon Him, I lean on Him with all my weight, and all my might. Guilty and black and vile—and foul as I am by nature—I wash in the fountain filled with His precious blood, and am clean every whit, even in the sight of the Most High God!” Oh, that you, dear friend, would do the same! I believe that you are doing it, that God is helping you to do it. I feel sure that He is, and that you are letting go all your foolish confidence, all trust in your own prayer, or even in your own faith, or your own anything! And you are going to trust yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, whether you sink or swim! Faith is very much like learning to swim. I have often thought that I could easily swim, but I never could induce myself to take the last toe off the ground—and there is no swimming till one does that. You must trust yourself wholly to the water. So must you trust yourself to Jesus! But you are afraid to take that last toe off the ground—you cannot give up just a little confidence in yourself. Oh, for the glorious plunge of faith! You fear that you will drown, but you will not, for you will swim. The everlasting love of Jesus will buoy up the biggest sinner out of hell if he will but rest himself upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for the sins of man! Only trust Him, and He will save you! May God give you the grace to trust Him, and He shall have all the glory. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: MARK 12:12-44.

Verse 12. *And they sought to lay hold on Him, but feared the people: for they knew that He had spoken the parable against them: and they left Him, and went their way.*

Christ's enemies could not injure Him, then, partly because the people heard Him gladly, and were ready to protect Him, but still more because the appointed time for His suffering and death had not fully come.

13, 14. *And they sent unto Him certain of the Pharisees, and of the Herodians to catch Him in His words. And when they were come, they said unto Him, Master, we know that You are true, and care for no man: for You regard not the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth.*

They meant "to catch Him in His words," if they could, so they baited their trap with flattery. Whenever a man begins to flatter you, be on your guard against him. If he tries to commence a conversation with you by uttering words of excessive admiration, depend upon it that he admires something that you have got, more than he admires you! And, therefore, be on the watch against him. Our Savior must, in His heart, have utterly despised men who were so foolish as to imagine that they could entrap Him by their flattering words. After that preface, they asked the questions which they thought would impale Him upon the horns of a dilemma—

14, 15. *Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?*

They knew very well that if Christ said, "Do not give tribute to Caesar," the Romans would have taken him up, and imprisoned him for preaching sedition, but, on the other hand, if He said, "Pay tribute to Caesar," the Jews would have said that He was their enemy, and not a true patriot, or else He would not have admitted that the chosen people were bound to pay taxes to their Roman conquerors.

15-17. *But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt you Me? Bring Me a penny, that I may see it. And they brought it. And He said unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto Him, Caesar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marveled at Him.*

He had answered them with matchless wisdom without committing Himself in either way!

18-23. *Then came unto Him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection, and they asked Him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind him, and leaves no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were seven brothers, and the first took a wife, and dying, left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. And the seven had her, and left no seed. Last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection, therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them, for the seven had her to wife.*

No doubt they thought that they had completely entangled Him that time! How could He answer such a difficult question as that? But, you see, they had based their inquiry upon the erroneous supposition that things are to be in another state as they are here—so Jesus was able at once to answer them as effectively as He had just answered the Pharisees and Herodians.

24-27. *And Jesus, answering said unto them, Do you not therefore, err, because you know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise: have you not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spoke unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living; you therefore do greatly err.*

His answer carried the war into the enemies' camp! They professed to believe in Moses, yet they denied the existence of spirits, and the fact of the resurrection. But Jesus Christ proved to a demonstration that God cannot be the God of the dead! If, therefore, He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive! And if He is your God, and my God, dear friends, we need not fear extinction—we will live, and we will live forever!

28-34. *And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered Him, The first of all the commandments is, hear, O Israel. The Lord our God is one Lord: and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto Him, Well, Master, You have said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but He; and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul and with all the*

strength, and to love his neighbor as himself is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, You are not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that dared asked Him any question.

He had so decidedly put all His questioners to the rout that no other man had the audacity to court defeat at His hands! The infallible wisdom of Christ had put all His accusers and tempters to flight.

35, 36. *And Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Spirit.*

In Psalm 110:1—

36, 37. *The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool. David therefore himself calls Him Lord; and from where is He then his son?*

They could not answer that riddle, but we can. We know that Jesus is both David's son, and David's Lord—a man like ourselves, of the great human race, yet, “very God of very God,” blessed be His holy name!

37-40. *And the common people heard Him gladly. And He said unto them in His doctrine, Beware of the scribes which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplace, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: which devour widows' houses, and for a presence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.*

We often hear foolish people say “You must always preach in love, and not say anything against anybody! Jesus did not denounce anybody.” Oh, dear! Then what about this denunciation of the scribes? Were Jesus here today, He would not be the soft-shelled creature that some people want us to be! He had a backbone and a conscience—and a very heavy right hand—and He brought that hand down like a sledgehammer upon cant, and hypocrisy and error! And if we would be like Christ, we must be manly, bold and outspoken! They tell us this in order that we may easily glide through the world, and that all men may speak well of us. But so did their fathers to the false prophets—and do you suppose that we who preach God's Word are going to keep back any part of our testimony because it will bring us into ill repute with the ungodly? God forbid! We live for something higher and nobler than being fed upon the breath of evil men! If there is error in high places, if there is vice *anywhere*, it is the duty of the minister of Christ, in His Master's name, to attack it with all his might! Here we find our Lord and Master plainly declaring that the scribes, the great masters of the law of God, were a set of pretentious hypocrites who robbed even the widow and the fatherless, and who would, in due time, “receive greater damnation.” Even so must the truth still be spoken, whoever may be offended by it!

41, 42. *And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow.*

Doubly poor, because she was not only a widow, but in poverty—“a certain poor widow.”

42-44. *And she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto Him His disciples, and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow has cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance.*

Christ measures what we really give by what we have left—by the proportion which what we give bears to what we possess—“For all they did cast in of their abundance.”

44. *But she of her need did cast in all that she had, even all her living.*

So she gave more than any or all the others did!

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”——645, 658.

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