

NEARNESS TO GOD

NO. 851

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”
Ephesians 2:13.*

THE text is a gate of pearl leading up to the excellent glory. Happy are the men to whom it is given to enter thereby. It turns upon hinges of diamond. Those two phrases, “in Christ Jesus,” “by the blood of Christ”—these are the two pivots of the precious doctrine of the text. “Made nigh,” this is our delightful privilege, but “in Christ Jesus,” is one source of the blessing, “and by the blood of Christ” is the other. Before our rejoicing eyes rolls a sea of love, an ocean of boundless peace and bliss comparable to the sea of glass before the sapphire throne. In order to reach this great Pacific, you must sail through yon narrow strait which flows between the two headlands of union to Christ, and cleansing by the atoning blood.

I. We commence, therefore this morning, by endeavoring to EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF THE TWO KEY WORDS—“*In Christ Jesus,*” and “*by the blood of Christ.*” “We who sometimes were far off are made nigh.”

First, because we are in Christ Jesus. All the elect of God are in Christ Jesus by a federal union. He is their Head ordained of old to be so from before the foundation of the world. As Adam was the federal head of the race, and as in him we fell, so Christ, the second Adam, stands as the Head of the chosen people, and in Him they rise again and live. This federal union leads in due time, by the grace of God, to a manifest and vital union—a union *of* life and *for* life, even unto eternal life, of which the visible bond is faith.

The soul comes to Jesus, and lays hold on Him by an act of faith, because Jesus has already laid hold upon that soul by the power of His Spirit, claiming it to be His heritage, seeing He has bought it with His blood, and His Father has given it to Him as the reward of the travail of His soul. All who are in Christ Jesus in the eternal covenant of grace, shall in due time be in Him by the living union of which we now speak—mystical and mysterious, but still most real, most true, and most efficient.

Now, beloved, when a soul becomes really in Christ, as the branch is in the vine, and draws its nourishment from the stem, as the limb is in the body, and derives all its vitality from the central heart—when a man thus becomes one with Christ, it is clear to the commonest observer that he must be near to God, for Christ is ever near to God, and those one with Him must be near also. Jesus is Himself God—here is nearness outdone. As man He is without spot or blemish, and near to God in character. As having finished the work which was given Him to do, He is near to God in acceptance. As having gone up to heaven to take the promised crown, He is near to God in person, and since we are one with Him, we must be from that very fact near to God, ay, as near to God as Christ Himself is.

Understand that if anything be one with a man, actually one with that man, it stands in the same place as that man does. So if we are one with Christ by a real and actual union, where Christ is, we are. Christ's standing is our standing. And as Christ is near unto God, even so He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places. We are—

*“So near, so very near to God,
We cannot nearer be.
For in the person of His Son,*

We are as near as He.”

The other key word of the text is “*by the blood of Christ.*” If it be asked what power lies in the blood to bring nigh, it must be answered, first, that the blood is the symbol of the covenant. Ever in Scripture when covenants are made, victims are offered, and the victim becomes the place and ground of approach between the two covenanting parties. The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is expressly called, “the blood of the everlasting covenant,” for God comes in covenant near to us by the blood of His only-begotten Son. Every man whose faith rests upon the blood of Jesus slain from before the foundations of the world is in covenant with God, and that covenant becomes to him most sure and certain because it has been ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ, and therefore can never be changed or disannulled.

The blood brings us near in another sense, because it is the taking away of the sin which separated us. When we read the word “blood,” as in the text, it means mortal suffering—we are made nigh by the griefs and agonies of the Redeemer. The shedding of blood indicates pain, loss of energy, health, comfort, happiness. But it goes further still—the term “blood,” signifies death. It is the death of Jesus in which we trust. We glory in His life, we triumph in His resurrection, but the ground of our nearness to God lies in His death.

The term “blood,” moreover, signifies not a mere expiring, but a painful, and ignominious, and penal death. A death not brought about by the decay of nature, or the arrows of disease, but caused by the sharp sword of divine vengeance. The word, in fact, refers directly to the crucifixion of our Lord. We are brought nigh to God especially and particularly by a crucified Savior pouring out His life’s blood for us.

Beloved, it is well to note this well-known doctrine, because there are some teachers—and I doubt not very excellent men, too—who seem not to be of Paul’s mind when he said, “God forbid that I should glory, save in *the cross* of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and who resolved to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him *crucified*. These brothers are incessantly preaching concerning Christ *glorified*, a valuable truth, I allow, but not the way of a sinner’s access to God.

Christ’s Second Coming was never intended to take the place of Christ’s crucifixion, and yet there have been some I fear, who, in their zeal for the very great and important truth of the coming glory, have suffered the blazing light of the second advent to obscure the milder radiance, and the more healing beams of the first advent, with its bloody sweat, its scourge, and thorn-crown, and ransom price for sinners lost.

Let it never be forgotten, that while we bless Immanuel, God with us, for His incarnation, and we joyfully perceive that even our Lord’s birth in human flesh brought man near to God. While we thank and praise the Man of Sorrows for His divine example, and we see that this is a blessed help to us practically to advance towards our heavenly Father, while we praise and magnify the Lord Jesus for His resurrection and His ascension, and discern in each glorious step fresh rounds of the ladder which leads from earth to heaven, yet still, for all that, we are not made nigh to God by the incarnation. We are not in very deed made nigh to God by the resurrection, nor by the second advent, but we are made nigh by the *blood of Christ*.

The first, the grandest, the highest, the most essential truth for us to lay hold of and to preach is the fact that Jesus Christ died for our sakes according to the Scriptures, and that this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and for sinners gave Himself up to die, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. God is glorified because Christ was punished for the sin of His people. Love has its full, but law has its due. On the cross we see sin fully punished, and yet fully pardoned. We see justice with her gleaming sword triumphant, and mercy with her silver scepter regnant in sublime splendor.

Glory be to the wondrous wisdom which discovered the way of blending vengeance with love, making a tender heart to be the mirror of unflinching severity, causing the crystal vase of Jesus’ loving nature to be filled with the red wine of righteous wrath.

*“O love of God, how strong and true!
Eternal, and yet ever new.
Uncomprehended and unbought,
Beyond all knowledge and all thought.*

*We read Thee best in Him who came
To bear for us the cross of shame—
Sent by the Father from on high,
Our life to live, our death to die.”*

Beloved, you thus see that we are made nigh because the blood of Christ has sealed a covenant between us and God, and has forever taken away the sin which separated us from God. Experientially, we are brought nigh by the application of the blood to our conscience. We see that sin is pardoned, and bless the God who has saved us in so admirable a manner, and then we who hated Him before, come to love Him. We who had no thought towards Him, desire to be like He is. We are experientially, and in our own souls, drawn and attracted to God by the blood of Jesus.

The great attracting loadstone of the Gospel is the doctrine of the cross. To preach the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is the shortest and surest way, under God’s Holy Spirit, to draw those who are far off, mentally and spiritually, very near unto God. Thus have I dwelt upon those two key words upon which the text seems to me to hinge.

II. Let us pass on to ILLUSTRATE THE NEARNESS into which God has been pleased to bring us in Christ Jesus by virtue of His blood.

I shall take three illustrations from the Word of God. The first illustration is from our first parent, *Adam*. Adam dwelt in the garden, abiding with God in devout communion. The Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day with Adam. As a favored creature, the first man was permitted to know much of his Creator and to be nigh to Him. But alas! Adam sinned, and at once we see the first stage of our own distance from God as we perceive Adam in the garden without his God.

In the garden, in the very midst of Paradise, flowers shedding their sweet perfume, fruits hanging ready to his hand on every side, and yet man is wretched, miserable, and cowardly. He hides among the trees of the garden until the Lord God calls to him, “Adam, where are you?” Here is the first stage of distance, and it is sad and terrible. But ah! brethren, you and I were further off than that—much farther off than that when His love made us nigh.

It would have been a great wonder of grace if being in such a position, God had restored us again to His favor. If He had said to us after one transgression, “I have blotted out your sin like a cloud: I have passed by your offense, I restore you to happiness.” But the grace which God has shown to us is as much greater than this as the thorn-bearing soil is sterner than Eden’s laughing bowers. Adam was brought before his God, arraigned, upbraided, and condemned to be expelled from Paradise. Justice drove out the man. With fiery sword the cherubim keep watch at Eden’s gate. Adam banished into the cold, sin-blighted world to till the ground whence he was taken, with the promise ringing in his ear, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head,” the second stage of distance from God.

Now, it would have been great grace for God to take Adam from outside the garden, to forgive him, to bring him within the happy gate, and restore him to his former place, but the mercy wrought in us is greater still. You and I were farther gone than Adam outside of Eden, with a Gospel promise newly given him. We were not on the threshold of Paradise, but we were far off by wicked works. Our natural position as Gentile sinners was not with Adam outside the gate, but with the nations that knew not God, when they had wandered farthest away from Paradise, had become most estranged from God, and had set up gods many, and lords many, and had polluted and defiled themselves with all manner of uncleanness.

See now the steps which God has taken with us Gentile dogs, as the Jews once called us. He has taken us, who were of old an idolatrous people, practicing bloody rites—a nation without knowledge of

the divine oracles, and He has illuminated us with the Gospel of His grace, bringing the kingdom of God very nigh unto us, and ourselves very near to it. The Lord has been pleased to separate many of us to Himself and bring us into His visible church, so that we dwell within that “garden walled around, chosen and made peculiar ground.” Herein is no small deed of love. Aliens are made fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God.

Yet, much more than this has been done for true believers in the blood of Jesus. Not the name only, but the very essence and soul of true piety is ours, so that once again we walk with God. And in communion with the saints and with their Lord, we find a new garden of delight, whose plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, camphor with spikenard. “Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphor, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon.” We might date our letters from Elysium, for, “We that have believed do enter into rest.” Yes, we are restored by grace to the King’s garden. We have found glory begun below—

*“Celestial fruits on earthly ground,
From faith and hope do grow.”*

Let me now give you a *second* illustration, which may place this wonder of love in a still clearer light. It shall be taken from the children of Israel traveling through the wilderness. If an angel had poised himself in midair, and watched awhile in the days of Moses, gazing down upon the people in the wilderness, and all else that surrounded them, his eye would have rested upon the central spot, the tabernacle, over which rested the pillar of cloud and fire by day and night, as the outward index of the presence of God.

Now, observe yonder select persons clad in fair white linen, who come near, very near, to that great center—they are priests, men who are engaged from day to day sacrificing bullocks and lambs, and serving God. They are near to the Lord, and engaged in most hallowed work, but they are not the nearest of all. One man alone comes nearest. He is the high priest who, once every year, enters into that which is within the veil.

Ah, what condescension is that which gives us the same access to God. The priests are servants of God, and very near to Him, but not nearest, and it would be great grace if God permitted the priests to enter into the most holy place. But brethren, we were not by nature comparable to the priests. We were not the Lord’s servants. We were not devoted to His fear, and the grace that has brought us near through the precious blood was much greater than that which admits a priest within the veil. Every priest that went within the veil entered there by blood which he sprinkled on the mercy seat. If made highest, even from the nearer stage, it must be by blood, and in connection with the one only High Priest.

If the angel continued his gaze, he would next see lying all round the tabernacle the twelve tribes in their tents. These were a people near unto God—for what nation has God so nigh unto them? (Deuteronomy 4:7). But they are nothing like so near as the priests. They did not abide in the holy court, nor were they always occupied in worship. Israel may fitly represent the outward church, the members of which have not yet received all the spiritual blessing they might have, yet are they blessed and made nigh.

If ever an Israelite advanced into the court of the priests, it was with blood. He came with sacrifice. There was no access without it. It was great favor which permitted the Israelite to come into the court of the priests and partake in divine worship. But brethren, you and I were farther off than Israel, and it needed more grace by far to bring us nigh. By blood alone are we made nigh, and by blood displayed in all the glory of its power.

Outside the camp of Israel altogether, you would have seen a company of miserable wretches who herded together as best they could—lepers, unclean, driven without the camp. This is more like our

position. If ever these lepers were brought nigh enough to come into communion with the camp of Israel, much more to come into communion with the priests, their access must be wholly and alone by blood. The turtle dove, or the young pigeon must be slain. The lamb must be killed, the scarlet wool and hyssop must be used. There was no purging of the leper to bring him into communion with the tribes of Israel except by blood.

And oh! we—we in our filthiness so like the leper—we have to praise almighty grace which looked upon us when our natural depravity stared us in the face, when it had become apparent by our continued disobedience to God. We have to praise the mercy which has brought us right away from the leper's place to as near to God as the accepted high priest before the veil. Beloved, had the angel still continued his gaze, he would have observed that even these lepers were far more favored than the other inhabitants of the world, for the whole world was lying in darkness, without God, without a revelation of His glory.

THIS is our position, this last. We were the aliens, the strangers, the foreigners. A leper, though a leper, was still an Israelite, and if he could not go up into the sanctuary of the Lord, yet still there was the mark of the covenant of his flesh, and he was of the seed of Abraham, and the wing of God in the cloudy pillar covered him. He ate the manna, and drank of the rock. But as for the poor heathen, for them there was no appointed way of access—they were cast out and left to perish in their sins. The old covenant did not, as far as its outward manifestation was concerned, have a word to say to us.

Far off then, with the Gentiles is your place and my place. We are by nature out of covenant and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. There are you right away in the dark heathen world, and what did God's grace do for you? Why, it brought you first of all into connection with God's people, and under the sound of the Gospel's silver trumpet. You became like the poor leper, but still you were near to Israel, hearing the Gospel, and learning the way of salvation. Thank God for bringing you so nigh as that, for there is no small privilege in hearing the truth. But grace did not stop there. It purged and cleansed you, and you were admitted into fellowship with the church. You became numbered with the seed of Israel. You pitched your tent near the tabernacle, and partook of its abundant blessings, but grace did not stop there.

It made you next a priest unto God, a consecrated servant of the Lord of Hosts, and you have been kept by grace in the place of holy service. You are still the Lord's anointed priest, and your sacrifices are well-pleasing in His sight. But here is the wonder of wonders—when the eternal love of God has brought you so near, so gloriously near, it did not stop there. It did not content itself with making you a priest, but it said you shall stand “in Christ Jesus.” And beloved, you know that this means that we are made as near Christ Himself, who, as the great High Priest, with blood in His hand, goes right into the veil, right up to the mercy seat, and talks with God.

A *third* illustration of our nearness to God will be found around the peaks of the mount of God, even Sinai, where the various degrees of access to God are set forth with singular beauty and preciseness of detail. The nineteenth chapter of the book of Exodus tells us that the Lord revealed Himself on the top of Sinai with flaming fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace. JEHOVAH drew near unto His people Israel, coming down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai, while the tribes stood at the foot of the mountain.

Now, remember that our natural position was much more remote than Israel at the foot of the mountain, for we were a Gentile nation to whom God did not appear in His glory, and with whom He spake not as with Israel. We were living in darkness, and in the valley of the shadow of death. But Israel was privileged to come very near as compared with us. Hence the apostle, in the chapter from which the text is taken, speaks of the circumcised as nigh. I take Israel to be to us this morning the type of those who live under Gospel privileges, and are allowed to hear the joyful sound of salvation bought with blood.

There stand the tribes at the foot of the mountain. They can hear the sound of the trumpet waxing exceeding loud and long, and a distinct voice proclaiming the law of God. They hear it, and it affects their hearts, and prostrates them with awe. Bounds were set round about the mountain, and an ordinance

was given that if so much as a beast touched the mountain, it should be stoned or thrust through with a dart. Their distance was thus far more apparent than their comparative nearness.

Do you see them standing there—the whole vast host—hearing, hearing distinctly, and trembling as they hear—at last trembling so much that they say to Moses, “Speak you with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us lest we die.” Their fear made them remove further still—what they saw and heard of God begot in them no love—it did not draw them to Him, but the reverse. They promised fairly to Moses that they would keep all God’s laws, that they would serve Him with all their hearts, but alas, their goodness soon vanished.

They had been outwardly purified, and made ready, sanctified, as Moses says, to behold the glory of the Lord, but alas! after a few short days they deliberately fell into idolatry, worshipping a golden calf—forgetting the solemnities of the law, and indifferent to the will of God who had displayed Himself to them. Very near they were, and yet far enough off to perish, for their carcasses fell in the wilderness, and with many of them He was not well-pleased.

Ah! my dear hearers, there is much grace in the fact that you are brought near enough, all of you, to be able to hear the Gospel plainly and earnestly delivered. At the base of Mount Zion you have stood trembling while we have warned you of the judgment to come, and told you of the indignation of God against sin. You have been like Israel, ready to sink into the earth with fear, and you have promised, some of you very fairly, that ere long you would repent and believe the Gospel. The Gospel command has come to your conscience with such power that you have been compelled to promise obedience to it.

But alas! what has been the result of your fear and your vow? You have gone farther back from God, and have plunged anew into the world’s idolatry, and are today worshipping yourselves, your pleasures, your sins, or your supposed righteousness. And when the Lord comes, the nearness of opportunity which you have enjoyed will prove to have been to you a most fearful responsibility, and nothing more. Like Israel you come to the mount of God, and hear His voice, but like Israel you go your way to rebel yet more and more.

Sometimes, under earnest sermons, or by solemn providences, or by the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, you have been almost persuaded to be Christians, but yet you are, to this hour, without Christ and without hope. You came up to the turning point, but you halted there. We all hoped well of you. We could almost have clapped our hands in the certainty of our hope that you would be saved, and yet you remained like Israel, only near in the point of outward privilege, but not brought near by the blood so as to be saved.

Child of God, be thankful for that first stage of nearness this morning, for even this is given us by blood. If there had been no paschal lamb, Israel had never stood at Sinai. And if there had been no blood shedding, you had never heard the Gospel. But bless the Lord that you have advanced far, far beyond this into a nearness infinitely preferable.

Turning to the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus, you will observe that the Lord said unto Moses, “Come up unto the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship you afar off.” The next stage of nearness to God is pictured by the chosen men selected from the people who were to climb halfway up the hill, nearer to the thick canopy of darkness which veiled the presence of God. But still they are said to have worshipped afar off.

Now, note that these seventy could not come nearer than the people except by blood—turn to the fifth verse, “And Moses sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant and read in the audience of the people...and Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you concerning all these words.”

The select band of representative men could not come into a degree of superior nearness without blood. It was a great honor to be called out from among the people to enjoy a nearer audience with the Almighty Lord. Surely those men, with their souls hushed under a deep sense of awe would,

nevertheless, rejoice and say, “What are we and what is our father’s house that we are called upon to climb so near to God?” Those seventy may be used to represent the visible church of Jesus Christ. Church members are all, in a certain sense, made nearer to God than the mere common hearers of the Word, and their position is one of eminent honor and privilege.

In the case of the seventy, it is said, “They saw the God of Israel”—tenth verse—that is to say, they had a remarkably vivid impression upon their minds of His august presence—“and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone.” That is, they were permitted to see the justice, the holiness, the purity of God typified by a pavement of clear crystal. As the text continues—“as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.” They were doubtless overwhelmed with a sense of the awful majesty, and holiness, and purity of God, and they were encouraged by divine mercy to be of good cheer, so that they saw God, “*and did eat and drink.*”

They had manifest communion with the Most High, and yet they did not die under the blaze of glory. “Upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand.” See here a fair type of the glory which God gives to His visible church. We are selected and taken out from among men to be a people near unto Him. We are made as church members to have a clearer view than others of the holiness and glory of God. We are permitted to eat and drink in His presence, to sit down at His table, and yet to live. We are favored in the church with many gracious displays of the Lord’s love and grace, such as the world sees not.

But I want you to notice a truth which strikes me as solemnly full of warning. Among those who thus were privileged to enter into this nearness, we have the names of Nadab and Abihu—and what became of them? They were destroyed before the Lord for offering strange fire upon the altar. So that it is clear that there is an official nearness of God which does not secure men from His wrath.

In the Christian church, there may be, nay, it seems as if there always must be some who shall, without doubt, perish, and the fire of God shall devour them. I wish that those who join the church without due consideration would solemnly recollect that it is not necessary for them to thrust themselves into such an awful position unless they know that they are the people of God. It were a pity for them to increase their own condemnation by such a willful act of presumption.

Note well that passage concerning the unfaithful servant who said in his heart, “My lord delays his coming; and began to beat the men servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken.” For it is written, “The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looks not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.” The sacrifices of the covenant were cut in sunder, and so the covenant was ratified.

Now, the man who mocks the covenant by intruding himself into the fellowship to which he belongs not, shall receive upon himself the curse which for others our Great Sacrifice has borne. There will be singular judgments for ungodly church members. It were good for such men that they had never been born. Judgment is to begin at the house of God. “His fan is in his hand.” And what will He do with it? “He will thoroughly purge *his floor.*” When He sits as a refiner, whom will He purify? Mark the words of Malachi! “He will purify the sons of Levi.” His fire, where is it? It is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem. There shall be no such condemnation as that which shall be measured out to those who in official standing possess peculiar nearness to God, and yet, like Nadab and Abihu, have not the true spirit, are unfaithful in service, look not to the Savior in truth, and so are cast away after all.

Most worthy of your notice is another fact connected with the seventy, and that is when Moses went up into the higher glory, he bade Aaron and the seventy stay where they were, but they failed to do it. He said unto the elders (in the fourteenth verse), “Tarry you here for us, until we come again unto you: and behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man has any matters to do, let him come unto them.” Moses was then gone from them for forty-six or forty-seven days at the least, and their duty was to have remained where he had appointed their place. If the people needed Aaron, they were to send up to him. He need not cease to direct and judge the people, but they were to come to him—he was not to go down to them.

Now, what did Aaron do? Why, he went down to the camp, and fell into the black sin of making a molten image. "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." Aaron would never have made that golden calf if he had stayed upon the mountain where he was bidden to remain.

What does this say to us? Is not the lesson plain? The visible church is too prone to come down to the world, and even those who are God's servants, when they are lifted up into a state of nearness to God, seldom abide there. They conform to this evil world. They descend from their true eminence, they mix with the people, and they who have seen God in His glory like unto a sapphire stone, are found pandering to the corruption of the world. To what a state of degradation may any of us come unless the Lord shall hold us up! We may go up very far and may see God, and then come down and become the instruments of the sins of others, as Aaron did.

If you read on, in the twenty-fourth chapter you will observe that the Lord called to Moses again, and he went up the hill attended by one single person. "And Moses rose up, and his minister, Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God." So these two men go alone, and Joshua comes to what I may call the fringe of the black cloud of darkness which hung over the central peak of Sinai. There he stopped, and there by God's grace he was able patiently to remain the first six days with Moses, and those other forty days, while Moses was on the top alone.

Joshua by God's grace, was enabled to maintain the true, real, abiding, faithful communion with God, and he seems to me to represent those virgin souls among God's elect ones who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes. Those men greatly beloved of God, who are delivered by abundant grace from much of the instability of the majority of professors, so that they walk in the light as He is in the light. They abide in their Lord, and His Word abides in them. These come not down to the people as Aaron and the elders did, but their conversation is in heaven, and their walk is with God. Such men fall not into the people's sin, but tarry in solitary nonconformity to a degenerate church. Even these do not realize the fullness of the nearness which belongs to them in the Mediator, but they come very, very near to God.

Now what are such men sure to be? What was Joshua? He was a warrior, and of martial spirit. When Moses came down from the mount with Joshua, Joshua said to him, "There is a sound of war in the camp." As a warrior he would naturally be apprehensive of a foe. Moses descended alone till he met his servant Joshua, waiting in his place. The two went down till they came to the place where the seventy ought to be, but they were all gone—all gone! And at the mountain-foot, where they might have expected to find Israel on their knees in prayer, they saw a ribald crew indulging in vile orgies before a golden calf.

Joshua's example seems to say to us, that if we are to keep up our fellowship with Christ, we must fight for it. If we would be men of God, we must be warriors for the truth. What a blessing if we can get to such a point as this! But there is something beyond it, and I desire to bring you to it by bidding you observe that Moses is the type of the Mediator, and he went right up to the greatest nearness of access, and there he communed with God, he interceded with God, and he received from God's hand the revelation of God's law.

Now hear and wonder, "We who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ," and brought to stand as near as Moses stood, for we are in Jesus as near to God as possible. It was something to come as near as Israel. It was more to advance as nigh as the elders. It was still higher to be called as near as Joshua, but to be brought as nigh as Moses, through the precious blood, so that we dwell in God, rejoice in Him, intercede with Him, have power with Him, and receive from Him the revelation of His truth by the energy of His Holy Spirit, this is the crown of all. O that we may go down with a glory upon our faces like that upon the face of Moses, to show the sons of men that we have been with Jesus into the holy place, and are filled with all the fullness of God.

Looking at these stages of nearness, does it not seem a tremendous distance from our place in far-off Tarshish, and the isles thereof, among the heathen, into the camp of Israel, up the sides of the mountain with the elders, higher still with Joshua, and beyond Joshua into the secret place of the majesty of the Most High, where the Mediator of that covenant stood alone, and where our Mediator stands forever with all those who are in Him!

III. Let us NOTE SOME OF THE DISPLAYS OF THE REALIZATIONS OF THIS NEARNESS TO GOD as granted to us by blood through our union with Christ.

We perceive and see manifestly our nearness to God in the very first hour of our conversion. The father fell upon the prodigal's neck and kissed him—no greater nearness than that. The prodigal becomes an accepted child—is and must be very near his father's heart. And we who sometimes were far off are as near to God as a child to his parents. We have a renewed sense of this nearness in times of restoration after backsliding, when, pleading the precious blood, we say, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." We come to God, and feel that He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart. We come near to God in prayer. Our nearness to God is peculiarly evinced at the mercy seat. The very term we use for prayer is, "Let us draw nigh unto God". But brethren, we never get to God in prayer unless it is through pleading the precious blood.

We see our nearness to God in the act of praise. Oftentimes in praising Him, we have taken the wings of seraphs, and passed up into the glory and magnified the Lord, but it has always been through Him who by His precious blood makes our praises acceptable to the Most High. We who have believed, come very near to God in the act of baptism, for we are baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Wicked and base is he who has dared to touch that ordinance unless he sincerely desired fellowship in the Lord's death. The nearness we get to God in baptism by faith depends upon whether or no we see the blood there, and behold Jesus as buried for us.

Then in the Lord's Supper—what nearness is there! But it all lies in the blood. We get no nearness through the wine, no nearness through the bread—the elements are nothing of themselves. It is only when we get to feel that our Lord's flesh is meat indeed, and His blood drink indeed, that we draw near to Him. And beloved, when we have done with means of grace, with communings here, and meditations, and prayers, and praises, we shall get nearer to our God up yonder—in the place where they see His face, and bear His name upon their foreheads. But why shall we then draw near to Him? It is written, "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: *therefore* are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple."

IV. I have thus hinted at various times when this nearness to God develops itself and is most seen. Let us close with a BRIEF EXHORTATION.

Let us live in the power of the nearness which union with Christ and the blood has given us. It is a well-known rule that our minds are sure to be occupied with those things which are most near to us. We may excuse ourselves for being so worldly, because the things of this world are so near us, but we must never venture to repeat that excuse again, since we now know that we are made nigh to God and heavenly things by the blood. Let your conversation be in heaven, "Where your treasure is, there let your heart be."

Beloved, if we are indeed so near to God through the blood and through union with Christ, let us enjoy those things which this nearness was intended to bring. Those who live under the equator never lack for light or heat. There vegetation is luxuriant, and every form of life is well-developed. They who dwell far away in the frigid zone, where the sun only casts his slanting rays, may well be meager and short of stature, and feel the pinch of poverty. But we who dwell under the equator of the Lord's love must bring forth much fruit. Let us rejoice with joy unspeakable. Let our souls be like those torrid zones where all the birds have plumage rich and rare, where brilliant flowers abound, where everything is full of vigor.

If we are so near to God, it follows as a very natural exhortation that we should exercise much faith in Him. If I be indeed brought so nigh to God, why should I be afraid that He will leave me in poverty?

If I were a stranger, and He knew me not, He might cast me away, but if I am nigh to Him, as nigh as Christ is, He cannot be unkind, thoughtless, or ungenerous to me. Nigh to Him! Why, my name is on the palms of Jesus' hands. I live in Jesus' heart. And I live, if I be in Christ, under the very eye of God. He will keep me as He keeps the apple of His eye.

One other word. Let us maintain a behavior suitable to the high position which grace has given us. If we are a people nigh to God, let us walk in all integrity, and uprightness, in all chasteness, honesty, soberness—in one word, in all holiness. “Be you perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

If you have looked upon the pavement of sapphire work, you must have seen your own sinfulness in contrast with its azure brightness. Pray the Lord to give you of His Spirit, that you may become somewhat like to Him who is thus so pure and glorious in all things. Let not the sons of God demean themselves. Let not princes of the blood imperial be found amongst the common herd. As you are to be the compeers of angels, nay, as you are far higher than they, and one with Christ, and as the precious blood has been your ransom price, walk as becomes saints. The Lord help you to do so, that His name may be glorified. Amen.

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