

BEAUTY FOR ASHES NO. 1016

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“To appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.”
Isaiah 61:3.*

WHEN soldiers are on the march, or advancing to the battle, military men think it wise to let the trumpet sound, that the warriors may be stimulated by the thrilling music. Many a weary soldier has marched on with new vigor when the band has struck up a lively march, or a soul-moving tune. In the midst of our present Christian service, my brothers and sisters, when I trust all of you have resolved to come to the help of the Lord—to the help of the Lord against the mighty—we would bid the silver trumpets of gospel promise sound aloud, that the hosts of God as they march on in battle array may feel their pulses quickened and their souls cheered. May times of revival be also seasons of refreshing. In times of great toil and eminent service much extra refreshment may with wisdom be dealt out. Harvest men require substantial meals amid their exhausting toil; and, as I feel that the Lord of the harvest would not have His laborers treated badly, I have to regale each of you with a portion of bread, a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. Melchisedek met Abraham with bread and wine—not on some fine holiday when he had been musing in the plains of Mamre, but when he returned from the slaughter of the kings. After hard fighting comes sweet refreshment, and any here who have strived diligently to serve the Master, and have been pursuing their sacred calling even unto faintness, will be entitled to come and sit down, and partake of the nourishing bread and wine, which such a text as this prepares for all the sons of the Father of the faithful. Elijah ate of bread brought by angelic hands, for a 40 days' journey was before him; such a trial of strength may be ordained for brothers and sisters to whom this word shall come. Precious promises are for poverty-stricken saints. The strong drink of divine consolation is for the heavy of heart, as says Solomon—“Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.” May He who uttered the words which are now open before us speak them with power to the heart of each one here present. They came from the lips of Jesus; may they drop again into our hearts fresh from His mouth (that undefiled well of comfort), and fall with all their ancient life-giving power.

We will read our text again, and then meditate on it. “To appoint those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.”

Our first consideration will be *who gives this word?* Secondly, *to whom does He give it?* Thirdly, *what says He in it?* And, fourthly, *what will come of it?*

I. First, then, WHO GIVES THIS WORD? It is a word to mourners in Zion, meant for their consolation; but who gives it? The answer is not far to seek. It comes from Him who said, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me.” “He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted.” Now in a very inferior and subordinate sense, Christian *ministers* have the Spirit of God resting upon them, and they are sent to bind up the broken-hearted; but they can only do so in the name of Jesus, and in strength given from Him. This word is not spoken by them, nor by prophets or apostles either, but by the great Lord and Master of apostles, and prophets, and ministers; even by Jesus Christ Himself! If He declares that He will comfort us, then we may rest assured we shall be comforted! The stars in His right hand may fail to penetrate the darkness, but the rising of the sun of righteousness effectually scatters the gloom. If the Consolation of Israel Himself comes forth for the uplifting of His downcast people, then their doubts and fears may well fly apace since His presence is light and peace.

But who is this anointed one who comes to comfort mourners? He is described in the preface to the text as a *preacher*. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord has appointed Me to

preach good tidings unto the meek.” Remember what kind of preacher Jesus was? “Never man spoke like this man.” He was a son of consolation, indeed; it was said of Him, “A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.” He was *gentleness* itself; His speech did not fall like a hail shower; it dropped like the rain, and distilled as the dew, as the soft rain upon the tender herb. He came down like the soft spring shower upon the new-mown grass, scattering refreshment and revival wherever His words were heard. The widow at the gates of Nain dried her eyes when He spoke, and Jairus no longer mourned for His child; Magdalene ceased her weeping, and Thomas ceased from doubting when Jesus showed Himself! Heavy hearts leaped for joy, and dim eyes sparkled with delight at His bidding! Now, if such is the person who declares He will comfort the broken-hearted; if He is such a preacher, we may rest assured He will accomplish His work.

In addition to His being a preacher, He is described as a *physician*. “He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted.” Some hearts need more than words; the choicest consolations that can be conveyed in human speech will not reach their case; the wounds of their hearts are deep—they are not flesh cuts, but horrible gashes which lay bare the bone, and threaten before long to kill unless they are skillfully closed. It is, therefore, a great joy to know that the generous friend in the text who promises to deal with the sorrowing, is fully competent to meet the most frightful cases. Jehovah Rophi is the name of Jesus of Nazareth! He is, in His own person, the Lord who heals us; He is the beloved physician of men’s souls; “By His stripes we are healed”; He Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses, and He is able now with a word to heal all our diseases, whatever they may be. Joy to you, you sons of mourning! Congratulations to you, you daughters of despondency! He who comes to comfort you cannot only preach with His tongue, but He can bind up with His hands; “He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars. He calls them all by their names.”

As if this were not enough, our gracious helper is next described as a liberator. “He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prisons to them who are bound.” There were many downcast persons in Israel in the olden times—persons who had become bankrupt, and had even sunk yet further into debt, till they were obliged to sell their children into slavery, and to become themselves slaves. Their yoke was very heavy, and their trouble was very sore; but the 50th year came round, and never was there heard music as sweet in all Judea’s land as when the silver trumpet was taken down on the Jubilee morn, and a loud shrill blast was blown in every city, and hamlet, and village in all Israel—from Dan even to Beersheba! What did that clarion sound mean? It meant this—“Israelite, you are free! If you have sold yourself, go forth without money, for the Year of Jubilee has come. Go back, go back, you who have lost your lands! Seek out the old homestead, and the acres from where you have been driven—they are yours again! Go back and plow, and sow, and reap once more, and sit each man under his vine, and his fig tree, for all your heritages are restored!” This made great joy among all the tribes, and Jesus has come with a similar message. He, too, publishes a jubilee for bankrupt and enslaved sinners; He breaks the fetters of sin, and gives believers the freedom of the truth of God! None can hold in captivity the souls whom Jesus declares to be the Lord’s free men! Surely, if the Savior has divine power, as the text declares to proclaim liberty to the captive, and if He can break open prison doors, and set free those convicted and condemned, He is just the one who can comfort your soul and mine, though we are mourning in Zion! Let us rejoice at His coming and cry, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Happy are we that we live in an age when Jesus breaks the gates of brass, and cuts the bars of iron in sunder!

As if this were not all, and not enough, one other matter is mentioned concerning our Lord. He is pictured as being sent as *the herald of good tidings* of all sorts to us, the sons of men. Read the second verse—“To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” God has taken upon Himself human flesh; the infinite Jehovah came down from heaven and became an infant, lived among us, and then died for us! Behold in the person of the incarnate God, the sure pledge of divine benevolence. “He who spared not His own son, but freely delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Beloved, the very fact that a Savior came into the world should be a source of hope to us! And when we think what a Savior He was; how He suffered, how He finished the work that was given Him to do, and what a salvation it is which He has worked out for us; we may well feel that the comfort of mourners is work for which He is well suited, and which He can execute most effectually! How beautiful upon Olivet and Calvary are the feet of Him who brings, in His person and His word, “Good tidings,

that publishes peace that brings good tidings of good that publishes salvation.” But I must not linger. I have spoken of Him enough to lead your thoughts to the blessed person who here declares that He will comfort the mourner. May the Holy Spirit reveal Him to you in all the power of His arm, the love of His heart, the virtue of His blood, the prevalence of His plea, the majesty of His exaltation, and the glory of His character!

II. Secondly, TO WHOM IS THIS WORD SPOKEN? It is spoken to those who mourn in Zion. They are in Zion; they are the Lord’s people, but they mourn. To mourn is not always a mark of divine grace. Nature mourns; fallen human nature will have to mourn forever, unless grace changes it. But the mourning here meant is a mourning in Zion—a mourning of gracious souls. Let me try and describe what kind of mourning it is. It assumes various shapes; it begins in most hearts with *lamentation over past sin*. I have broken God’s just commandments; I have done evil against my God; I have destroyed my soul—my heart feels this, and bitterly mourns. It is one thing to say formally, “I am a miserable sinner.” It is a very different thing to *be* one! To say it may be gross hypocrisy—to *feel* it is a mark of grace! Oh that every one of us, if we have never felt mourning for sin, may feel it at this hour! May we mourn to think that we have pierced the Savior, that we have transgressed against a God so good, and a Redeemer so generous! Those who mourn for the guilt of past sin, before long, reach a higher point. mourners are not allowed to tarry long; grace takes their load of guilt away; their transgressions are covered. Do they leave off mourning then? Oh, no, they mourn in another way! There is a *sweet* mourning concerning my past sin which I would never wish to lose; it is forgiven, every sin of mine is blotted out, and my soul, therefore, with a sweet bitterness, would mourn over it more and more—

*“My sins, my sins, my Savior!
How sad on You they fall,
Seen through Your gentle patience
I tenfold feel them all.
I know they are forgiven
But still their pain to me
Is all the grief and anguish
They laid, my Lord, on Thee.”*

This is a kind of mourning which may accompany us even to heaven’s gates, and we might almost regret to have to part with such a friend even there—

*“Lord, let me weep for nothing but sin,
And after none but Thee.
And then I would—oh that I might—
A constant weeper be!”*

True hearts, however, mourn not only for their past transgressions, but they also *sorrow over their present imperfections*. If you are what you should be, dear friend, I am quite certain you see a great deal in yourself to grieve over; you cannot live as you would live. Whenever I meet with a person who feels that he is perfect, I conceive at once that he has not yet attained even a remote conception of what true perfection must be! The savage of Australia is satisfied with his weapons of war as long as he has never seen a rifle or heard of a cannon—to him his hovel is a model of architecture, for he has never heard of a cathedral or a palace. I have no doubt that a barn-door fowl would be quite surprised at the complaint which an eagle might make about its inability to mount as high as it desires to do. The fowl is perfect; perfect up to the condition of its barn-door, barley-scratching life. It knows nothing higher than its roosting place, and so it concludes itself absolutely perfect and fit for all that is desirable in flight. But oh, could it know where the thunders dwell and sail above the clouds; where the callow lightning waits the bidding of the Lord; *then* would the creature feel something of the aspirations and the griefs which torment the heart of the royal bird. Men know not what God is, nor the infinity of His perfections, nor the majesty of His purity, else, when highest, they would cry, “Higher! Higher! Higher!” And they would mourn because they had not yet attained, and need still to mount as on eagle’s wings! Brothers and sisters, I speak for you all when I say there is not a day in which our service satisfies us, or not a deed we have ever performed that contents us. We see our spots, and would gladly wash them out with tears if we could, though we bless God they are removed by the precious blood of Jesus. Among the blessed are those who mourn because they cannot live a perfect life as they desire; to mourn after more holiness is a sign of holiness; to mourn after greater conformity to the image of Christ proves that we are already in a

measure conformed; to sigh after more complete subordination of our entire life to the will of God is a mourning for which Jesus Christ will bring rich comfort!

The Christian mourner *laments, also, because he cannot be more continually in communion with God*. He knows the sweetness of fellowship with the Father and with the son; he cannot bear to have it broken; if but the thinnest cloud passes between him and the sun of God's love, he is distressed, for he is sensitive lest he should lose the delights of communion. A native of sunny Italy deploras the absence of heaven's bright blue, when made to dwell in this land of the fleecy clouds. And he who has dwelt in unclouded fellowship with the Lord bemoans his hard lot if even for a while he beholds not that face which is as the sun shining in its strength. Love cannot endure absence, much less, coldness; true grace finds its life in fellowship, and pines if it is denied it.

The real Christian mourns, again, *because he cannot be more useful*. He wishes he were like a pillar of fire and light so that he might evermore, by day and by night, enlighten the ignorant, and inspire the dull and laggard. He wishes not so much for more talent as for more *grace* to make use of the talent which he has; he would gladly bring in a great bounty to the owner of the vineyard who has placed him as a farmer among the vines; he longs to bring up priceless pearls from the deep seas of sin to adorn the diadem of his Lord and King; he sighs because thorns and thistles will spring up where he looked for a hundred-fold harvest—this makes him groan out, “Who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” Moreover, like his Lord, *he mourns for others*. He mourns in Zion because of the deadness of the Christian Church—its divisions, its errors; its carelessness towards the souls of sinners. He cries with Jeremiah, “How the gold has become dim! How the much fine gold is changed!” But he mourns most of all for the unconverted; he sees their state of alienation from God, and knowing the danger of it, his heart shrinks within him, as with a prophetic glance he sees what their end will be—when “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” His heart breaks for the sins and sorrows of others, and like his Savior, he could weep over the cities that reject divine love. He could say like Moses that he was almost willing to have his name blotted out of the book of life if others might be saved! He feels such sorrow and heaviness of heart for his kinsmen according to the flesh who are strangers to Christ, that he has no rest in his death concerning them. Dear beloved, he who is quickened by the new life obtains an enlarged heritage of mourning, but let it not be forgotten, he wins tenfold more joy as well. And, meanwhile, such weeping is, in itself, sweet—tears not too briny, and griefs not too bitter; such griefs we would wish to feel as long as we live, especially if the Lord Jesus alternates them with the fulfilling of that most excellent promise, to which I now direct you.

III. What is it, then, in the third place, WHICH IS SPOKEN in the text to those who mourn? I would draw particular attention to the words, “To appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes.” Come, mourning souls, who mourn in the way described, come gladly here; there is comfort *appointed* for you, and there is also comfort *given* to you! It is the prerogative of King Jesus both to appoint and to give! How cheering is the thought that as our griefs are appointed, so also are our consolations! God has allotted a portion to each of His mourners, even as Joseph allotted a mess to each of his brothers at the feast. You shall have your due share at the table of grace, and if you are a little one, and have double sorrows, you shall have a double portion of comfort! “To *appoint* to those.” This is a word full of strong consolation, for if God appoints me a portion, who can deprive me of it? If He appoints my comfort, who dares stand in the way? If He appoints it, it is mine by right! But then, to make the appointment secure, He adds the words, “To *give*.” The Holy One of Israel in the midst of Zion *gives* as well as appoints! The rich comforts of the gospel are conferred by the Holy Spirit, at the command of Jesus Christ, upon every true mourner in the time when he needs them; they are given to each spiritual mourner in the time when he would faint for lack of them; He can effectually give the comfort appointed for each particular case. All I can do is to *speak* of the comfort for God's mourners; I can neither allot it, nor yet distribute it. But our Lord can do both! My prayer is that He may do so at this moment, that every holy mourner may have a time of sweet rejoicing while sitting at the Master's feet in a waiting posture. Did you ever feel, while cast down, on a sudden lifted up—when some precious promise has come home to your soul? This is the happy experience of all the saints—

*“Sometimes a light surprises
The Christian while he sings—
It is the Lord who rises*

*With healing in His wings!
When comforts are declining,
He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining
To cheer it, after rain.”*

Our ever gracious and Almighty Lord knows how to comfort His children, and be assured He will not leave them comfortless; He who bids His ministers again and again attend to this duty, and says, “Comfort you, comfort you My people,” will not, Himself, neglect to give them consolation! If you are very heavy, there is the more room for the display of His grace in you, by making you very joyful in His ways. Do not despair! Do not say, “I have fallen too low; my harp has been so long upon the willows that it has forgotten Zion’s joyful tunes.” Oh no, you shall lay your fingers among the old accustomed strings, and the art of making melody shall come back to you, and your heart shall once more be glad! He appoints and He gives—the two words put together afford double hope to us—He appoints and He gives comfort to His mourners!

Observe in the text the change Christ promises to work for His mourners. First, here is *beauty* given for *ashes*. In the Hebrew there is a ring in the words which cannot be conveyed in the English. The ashes that men put upon their heads in the East in the time of sorrow made a grim tiara for the brow of the mourner. The Lord promises to put all these ashes away, and to substitute for them a glorious head dress—a diadem of beauty! Or, if we run away from the word, and take the inner sense, we may look at it thus—mourning makes the face wan and emaciated, and so takes away the beauty, but Jesus promises that He will so come and reveal joy to the sorrowing soul that his face shall fill up again; his eyes that were dull and cloudy shall sparkle again! And the countenance, yes, and the whole person shall be once more radiant with the beauty which sorrow had so grievously marred! I thank God I have sometimes seen this change take place in precious saints who have been cast down in soul; there has even seemed to be a visible beauty put upon them when they have found peace in Jesus Christ, and this beauty is far more lovely and striking because it is evidently a beauty of the mind—a *spiritual luster*—far superior to the surface comeliness of the flesh! When the Lord shines full upon His servants’ faces, He makes them fair as the moon when at her full she reflects the light of the sun; a gracious and unchanging God sheds on His people a gracious and unfading loveliness! O mourning soul, you have made your eyes red with weeping, and your cheeks are marred with furrows where the scalding tears have burned their way. But the Lord who heals you, the Lord Almighty who wipes all tears from human eyes, shall visit you yet! And if you now believe in Jesus, He shall visit you now, and chase these cloudy griefs away, and your face shall be bright and clear again; it will be fair as the morning, and sparkling as the dew. You shall rejoice in the God of your salvation, even in God, your exceeding joy! Is not this a dainty promise for mourning souls?

Then it is added, “He will give the *oil of joy for mourning*.” Here we have first, beauty and then unction. The Orientals used rich perfumed oils on their persons, used them largely and lavishly in times of great joy. Now the Holy Spirit comes upon those who believe in Jesus, and gives them an anointing of perfume, most precious, more sweet and costly than the herds of the Arab; an unction such as royalty has never received sheds its costly moisture over all the redeemed when the Spirit of the Lord rests upon them. “We have unction from the Holy One,” says the apostle; “You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over.” Oh, how favored are those who have the Spirit of God upon them! You remember that the oil which was poured on Aaron’s head went down to the skirts of his garment so that the same oil was on his skirts that had been on his head. It is the same Spirit who rests on the believer as that which rests on Jesus Christ, and he that is joined unto Christ is one Spirit. What favor is here! Instead of mourning, the Christian shall receive the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who shall take of the things of Christ and reveal them to him, and make him not merely glad, but honored and esteemed!

Then it is added, to give still greater fullness to the cheering promise, that the Lord will give, “*the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*.” The man is first made beautiful; next he has the anointing; then afterwards he is arrayed in robes of splendor! What garments these are! Surely Solomon in all his glory wore not such right royal apparel! “*The garment of praise*.” What a dress is this! Speak of worked gold, or fine linen, or needlework of various colors, or taffeta, or damasks, or gorgeous silks most rich and rare which come from far-off lands—where is anything compared with “the garment of praise”? It is

as when a man wraps himself about, as it were, with psalmody, and lives forever a chorister, singing not with equal voice, but with the same earnest heart as they do who day and night keep up the never ending hymn before the throne of the infinite! As what a life is his, what a man is he! O mourner, this is to be your portion! Take it now! Jesus Christ will cover you, even at this hour, with the garment of praise! So grateful shall you be for sins forgiven, for infirmity overcome, for watchfulness bestowed, for the church revived, for sinners saved, that you shall undergo the greatest conceivable change, and the sordid garments of your woe shall be put aside for the brilliant array of delight! It shall not be the *spirit* of praise for the *spirit* of heaviness, though that were a fair exchange, but as your heaviness you tried to keep to yourself, so your praise you shall *not keep to yourself!* It shall be a *garment* to you, external and visible, as well as inward and profound; wherever you are, it shall be displayed to others, and they shall see and take knowledge of you that God has done great things for you whereof you are glad! I wish I had power to speak fitly on such a theme as this; but surely, it needs Him upon whom the Spirit rested without measure to proclaim this joyful promise to the mourners in Zion!

We must close by noticing what will be the result of this appointment, and our text concludes by saying, “*That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.*” We learn here that those mourning souls who are cast down, and have put ashes on their heads shall, when Jesus Christ in infinite mercy comes to them, be made like trees—like “oaks.” The original is, like “oaks of righteousness.” That is, they shall become strong, firmly rooted, covered with green leaves; they shall be like a well-watered tree for pleasantness and delight. You say, “I am a dry tree, a dry branch, I am a cast off, fruitless bough; oh that I were visited of God and saved! I mourn because I cannot be what I would.” mourner, you shall be all you would be, and much more if Jesus visits you! Breathe a prayer to Him now; look to Him, trust Him. He can change you from a withered tree that seems twice dead into a tree standing by the rivers of water, whose leaf is unwithering, and whose fruit ripens in its season! Only have confidence in an anointed Savior; rely upon Him who came not here to destroy, but to bless, and you shall yet, through faith, become a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified!

But the very essence of the text lies in a little word to which you must look; “You shall be *called* trees of righteousness.” Now there are many mourning saints who *are* trees of righteousness, but nobody calls them so; they are so desponding that they give a doubtful idea to others. Observers ask, “Is this a Christian?” And those who watch and observe them are not at all struck with their Christian character. Indeed, I may be speaking to some here who are true believers in Jesus, but they are all their lifetime subject to bondage! They hardly know themselves whether they are saved, and therefore, they cannot expect that others should be very much impressed by their godly character and fruitful conversation. But, O mourners, if Jesus visits you, and gives you the oil of joy, men shall *call* you “trees of righteousness”; they shall see grace in you; they shall not be able to help acknowledging it—it shall be so distinct in the happiness of your life, that they shall be compelled to see it! I know some Christian people who, wherever they go, are attractive advertisements of the gospel; nobody could be with them for a half an hour without saying, “Where do they gain this calm, this peace, this tranquility, this Holy delight and joy?” Many have been attracted to the cross of Christ by the Holy pleasantness, and cheerful conversation of those whom Christ has visited with the abundance of His love. I wish we were all such; I would not discourage a mourner—no, but encourage him to seek after the garments of praise. Nevertheless, I must say that it is a very wretched thing for so many professors to go about the world grumbling at what they have, and at what they have not, murmuring at the dispensations of providence, and at the labors of their brothers and sisters. They are more like wild crab trees than the Lord’s fruit trees! Well may people say, “If these are Christians, God save us from such Christianity!” But when a man is contented—more than that; when he is happy under *all* circumstances; when “His spirit does rejoice in God his Savior” in deep distress; when he can sing in the fires of affliction; when he can rejoice on the bed of sickness; when his shout of triumph grows louder as his conflict waxes more and more severe, and when he can utter the sweetest song of victory in his departing moments—then all who see such people call them trees of righteousness, and they confess that they *are* the people of God!

Note, still, the result of all this goes further: “They shall be called trees of righteousness, *the planting of the Lord.*” That is to say, where there is joy imparted, and unction given from the Holy Spirit instead of despondency, men will say, “It is God’s work; it is a tree that God has planted! It could not grow like

that if anybody else had planted it; this man is a man of God's making! His joy is a joy of God's giving." I feel sure that in the case of some of us, we were under such sadness of heart before conversion, through a sense of sin, that when we did find peace everybody noticed the change there was in us, and they said one to another, "Who has made this man so happy, for he was just now most heady and depressed?" And, when we told them where we lost our burden, they said, "Ah, there is something in religion after all." "Then said they among the heathen, the Lord has done great things for them." Remember poor Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*? Mark what heavy sighs he heaved; what tears fell from his eyes; what a wretched man he was when he wrung his hands and said, "The city wherein I dwell is to be burned up with fire from heaven, and I shall be consumed in it, and besides, I am myself undone by reason of a burden that lies hard upon me; oh that I could get rid of it!" Do you remember John Bunyan's description of how he got rid of the burden? He stood at the foot of the cross, and there was a sepulcher hard by, and as he stood and looked, and saw one hanging on the tree, suddenly the bands that bound his burden cracked, and the load rolled right away into the sepulcher! And when he looked for it, it could not be found! And what did he do? Why, he gave three great leaps for joy, and sang—

"Blessed cross!

Blessed sepulcher!

Blessed rather be the man

Who there was put to shame for me!"

If those who knew the Pilgrim in his wretchedness, had met him on the other side of that never-to-be-forgotten sepulcher, they would have said, "Are you the same man?" If Christiana had met him that day, she would have said, "My husband, are you the same? What a change has come over you!" And when she and the children marked the father's cheerful conversation, they would have been compelled to say, "It is the Lord's doing, and it is wondrous in our eyes!" Oh live such a happy life that you may compel the wicked man to ask where you learned the art of living! Let the stream of your life be so clear, so understandable, and so cool, so sparkling, so like the river of the water of life above, that men may say, "From where came this crystal river? We will trace it to its source"—and so may they be led to the foot of that dear cross where all your hopes began!

Another word remains, and when we have considered it, we will conclude. That other word is this, "*The planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.*" That is the end of it all; that is the great result we drive at, and that is the objective, even, of God Himself—"That *HE* might be glorified." For when men see the cheerful Christian, and perceive that this is God's work, then they acknowledge the power of God. Not always, perhaps, with their hearts as they should, but still they are obliged to confess, "This is the finger of God." Meanwhile the saints, comforted by your example, praise and bless God, and all the church lifts up a song to the Most High. Come, my brothers and sisters, are any of you down? Are you almost beneath the enemy's foot? Here is a word for you, "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy, though I fall, yet shall I rise again." Are any of you in deep trouble—very deep trouble? Another word, then, for you—"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you." Are you pressed with labors and afflictions? "As your days, so shall your strength be." "All things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Are you persecuted? Here is a note of encouragement for you: "Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Whatever your circumstances are, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice." Think what Jesus has given you! Your sins are pardoned for His name sake! Your heaven is made secure to you, and all that is needed to bring you there; you have grace in your hearts, and heaven awaits you; you have already grace within you, and greater grace shall be granted you; you are renewed by the Spirit of Christ in your inner man—the good work is begun, and God will never leave it till He has finished it.

Your names are in His book. No, engraved on the palms of His hands! His love never changes; His power never diminishes; His grace never fails; His truth is firm as the hills, and His faithfulness is like the great mountains! Lean on the love of His heart, on the might of His arm, on the merit of His blood, on the power of His plea, and the indwelling of His Spirit! Take such promises as these for your consolation, "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart,

be strong, and fear not.” “Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel. I will help you, says the Lord, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” “For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto Me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you.” “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” “He gives power to the faint, and to them who have no might He increases strength.” “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and He shall thrust out the enemy from before you, and shall say, destroy them.” “I am God, I fail not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed.” one might continue forever quoting these precious passages, but may the Lord apply one or other of them to every mourner’s soul; and especially if there is a mourning sinner here, may he get a grip of that choice Word of God: “He who comes to Me I will in no wise cast out”; or that other grand word, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men”; or that other, “The blood of Jesus Christ, His son, cleanses us from all sin”; or that equally encouraging word, “Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as snow.” May the Lord bring us all into comfort and joy by the way of the cross!

Perhaps I speak to some for whom the promises of God have no charm. Let me remind them that His *threats* are as sure as His promises. He can bless, but He can also curse. He appoints mourning for those who laugh now with sinful merriment; He will give to His enemies vengeance for all their rebellions; He has Himself said, “And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell, there shall be stink; and instead of a sash, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty” (Isa 3:24). Beware, then, you who forget God, lest He overthrow you in His hot displeasure. Seek the Savior now, lest the acceptable year of the Lord be closed with a long winter of utter despair—

*“You who spurn His righteous sway,
Yet, oh yet, He spares your breath;
Yet His hand, averse to slay,
Balances the bolt of death!
Before that dreadful bolt descends,
Hasten before His feet to fall;
Kiss the scepter He extends,
And adore Him, ‘Lord of all.’”*

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 61.

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

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