



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 34: 1888

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 34: 1888* by Charles Spurgeon

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A Little Sanctuary

A Sermon

(No. 2001)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day, January 8th, 1888, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them, as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."—Ezekiel 11:16.

THE TEXT BEGINS WITH "therefore." There was a reason for God's speaking in this way. It is profitable to trace the why and the wherefore of the gracious words of the Lord. The way by which a promise comes usually shines with a trail of light. Upon reading the connection we observe that those who had been carried captive were insulted by those who tarried at Jerusalem. They spoke in a very cruel manner to those with whom they should have sympathized. How often do prosperous brothers look with scorn on the unfortunate! Did not Job of old complain, "He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease"?

The Lord hears the unkind speeches of the prosperous when they speak bitterly of those who are plunged in adversity. Read the context—"Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the Lord: unto us is this land given in possession." This unbrotherly language moved the Lord to send the prophet Ezekiel with good and profitable words to the children of the captivity. Many a time the cruel word of man has been the cause of a tender word from God. Because of the unkindness of these people, therefore God, in lovingkindness, addressed in words of tender grace those whom they despised. As, in our Saviour's days, the opposition of the Pharisees acted upon the Saviour like a steel to the flint, and fetched bright sparks of truth out of him, so the wickedness of man has often been the cause why the grace of God has been more fully revealed. This is some solace when under the severe chastisement of human tongues.

Personally, I am glad of this comfort. I would gladly be at peace with all men: I would not unnecessarily utter a word of provocation; but it is a world in which you cannot live at peace unless you are willing to be unfaithful to your conscience. Offences, therefore, will come. But why should we fret unduly under this trial when we perceive that out of opposition to the cause of God occasions arise for the grandest displays of God's love and power? If from the showers we gain our harvests, we will not mourn when the heavens gather blackness, and the rain pours down. If the wrath of man is made to praise the Lord, then let man be wrathful if he wills. Brethren, let us brace ourselves to bear the bruises of slanderous tongues! Let us take all sharp speeches and cutting criticisms to God. It may be that he will hear what the enemy has said, and that he will be very pitiful to us. Because of the bitterness of the oppressor he will bring home to our heart by the Spirit, with greater tenderness and power, some sweet word of his which has lain hidden from us in his Book. Be not dismayed, but go to him who is the God of all comfort, who comforteth all those that are bowed down, and he will give you a word which shall heal your wounds, and breathe peace into your spirit.

Now to proceed at once to our text, seeing that the occasion of it is a sufficient preface. Let us notice, first, *where God's people may be, and yet be God's people*. They may be by God's own hand "scattered among the countries, and cast far off among the heathen." And, secondly, *what God will be to them when they are in such circumstances*. "Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." May the Holy Spirit, who spake by Ezekiel, speak through these words to our hearts!

I. First, then, WHERE GOD'S PEOPLE MAY BE.

If you ask where they may be, the answer to the question is, first, *they may be under chastisement*.

If you will remember, in the Book of Deuteronomy, God threatened Israel that if they, as a nation, sinned against him, they should be scattered among the nations, and cast far off among the heathen. Many a time they so sinned. I need not recapitulate the story of their continued transgressions and multiplied backslidings. The Lord was slow to fulfil his utmost threatenings, but put forth his utmost patience, till there was no more room for long-suffering. At last the threatened chastisement fell upon them, and fierce nations carried them away in bonds to the far-off lands of their dread. They were not utterly destroyed: their being scattered among the people showed that they still existed. Though they were a people scattered and peeled, yet they were a people, even as Israel is to this day. For all that tyrants and persecutors have ever done, yet the Jew is still extant among us, even as the bush burned with fire, but was not consumed. Israel is still to the front, and will be to the world's end. The Lord hath not cast away his people, even though he has cast them far off among the heathen. He has scattered them among the countries, but they are not absorbed into those countries; they still remain a people separated unto the living God, in whom he will yet be glorified.

But, assuredly, the chosen seed came under chastisement. When, by the rivers of Babylon, they sat down and wept, yea, they wept when they remembered Zion, then were they under the Lord's heavy hand. The instructed among them knew that their being in exile was the fruit of the transgressions of their fathers, and the result of their own offences against God. And yet, though they were under chastisement, God loved them, and had a choice word for them, which I will by-and-by endeavour to explain to you; for the Lord said, "Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary." Beloved, you and I may lie under the rod of God, and we may smart sorely because of our iniquities, even as David did; and yet we may be the children of God towards whom he has thoughts of grace. Our moisture may be turned into the drought of summer, while day and night the Lord's hand is heavy upon us; we may be in sore temporal trouble, and may be compelled by an enlightened conscience to trace our sorrow to our own folly. We may be in great spiritual darkness, and may be compelled to confess that our own sins have procured this unto ourselves. And yet, for all that, the Lord may have sent the chastisement in love, and in nothing else but love; and he may intend by it, not our destruction, but the destruction of the flesh; not our rejection, but our refining, not our curse, but our cleansing. Let us take comfort, seeing that God has a word to say to his mourners and to his afflicted, and that word in the text is a "yet" which serves to show that there is a clear limit to his anger. He smites, but it is with an "although" and a "yet": he scatters them to a distance, but he sends a promise after them, and says, "I will be to them as a little sanctuary." In the Lord's hand towards his chosen there may be a rod, but not a sword. It is a heavy rod, but it is not a rod of iron. It is a rod that bruises, but it is not a rod that batters to pieces. God tempers our afflictions, severe though they may seem to be; and though, apparently, he strikes us with the blows of a cruel one, yet there is a depth unutterable of

infinite love in every stroke of his hand. His anger endureth but for a night: he hastens to display his favour. Listen to his own words of overflowing faithfulness: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." However, it is clear that God's own people may be under chastisement.

But, secondly, wherever they are, whether they are under chastisement or not, *they are where the Lord has put them*. Read the text carefully: "Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries." The Lord's hand was in their banishment and dispersion: Jehovah himself inflicted the chastisement for sin. You say to me, "Why, it was Nebuchadnezzar who carried them away: the Babylonians and the Chaldeans took them captive." Yes, I know it was so; but the Lord regards these as instruments in his hand, and he says, "I have done it," just as Job, when the Chaldeans and the Sabeans had swept away his property, and his children had been destroyed through the agency of Satan, yet said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." The Lord was as truly in the taking away as he was in the giving. It is well to look beyond all second causes and instrumentalities. Do not get angry with those who are the nearer agents, but look to the First Cause. Do not get fretting about the Chaldeans and Sabeans. Let them alone, and Satan too. What have you to do with them? Your business is with God. See *his* hand, and bow before it. Say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Come to that, for then you will be able to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Though your trials be peculiar, and your way be hedged up, yet the hand of the Lord is still in everything; and it behoves you to recognize it for your strengthening and consolation.

Note, next, that *the people of God may dwell in places of great discomfort*. The Jews were not in those days like the English, who colonize and find a home in the Far West, or even dwell at ease beneath sultry skies. An ancient Hebrew out of his own country was a fish out of water: out of his proper element. He was not like the Tyrian, whose ship went to Tarshish, and passed the Gates of Hercules, seeking the *Ultima Thule*. The Jew tarried at home. "I dwell among mine own people," said a noble woman of that nation; and she did but speak the mind of a home-loving people who settled each one upon his own patch of ground, and sat down under his vine and fig-tree, none making him afraid. Their Lord had driven them into a distant land, to rivers whose waters were bitter to their lips, even to the Tigris and the Euphrates. They were in a foreign country, where everything was different from their ways—where all the customs of the people were strange and singular. They would be a marked and despised people, nobody would fraternize with them, but all would pass them by in scorn. The Jews excited much prejudice, for, as their great adversary, the wicked Haman, said, "their laws were diverse from all people," and their customs had a peculiarity about them which kept them a distinct race. It must have been a great discomfort to God's people to dwell among idolaters, and to be forced to witness obscene rites and revolting practices. God's own favoured ones in these days may be living where they are as much out of place as lambs among wolves, or doves among hawks. Do not imagine that God makes a nest of down for all his eaglets. Why, they would never take to flying if he did not put thorns under them, and stir up their nest that they may take to their wings, and learn the heavenward flight to which they are predestinated! Perfect comfort on earth is no more to be expected than constant calm on the sea. Sleep in the midst of a battle, and ease when on the march, would be more in place than absolute rest in this present state. God meaneth not his children to take up their inheritance on this side Jordan. "This is not your rest: because it is polluted." And so he often puts us where we are very

uncomfortable. Is there any Christian man who can say that he would, if he might, take up his lot for ever in this life? No, no. There is an irksomeness about our condition, disguise it as we may. In one way or another we are made to remember that we are in banishment. We have not yet come unto our rest. That rest "remaineth for the people of God," but as yet we have not come into the land which the Lord our God has given to us to be our place of rest. Some of God's servants feel this in a very peculiar manner, for their soul is among lions, and they dwell among those whose tongues are set on fire of hell. Abel was hated by Cain, Isaac was mocked by Ishmael, Joseph was among envious brethren, Moses was at first rejected by Israel, David was pursued by Saul, Elijah was hunted by Jezebel, Mordecai was hated by Haman; and yet these men were wisely placed, and the Lord was eminently with them. I mention this in order that tried believers may still know that, however uncomfortable their position, it is nevertheless true that God has put them there for some good end.

The beloved of God may yet be in a place of great barrenness as to all spiritual good. "I have cast them far off among the heathen"—far off from my temple—far off from the place of my worship—far off from the shrine of my glory. "I have scattered them among the countries," where they will learn no good—where, on the contrary, they will see every abominable thing, and often feel like Lot, who was vexed with the filthy conversation of the people among whom he dwelt. We are not kept apart from the wicked by high walls, or guards of heavenly soldiery. Even our Lord did not pray that we should be taken out of the world. Grace builds neither monasteries nor nunneries. "Woe is me," is frequently the cry of God's chosen, "that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" David knew what it was to be cut off from the assemblies of the Lord's house, and to be in the cave or in the wilderness. It may be so with you, and yet you may be a child of God. You may not be out of your place, for the dear path to his abode may go straight through this barren land. You may have to pass for many a day through this great and terrible wilderness, this land of fiery serpents, and of great drought, on your way to the land that floweth with milk and honey. To make heaven the sweeter we may find our exile made bitter. Our education for eternity may necessitate spiritual tribulation, and bereavement from visible comforts. To be weaned from all reliance on outward means may be for our good, that we may be driven in upon the Lord, and made to know that he is all in all. Doubtless the jeers of Babylon endeared the quiet of Zion to the banished: they loved the courts of the Lord's house all the more for having sighed in the halls of the proud monarch.

Worse still, *the Lord's chosen may be under oppression through surrounding ungodliness and sin.* The captive Israelites found Babylonia and Chaldea to be a land of grievous oppression. They ridiculed them, and bade them sing them one of the songs of Zion. They required of them mirth when their hearts were heavy. On the festivals of their false gods they demanded that the worshippers of the Eternal One should help in their choirs, and tune their harps to heathenish minstrelsy. Even Daniel, in his high position under the Persian monarch, found that he was not without adversaries, who rested not till they had cast him into a den of lions. Those who were far away, whether in Babylonia or in Persia, found themselves the constant subjects of assault from the triumphant foe. They were crushed down, until they cried by reason of their oppression. It was not the first time that the people of God had been in the iron furnace. Did they not come forth from the house of bondage at the first, even from Egypt? Neither was Babylon the last place of trial for saints; for until the end of time the seed of the serpent will war with the seed of the woman. Is it not still true of us, as well as of our Saviour, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son"? Expect still to meet with

opposition and oppression while you are passing to the land where the seed shall possess the heritage. Those of us who bear public testimony may have to bear the brunt of the battle, and suffer much from angry tongues. Nevertheless, to us it shall be an evident token of the Lord's favour, inasmuch as he counts us worthy to suffer for his name's sake.

But enough of that. I am making a very long story about the grievous routes through which we wend our way to the Celestial City. We climb on hands and knees up the Hill Difficulty; we tremblingly descend the steep of Humiliation. We feel our way through the tremendous pass of the Shadow of Death, and hasten through Vanity Fair, and walk warily across the Enchanted Ground. Not much of the way could one fall in love with. Perhaps the only part of it is that Valley of Humiliation, where the shepherd boy sat down and sang his ditty among the wild flowers and the lambs. One might wish to be always there; but fierce adversaries invade even these tranquil meadows, for hard-by where the shepherd sang his happy pastoral Christian met Apollyon, and had to struggle hard for his life. Do you not remember the spot where

"The man so bravely played the man,
He made the fiend to fly"?

You see where God's people may be, and yet may be none the less, but all the more, under the divine protection. Are you in difficult places? Be not dismayed, for this way runs the road to glory. Sigh not for the dove's wing to hurry to your rest, but take the appointed path: the footsteps of your Lord are there.

II. So, now, I hasten at once into the sweet part of the subject, which consists of this: **WHAT GOD WILL BE TO HIS PEOPLE WHEN THEY GET INTO THESE CIRCUMSTANCES.** "Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."

Brethren, the great sanctuary stood on Mount Sion, "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth." That glorious place which Solomon had builded was the shrine to which the Hebrew turned his eye: he prayed with his window open toward Jerusalem. Alas! when the tribes were carried away captive, they could not carry the holy and beautiful house with them, neither could they set up its like within the brazen gates of the haughty city. "Now," says the Lord God in infinite condescension, "I will be a travelling temple to them. I will be as a little sanctuary to each one of them. They shall carry my temple about with them. Wherever they are, I will be, as it were a holy place to them." In using the word "little," the gracious God would seem to say, "I will condescend to them, and I will be as they are. I will bow down to their littleness, and I will be to each little one of them a little sanctuary." Even the temple which Solomon builded was not a fit habitation for the infinite Jehovah, and so the Lord will stoop a little further, and be unto his people, not as the sanctuary "exceedingly magnificent," but as a little temple suitable for the most humble individual, rather than as a great temple in which vast multitudes could gather. "I will be to them as a little sanctuary" is a greatly condescending promise, implying an infinite stoop of love. There is a good deal more in my text than I shall be able to bring out, and I may seem, in making the attempt, to give you the same thought twice over. Please bear with me. Let me begin at the beginning.

A sanctuary was a *place of refuge*. You know how Joab fled to the horns of the altar to escape from Solomon's armed men: he ran to the temple hoping to find sanctuary there. In past ages, churches and abbeys and altars have been used as places of sanctuary to which men have fled when in danger of their lives. Take that sense, and couple it with the cities of refuge which were set up throughout all Israel, to which the man who killed another by misadventure might flee to hide himself from the manslayer. Now, beloved fellow-believer, wherever you are, wherever you dwell,

God will be to you a constant place of refuge. You shall flee from sin to God in Christ Jesus. You shall flee from an accusing conscience to his pardoning love. You shall flee from daily cares to him who careth for you. You shall flee from the accusations of Satan to the advocacy of Jesus. You shall flee even from yourselves to your Lord, and he will be to you in all senses a place of refuge. This is the happy harbour of all saints in all weathers. Hither come all weather-beaten barques, and cast anchor in placid waters.

"God is our refuge, tried and proved,
Amid a stormy world:
We will not fear though earth be moved,
And hills in ocean hurled,"

O my hearer, make the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, and then shalt thou know the truth of this text: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Wherever thou art cast, God will be to thee a suitable refuge, a little haven for thy little boat: not little in the sense that he cannot well protect thee; not little in the sense that his word is a small truth, or a small comfort, or a small protection, but little in this respect—that it shall be near thee, accessible to thee, adapted to thee. It is as though the refuge were portable in all our wanderings, a protection to be carried and kept in hand in all weathers. Thou shalt carry it about with thee wherever thou art, this "little sanctuary." Thy God, and thy thoughts of thy God, and thy faith in thy God, shall be to thee a daily, perpetual, available, present refuge. Oh, it is a delightful thought to my mind, that from every danger and every storm God will be to us an immediate refuge, which we carry about with us, so that we abide under the shadow of the Almighty!

Next, a sanctuary signifies also *a place of worship*. It is a place where the divine presence is peculiarly manifested—a holy place. It usually means a place where God dwells, a place where God has promised to meet with his people, a place of acceptance where prayers, and praises, and offerings come up with acceptance on his altar. Now, notice, God says to his people, when they are far away from the temple and Jerusalem, "I will be to them as a little sanctuary." Not, "I have loved the people, and I will build them a synagogue, or I will lead others to build for them a meeting-place; but I myself will be to them as a little sanctuary." The Lord Jesus Christ himself is the true place of worship for saved souls. "There is no chapel in the place where I live," says one. I am sorry to hear it, but chapels are not absolutely essential to worship, surely. Another cries, "There is no place of public worship of any sort where the gospel is fully and faithfully preached." This is a great want, certainly, but still, do not say, "I am far away from a place of worship." That is a mistake. No godly man is far away from a holy place. What is a place of worship? I hope that our bed-chambers are constantly places of worship. Place of worship? Why, it is one's garden where he walks and meditates. A place of worship? It is the field, the barn, the street, when one has the heart to pray. God will meet us by a well, a stone, a bush, a brook, a tree. He has great range of trysting-places when men's hearts are right.

"Where'er we seek him he is found,
And every place is hallowed ground."

When a man lives near to God, and abides in him, he should shake off the folly of superstition, and talk no more of holy places. God himself, his own presence makes a place of worship. Do you not catch the fulness of the thought? Yonder is Jacob. He lies down to sleep in a desert place with a stone for his pillow. No bishop had ever been upon the spot to consecrate it, no service had been held in the place by way of dedication, and yet when he awoke in the morning, he said, "How

dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." God had been to his servant a little sanctuary in that instance, as he has been oftentimes since. Whenever you go to sea, God in your cabin shall be to you a little sanctuary. When you travel by railway, the carriage shall, through the Lord's presence, be a little sanctuary. God's presence, seen in a bit of moss, made in the desert for Mungo Park a little sanctuary. How often have the streets of London been to some of us as the golden pavements of the New Jerusalem, for God has been there! The Lord himself is the temple of saints in heaven, and he is their temple on earth. When God draws near to us, we worship and rejoice. Whenever we are abroad, and cannot come to the visible sanctuary where multitudes worship, let us ask the Lord to be to us as "a little sanctuary." Have not your hearts cried out as you have thought of this house when you have been far away—"Ziona, Ziona, the place of our solemn assemblies, when shall we return to thee? O sacred spot, where we have worshipped God, and God has met with us, and made the place of his feet glorious, when shall we again behold thee"? I shall not contend with the feeling; but I would supplant it with this higher thought: the Lord himself is our dwelling-place, and our holy temple. Hath he not said, "I will be to them as a little sanctuary"?

Now, go a little farther. Our God is to us *a place of stillness*. What was the sanctuary of old? The sanctuary was the most holy place, the third court, the innermost of all within the veil. It was the stillest place that ever was on earth: a closet of absolute silence. You must not think of the tabernacle in the wilderness as being a huge building. It was a small affair, and the innermost room of all was of narrow dimensions. The Holy of Holies was great for holiness, but not for space. There was this peculiarity about it, that it was the shrine of unbroken quiet. Was ever a voice heard in it? Once in the year the high-priest went in, and filled it full of the smoke of incense as he waved his censor in the mystic presence; but otherwise it was a chamber in which there was no footfall of living thing, or voice of mortal man. Here was the home of absolute quiet and silence. The stillness within the Holy of Holies of the temple must have reached the intensity of awe. What repose one might enjoy who could dwell in the secret place of the Most High! How one sighs for stillness! We cannot get it to the full anywhere in this country: even to the loneliest hill-top the scream of the railway-engine rises to the ear. Utter and entire stillness, one of the richest joys on this side heaven, one cannot readily obtain. Those who live in the wear and tear of this city life—and it is an awful wear and tear—might well pay down untold gold to be still for a while. What would we not give for quiet, absolute quiet, when everything should be still, and the whirring wheels of care should cease to revolve for at least a little while?

I sometimes propose to myself to wait upon God and be still. Alas! There is the bell! Who is this? Somebody that will chatter for a quarter of an hour about nothing! Well, that intruder has gone; let us pray. We are on our knees. What is this? A telegram! One is half frightened at the very sight of it: it is opened, and it calls you away to matters which are the reverse of quieting. Where is stillness to be had? The only prescription I can give is this promise: "I will be to them as a little sanctuary." If you can get with God, you will then escape from men, even though you have to live among them. If you can baptize your spirit into the great deeps of Godhead, if you can take a plunge into the fathomless love of the covenant, if you can rise to commune with God, and speak with him as a man speaketh with his friend, then will he be unto you as a little sanctuary, and you shall enjoy that solemn silence of the soul which hath music in it like the eternal harmonies. The presence of the Lord will be as a calm hand for that fevered brow, and a pillow for that burdened head. Use your God in this way, for so he presents himself to you.

The sanctuary was *a place of mercy*. When the high-priest entered within the veil, he passed into the throne-room of mercy. The blood had been sprinkled there, and man might draw near to the God of mercy. A light was shining—a light of love and mercy, between the wings of the cherubim. Those angelic forms were ministers of mercy, attendants upon the Lord of grace. Before the high-priest stood the mercy-seat. That was the name of the cover of the sacred ark of the covenant. On that mercy-seat there was the shechinah, which symbolized the presence of a merciful God. Of that mercy-seat the Lord had said, "There will I meet with you." The holy place was a house of mercy. God was not there in power to destroy, nor in subtle wisdom to discover folly: he was there in mercy, waiting to forgive. Now, dear friends, God says, "I will be to them as a little sanctuary," that is to say, an accessible throne of mercy, an accessible place of mercy. When men have no mercy on you, go to God. When you have no mercy on yourself—and sometimes you have not—run away to God. Draw near to him, and he will be to you as a little sanctuary.

The sanctuary was the house of mercy, and hence, *a place of condescension*—"a little sanctuary." Brethren, to suit our needs the blessings of grace must be given in little forms. What are we great in at all except in sin? We hear of "great men." O friends, a great man! Does not the term make you laugh? Did you ever hear of a great ant, or a great emmet, or a great nothing? And that is all that the greatest of us can ever be. Our degrees and ranks are only shades of littleness; that is all. When the Lord communes with the greatest of men, he must become little to speak with him.

I cannot convey to you quite what I see to be the meaning of this little sanctuary, laying the stress upon the adjective "little." If you are talking of anything that is very dear, the tendency is always to call it "little." The affectionate terms of language are frequently diminutives. One never says, "My dear great wife," but we are apt to say, "My dear little wife." We speak thus of things which are not "little" really, but we use the word as a term of affection. To speak very simply, there is a cosiness about a little thing which we miss in that which is on a large scale. We say, "Well, I did so enjoy that little prayer-meeting; but when it grew so much in numbers I seemed lost in it." It is to me so marvellous that I hardly dare to say what I mean; but when the Lord brings himself down to our capacity he is greatly dear to us, and he would have us feel at home with him, comfortable with him. When he becomes to us "as a little sanctuary," and we are able to compass his mercy to ourselves, and perceive its adaptation to our little trials and little difficulties, then we feel ourselves at home with him, and he is most dear to us. O thou blessed God, thou art so great, that thou must, as it were, belittle thyself to manifest thyself to me; how I love and adore thee that thou wilt deign to do this! Glory be to thy great name, though the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, yet thou dwellest in the temple of my poor heart!

Dear brethren, the sanctuary was only a little place. But then, if it had been ever so great—if it had been as spacious as this whole island, and had been shut in to be the house of God—would it have been a house fitted to contain the infinite God? If you take the arch of heaven as a roof, and floor it with the sea, or if you soar into still more boundless space, is that a house fit for him who filleth all immensity? When Jehovah makes himself little enough to be in the least comprehended by us, the descent is immeasurable. It is nothing more to him to come down to count the hairs of our head than to bow in the infinity of his mercy to take an interest in our littlenesses.

Go a stage further. That sanctuary, of which we read in the Old Testament, was not only a place of great stillness, great mercy, and great condescension but it was *a place of great holiness*. "Holiness becometh thy house." This applied to the whole temple, but the inner shrine was called "sanctum sanctorum"—the Holy of Holies, for so the Hebrews make a superlative. It was the holiest place

that could be. The world is an unholy place, and at times it is most grievously so. You mix up with people who defile you; how can you help it? Your daily business calls you to see and hear many things which are defiling. When these things are more than ordinarily glaring, you say to yourself, "Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness, that I might get away from the very sight of men!" I was with a mountain-climbing friend some time ago, and being thirsty, I drank some water from a fountain by the roadside. When I held the cup to my companion, he refused it, saying, "I don't drink that." I said, "Why don't you drink it?" He answered, "I wait till I have climbed up into the mountains, where mortal men never pollute the streams, and then I drink. I like drinking of fountains at which none but birds sip: where the stream pours forth from God's hand pure as crystal." Alas! I cannot climb with my Alpine friend as to material things; but what a blessed thing it is to get right away from man, and drink of the river of God which is full of water, and know the joys of his own right hand, which are for evermore! What bliss to enter into the Holy of Holies! Now, you cannot do that by getting into a cell, or by shutting yourselves up in your room; but you can enter the most holy place by communion with God. Here is the promise; the text means this—"I will be to them as a little sanctuary—a little Holy of Holies. I will put them into myself as into the most holy place, and there will I hide them. In the secret of my tabernacle will I hide them. I will set them up upon a rock." Away from the unholiness of your own hearts, and the unholiness of those about you, get to your God, and hide yourselves in him.

Again, we may regard the sanctuary as *a place of cleansing*. That may be gathered from the other rendering of my text. "I will be unto them a little sanctification." God is the sanctification of his people he cleanses them from daily defilements, and is himself their righteousness. Those that come to God shall find in him sanctification for the daily acts of life, cleansing from ordinary as well as extraordinary transgression. We want not only the great blood-washing, but also the lesser washing of the feet with water; and the Lord himself will give us this blessing. Did not Jesus take a towel, and gird himself for this very purpose?

Lastly, God will be to us *a place of communion and of revelation*. In the Holy of Holies God spoke with man, on that one day in the year, in a wondrous manner; and he that had been there, and came forth alive, came out to bless the congregation. Every day of the year the teaching of the sanctuary was that in God there was everything his people wanted. In the holy place was the shechinah light, and "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." "The Lord is my light and my salvation." In the holy place were the cherubim: God has legions of angels at his bidding, waiting to bless his people. In the holy place was the ark: God is to us the ark of the covenant. He has entered into covenant with men, towards us he has a throne of grace, and there he meets us, even in Christ Jesus, who is our propitiation.

Within that ark there were three things: the rod of Aaron, that divine work of Christ which always buds; the pot of manna, the emblem and token of the living bread whereon his people feed; and the tablets of the law unbroken, in all their splendour, whereby the saints are justified. O brethren, if you want anything, if you want everything, go to God for it! He will be to you as a little sanctuary; that is to say, he will bring to you everything which was inside that holy place. Though but one piece of furniture, yet that ark of the covenant did really contain in itself, and round about it, all that the heirs of God can ever need while in this wilderness. Let this be a joy to you this day. Do not rely upon the creature. "All men are liars," said David; and he was not far out. Broken cisterns abound on all sides; why waste your time on them? Get you straight away to your Creator, and find your all in him. If this day you are wrapped up in the things that are seen and temporal,

may God deliver you therefrom, for all these things will melt as you hold them in your hand! The joys of this life are like the ice palace of Montreal, which is fair to look upon while the winter lasts, but it all dissolves as the spring comes on. All things round about us here are myths and dreams. This is the land of fancies and of shadows. Pray God to get you out of them, and that you may find in him your sanctuary, and indeed all that you want.

If at this time you have lost many of the comforts of this life, and seem bereaved of friends, then find in God your "little sanctuary." Go home to your chamber with holy faith and humble love, and take him to be your all in all, and he will be all in all to you. Pray after this fashion—"O Lord, so work in me by thy Spirit that I may find thee in all things, and all things in thee!"

The Lord has ways of weaning us from the visible and the tangible, and bringing us to live upon the invisible and the real, in order to prepare us for that next stage, that better life, that higher place, where we shall really deal with eternal things only. God blows out our candles, and makes us find our light in him, to prepare us for that place in which they need no candle, for the glory of God is their light; and where, strange to tell, they have no temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof. The holy leads to the holiest: living upon God here leads to living with God hereafter. Oh, that God would gradually lift us up above all the outward, above all the visible, and bring us more and more into the inward and unseen! If you do not know anything about this, ask the Lord to teach you this riddle; and if you do know it, ask him to keep you to the life and walk of faith, and never may you be tempted to quit it for the way of sight and feeling. For Christ's sake we ask it. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ezekiel 11.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—196, 198, 708.

The Lord And The Leper

A Sermon

(No. 2008)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, February 12th, 1888, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. and Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed."—Mark 1:40-42.

Beloved, we saw in the reading, that our Lord had been engaged in special prayer. He had gone alone on the mountain-side to have communion with God. Simon and the rest search for him, and he comes away in the early morning with the burrs from the hill-side upon his garments, the smell of the field upon him, even of a field that the Lord God had blessed; he comes forth among the people, charged with power which he had received in communion with the Father; and now we may expect to see wonders. And we do see them; for devils fear and fly when he speaks the word; and by-and-by, there comes to him one, an extraordinary being, condemned to live apart from the rest of men, lest he should spread defilement all around. A leper comes to him, and kneels before him, and expresses his confident faith in him, that he can make him whole. Now is the Son of Man glorious in his power to save.

The Lord Jesus Christ at this day has all power in heaven and in earth. He is charged with a divine energy to bless all who come to him for healing. Oh, that we may see today some great wonder of his power and grace! Oh, for one of the days of the Son of Man here and now! To that end it is absolutely needful that we should find a case for his spiritual power to work upon. Is there not one here in whom his grace may prove its omnipotence? Not you, ye good, ye self-righteous! You yield him no space to work in. You that are whole have no need of a physician: in you there is no opportunity for him to display his miraculous force. But yonder are the men we seek for. Forlorn, and lost, full of evil, and self-condemned, you are the characters we seek. You that feel as if you were possessed with evil spirits, and you that are leprous with sin, you are the persons in whom Jesus will find ample room and verge enough for the display of his holy skill. Of you I might say, as he once said of the man born blind: you are here that the works of God may be manifest in you. You, with your guilt and your depravity, you furnish the empty vessels into which his grace may be poured, the sick souls upon whom he may display his matchless power to bless and save. Be hopeful, then, ye sinful ones! Look up this morning for the Lord's approach, and expect that even in you he will work great marvels. This leper shall be a picture-yea, I hope a mirror- in whom you will see yourselves. I do pray that as I go over the details of this miracle many here may put themselves in the leper's place, and do just as the leper did, and receive, just as the leper received, cleansing from the hand of Christ. O Spirit of the living God, the thousands of our Israel now entreat thee to work, that Jesus, the Son of God, may be glorified here and now!

I. I will begin my rehearsal of the gospel narrative by remarking, first, that **THIS LEPER'S FAITH MADE HIM EAGER TO BE HEALED**. He was a leper; I will not stay just now to describe

what horrors are compacted into that single word; but he believed that Jesus could cleanse him, and his belief stirred him to an anxious desire to be healed at once.

Alas! we have to deal with spiritual lepers eaten up with the foul disease of sin; but *some of them do not believe that they ever can be healed*, and the consequence is that despair makes them sin most greedily. "I may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb," is the inward impression of many a sinner when he fears that there is no mercy and no help for him. Because there is no hope, therefore they plunge deeper and yet deeper into the slough of iniquity. Oh, that you might be delivered from that false idea! Mercy still rules the hour. There is hope while Jesus sends his gospel to you, and bids you repent. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins": this is a sweet sentence of a true creed. I believe also in the renewal of men's hearts; for the Lord can give new hearts and right spirits to the evil and unthankful. I would that you believed it; for if you did, I trust it would quicken you into seeking that your sins might be forgiven and your minds might be renewed. Do you believe it? Then come to Jesus and receive the blessings of free grace.

We have a number of lepers who come in among us whose disease is white upon their brows, and visible to all beholders, and yet *they are indifferent*: they do not mourn their wickedness, nor wish to be cleansed from it. They sit among God's people, and they listen to the doctrine of a new birth, and the news of pardon, and they hear the teaching as though it had nothing to do with them. If now and then they half wish that salvation would come to them, it is too languid a wish to last. They have not yet so perceived their disease and their danger as to pray to be delivered from them. They sleep on upon the bed of sloth, and care neither for heaven nor hell. Indifference to spiritual things is the sin of the age. Men are stolid of heart about eternal realities. An awful apathy is upon the multitude. The leper in our text was not so foolish as this. He eagerly desired to be delivered from his dreadful malady: with heart and soul he pined to be cleansed from its terrible defilement. Oh that it were so with you! May the Lord make you feel how depraved your heart is, and how diseased with sin are all the faculties of your soul! Alas, dear friends,—*there are some that even love their leprosy!* Is it not a sad thing to have to speak thus? Surely, madness is in men's hearts. Men do not wish to be saved from doing evil. They love the ways and wages of iniquity. They would like to go to heaven, but they must have their drunken frolics on the road; they would very well like to be saved from hell, but not from the sin which is the cause of it. Their notion of salvation is not to be saved from the love of evil, and to be made pure and clean; but that is God's meaning when he speaks of salvation. How can they hope to be the slaves of sin, and yet at the same time be free? Our first necessity is to be saved from sinning. The very name of Jesus tells us *that*: he is called Jesus because "he shall save his people from their sins." These persons do not care for a salvation which would mean self-denial and the giving up of ungodly lusts. O wretched lepers, that count their leprosy to be a beauty, and take pleasure in sin which in the sight of God is far more loathsome than the worst disease of the body! Oh, that Christ Jesus would come and change their views of things until they were of the same mind as God towards sin; and you know he calls it "that abominable thing which I hate." Oh, if men could see their love to wrong things to be a disease more sickening than leprosy, they would fain be saved, and saved at once! Holy Spirit, convince of sin, that sinners may be eager to be cleansed!

Lepers were obliged to consort together: lepers associated with lepers, and they must have made up a dreadful confraternity. How glad they would have been to escape from it! But I know spiritual lepers who *love the company of their fellow lepers*. Yes, and the more leprous a man becomes, the more do they admire him. A bold sinner is often the idol of his comrades. Though foul is his life,

others cling to him for that very reason. Such persons like to learn some new bit of wickedness, they are eager to be initiated into a yet darker form of impure pleasure. Oh, how they long to hear that last lascivious song, to read that last impure novel! It seems to be the desire of many to know as much evil as they can. They flock together, and take a dreadful pleasure in talk and action which is the horror of all pure minds. Strange lepers, that heap up leprosy as a treasure! Even those who do not go into gross open sin, yet are pleased with infidel notions and skeptical opinions, which are a wretched form of mental leprosy. O horrible malady, which makes men doubt the word of the living God!

Lepers were not allowed to associate with healthy persons except under severe restrictions. Thus were they separated from their nearest and dearest friends. What a sorrow! Alas! I know persons thus separated, who *do not wish to associate with the godly*: to them holy company is dull and wearisome; they do not feel free and easy in such society, and therefore they avoid it as much as decency allows. How can they hope to live with saints for ever, when they shun them now as dull and moping acquaintances?

O my hearers, I have come hither this morning in the hope that God would bless the word to some poor sinner who feels he is a sinner, and would fain be cleansed: such is the leper I am seeking with my whole heart. I pray God to bless the word to those who wish to escape from evil company, who would no longer sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor run in the paths of the unholy. To those who have grown weary of their sinful companions, and would escape from them, lest they should be bound up in bundles with them to burn at the last great day—to such I speak at this time with a loving desire for their salvation. I hope my word will come with divine application to some poor heart here that is crying, "I wish I might be numbered with the people of God. I wish I were fit to be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord. Oh, that my dreadful sinfulness were conquered, so that I could have fellowship with the godly, and be myself one of them!" I hope my Lord has brought to this place just such lost ones, that he may find them. I am looking out for them with tearful eyes. But my feeble eyes cannot read inward character; and it is well that the loving Saviour, who discerns the secrets of all hearts, and reads all inward desire, is looking from the watch-towers of heaven, that he may discover those who are coming to him, even though as yet they are a great way off. Oh that sinners may now beg and pray to be rescued from their sins! May those who have become habituated to evil long to break off their evil habits! Happy will the preacher be if he finds himself surrounded with penitents who hate their sins, and guilty ones who cry to be forgiven, and to be so changed that they shall go and sin no more.

II. In the second place, let us remark that **THIS LEPER'S FAITH WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO MAKE HIM BELIEVE THAT HE COULD BE HEALED OF HIS HIDEOUS DISEASE.** *Leprosy was an unutterably loathsome disease.* As it exists even now, it is described by those who have seen it in such a way that I will not harrow your feelings by repeating all the sickening details. The following quotation may be more than sufficient. Dr. Thomson in his famous work, "The Land and the Book," speaks of lepers in the East, and says, "The hair falls from the head and eye-brows; the nails loosen, decay and drop off; joint after joint of the fingers and toes shrink up and slowly fall away. The gums are absorbed, and the teeth disappear. The nose, the eyes, the tongue and the palate are slowly consumed." This disease turns a man into a mass of loathsomeness, a walking pile of pests. Leprosy is nothing better than a horrible and lingering death. The leper in the narrative before us had sad personal experience of this, and yet he believed that Jesus could cleanse him. Splendid faith! Oh that you who are afflicted with moral and spiritual leprosy could believe in this

fashion! Jesus Christ of Nazareth can heal even you. Over the horror of leprosy faith triumphed. Oh that in your case it would overcome the terribleness of sin!

Leprosy was known to be incurable. There was no case of a man being cured of real leprosy by any medical or surgical treatment. This made the cure of Naaman in former ages so noteworthy. Observe, moreover, that our Saviour himself, so far as I can see, had never healed a leper up to the moment when this poor wretch appeared upon the scene. He had cured fever, and had cast out devils, but the cure of leprosy was in the Saviour's life as yet an unexampled thing. Yet this man, putting this and that together, and understanding something of the nature and character of the Lord Jesus Christ, believed that he could cure him of his incurable disease. He felt that even if the great Lord had not yet healed leprosy, he was assuredly capable of doing so great a deed, and he determined to apply to him. Was not this grand faith? Oh that such faith could be found among my hearers at this hour! Here me, O trembling sinner: if thou be as full of sin this morning as an egg is full of meat, Jesus can remove it all. If thy propensities to sin be as untamable as the wild boar of the wood, yet Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, can subdue thine iniquities, and make thee the obedient servant of his love. Jesus can turn the lion into a lamb, and he can do it now. He can transform thee where thou art sitting, saving thee in yonder pew while I am speaking the word. All things are possible to the Saviour God; and all things are possible to him that believeth. I would thou hadst such a faith as this leper had, although if it were even less it might serve thy turn, since thou hast not all his difficulties to contend with, since Jesus has already saved many sinners like thyself, and changed many hearts as hard as thine. If he shall regenerate thee, he will be doing for thee no strange thing, but only one of the daily miracles of his grace. He has now healed thousands of thy fellow lepers: canst thou not believe that he can heal the leprosy in thee?

This man had a marvelous faith, thus to believe while *he was personally the victim of the mortal malady*. It is one thing to trust a doctor when you are well, but quite another to confide in him when your body is rotting away. For a real, conscious sinner to trust the Saviour is no mean thing. When you hope that there is some good thing in you, it is easy to be confident; but to be conscious of total ruin and yet to believe in the divine remedy—this is real faith. To see in the sunshine is mere natural vision; but to see in the dark needs the eye of faith: to believe that Jesus has saved you when you see the signs of it, is the result of reason; but to trust him to cleanse you while you are still defiled with sin—this is the essence of saving faith.

The leprosy was firmly seated and fully developed in this man. Luke says that he was "full of leprosy": he had as much of the poison in him as one poor body could contain, it had come to its worst stage in him; and yet he believed that Jesus of Nazareth could make him clean. Glorious confidence! O my hearer, if thou art full of sin, if thy propensities and habits have become as bad as bad can be, I pray the Holy spirit to give thee and renew thee, and do it at once. With one word of his mouth Jesus can turn your death into life, your corruption into comeliness. Changes which we cannot work in others, much less in ourselves, Jesus, by his invincible Spirit, can work in the hearts of the ungodly. Of these stones he can raise up children unto Abraham. His moral and spiritual miracles are often wrought upon cases which seem beyond all hope, cases which pity itself endeavours to forget because her efforts have been so long in vain.

I like best about this man's faith the fact that he did not merely believe that Jesus Christ could cleanse a leper, but that he could cleanse *him!* He said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make *me* clean." It is very easy to believe for other people. There is really no faith in such impersonal, proxy confidence. The true faith believes for itself first, and then for others. Oh, I know some of you are

saying, "I believe that Jesus can save my brother. I believe that he can save the vilest of the vile. If I heard that he had saved the biggest drunkard in Southward I should not wonder." Canst thou believe all this, and yet fear that he cannot save thee? This is strange inconsistency. If he heals another man's leprosy, can he not heal *thy* leprosy? If one drunkard is saved, why not another? If in one man a passionate temper is subdued, why not in another? If lust, and covetousness, and lying, and pride have been cured in many men, why not in thee? Even if thou art a blasphemer, blasphemy has been cured; why should it not be so in thy case? He can heal thee of that particular form of sin which possesses thee, however high a degree its power may have reached; for nothing is too hard for the Lord. Jesus can change and cleanse thee now. In a moment he can impart a new life and commence a new character. Canst thou believe this? This is the faith which glorified Jesus, and brought healing to this leper; and it is the faith which will save you at once if you now exercise it. O Spirit of the living God, work this faith in the minds of my dear hearers, that they may thus win their suit with the Lord Jesus, and go their way healed of the plague of sin!

III. Now, notice, thirdly, that this man's faith WAS FIXED ON JESUS CHRIST ALONE. Let me read the man's words again. He said unto Jesus, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Throw the emphasis upon the *pronouns*. See him kneeling before the Lord Jesus and hear him say, "If *thou* wilt, *thou* canst make *me* clean." He has no idea of looking to the disciples; no, not to one of them or to all of them. He had no notion of trusting in a measure to the medicine which physicians would prescribe for him. All that is gone. No dream of other hope remains; but with his eye fully fixed on the blessed Miracle-worker of Nazareth, he cries, "If *thou* wilt, *thou* canst make me clean." In himself he had no shade of confidence; every delusion of that kind had been banished by a fierce experience of his disease. He knew that none on earth could deliver him, and that by no innate power of constitution could he throw out the poison; but he confidently believed that the Son of God could by himself effect the cure. This was God-given faith—the faith of God's elect, and Jesus was its sole object.

How came this man to have such faith? I cannot tell you the outward means, but I think we may guess without presumption. Had he not *heard our Lord preach*? Matthew puts this story immediately after the Sermon on the Mount, and says, "When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Had this man managed to stand at the edge of the crowd and hear Jesus speak, and did those wondrous words convince him that the great Teacher was something more than man? As he noted the style, and manner, and matter of that marvelous sermon, did he say within himself, "never man spake like this man. Truly he is the Son of God. I believe in him. I trust him. he can cleanse me"? May God bless the preaching of Christ crucified to you who hear me this day! Is not this used of the Lord, and made to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth?

Perhaps this man had *seen our Lord's miracles*. I feel sure he had. He had seen the devils cast out, and had heard of Peter's wife's mother, who had lain sick of a fever, and had been instantaneously recovered. The leper might very properly argue—To do this requires omnipotence; and once granted that omnipotence is at work, then omnipotence can as well deal with leprosy as with fever. Did he not reason well if he argued thus—What the Lord has done, he can do again: if in one case he has displayed almighty power, he can display that same power in another case? Thus would the acts of the Lord corroborate his words, and furnish a sure foundation for the leper's hope. My hearer,

have you not seen Jesus save others? Have you not at least read of his miracles of grace? Believe him, then, for his works' sake, and say to him, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

Besides, I think this man may have *heard something of the story of Christ*, and may have been familiar with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. We cannot tell but some disciple may have informed him of John's witness concerning the Christ, and of the signs and tokens which supported John's testimony. He may thus have discerned in the Son of Man the Messiah of God, the Incarnate Deity. At any rate, as knowledge must come before faith, he had received knowledge enough to feel that he could trust this glorious personage, and to believe that, if he willed it, Jesus could make him clean. O my dear hearers, cannot you trust the Lord Jesus Christ in this way? Do you not believe—I hope you do—that he is the Son of God; and if so, why not trust him? He that was born of Mary at Bethlehem was God over all, blessed forever! Do you not believe this? Why, then, do you not rely upon God in our nature? You believe in his consecrated life, his suffering death, his resurrection, his ascension, his sitting in power at the right hand of the Father; why do you not trust him? God hath highly exalted him, and caused all fullness to dwell in him: he is able to save unto the uttermost, why do you not come to him? Believe that he is able, and then with all thy sins before thee, red like scarlet—and with all thy sinful habits, and thy evil propensities before thee, ingrained like the leopard's spots—believe that the Saviour of men can at once make thee whiter than snow as to past guilt, and free from the present and future tyranny of evil. A divine Saviour must be able to cleanse thee from all sin. Only Jesus can do it, but he can do it—do it himself alone, do it now, do it in thee, do it with a word. If Jesus wills to do it, it is all that is wanted; for his will is the will of the Almighty Lord. Say, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Faith must be fixed alone on Jesus. None other name is given among men whereby we must be saved. I do pray the Lord to give that faith to all my dear friends present this morning who as yet have not received cleansing at the Lord's hands. Jesus is God's ultimatum of salvation: the unique hope of guilty men both as to pardon and renewal. Accept him even now.

IV. Now let me go a step further: THIS MAN'S FAITH HAD RESPECT TO A REAL MATTER-OF-FACT CURE. He did not think of the Lord Jesus Christ as a priest who would perform certain ceremonies over him, and formally say, "Thou art clean"; for that would not have been true. He wanted really to be delivered from the leprosy; to have those dry scales, into which his skin kept turning, taken all away, that his flesh might become as the flesh of a little child; he wanted that the rottenness, which was eating up his body, should be stayed, and that health should be actually restored. Friends, it is easy enough to believe in a mere priestly absolution if you have enough credulity; but we need more than this. It is very easy to believe in Baptismal Regeneration, but what is the good of it? What practical result does it produce? A child remains the same after it has been baptismally regenerated as it was before, and it grows up to prove it. It is easy to believe in Sacramentarianism if you are foolish enough; but there is nothing in it when you believe in it. No sanctifying power comes with outward ceremonials in and of themselves. To believe that the Lord Jesus Christ can make us love the good things which once we despised, and shun those evil things in which we once took pleasure—this is to believe in him indeed and of a truth. Jesus can totally change the nature, and make a sinner into a saint. This is faith of a practical kind; this is a faith worth having.

None of us would imagine that this leper meant that the Lord Jesus could make him feel comfortable in remaining a leper. Some seem to fancy that Jesus came to let us go on in our sins with a quiet conscience; but he did nothing of the kind. His salvation is cleansing from sin, and if

we love sin we are not saved from it. We cannot have justification without sanctification. There is no use in quibbling about it; there must be a change, a radical change, a change of heart, or else we are not saved. I put it now to you, Do you desire a moral and a spiritual change, a change of life, thought and motive? This is what Jesus gives. Just as this leper needed a thorough physical change, so do you need an entire renewal of your spiritual nature, so as to become a new creature in Jesus Christ. Oh that many here would desire this, for it would be a cheering sign. The man who desires to be pure is beginning to be pure; the man who sincerely longs to conquer sin has struck the first blow already. The power of sin is shaken in that man who looks to Jesus for deliverance from it. The man who frets under the yoke of sin will not long be a slave to it; if he can believe that Jesus Christ is able to set him free, he shall soon quit his bondage. Some sins which have hardened down into habits, will yet disappear in a moment when Jesus Christ looks upon a man in love. I have known many instances of persons who, for many years, had never spoken without an oath, or a filthy expression, who, being converted, have never been known to use such language again, and have scarcely ever been tempted in that direction. This is one of the sins which seem to die at the first shot, and it is a very wonderful thing it should be so. Others I have known so altered at once that the very propensity which was strongest in them has been the last to annoy them afterwards: they have had such a reversion of the mind's action that, while other sins have worried them for years, and they have had to set a strict watch against them, yet their favourite and dominant sin has never again had the slightest influence over them, except to excite an outburst of horror and deep repentance. Oh, that you had faith in Jesus that he could thus cast down and cast out your reigning sins! Believe in the conquering arm of the Lord Jesus, and he will do it. Conversion is the standing miracle of the church. Where it is genuine, it is as clear a proof of divine power going with the gospel, as was the casting out of devils, or even the raising of the dead in our Lord's day. We see these conversions still; and have proof that Jesus is able to work great moral marvels still. O my hearer, where art thou? Canst thou not believe that Jesus is able to make a new man of thee? O brethren, who have been saved, I entreat you to breathe a prayer at this time for those who are not yet cleansed from the foul disease of sin. Pray that they may have grace to believe in the Lord Jesus for purification of heart, pardon of sin, and the implantation of eternal life. Then when faith is given, the Lord Jesus will work their sanctification, and none shall effectually hinder. In silence let us pray for a moment. (Here there was a pause, and silent prayer went up to heaven.)

V. And now we will go another step: THIS MAN'S FAITH WAS ATTENDED WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE A HESITANCY. But after thinking it over a good deal, I am hardly inclined to think it such a hesitancy as many have judged it to be. He said, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." There was an "if" in this speech, and that "if" has aroused the suspicions of many preachers. Some think it supposes that he doubted our Lord's willingness. I hardly think that the language justly bears so harsh a construction. What he meant may have been this—"Lord, I do not know yet that thou art sent to heal lepers; I have not seen that thou hast ever done so; but, still, if it be within the compass of thy commission, I believe thou wilt do it, and assuredly thou canst if thou wilt. Thou canst heal not only some lepers, but me in particular; thou canst make me clean." Now, I think this was a legitimate thing for him to say, as he had not seen a leper healed—"If it be within the compass of thy commission, I believe thou canst make me whole."

Moreover, I admire in this text *the deference which the leper pays to the sovereignty of Christ's will as to the bestowal of his gifts*. "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean";—as much as to say, "I know thou hast a right to distribute these great favours exactly as thou pleasest. I have no claim

upon thee; I cannot say that thou art bound to make me clean; I appeal to thy pity and free favour. The matter remains with thy will." The man had never read the text which saith, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," for it was not yet written; but he had in his mind the humble spirit suggested by that grand truth. He owned that grace must come as a free gift of God's good pleasure when he said "Lord, if thou wilt." Beloved, we need never raise a question as to the Lord's will to give grace when we have the will to receive it; but still, I would have every sinner feel that he has no claim upon God for anything. O sinner, if the Lord should give thee up, as he did the heathen described in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, thou deservest it. If he should never look upon thee with an eye of love, what couldst thou say against his righteous sentence? Thou hast wilfully sinned, and thou deservest to be left in thy sin. Confessing all this, we still cling to our firm belief in the power of grace, and cry, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst." We appeal to our Saviour's pitying love, relying upon his boundless power.

See, also, how the leper, to my mind, *really speaks without any hesitancy*, if you understand him. He does not say, "Lord, if thou puttest out thy hand, thou canst make me clean"; nor, "Lord, if thou speakest, thou canst make me clean"; but only, "Lord, *if thou wilt*, thou canst make me clean": thy mere will can do it. Oh, splendid faith! If you are inclined to spy a little halting in it, I would have you admire it for running so well with a lame foot. If there was a weakness anywhere in his faith, still it was so strong that the weakness only manifests its strength. Sinner, it is so; and I pray God that thy heart may grasp it—if the Lord wills it he can make thee clean. Believest thou this? If so, carry out practically what thy faith will suggest to thee—namely, that thou come to Jesus and plead with him, and get from him the cleansing which thou needest. To that end I am hoping to lead thee, as the Holy Spirit shall enable me.

VI. In the sixth place, notice that THIS MAN'S FAITH HAD EARNEST ACTION FLOWING OUT OF IT. Believing that, if Jesus willed, he could make him clean, what did the leper do? At once he came to Jesus. I know not from what distance, but he came as near to Jesus as he could. Then we read that he besought him; that is to say, he pleaded, and pleaded, and pleaded again. He cried, "Lord, cleanse me! Lord heal my leprosy!" Nor was this all; he fell on his knees and worshipped; for we read, "Kneeling down to him." He not only knelt, but knelt to Jesus. He had no difficulty as to paying him divine honour. He worshipped the Lord Christ, paying him reverent homage. He then went on to honour him by an open acknowledgment of his power, his marvelous power, his infinite power, by saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." I should not wonder if some that stood by began to smile at what they thought the poor man's fanatical credulity. They murmured, "What a poor fool as this leper is, to think that Jesus of Nazareth can cure him of his leprosy!" Such a confession of faith had seldom been heard. But whatever critics and skeptics might think, this brave man boldly declared, "Lord, this is my confession of faith: I believe that if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Now, poor soul, thou that art full of guilt, and hardened in sin, and yet anxious to be healed, look straight away to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is here now. In the preaching of the gospel he is with us alway. With the eyes of thy mind behold him, for he beholdeth thee. Thou knowest that he lives, even though thou seest him not. Believe in this living Jesus; believe for perfect cleansing. Cry to him, worship him, adore him, trust him. He is very God of very God; bow before him, and cast thyself upon his mercy. Go home, and on thy knees say, "Lord, I believe that thou canst make me clean." He will hear your cry, and will save you. There will be no interval between your prayer and the gracious reward of faith, of which I am now to speak.

VII. Lastly, HIS FAITH HAD ITS REWARD. Have patience with me just a minute. The reward of this man's faith was, first, that *his very words were treasured up*. Matthew, Mark, Luke, all three of them record the precise words which this man used: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." They evidently did not see so much to find fault with in them as some have done; on the contrary, they thought them gems to be placed in the setting of their gospels. Three times over are they recorded, because they are such a splendid confession of faith for a poor diseased leper to have made. I believe that God is as much glorified by that one sentence of the leper as by the song of Cherubim and Seraphim, when they continually do cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." A sinner's lips declaring his confident faith in God's own Son can breathe sonnets unto God more sweet than those of the angelic choirs. This man's first faith- words are folded up in the fair linen of three evangelists, and laid up in the treasury of the house of the Lord. God values the language of humble confidence.

His next reward was, that *Jesus echoed his words*. He said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"; and Jesus said, "I will; be thou clean." As an echo answers to the voice, so did Jesus to his supplicant. The Lord Jesus was so pleased with this man's words that he caught them as they leaped out of his mouth, and used them himself, saying, "I will; be thou clean." If you can only get, then, as far as this leper's confession, I believe that our Lord Jesus from his throne above will answer to your prayer.

So potent were the words of this leper that *they moved our Lord very wonderfully*. Read the forty-first verse: "And Jesus, moved with compassion." The Greek word here used, if I were to pronounce it in your hearing, would half suggest its own meaning. It expresses a stirring of the entire manhood, a commotion in all the inward parts. The heart and all the vitals of the man are in active movement. The Saviour was greatly moved. You have seen a man moved, have you not? When a strong man is unable any longer to restrain himself, and is forced to give way to his feelings, you have seen him tremble all over, and at last burst out into an evident break-down. It was just so with the Saviour: his pity moved him, his delight in the leper's faith mastered him. When he heard the man speak with such confidence in him, the Saviour was moved with a sacred passion, which, as it was in sympathy with the leper, is called "compassion." Oh, to think that a poor leper should have such power over the divine Son of God! Yet, my hearer, in all thy sin and misery, if thou canst believe in Jesus, thou canst move the heart of thy blessed Saviour. Yea, even now his bowels yearn towards thee.

No sooner was our Lord Jesus thus moved than *out went his hand*, and he touched the man and healed him immediately. It did not require a long time for the working of the cure; but the leper's blood was cooled and cleansed in a single second. Our Lord could work this miracle, and make all things new in the man; for "all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." He restored the poor, decaying, putrefying body of this man, and he was cleansed at once. To make him quite sure that he was cleansed, the Lord Jesus bade him go to the priest, and seek a certificate of health. He was so clean that he might be examined by the appointed sanitary authority, and come off without suspicion. The cure which he had received was a real and radical one, and therefore he might go away at once, and get the certificate of it. If our converts will not bear practical tests, they are worth nothing; let even our enemies judge whether they are not better men and women when Jesus has renewed them. If Jesus saves a sinner, he does not mind all men testing the change. Jesus does not seek display, but he seeks examination from those able to judge. Our converts will bear the test. Come hither, angels! Come hither, pure intelligences, able to observe

men in secret! Here is a wretch of a sinner who came hither this morning. He seemed first cousin to the devil; but the Lord Jesus Christ has converted him and changed him. Now look at him, ye angels; look at him at home in his chamber! Watch him in private life. We can read your verdict. "There is joy in presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth"; and this proves what you think. It is such a wonderful change, and angels are so sure of it, that they give their certificates at once. How do they give their certificates? Why, each one manifests his joy as he sees the sinner turning from his sinful ways. Oh, that the angels might have work of this kind to do this morning! Dear hearer, may you be one over whom they rejoice! If thou believest on Jesus Christ, and if thou wilt trust him, as the sent One of God, fully and entirely with thy soul, he will make thee clean. Behold him on the cross, and see sin put away. Behold him risen from the dead, and see new life bestowed. Behold him enthroned in power, and see evil conquered. I am ready to be bound for my Lord, to be his surety, that if thou, my hearer, wilt come to him, he will make thee clean. Believe thy Saviour, and thy cure is wrought. God help thee, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark 1:16-45.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—428, 602, 546.

The Rent Veil

A Sermon

(No. 2015)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, March 25th, 1888, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom—Matthew 27:50-51.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the, veil, that is to say, his flesh—Hebrews 10:19-20.

THE DEATH of our Lord Jesus Christ was fitly surrounded by miracles; yet it is itself so much greater a wonder than all besides, that it as far exceeds them as the sun outshines the planets which surround it. It seems natural enough that the earth should quake, that tombs should be opened, and that the veil of the temple should be rent, when He who only hath immortality gives up the ghost. The more you think of the death of the Son of God, the more will you be amazed at it. As much as a miracle excels a common fact, so doth this wonders of wonders rise above all miracles of power. That the divine Lord, even though veiled in mortal flesh, should condescend to be subject to the power of death, so as to bow His head on the cross, and submit to be laid in the tomb, is among mysteries the greatest. The death of Jesus is the marvel of time and eternity, which, as Aaron's rod swallowed up all the rest, takes up into itself all lesser marvels.

Yet the rending of the veil of the temple is not a miracle to be lightly passed over. It was made of "fine twined linen, with Cherubims of cunning work." This gives the idea of a substantial fabric, a piece of lasting tapestry, which would have endured the severest strain. No human hands could have torn that sacred covering; and it could not have been divided in the midst by any accidental cause; yet, strange to say, on the instant when the holy person of Jesus was rent by death, the great veil which concealed the holiest of all was "rent in twain from the top to the bottom." What did it mean? It meant much more than I can tell you now.

It is not fanciful to regard it as a solemn act of mourning on the part of the house of the Lord. In the East men express their sorrow by rending their garments; and the temple, when it beheld its Master die, seemed struck with horror, and rent its veil. Shocked at the sin of man, indignant at the murder of its Lord, in its sympathy with Him who is the true temple of God, the outward symbol tore its holy vestment from the top to the bottom. Did not the miracle also mean that from that hour the whole system of types, and shadows, and ceremonies had come to an end? The ordinances of an earthly priesthood were rent with that veil. In token of the death of the ceremonial law, the soul of it quitted its sacred shrine, and left its bodily tabernacle as a dead thing. The legal dispensation is over. The rent of the veil seemed to say—"Henceforth God dwells no longer in the thick darkness of the Holy of Holies, and shines forth no longer from between the cherubim. The special enclosure is broken up, and there is no inner sanctuary for the earthly high priest to enter: typical atonements and sacrifices are at an end."

According to the explanation given in our second text, the rending of the veil chiefly meant that the way into the holiest, which was not before made manifest, was now laid open to all believers. Once in the year the high priest solemnly lifted a corner of this veil with fear and trembling, and with blood and holy incense he passed into the immediate presence of Jehovah; but the tearing of the veil laid open the secret place. The rent front top to bottom gives ample space for all to enter who are called of God's grace, to approach the throne, and to commune with the Eternal One. Upon that subject I shall try to speak this morning, praying in my inmost soul that you and I, with all other believers, may have boldness actually to enter into that which is within the veil at this time of our assembling for worship. Oh, that the Spirit of God would lead us into the nearest fellowship which mortal men can have with the Infinite Jehovah!

First, this morning, I shall ask you to consider *what has been done*. The veil has been rent. Secondly, we will remember *what we therefore have*: we have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood Jesus." Then, thirdly, we will consider *how we exercise this grace*: we "enter by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh."

I. First, think of WHAT HAS BEEN DONE. In actual historical fact the glorious veil of the temple has been rent in twain from the top to the bottom: as a matter of spiritual fact, which is far more important to us, *the separating legal ordinance is abolished*. There was under the law this ordinance—that no man should ever go into the holiest of all, with the one exception of the high priest, and he but once in the year, and not without blood. If any man had attempted to enter there he must have died, as guilty of great presumption and of profane intrusion into the secret place of the Most High. Who could stand in the presence of Him who is a consuming fire? This ordinance of distance runs all through the law; for even the holy place, which was the vestibule of the Holy of Holies, was for the priests alone. The place of the people was one of distance. At the very first institution of the law when God descended upon Sinai, the ordinance was, "Thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about," There was no invitation to draw near. Not that they desired to do so, for the mountain was together on a smoke, and "even Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake." "The Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish." If so much as a beast touch the mountain it must be stoned, or thrust through with a dart. The spirit of the old law was reverent distance. Moses and here and there a man chosen by God, might come near to Jehovah; but as for the bulk of people, the command was, "Draw not nigh hither." When the Lord revealed His glory at the giving of the law, we read—"When the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off." All this is ended. The precept to keep back is abrogated, and the invitation is, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden." "Let us draw near" is now the filial spirit of the gospel. How thankful I am for this! What a joy it is to my soul! Some of God's people have not yet realized this gracious fact, for still they worship afar off. Very much of prayer is to be highly commended for its reverence; but it has in it a lack of childlike confidence. I can admire the solemn and stately language of worship which recognizes the greatness of God; but it will not warm my heart nor express my soul until it has also blended therewith the joyful nearness of that perfect love which casteth out fear, and ventures to speak with our Father in heaven as a child speaketh with its father on earth. My brother, no veil remains. Why dost thou stand afar off, and tremble like a slave? Draw near with full assurance of faith. The veil is rent: access is free. Come boldly to the throne of grace. Jesus has made thee nigh, as nigh to God as even He Himself is. Though we speak of the holiest of all, even the secret place

of the Most High, yet it is of this place of awe, even of this sanctuary of Jehovah, that the veil is rent; therefore, let nothing hinder thine entrance. Assuredly no law forbids thee; but infinite love invites thee to draw nigh to God.

This rending of the veil signified, also, *the removal of the separating sin*. Sin is, after all, the great divider between God and man. That veil of blue and purple and fine twined linen could not really separate man from God: for He is, as to His omnipresence, not far from any one of us. Sin is a far more effectual wall of separation: it opens in abyss between the sinner and his Judge. Sin shuts out prayer, and praise, and every form of religious exercise. Sin makes God walk contrary to us, because we walk contrary to Him. Sin, by separating the soul from God, causes spiritual death, which is both the effect and the penalty of transgression. How can two walk together except they be agreed? How can a holy God have fellowship with unholy creatures? Shall justice dwell with injustice? Shall perfect purity abide with the abominations of evil? No, it cannot be. Our Lord Jesus Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He taketh away the sin of the world, and so the veil is rent. By the shedding of His most precious blood we are cleansed from all sin, and that most gracious promise of the new covenant is fulfilled—"Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." When sin is gone, the barrier is broken down, the unfathomable gulf is filled. Pardon, which removes sin, and justification, which brings righteousness, make up a deed of clearance so real and so complete that nothing now divides the sinner from his reconciled God. "The Judge is now the Father: He, who once must necessarily have condemned, is found justly absolving and accepting. In this double sense the veil is rent: the separating ordinance is abrogated, and the separating sin is forgiven.

Next, be it remembered that *the separating sinfulness is also taken away through our Lord Jesus*. It is not only what we have *done*, but what we *are* that keeps us apart from God. We have sin engrained in us: even those who have grace dwelling them have to complain, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." How can we commune with God with our eyes blinded, our ears stopped, our hearts hardened, and our senses deadened by sin? Our whole nature is tainted, poisoned, perverted by evil; how can we know the Lord? Beloved, through the death of our Lord Jesus the covenant of grace is established with us, and its gracious provisions are on this wise: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." When this is the case, when the will of God is inscribed on the heart, and the nature is entirely changed, then is the dividing veil which hides us from God taken away: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Blessed are all they that love righteousness and follow after it, for they are in a way in which the Righteous One can walk in fellowship with them. Spirits that are like God are not divided from God. Difference of nature hangs up a veil; but the new birth, and the sanctification which follows upon it, through the precious death of Jesus, remove that veil. He that hates sin, strives after holiness, and labors to perfect it in the fear of God, is in fellowship with God. It is a blessed thing when we love what God loves, when we seek what God seeks, when we are in sympathy with divine aims, and are obedient to divine commands: for with such persons will the Lord dwell. When grace makes us partakers of the divine nature; then are we at one with the Lord, and the veil is taken away.

"Yes," saith one, "I see now how the veil is taken away in three different fashions; but still God is God, and we are but poor puny men: between God and man there must of necessity be a separating veil, caused by the great disparity between the Creator and the creature. How can the finite and the infinite commune? God is all in all, and more than all; we are nothing, and less than nothing; how

can we meet?" When the Lord does come near to His favored ones, they own how incapable they are of enduring the excessive glory. Even the beloved John said, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." When we have been especially conscious of the presence and working of our Lord, we have felt our flesh creep, and our blood chill; and then we have understood what Jacob meant when he said, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." All this is true; for the Lord saith, "Thou canst not see my face and live." Although this is a much thinner veil than those I have already mentioned, yet it is a veil; and it is hard for man to be at home with God. But *the Lord Jesus bridges the separating distance*. Behold the blessed Son of God has come into the world, and taken upon Himself our nature! "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of the flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." Though He is God as God is God, yet is He as surely man as man is man. Mark well how in the person of the Lord Jesus we see God and man in the closest conceivable alliance; for they are united in one person forever. The gulf is completely filled by the fact that Jesus has gone through with us even to the bitter end, to death, even to the death of the cross. He has followed out the career of manhood even to the tomb; and thus we see that the veil, which hung between the nature of God and the nature of man, is rent in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We enter into the holiest of all through His flesh, which links manhood to Godhead.

Now, you see what it is to have the veil taken away. Solemnly note that this avails only for believers: those who refuse Jesus refuse the only way of access to God. God is not approachable, except through the rending of the veil by the death of Jesus. There was one typical way to the mercy-seat of old, and that was through the turning aside of the veil; there was no other. And there is now no other way for any of you to come into fellowship with God, except through the rent veil, even the death of Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin. Come this way, and you may come freely. Refuse to come this way, and there hangs between you and God an impassable veil. Without Christ you are without God, and without hope. Jesus Himself assures you, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." God grant that this may not happen to any of you!

For believers the veil is not rolled up, but rent. The veil was not unhooked, and carefully folded up, and put away, so that it might be put in its place at some future time. Oh, no! But the divine hand took it and rent it front top to bottom. It can never be hung up again; that is impossible. Between those who are in Christ Jesus and the great God, there will never be another separation. "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" Only one veil was made, and as that is rent, the one and only separator is destroyed. I delight to think of this. The devil himself can never divide me from God now. He may and will attempt to shut me out from God; but the worst he could do would be to hang up a rent veil. What would that avail but to exhibit his impotence? God has rent the veil, and the devil cannot mend it. There is access between a believer and his God; and there must be such free access forever, since the veil is not rolled up, and put on one side to be hung up again in days to come; but it is rent, and rendered useless.

The rent is not in one corner, but in the midst, as Luke tells us. It is not a slight rent through which we may see a little; but it is rent from the top to the bottom. There is an entrance made for the greatest sinners. If there had only been a small hole cut through it, the lesser offenders might have crept through; but what an act of abounding mercy is this, that the veil is rent in the midst, and rent from top to bottom, so that the chief of sinners may find ample passage! This also shows that for believers there is no hindrance to the fullest and freest access to God. Oh, for much boldness,

this morning, to come where God has not only set open the door, but has lifted the door from its hinges; yea, removed it, post, and bar, and all!

I want you to notice that this veil, when it was rent, was rent by God, not by man. It was not the act of an irreverent mob; it was not the midnight outrage of a set of profane priests: it was the act of God alone. Nobody stood within the veil; and on the outer side of it stood the priests only fulfilling their ordinary vocation of offering sacrifice. It must have astounded them when they saw that holy place laid bare in a moment. How they fled, as they saw that massive veil divided without human hand in a second of time! Who rent it? Who but God Himself? If another had done it, there might have been a mistake about it, and the mistake might need to be remedied by replacing the curtain; but if the Lord has done it, it is done rightly, it is done finally, it is done irreversibly. It is God Himself who has laid sin on Christ, and in Christ has put that sin away. God Himself has opened the gate of heaven to believers, and cast up a highway along which the souls of men may travel to Himself. God Himself has set the ladder between earth and heaven. Come to Him now, ye humble ones. Behold, He sets before you an open door!

II. And now I ask you to follow me, dear friends, in the second place, to an experimental realization of my subject. We now notice WHAT WE HAVE: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest," Observe the threefold "having" in the paragraph now before us, and be not content without the whole three. *We have "boldness to enter in."* There are degrees in boldness; but this is one of the highest. When the veil was rent it required some boldness to *look* within. I wonder whether the priests at the altar did have the courage to gaze upon the mercy-seat. I suspect that they were so struck with amazement that they fled from the altar, fearing sudden death. It requires a measure of boldness steadily to look upon the mystery of God: "Which things the angels desire to look into." It is well not to look with a merely curious eye into the deep things of God. I question whether any man is able to pry into the mystery of the Trinity without great risk. Some, thinking to look there with the eyes of their natural intellect, have been blinded by the light of that sun, and have henceforth wandered in darkness. It needs boldness to look into the splendors of redeeming and electing love. If any did look into the holiest when the veil was rent, they were among the boldest of men; for others must have feared lest the fate of the men of Bethshemesh would be theirs. Beloved, the Holy Spirit invites you to look into the holy place, and view it all with reverent eye for it is full of teaching to you. Understand the mystery of the mercy-seat, and of the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold, and of the pot of manna, and of the tables of stone, and of Aaron's rod that budded. Look, look boldly through Jesus Christ: but do not content yourself with looking! Hear what the text says: "Having boldness to *enter in.*" Blessed be God if He has taught us this sweet way of no longer looking from afar, but of entering into the inmost shrine with confidence! "Boldness to enter in" is what we ought to have.

Let us follow the example of the high priest, and, having entered, *let us perform the functions of one who enters in.* "Boldness to enter in" suggests that we act as men who are in their proper places. To stand within the veil filled the servant of God with an overpowering *sense of the divine presence.* If ever in his life he was near to God, he was certainly near to God then, when quite alone, shut in, and excluded from all the world, he had no one with him, except the glorious Jehovah. O my beloved, may we this morning enter into the holiest in this sense! Shut out front the world, both wicked and Christian, let us know that the Lord is here, most near and manifest. Oh that we may now cry out with Hagar, "Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" Oh, how sweet to realize by personal enjoyment the presence of Jehovah! How cheering to feel that the Lord of

hosts is with us! We know our God to be a very present help in trouble. It is one of the greatest joys out of heaven to be able to sing—Jehovah Shammah—the Lord is here. At first we tremble in the divine presence; but as we feel more of the spirit of adoption we draw near with sacred delight, and feel so fully at home with our God that we sing with Moses, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." Do not live as if God were as far off from you as the east is from the west. Live not far below on the earth; but live on high, as if you were in heaven. In heaven You Will be with God; but on earth He will be with you: is there much difference? He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Jesus hath made us nigh by His precious blood. Try day by day to live in as great nearness to God, as the high priest felt when he stood for awhile within the secret of Jehovah's tabernacle.

The high priest had *a sense of communion with God*; he was not only near, but he spoke with God. I cannot tell what he said, but I should think that on the special day the high priest unburdened himself of the load of Israel's sin and sorrow, and made known his requests unto the Lord. Aaron, standing there alone, must have been filled with memories of his own faultiness, and of the idolatries and backslidings of the people. God shone upon him, and he bowed before God. He may have heard things which it was not lawful for him to utter, and other things which he could not have uttered if they had been lawful. Beloved, do you know what it is to commune with God? Words are poor vehicles for this fellowship; but what a blessed thing it is! Proofs of the existence of God are altogether her superfluous to those of us who are in the habit of conversing with the Eternal One. If anybody were to write an essay to prove the existence of my wife, or my son, I certainly should not read it, except for the amusement of the thing; and proofs of the existence of God to the man who communes with God are much the same. Many of you walk with God: what bliss! Fellowship with the Most High is elevating, purifying, strengthening. Enter into it boldly. Enter into His revealed thoughts, even as He graciously enters into yours: rise to His plans, as He condescends to yours; ask to be uplifted to Him, even as He deigns to dwell with you.

This is what the rent of the veil brings us when we have boldness to enter in; but, mark you, the rent veil brings us nothing until we have boldness to enter in. Why stand we without? Jesus brings us near, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Let us not be slow to take up our freedom, and come boldly to the throne. The high priest entered within the veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, with blood, and with incense, that he might *pray for Israel*; and there he stood before the Most High, pleading with Him to bless the people. O beloved, prayer is a divine institution, and it belongs to us. But there are many sorts of prayers. There is the prayer of one who seems shut out from God's holy temple; there is the prayer of another who stands in the court of the Gentiles afar off, looking towards the temple; there is the prayer of one who gets where Israel stands and pleads with the God of the chosen; there is the prayer in the court of the priests, when the sanctified man of God makes intercession; but the best prayer of all is offered in the holiest of all. There is no fear about prayer being heard when it is offered in the holiest. The very position of the man proves that he is accepted with God. He is standing on the surest ground of acceptance, and he is so near to God that his every desire is heard. There the man is seen through and through; for he is very near to God. His thoughts are read, his tears are seen, his sighs are heard; for he has boldness to enter in. He may ask what he will, and it shall be done unto him. As the altar sanctifieth the gift, so the most holy place, entered by the blood of Jesus, secures a certain answer to the prayer that is offered therein. God give us such power in prayer! It is a wonderful thing that the Lord should hearken to the voice of a man; yet are there

such men. Luther came out of his closet, and cried, *Vici*—"I have conquered." He had not yet met his adversaries; but as he had prevailed with God for men, he felt that he should prevail with men for God.

But the high priest, if you recollect, after he had communed and prayed with God, *came out and blessed the people*. He put on his garments of glory and beauty, which he had laid aside when he went into the holy place, for there he stood in simple white, and nothing else; and now he came out wearing the breast-plate and all his precious ornaments, and he blessed the people. That is what you will do if you have the boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus: you will bless the people that surround you. The Lord has blessed you, and He will make you a blessing. Your ordinary conduct and conversation will be a blessed example; the words you speak for Jesus will be like a dew from the Lord: the sick will be comforted by your words; the despondent will be encouraged by your faith; the lukewarm will be recovered by your love. You will be, practically, saying to each one who knows you, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and give thee peace." You will become a channel of blessing: "Out of your belly shall flow rivers of living water." May we each one have boldness to enter in, that we may come forth laden with benedictions!

If you will kindly look at the text, you will notice, what I shall merely hint at, that *this boldness is well grounded*. I always like to see the apostle using a "therefore": "Having *therefore* boldness." Paul is often a true poet, but he is always a correct logician; he is as logical as if he were dealing with mathematics rather than theology. Here he writes one of his *therefores*.

Why is it that we have boldness? Is it not because of our relationship to Christ which makes us "brethren?" "Having therefore, *brethren*, boldness." The feeblest believer has as much right to enter into the holy places as Paul had; because he is one of the brotherhood. I remember a rhyme by John Ryland, in which he says of heaven—

"They shall all be there, the great and the small;
Poor I shall shake hands with the blessed St. Paul."

I have no doubt we shall have such a position, and such fellowship. Meanwhile, we do shake hands with I Him this morning as he calls us brethren. We are brethren to one another, because we are brethren to Jesus. Where we see the apostle go, we will go; yea, rather, where we see the Great Apostle and High Priest of our profession enter, we will follow. "Having therefore, boldness."

Beloved, we have now no fear of death in the most holy place. The high priest, whoever he might be, must always have dreaded that solemn day of atonement, when he had to pass into the silent and secluded place. I cannot tell whether it is true, but I have read that there is a tradition among the Jews, that a rope was fastened to the high priest's foot that they might draw out his corpse in case he died before the Lord. I should not wonder if their superstition devised such a thing, for it is an awful position for a man to enter into the secret dwelling of Jehovah. But we cannot die in the holy place now, since Jesus has died for us. The death of Jesus is the guarantee of the eternal life of all for whom He died. We have boldness to enter, for we shall not perish.

Our boldness arises from the perfection of His sacrifice. Read the fourteenth verse: "He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." We rely upon the sacrifice of Christ, believing that He was such a perfect Substitute for us, that it is not possible for us to die after our Substitute has died; and we must be accepted, because He is accepted. We believe that the precious blood has so effectually and eternally put away sin from us, that we are no longer obnoxious to the wrath of God. We may safely stand where sin must be smitten, if there be any sin upon us; for we are so

washed, so cleaned, and so fully justified that we are accepted in the Beloved. Sin is so completely lifted from us by the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, that we have boldness to enter where Jehovah Himself dwells.

Moreover, we have his for certain, that as a priest had a right to dwell near to God, we have that privilege; for Jesus hath made us kings and priests unto God, and all the privileges of the office come to us with the office itself. We have a mission within the holy place; we are called to enter there upon holy business, and so we have no fear of being intruders. A burglar may enter a house, but he does not enter with boldness; he is always afraid lest he should be surprised. You might enter a stranger's house, without an invitation, but You Would feel no boldness there. We do not enter the holiest as housebreakers, nor as strangers; we come in obedience to a call, to fulfill our office. When once we accept the sacrifice of Christ, we are at home with God. Where should a child be bold but in his father's house? Where should a priest stand but in the temple of his God, for whose service he is set apart? Where should a blood-washed sinner live but with his God, to whom he is reconciled?

It is a heavenly joy to feel this boldness! We have now such a love for God, and such a delight in Him, that it never crosses our minds that we are trespassers when we draw near to Him. We never say, "God, my dread," but "God, my exceeding joy." His name is the music to which our lives are set: though God be a consuming fire we love Him as such, for He will only consume our dross, and that we desire to lose. Under no aspect is God now distasteful to us. We delight in Him, be He what He may. So you see, beloved, we have good grounds for boldness when we enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

I cannot leave this point until I have reminded you that *we may have this boldness of entering in at all times*, because the veil is always rent, and is never restored to its old place. "The Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy Place within the veil before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not"; but the Lord saith not so to us. Dear child of God, you may at all times have "boldness to enter in." The veil is rent both day and night. Yea, let me say it, even when thine eye of faith is dim, still enter in; when evidences are dark, still have "boldness to enter in"; and even if thou hast unhappily sinned, remember that access is open to thy penitent prayer. Come still through the rent veil, sinner as thou art. What though thou hast backslidden, what though thou art grieved with the sense of thy wanderings, come even now! "Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart," but enter at once; for the veil is not there to exclude thee, though doubt and unbelief may make you think it is so. The veil cannot be there, for it was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

III. My time has fled, and I shall not have space to speak as I meant to do upon the last point—HOW WE EXERCISE THIS GRACE. Let me give you the notes of what I would have said.

Let us at this hour enter into the holiest. Behold the way! We come *by the way of atonement*: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." I have been made to feel really ill through the fierce and blasphemous words that have been used of late by gentlemen of the modern school concerning the precious blood. I will not defile my lips by a repetition of the thrice-accursed things which they have dared to utter while trampling on the blood of Jesus. Everywhere throughout this divine Book you meet with the precious blood. How can he call himself a Christian who speaks in flippant and profane language of the blood of atonement? My brothers, there is no way into the holiest, even though the veil be rent, without blood. You

might suppose that the high priest of old brought the blood because the veil was there; but *you* have to bring it with you though the veil is gone. The way is open, and you have boldness to enter; but not without the blood of Jesus. It would be an unholy boldness which would think of drawing near to God without the blood of the great Sacrifice. We have always to plead the atonement. As without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, so without that blood there is no access to God.

Next, the way by which we come is *an unfailing way*. Please notice that word—"by a *new way*"; this means by a way which is always fresh. The original Greek suggests the idea of "newly slain." Jesus died long ago, but His death is the same now as at the moment of its occurrence. We come to God, dear friends, by a way which is always effectual with God. It never, never loses one whit of its power freshness.

Dear dying lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power.

The way is not worn away by long traffic: it is always new. If Jesus Christ had died yesterday, would you not feel that you could plead His merit today? Very well, you can plead that merit after these 19th centuries with as much confidence as at the first hour. The way to God is always newly laid. In effect, the wounds of Jesus incessantly bleed our expiation. The cross is as glorious as though He were still upon it. So far as the freshness, vigor, and force of the atoning death is concerned, we come by a new way. Let it be always new to our hearts. Let the doctrine of atonement never grow stale, but let it have dew upon your souls.

Then the apostle adds, it is a "*living way*." A wonderful word! The way by which the high priest went into the holy place was of course a material way, and so a dead way. We come by a spiritual way, suitable to our spirits. The way could not help the high priest, but our way helps us abundantly. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, *and the life*." When we come to God by this way, the way itself leads, guides, bears, brings us near. This way gives its life with which to come.

It is a *dedicated way*. "which he hath consecrated for us." When a new road is opened, it is set apart and dedicated for the public use. Sometimes a public building is opened by a king or a prince, and so is dedicated to its purpose. Beloved, the way to God through Jesus Christ is dedicated by Christ, and ordained by Christ for the use of poor believing sinners, such as we are. He has consecrated the way towards God, and dedicated it for us, that we may freely use it. Surely, if there is a road set apart for me, I may use it without fear; and the way to God and heaven through Jesus Christ is dedicated by the Saviour for sinners; it is the King's highway for wayfaring men, who are bound for the City of God; therefore, let us use it. "Consecrated for us!" Blessed word!

Lastly, it is a *Christly way*; for when we come to God, we still come through His flesh. There is no coming to Jehovah, except by the incarnate God. God in human flesh is our way to God; the substitutionary death of the Word made flesh is also the way to the Father. There is no coming to God, except by representation. Jesus represents us before God, and we come to God through Him who is our covenant head, our representative and forerunner before the throne of the Most High. Let us never try to pray without Christ; never try to sing without Christ; never try to preach without Christ. Let us perform no holy function, nor attempt to have fellowship with God in any shape or way, except through that rent which He has made in the veil by His flesh, sanctified for us, and offered upon the cross on our behalf.

Beloved, I have done when I have just remarked upon the next two verses, which are necessary to complete the sense, but which I was obliged to omit this morning, since there would be no time to handle them. We are called to take holy freedoms with God. "Let us draw near," at once, "with

a true heart in full assurance of faith." Let us do so boldly, for we have a great high priest. The twenty-first verse reminds us of this. Jesus is the great Priest, and we are the sub-priests under Him, and since He bids us come near to God, and Himself leads the way, let follow Him into the inner sanctuary. Because He lives, we shall live also. We shall nor die in the holy place, unless He dies. God will not smite us unless He smites Him. So, "having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

And then the apostle tells us that we may not only come with boldness, because our high priest leads the way, but because we ourselves are prepared for entrance. Two things the high priest had to do before he might enter: one was, to be sprinkled with blood, and this we have; for "our hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience."

The other requisite for the priests was to have their "bodies washed with pure water." This we have received in symbol in our baptism, and in reality in the spiritual cleansing of regeneration. To us has been fulfilled the prayer—

"Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

We have known the washing of water by the Word, and we have been sanctified by the Spirit of His grace; therefore let us enter into the holiest. Why should we stay away? Hearts sprinkled with blood, bodies washed with pure water—these are the ordained preparations for acceptable entrance. Come near, beloved! May the Holy Spirit be the spirit of access to you now. Come to your God, and then abide with Him! He is your Father, your all in all. Sit down and rejoice in Him; take your fill of love; and let not your communion be broken between here and heaven. Why should it be? Why not begin today that sweet enjoyment of perfect reconciliation and delight in God which shall go on increasing in intensity until you behold the Lord in open vision, and go no more out? Heaven will bring a great change in condition, but not in our standing, if even now we stand within the veil. It will be only such a change as there is between the perfect day and the daybreak; for we have the same sun, and the same light from the sun, and the same privilege of walking in the light. "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Division." Amen, and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HEBREWS 10.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—318, 296, 395.

The Blessing of Full Assurance

A Sermon

(No. 2023)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, May 13th, 1888, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."—1 John 5:13.

JOHN wrote to believers—"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God." It is worthy of note that all the epistles are so written. They are not letters to everybody, they are letters to those who are called to be saints. It ought to strike some of you with awe when you open the Bible and think how large a part of it is not directed at you. You may read it, and God's Holy Spirit may graciously bless it to you, but it is not directed to you. You are reading another man's letter: thank God that you are permitted to read it, but long to be numbered with those to whom it is directed. Thank God much more if any part of it should be used of the Holy Ghost for your salvation. The fact that the Holy Spirit speaks to the churches and to believers in Christ should make you bow the knee and cry to God to put you among the children, that this Book may become your Book from beginning to end, that you may read its precious promises as made to you. This solemn thought may not have struck some of you: let it impress you now.

We do not wonder that certain men do not receive the epistles, for they were not written to them. Why should they cavil at words which are addressed to men of another sort from themselves? Yet we do not marvel, for we knew it would be so. Here is a will, and you begin to read it; but you do not find it interesting: it is full of words and terms which you do not take the trouble to understand, because they have no relation to yourself; but should you, in reading that will, come upon a clause in which an estate is left to you, I warrant you that the nature of the whole document will seem changed to you. You will be anxious now to understand the terms, and to make sure of the clauses, and you will even wish to remember every word of the clause which refers to yourself. O dear friends, may you read the Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ as a testament of love to yourselves, and then you will prize it beyond all the writings of the sages.

This leads me to make the second remark, that as these things are written to believers, believers ought especially to make themselves acquainted with them, and to search into their meaning and intent. John says, "These things have I written to you that believe on the name of the Son of God." Do not, I beseech you, neglect to read what the Holy Ghost has taken care to write to you. It is not merely John that writes. John is inspired of the Lord, and these things are written to you by the Spirit of God. Give earnest heed to every single word of what God has sent as his own epistle to your hearts. Value the Scriptures. Luther said that "he would not be in paradise, if he might, without the Word of the Lord; but with the Word he could live in hell itself." He said at another time that "he would not take all the world for one leaf of the Bible." The Scriptures are everything to the Christian—his meat and his drink. The saint can say, "O how I love thy law!" If we cannot say so,

something is wrong with us. If we have lost our relish for Holy Scripture, we are out of condition, and need to pray for spiritual health.

This much is the porch of my sermon, let us now enter more fully into our subject, noticing, first, that *John wrote with a special purpose*; and then going on to assert, secondly, that *this purpose we ought to follow up*.

I. First, JOHN WROTE WITH A SPECIAL PURPOSE. Men do not write well unless they have some end in writing. To sit down with paper and ink before you, and so much space to fill up, will ensure very poor writing. John knew what he was at. His intent and aim were clear to his own mind, and he tells us what they were.

According to the text the beloved apostle had one clear purpose which branched out into three.

To begin with, *John wrote that we might enjoy the full assurance of our salvation*. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life."

Many who believe on the name of Jesus are not sure that they have eternal life; they only hope so. Occasionally they have assurance, but the joy is not abiding. They are like a minister I have heard of, who said he felt assured of his salvation, "except when the wind was in the east." It is a wretched thing to be so subject to circumstances as many are. What is true when the wind is in the soft south or the reviving west is equally true when the wind is neither good for man nor beast. John would not have our assurance vary with the weather-glass, nor turn with the vane. He says, "These things have I written unto you, that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life." He would have us certain that we are partakers of the new life, and so *know* it as to reap the golden fruit of such knowledge, and be filled with joy and peace through believing.

I speak affectionately to the weaker ones, who cannot yet say that they know they have believed. I speak not to your condemnation, but to your consolation. Full assurance is not essential to salvation, but it is essential to satisfaction. May you get—may you get it at once; at any rate may you never be satisfied to live without it. You may have full assurance. You may have it without personal revelations: it is wrought in us by the Word of God. These things are written that you may have it; and we may be sure that the means used by the Spirit are equal to the effect which he desires. Under the guidance of the Spirit of God, John so wrote as to attain his end in writing. What, then, has he written with the design of making us know that we have eternal life? Go through the whole Epistle, and you will see that it all presses in that direction; but we shall not at this present have time to do more than glance through this chapter.

He begins thus: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Do you believe that Jesus is the anointed of God? Is he so to you? Is he anointed as your prophet, priest, and king? Have you realized his anointing so as to put your trust in him? Do you receive Jesus as appointed of God to be the Mediator, the Propitiation for sin, the Saviour of men? If so, you are born of God. "How may I know this?" Brethern, our evidence is the witness of God himself as here recorded. We need no other witness. Suppose an angel were to tell you that you are born of God, would that be a more sure testimony than the infallible Scripture? If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God. John has thus positively declared the truth, that you may know that you have eternal life. Can anything be more clear than this?

The loving spirit of John leads him to say, "Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." Do you love God? Do you love his Only-begotten Son? You can answer those two questions surely. I knew a dear Christian woman who would sometimes say, "I

know that I love Jesus; but my fear is that he does not love me." Her doubt used to make me smile, for it never could have occurred to me. If I love him, I know it is because he first loved me. Love to God in us is always the work of God's love towards us. Jesus loved us, and gave himself for us, and therefore we love him in return. Love to Jesus is an effect which proves the existence of its cause. Do you love Jesus? Do you feel a delight in him? Is his name as music to your ear, and honey to your mouth? Do you love to hear him extolled? Ah, dear friends! I know that to many of you a sermon full of his dear name is as a royal banquet; and if there is no Christ in a discourse, it is empty, and vain, and void to you. Is it not so? If you do indeed love him that begat and him that is begotten of him, then this is one of the things that is written "that ye may know that ye have eternal life."

John goes on to give another evidence: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." Do you love God? and do you love his children? Listen to another word from the same apostle: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." That may appear to be a very small evidence; but I can assure you it has often been a great comfort to my soul. I know I love the brethren: I can say unto my Lord,

"Is there a lamb among thy flock
I would disdain to feed?"

I would gladly cheer and comfort the least of his people. Well, then, if I love the brethren, I love the Elder Brother. If I love the babes, I love the Father; and I know that I have passed from death unto life. Brethren, take this evidence home in all its force. It is conclusive: John has said, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren"; and he would not have spoken so positively if it had not been even so. Brethren, never be content with sentimental comforts; set your feet firmly upon the rock of fact and truth. True Christian assurance is not a matter of guesswork, but of mathematical precision. It is capable of logical proof, and is no rhapsody or poetical fiction. We are told by the Holy Ghost that, if we love the brethren, we have passed from death to life. You can tell whether you love the brethren, as such, for their Master's sake, and for the truth's sake that is in them; and if you can truly say that you thus love them, then you may know that you have eternal life.

Our apostle gives us this further evidence: "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." Obedience is the grand test of love. If you are living after your own will, and pay no homage to God, you are none of his. If you never think of the Lord Jesus as your Master, and never recognize the claims of God, and never wish to be obedient to his will, you are not in possession of eternal life. If you desire to be obedient, and prove that desire by your actions, then you have the divine life within you. Judge yourselves. Is the tenor of your life obedience or disobedience? By the fruit you can test the root and the sap.

But note, that this obedience must be cheerful and willing. No doubt some for a while obey the commands of God unwillingly. They do not like them, though they bow to them. They fret and grizzle because of the restraints of piety; and this proves that they are hypocrites. What you wish to do you practically are doing in the sight of God. If there could be such a thing as holiness forced upon a man, it would be unholiness. O my hearer, it may be that you cannot fall into a certain line of sin; but if you could, you would: your desires show what you really are. I have heard of Christian people, so called, going to sinful amusements, just, as they say, to enjoy a little pleasure. Ah well, we see where you are! Where your pleasure is, your heart is. If you enjoy the pleasures of the world, you are of the world, and with the world you will be condemned. If God's commands are grievous

to you, then you are a rebel at heart. Loyal subjects delight in the royal law. "His commandments are not grievous." I said to one who came to join the church the other day, "I suppose you are not perfect"? and the reply was, "No, sir, I wish I might be." I said, "And suppose you were"? "Oh, then," she said, "that would be heaven to me." So it would be to me. We delight in the law of God after the inward man. Oh, that we could perfectly obey in thought, and word, and deed! This is our view of heaven. Thus we sing of it:

"There shall we see his face,
And never, never sin;
There from the rivers of his grace
Drink endless pleasures in."

We would scarce ask to be rid of sorrow, if we might be rid of sin. We would bear any burden cheerfully if we could live without spot we shall also be without grief. His commandments are not grievous, but they are ways of pleasantness and peace to us. Do you feel that you love the ways of God, that you desire holiness, and follow after it joyfully? Then, dear friends, you have eternal life, and these are the sure evidences of it. Obedience, holiness, delight in God never came into a human heart except from a heavenly hand. Wherever they are found they prove that the Lord has implanted eternal life, for they are much too precious to be buried away in a dead soul.

John then proceeds to mention three witnesses. Now, dear hearers, do you know anything about these three witnesses? "There are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." Do you know "the Spirit" ? Has the Spirit of God quickened you, changed you, illuminated you, sanctified you? Does the Spirit of God dwell in you? Do you feel his sacred impulses? Is he the essence of the new life within you? Do you know him as clothing you with his light and power? If so, you are alive unto God. Next, do you know "the water," the purifying power of the death of Christ? Does the crucified Lord crucify your sins? Is the water applied to you to remove the power of sin? Do you now long to perfect holiness in the fear of God? This proves that you have eternal life. Do you also know "the blood"? This is a wretched age, in which men think little of the precious blood. My heart has well-nigh been broken, and my very flesh has been enfeebled, as I have thought upon the horrible things which have been spoken of late about the precious blood by men called Christian ministers. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." Beloved friends, do you know the power of the blood to take away sin, the power of the blood to speak peace to the conscience, the power of the blood to give access to the throne of grace? Do you know the quickening, restoring, cheering power of the precious blood of Christ which is set forth in the Lord's Supper by the fruit of the vine? Then in the mouth of these three witnesses shall the fact of your having eternal life be fully established. If the Spirit of God be in you, he is the earnest of your eternal inheritance. If the water has washed you, then you are the Lord's. Jesus said to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me." But ye are washed, and therefore the Lord's. If the precious blood has cleansed you from the guilt of sin, you know that it has also purchased you from death, and it is to you the guarantee of eternal life. I pray that you may from this moment enjoy the combined light of these three lamps of God—"the spirit, and the water, and the blood," and so have full assurance of faith.

One thing more I would notice. Read the ninth verse: the apostle puts our faith and assurance on the ground that we receive "the witness of God." If I believe that I am saved because of this, that, and the other, I may be mistaken: the only sure ground is "the witness of God." The inmost heart of Christian faith is that we take God as his word; and we must accept that word, not because

of the probabilities of its statements, nor because of the confirmatory evidence of science and philosophy, but simply and alone because the Lord has spoken it. Many professing Christians fall sadly short of this point. They dare to judge the Word instead of bowing before it. They do not sit at the Master's feet, but become doctors themselves. I thank God that I believe everything that God has spoken, whether I am able to see its reason or not. To me the fact that the mouth of God hath spoken it stands in the place of all argument, either for or against. If Jehovah says so, so it is. Do you accept the witness of God? If not, you have made him a liar, and the truth is not in you; but if you have received "the witnesses of God," then this is his witness, that "He hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." I say again, if your faith stands in the wisdom of men, and is based upon the cleverness of a preacher, it will fail you; but if it stands on the sure Word of the Lord it will stand for ever, and this may be to you a special token that you have eternal life. I have said enough upon this subject; oh that God may bless it to you! May we be enabled, from what John has written, to gather beyond doubt that we have the life of God within our souls.

Furthermore, *John wrote that we might know our spiritual life to be eternal.* Please notice this, for there are some of God's children who have not yet learned this cheering lesson. The life of God in the soul is not transient, but abiding; not temporary but eternal. Some think that the life of God in the believer's soul may die out; but how, then, could it be eternal? If it die it is not eternal life. If it be eternal life it cannot die. I know that modern deceivers deny that eternal means eternal, but you and I have not learned their way of pumping the meanings out of the words which the Holy Spirit uses. We believe that "eternal" means endless, and that if I have eternal life, I shall live eternally, Brethren, the Lord would have us know that we have eternal life.

Learn, then, the doctrine of the eternality of life given in the new birth. It must be eternal life, because it is "the life of God." We are born again of the Spirit of God by a living and incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever. We are said to be "made partakers of the divine nature." Surely, this means, among other things, that we receive an undying life; for immortality is of the essence of the Life of God. His name is "I am that I am." He hath life in himself, and the Son hath life in himself, and of this life we are the receivers. This was his purpose concerning his Son, that he might give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him. If it be the life of God which is in a believer—and certainly it is, for he hath begotten us again—then that life must be eternal. As children of God, we partake of his life, and as heirs of God, we inherit his eternity. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ calls the life of his people eternal life. How often do I quote this text! It seems to lie on the tip of my tongue: "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." And again, "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." It is not temporary life, not life which at a certain period must grow old and die, but everlasting life. "It shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." This is the life of Christ within the soul. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." If our life is Christ's life, we shall not die until Christ dies. If our life is hidden in him, it will never be discovered and destroyed until Christ himself is destroyed. Let us rest in this.

Mark again how our Lord has put it: "Because I live, ye shall live also." As long, then, as Jesus lives, his people must live, for the argument will always be the same, "Because I live, ye shall live also." We are so one with Christ that while the head lives the members cannot die. We are so one

Christ that the challenge is given, "Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" A list is added of things which may be supposed to separate, but we are told that they cannot do so, for "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Is it not clear, then, that we are quickened with a life so heavenly and divine that we can never die? John tells us in this very chapter, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not." He does not go back to his old sin, he does not again come under the dominion of sin; but, "he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not."

Beloved, I entreat you to keep a hard and firm grip of this blessed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. How earnestly do I long "that ye may know that ye have eternal life"! Away with your doctrine of being alive in Christ to-day and dead tomorrow. Poor, miserable doctrine that! Hold fast to eternal salvation through the eternal covenant carried out by eternal love unto eternal life; for the Spirit of God has written these things unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life.

Once more, according to the Authorized text, though not according to the Revised Version, *John desired the increase and confirmation of their faith.* He says, "That ye might believe on the name of the Son of God." John wrote to those who believed, that they might believe in a more emphatic sense. As our Saviour has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly, so does John write, that having faith we may have more of it. Come beloved, listen for a moment to this! You have the milk of faith, but God wills that you should have this cream of assurance! He would increase your faith. May you believe more extensively. Perhaps you do not believe all the truth, because you have not yet perceived it. There were members of the Corinthian church who had not believed in the resurrection of the dead, and there were Galatians who were very cloudy upon justification by faith. Many a Christian man is narrow in the range of his faith from ignorance of the Lord's mind. Like certain tribes of Israel, they have conquered a scanty territory as yet, though all the land is theirs from Dan to Beersheba. John would have us push out our fences, and increase the enclosure of our faith. Let us believe all that God has revealed, for every truth is precious and practically useful. Perhaps your doctrinal belief has been poor and thin. Oh that the Lord would turn the water into wine! Many of you live upon milk, and yet your years qualify you to feed on meat. Why keep the babes' diet? You that believe are exhorted to "go in and out, and find pasture"; range throughout the whole revelation of God.

It will be well for you if your faith also increases intensively. Oh that you may more fully believe what you do believe! We need deeper insight and firmer conviction. We do not half believe, as yet, any of us. Many of you only skim the pools of truth. Blessed is the wing which brushes the surface of the river of life; but infinitely more blessed is it to plunge into the depths of it. This is John's desire for you, that you would believe with all you heart, and soul, and strength.

He would have you believe more constantly, so that you may say, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." It is not always so with us. We are at times chicken-hearted. We play the man today, and the mouse tomorrow. Lord have mercy upon us: we are an inconsistent people, fickle as the wind. The Lord would have us abide always in him with strong and mighty confidence, being rooted and built up in him.

He would have us trust courageously. Some can believe in a small way about small things. Oh for a boundless trust in the infinite God! We need more of a venturesome faith: the faith to do and dare. Often we see the way of power, but have not the faith which would be equal to it. See Peter walking on the sea! I do not advise any of you to try it, neither did our Lord advise Peter to do so:

we do well enough if we walk uprightly on land. But when Peter had once taken a few steps on the sea, he ought to have known that his Lord could help him all the rest of the way; but alas! His faith failed, and he began to sink. He could have walked all the way to Jesus if he had believed right on. So is it with us: our faith is good enough for a spurt, but it lacks staying power. Oh, may God give us to believe, so that we may not only trip over a wave or two, but walk on the water to the end! If the Lord bids you, you may go through fire and not be burned, through the floods and not be drowned. Such a fearless, careless, conquering faith may the Lord work in us!

We need also to have our faith increased in the sense of its becoming more practical. Some people have a fine new faith, as pretty as the bright poker in the parlour, and as useless. We want an everyday faith, not to look at, but to use. Brothers and sisters, we need faith for the kitchen and the pantry, as well as for the drawing-room and the conservatory. We need workshop faith, as well as prayer-meeting faith. We need faith as to the common things of life, and the trying things of death. We could do with less paint if we had more power. We need less varnish and more verity. God give to you that you may believe on the name of the Son of God with a sound, common-sense faith, which will be found wearable, and washable, and workable throughout life.

We need to believe more joyfully. Oh what a blessed thing it is when you reach the rest and joy of faith! If we would truly believe the promise of God, and rest in the Lord's certain fulfillment of it, we might be as happy as the angels. I notice how very early in the morning how the birds begin to sing: before the sun is up or even the first grey tints of morning light are visible, the little songsters are awake and singing. Too often we refuse to sing until the sun is more than up, and noon is near. Shame on us! Will we never trust our God? Will we never praise him for favours to come? Oh for a faith that can sing through the night and through the winter! Faith that can live on a promise is the faith of God's elect. You will never enjoy heaven below until you believe without wavering. The Lord give you such faith.

II. Thus I have gone through my first head, and taken nearly all the time. I must now come to push of pike, as the old soldiers used to say. We must drive our teaching home. **THE PURPOSE WHICH JOHN HAD IN HIS MIND WE OUGHT TO FOLLOW UP.** If he wished us to know that we have eternal life, brothers and sisters, let us try to know it. The Word of God was written for this purpose; let us use it for its proper end. The whole of these Scriptures were written that "we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing we might have life through his name." This Book is written to you who believe, that you may know that you believe. Will you suffer your Bibles to be a failure to you? Will you live in perpetual questioning and doubt? If so, the Book has missed its mark for you. The Bible is sent that you may have full assurance of of your possession of eternal life; do not, therefore, dream that it will be presumptuous on your part to aspire to it. Our conscience tells us that we ought to seek full assurance of salvation. It cannot be right for us to be children of God, and not to know our own Father. How can we kneel down and say, "Our Father which art in heaven," when we do not know whether he is our Father or not? Will not a life of doubt tend to be a life of falsehood? May we not be using language which is not true to our consciousness? Can you sing joyful hymns which you fear are not true to you? Will you join in worship when your heart does not know that God is your God? Until the spirit of adoption enables you to cry, "Abba, Father," where is your love to God? Can you rest? Dare you rest, while it is a question whether you are saved or not? Can you go home to your dinner to-day and enjoy your meal, while there is a question about your soul's eternal life? Oh, be not so foolhardy as to run risks on that matter! I pray you, make sure work for eternity. If you leave anything in uncertainty, let it concern your body or

your estate, but not your soul. Conscience bids you seek to know that you have eternal life, for without this knowledge many duties will be impossible of performance. Many Scriptures which I cannot quote this morning stir you up to this duty. Are you not bidden to make your calling and election sure? Are you not a thousand times over exhorted to rejoice in the Lord, and to give thanks continually? But how can you rejoice, if the dark suspicion haunts you, that perhaps, after all, you have not the life of God? You must get this question settled, or you cannot rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Come, brothers and sisters, I beseech you, as you would follow Scripture, and obey the Lord's precepts, get the assurance without which you cannot obey them.

Listen, as I close, to this mass of reasons why each believer should seek to know that he has eternal life. Here they are. Assurance of your salvation will bring you "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." If you know that you are saved, you can sit down in poverty, or in sickness, or under slander, and feel perfectly content. Full assurance is the Koh-i-noor amongst the jewels wherewith the heavenly Bridegroom adorns his spouse. Assurance is a mountain of spices, a land that floweth with milk and honey. To be the assured possessor of eternal life is to find a paradise beneath the stars, where the mountains and the hills break forth before you into singing.

Full assurance will sometimes overflow in cataracts of delight. Peace flows like a river, and here and there it leaps in cascades of ecstatic joy. There are seasons when the plant of peace is in flower, and then it sheds a perfume as of myrrh and cassia. Oh, the blessedness of the man who knows that he has eternal life! Sometimes in our room alone, when we have been enjoying this assurance, we have laughed outright, for we could not help it. If anybody had wondered why a man was laughing by himself alone, we could have explained that it was nothing ridiculous which had touched us, but our mouth was filled with laughter because the Lord had done great things for us, whereof we were glad. That religion which sets no sweatmeats on the table is a niggardly housekeeper. I do not wonder that some people give up their starveling religion: it is hardly worth the keeping. The child of God who knows that he has eternal life goes to school, be he has many a holiday; and he anticipates that day of home-going when he shall see the face of his Beloved for ever.

Brethren, full assurance will give us the full result of the gospel. The gospel ought to make us holy; and so it will when we are in full possession of it. The gospel ought to make us separate from the world, the gospel ought to make us lead a heavenly life here below; and so it will if we drink deep draughts of it; but if we take only a sip of it now and again, we give it no chance of working out its design in us. Do not paddle about the margin of the water of life, but first wade in up to your knees, and then hasten to plunge into the waters to swim in. Beware of contentment with shallow grace. Prove what the grace of God can do for you by giving yourself up to its power.

Full assurance gives a man a grateful zeal for the God he loves. These are the people that will go to the Congo for Jesus, for they know they are his. These are the people that will lay down their all for Christ, for Christ is theirs. These are the people that will bear scorn and shame and misrepresentation for the truth's sake, for they know that they have eternal life. These are they that will keep on preaching and teaching, spending and working, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and they know it. Men will do little for what they doubt, and much for what they believe. If you have lost your title deeds, and you do not know whether your house is your own or not, you are not going to spend much in repairs and enlargements. When you know that heaven is yours, you are anxious to get ready for it. Full assurance finds fuel for zeal to feed upon.

This also creates and sustains patience. When we know that we have eternal life, we do not fret about the trials of this passing life. I could point to the brethren here this morning, and I could mention sisters at home, who amaze me by their endurance of pain and weakness. This I know concerning them, that they never have a doubt about their interest in Christ; and for this cause they are able to surrender themselves into those dear hands which were pierced for them. They know that they are the Lord's, and so they say, "Let him do what seemeth him good." A blind child was in his father's arms, and a stranger came into the room, and took him right away from his father. Yet he did not cry or complain. His father said to him, "Johnny, are you afraid? You do not know the person who has got hold of you." "No, father," he said, "I do not know who he is, but you do." When pain gives us an awkward nip, and we do not know whether we shall live or die, when we are called to undergo a dangerous operation, and pass into unconciousness, then we can say, "I do not know where I am, but my Father knows, and I leave all with him." Assurance makes us strong to suffer.

This, dear friends, will give you constant firmness in your confession of divine truth. You who do not know whether you are saved or not, I hope the Lord will keep you from denying the faith; but those who have a firm grip of it, these are the men who will never forsake it. A caviller in an omnibus said to a Christian man one day, "Why, you have nothing after all to rest upon. I can prove to you that your Scriptures are not authentic." The humble Christian man replied, "Sir, I am not a learned man, and I cannot answer you questions; but I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I have experienced such a change in character, and I feel such a joy and peace through believing, that I wish you knew my Saviour, too." The answer he received was a very unexpected one: the unbeliever said, "You have got me there; I cannot answer *that*." Just so: we have got them there. If we know what has been wrought in us by grace, they cannot overcome us. The full-assurance man baffles the very devil. Satan is cunning enough, but those who know and are persuaded, are birds which he cannot take in the snares of hell. When you know that your Lord is able to keep that which you have committed to him until that day, then you are firm as a rock. God make you so.

Dear brethren, this is the kind of thing that will enable you to bear a telling testimony for your Lord. It is of no use to stand up and preach things that may or may not be true. I am charged with being a dreadful dogmatist, and I am not anxious to excuse myself. When a man is not quite sure of a thing, he grows very liberal: anybody can be a liberal with money which he cannot claim to be his own. The broad-school man says, "I am not sure, and I do not suppose that you are sure, for indeed nothing is sure." Does this sandy foundation suit you? I prefer rock. The things which I have spoken to you from my youth up have been such as I have tried and proved, and to me they wear an absolute certainty, confirmed by my personal experience. I have tried these things: they have saved me, and I cannot doubt them. I am a lost man if the gospel I have preached to you be not true; and I am content to bide the issue of the day of Judgement. I do not preach doubtingly, for I do not live doubtingly. I know what I have told you to be true; why should I speak as if I were not sure? If you want to make your own testimony tell in such a day as this, you must have something to say that you are sure about; and until you are sure about it I would advise you to hold you tongue. We do not require any more questionings; the market is overstocked. We need no more doubt, honest or dishonest; the air is dark with these horrible blacks.

Brethren, if you know that you have eternal life, you are prepared to live, and equally prepared to die. How frequently do I stand at the bedside of our dying members! I am every now and then saying to myself, "I shall certainly meet with some faint-hearted one. Surely I shall come across

some child of God who is dying in the dark." But I have not met with any such. Brethren, a child of God may die in the dark. One said to old Mr. Dodd, the quaint old Puritan—"How sad that our brother should have passed away in the darkness! Do you doubt his safety?" "No," said old Mr. Dodd, "no more than I doubt the safety of him who said, when he was dying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"" Full assurance, as we have said before, is not of the essence of salvation. Still, I beg of you to note this, that all along through these many years, in each case, when I have gone to visit any of our brethren and our sisters at death, I have always found them departing in sure and certain hope of seeing the face of their Lord in glory. I have often marvelled that this should be without exception, and I glory in it. Often have they said to me, "We have fed on such good food that we may well be strong in the Lord." God grant that you may have this assurance, all of you! May sinners begin to believe in Jesus, and saints believe more firmly, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 JOHN 5.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—175, 738, 711.

To the Saddest of the Sad

A Sermon

(No. 2026)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day, June 3rd, 1888, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage."—Exodus 6:9.

LITTLE WORDS OFTEN CONTAIN great meanings. It is often the case with that monosyllable "*so*." In the present instance we must lay stress upon it and read the text thus—"Moses spake *so* unto the children of Israel." That is, he said what God told him to say. He did not invent his message. He did not think out the gospel that he had to carry to the people. He was simply a repeater of the divine message. As he received it, *so* he spake it. "Moses spake as unto the children of Israel." If he had not done *so*, the responsibility must have rested upon himself, whether the nation was moved by his words or not; but when he was simply God's ambassador, saying only what God would have him say, his responsibility was limited. If he delivered the Lord's own word and it failed to win the heart of Israel, he could not be blamed. Although it was a great sadness of heart to him that the people did not, and even could not, receive the divine message, yet as far as he was concerned, his conscience was clear. It is ever so with the preacher of the gospel: if he declares the word of the Lord as he has received it, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, he is clear before God, whatever his hearers may do or may not do.

I often wonder what those preachers do who feel called to make up their message as they go on; for if they fail, their failure must be attributed in great measure to their want of ability to make up a moving tale. They have to spread their sails to the breeze of the age, and to pick up a gospel that comes floating down to them on the stream of time, altering every week in the year; and they must have an endless task to catch this new idea, or, as they put it, to keep abreast of the age. Unless, indeed, like chameleons, they have a natural aptitude to change colour, they must have a worrying time of it, and a horrible amount of shifting to get through. When they have done their best to preach this gospel of their own, then they are accountable for having made that gospel. For every bit of its teaching they are accountable, because they were the manufacturers of it, and it came forth from their foundry, bearing their stamp. If they take this yoke upon them, and so refuse to learn of Christ, they will find no rest to their souls. To me the preaching of the Lord's own gospel is a joy and a privilege; for notwithstanding that concern for your souls loads me with the burden of the Lord, it is his burden, and not one which I have selected for myself. I often feel on a Sabbath night when I go home weary: "I know that I have preached what I believe to be God's gospel." I have not said anything—I have not intended to say anything that was my own. I have not left out, at least, I have not intended to leave out anything that was in the text, nor anything which I believe to be the teaching of the gospel of Christ. And then if you do not receive it, that is a sorrowful business, but it is no concern of mine so that I shall have to answer for it at the last great day. When a man-servant goes to the door with a message from his master, if you do not like what he tells you, do not be angry with him. What has he to do with it? Has he said what his master told him to say? If he has,

then be angry with his master if you must be, or accept what his master says if you think fit; but let the poor man that brought the message be held clear if he has faithfully reported his master's words. I claim that, if I have preached my Master's gospel, whether men are saved or lost, whether they accept it or reject it, I must leave that with themselves, and not have their sin laid at my door. How heartily do I cry to God that the Word may not be a savour of death unto death, but a savour of life unto life; but oh, my hearers, if you perish after hearing the gospel of God, do not think that you can cast the blame on me.

Now, the message Moses brought was rejected, and he knew why it was rejected. He could see the reason. The people were in such bondage, they were so miserably ground down, they were so unhappy and hopeless, that what he spake seemed to them to be as idle words. There are hundreds of reasons why men reject the gospel. We will not go into them to-night. He that wants to beat a dog can always find a stick, and he that wishes to reject Christ can always find a reason for it; and, however unreasonable a reason may be, it will serve a sinner's turn, when that turn happens to be the making of some excuse for himself why he should not yield to the Saviour. Oh that men were less cunning in making apologies for refusing the Lord Jesus!

Amongst all the reasons, however, that I ever heard, that with which I have the most sympathy, is this one—that some cannot receive Christ because they are so full of anguish, and are so crushed in spirit that they cannot find strength enough of mind to entertain a hope that by any possibility salvation can come to them. It is to their sad case that I desire to speak. I think that I can speak to the case, if God help me, for I have felt the same. I do remember when I could not believe even Jesus himself by reason of sore anguish and straitness of spirit; and, therefore, as one who has worn the chains, I speak to those who are still in chains. I know the clanking of those fetters, and what it is to feel the damp of the stone walls, and to fear that there is no coming out of prison, and to be so despairing that even when the emancipator turned the great key in the lock, and set the door wide open, yet still my heart had made for itself a direr cage, and I could not believe in the possibility of liberty, and therefore I sat bound in a dungeon of my own creation. Ah! there is no Bastille so awful as that which is built by despair, and kept under the custody of a crushed spirit. Many are the desponding ones whose eyes fail so that they cannot look up, or look out. To such I speak. May God speak through me by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter!

I. And first, will you notice that what Moses brought to these people was glad tidings. **IT WAS A FREE AND FULL GOSPEL MESSAGE.** To them it was the gospel of salvation from a cruel bondage, the gospel of hope, the gospel of glorious promise. It is a very admirable type and metaphorical description of what the gospel is to us. Moses' word to them was singularly clear, cheering, and comforting; but they could not receive it. "They hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit and cruel bondage."

First, Moses spoke to them *about their God*. He said, "You have a God, and his name is Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." They looked up from their bricks, and they seemed to say, "God? What have we to do with him? Oh, that the straw were given us to make our bricks! We are up to our necks in this filthy Nile mud, making the bricks, and you come and talk to us about God. Go, and preach to Pharaoh and the taskmasters that rule us; but as for us poor creatures, slaves that we are, we do not understand you. What do you mean by JAH, Jehovah, our God? Bring us more garlic and onions, or lessen our daily tasks, or take away the sticks from our drivers, and then we will listen to you." And so they shook their heads, and said that such mysteries and theologies were not for them. And yet, dear sirs, if any of you are in such

a case, it is for you. Jehovah, Israel's God, was indeed their only hope, and he is your only hope also. Alas, that they should be so unwise as to refuse to let the light shine upon them, for light it was! What a poor reason for refusing light because the night is so dark! Man's best hope lies in his God. O you whose lives are bitter with toil and want, there is something for you after all, much better than the hard saying, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink?" There is an inheritance above the grinding toil of every-day life. There is a portion much better than this killing care, which frets so many of you and makes life a calamity to you. Do not, therefore, because of the heaviness of your lot, refuse to hear about God, your Maker, your Benefactor. In that direction lies your only real hope. Have this God for a father and a friend, and life will wear another aspect, and you will be another man.

Then Moses went on to tell them *about a covenant*. He said, "You have a God, and that God has said, "I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers." Covenant? Why, many of them would hardly know what it meant. "Covenant?" said they, "God made a covenant with us poor brickmakers, that have to slave from morning to night without wage, and now are forced to make bricks without straw?" God and a covenant: these are strange words in ears that hear the curses of taskmasters and the crack of their whips. It sounded like mockery to them to talk of such high matters. I doubt not they muttered to themselves, "This Moses is a mad philosopher who has grand mouthfuls of words; but what are words to us? A bit of fish out of the Nile, or a cumber from the irrigated fields would be a deal better than talking to us about a covenant." And yet, hearken. If any of you are in a sad condition, your best hopes may lie this way. What if God has entered into covenant with you that he will bless you for Jesus Christ's sake? There may be a mint of wealth for the sons of poverty in this everlasting covenant; and the best kind of wealth, too. There may be for you a promised emancipation which will break the fetters which now hold you, and set you free. I tell you that in the covenant of grace lies the charter of the poor and needy. At any rate, if you come under that covenant it cannot be worse with you than it is now. You seem now to be under a covenant of bondage and of sorrow, and any change will be for the better. If there be another covenant—a covenant of grace, and love, and peace, and everlasting faithfulness, it were worth while to hear about it, and to seek it out until you discover whether you have part and lot in it. I entreat you, look into this matter. Harken diligently to the voice of the gospel. Hear, and your soul shall live.

So, when Moses had spoken of the covenant, he went on to speak yet more *about God's pity to them*. He reported that Jehovah had said, "I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered my covenant." I fancy that those words opened their eyes a little. They looked up and said to one another, "Is there, indeed, a God who has heard our groanings? Oh, but," they muttered, "look at the many years we have been groaning. Why, it is forty years since this man Moses first came out and saw our burdens. Where has he been these forty years? What is the use of pity that is so tardy in its movements?" And yet, dear sirs, if you are inclined to talk so, it may be that if God be slow he is sure; and if he be slow to you it is out of patience and long-suffering to others. He knows best when and how to save his people. Remember that when the tale of bricks was doubled then Moses came; and when you are getting to your very worst, and your night is darkening into a sort of hellish midnight, it may be that your darkness is coming to an end. Therefore, be not so bowed down as to let the brick-earth get into your ears and eyes and make you deaf and blind. But do listen if there be anything to be heard that is better than your daily moans and groans. Listen to the messenger of God who comes

to tell of what God is about to do. He is a God full of compassion, and he has respect unto broken hearts and tearful eyes.

And then Moses went on further with his blessed gospel message to tell them *about the Lord's resolve to rescue them by a great redemption*. The Lord had said, "I am Jehovah, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage." Do you notice that all along the Lord uses strong words, and speaks like a great king? "I am Jehovah. I will. I will. I will." When you go home just notice what a number of "I wills" there are in this declaration of the great God. When God says, "I will," he means it; depend upon it. He does not ask our leave, or wait for our help. "I will" is omnipotence putting itself into speech. Jehovah will accomplish what he promises. He told them, therefore, that he meant to come to their rescue. "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments." God means to save you. Poor, troubled, confessedly guilty sinner, believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and trust yourself with him, and the Lord will save you. He will deliver you from all the guilt of your past life, from the evil habits of your present life, and from the temptations of your future life. He will break the yoke of Satan from off your neck and make you to be no more the slave of sin, but you shall become the child of the living God.

Moses told them *about the Lord's ways of grace and the inheritance* which he had prepared for them. My message is after the same sort. Thus saith Jehovah to-night, in the preaching of the gospel to every one that will believe in Jesus, "I will save and I will deliver you; and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord." These are great words, but they come from the mouth of the great God, who cannot lie. Wherefore believe them, and take heart of hope. God will take you, poor guilty ones, to be his children. He will promote you to be his willing servants. He will use you for his glory though now you dishonour his name. He will sanctify you and cleanse you, and he will bring you to heaven, even you who have lien among the pots and have been defiled in the brick-kilns of sin. He will never rest till he makes you sit upon his throne with him, where he is glorified, world without end. This I speak to you who are in bondage. Even as Jesus said of old, so say I in my measure as his messenger: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Believe you in Christ Jesus, and he who has come to save the lost will give you as clear and clean a deliverance from the power of sin as Jehovah gave Israel deliverance from the power of the Egyptian tyrant. He will bring you out of bondage and guide you through the wilderness till you come into the eternal rest, even to a goodlier land than Canaan, though it flowed with milk and honey.

II. We come now to note that **IT WAS RECEIVED WITH UNBELIEF CAUSED BY ANGUISH OF HEART**. The message was from the Lord, and it was full of hope for them, but they were too much broken down to receive it. We can quite understand what that meant. Let us look into the case. They could not now receive this gospel because *they had at first caught at it, and had been disappointed*. They were under a misapprehension, for they expected to be free at once, as soon as Moses went to Pharaoh; and as they did not get immediate relief, they fell back into sullen despair. When Moses came to them and said that God had appeared to him at the bush, and had sent him to deliver them, they bowed their heads, and worshipped. Great things they looked for on the

morrow, for they were at the end of their patience; but after that, when Moses went in unto Pharaoh, and the tyrant doubled their labour by denying them straw, then they could not believe in God or in his messenger. In the process of salvation it often happens—I have seen it many time—that after persons have come to hear the gospel, after they have, in some measure, become attentive to its invitations, they have for a season been much more miserable than they were before. Have you never noticed, in taking a medicine, how often you are made to feel more sick before you are made well? It is often so in the workings of the great remedy of divine grace: it discovers to us our disease that we may the more heartily accept the heavenly medicine. Yes, and in special cases there may be evils within the spiritual system which must be thrown out in the flesh, to be made visible, and so to become the subjects of repentance and abhorrence. The man who judges with shortness and straightness of judgment, demands a remedy that will cure his soul of all evils on the spot, and if it does not evidently and immediately do this, he cries, "Away with it." I find that the Hebrew word translated "anguish" here signifies shortness. Your marginal Bibles have "straitness." So they could not believe because of the shortness of their judgment: they measured God by inches. They limited the great and infinite God to minutes and days; and so, as they found themselves at first getting into a worse case than before, they said to Moses, deliberately, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians." They did as good as say—You have done us no good; indeed you have increased our miseries; and we cannot believe in you or accept your message as really from God, seeing it has caused us a terrible increase of our sufferings.

Grace may truly and effectually come to a heart, and for a while cause no joy, no peace; but the reverse. I have known many a man coming to this Tabernacle, who has been prospering in business, and so on, and yet he has been going down to hell as fast as ever he could travel. Well, he has come and heard the gospel, and he has made a great many improvements in his conduct, and has become a regular and attentive hearer; and at that very time he has fallen into an affliction the like of which he had never experienced before; and he has consequently complained, "Why, I am worse instead of better. I find my heart grows more rebellious against God than ever it was before." I do not wonder that it should be so, for I have seen so many examples of it. The discipline of the household of God begins very early. But a present increase of sorrow has nothing to do with what the main result will be, except that it works towards it in a mysterious manner. Perhaps what you at first thought was genuine faith was not faith; and God is going to knock down the false before he builds up the true. If you had an old house, and any friend of yours were to say, "John, I will build you a new house. When shall I begin?" "Oh!" you might say, "begin next week to build the new house." At the end of the week he has pulled half your old house down. "Oh," say you, "this is what you call building me a new house, is it? You are causing me great loss: I wish I had never consented to your proposal." He replies, "You are most unreasonable: how am I to build you a new house on this spot without taking the old one down?" And so it often happens that the grace of God does seem in its first work to make a man even worse than he was before, because it discovers to him sins which he did not know to be there, evils which had been concealed, dangers never dreamed of. Thus the work of grace even makes his bondage seem to be heavier than ever it was; and yet this is all done in wisdom, in love, and in fulfilment of the promise which God has given. Yet I am never very much astonished when I find people ready almost to turn away from the hearing of the gospel; because, after having at first heard it with pleasure, they find that, for the time being, it involves them in even greater sorrow than before. How earnestly would I persuade them to overcome their very natural tendency to a hasty judgment! Press on, dear friend. Be of good courage.

Pharaoh will not long be able to make you keep up that enormous number of bricks. Within a very few days he will be glad to get rid of you. Wait hopefully; for the God who begins in darkness will end in light, and before long you will come to understand those ways of mercy, which are now past finding out. Not many weeks after the sobbing and sighing at the brickyards, Moses and the children at Israel sang this song unto the Lord: " Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." The work of deliverance began very grimly, but it ended very gloriously.

The inability of Israel to believe the message of Moses arose also from the fact that *they were earthbound by heavy oppression*: the mere struggle to exist exhausted all their energy, and destroyed all their hope. The extreme hardness of their lot made them despondent and sullen. They had to work from morning to night. The Egyptian fellahs of the present age have known what it is to work very, very hard, and to let their earnings go into the coffers of their precious princes. It seems always to have been so with wretched Egypt: it is ever the house of bondage. But these Israelites, being not even Egyptians, but strangers in Egypt, were worked without any pity or mercy. It was a daily question with them whether life was worth living under such cruel conditions. I do not wonder that a great many are unable to receive the gospel in this city of ours, because their struggle for existence is awful. I am afraid that it gets more and more intense, though even now it passes all bounds. If any of you can do anything to help the toil-worn workers, I pray you, do it. The poor workwoman, who sits so many hours with the candle and needle, and does not earn enough, when she has worked all those hours, to more than just pay the rent and keep body and soul together, do you wonder that she thinks that this gospel of ours cannot be for her, and does not care to listen to it? I know that it would be her comfort, but her soul refuseth to be comforted, she is so crushed. The dock labourer, who comes home five days out of the six having earned nothing, and hears his little children crying for bread—is it any wonder that he cannot hear about heavenly things? Why, it is with our white population very much as it was with the negro population of Jamaica. When there was work to be had, and they could get enough to eat and more, our churches were crowded with them. They were the best of hearers and the speediest of converts; they were soon gathered into immense churches. But when everything went badly with them, and they had to work very hard barely to live, there were groups of backsliders, and multitudes who did not feel that they could go to the house of God at all. They said that they had no garments to wear, and no money to spare; and do you wonder at it? Their poverty was so grinding, and their toil so severe, that the services they had once delighted in they had no heart for. It is all very easy to say that it ought not to be so; but it is so; and it is so with multitudes in London. And yet, dear friend—if such a one has come in here to-night—I pray you do not throw away the next world because you have so little of this. This is sheer folly. If I have little here, I would make sure of the more hereafter. If you have such a struggle for existence here, you should seek that higher, nobler, better life, which would give you, even in penury and want, a joy and a comfort to which you are a stranger now. May the Holy Ghost come upon you, and raise you out of this present evil world into newness of life in Christ Jesus! I do not find that God's people get into a condition of utter desolation: they are, at their very worst, kept from total desertion; for the Lord hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." They do have to work hard, and they may come very near to want, but my observation satisfies me that they are happy still; that they are joyful still; and they are uplifted by the inner life above the down-dragging depression of external trials. I would to God that I could say a word that might comfort any child

of poverty who should happen to be here to-night, and I pray the Lord himself to be their comforter and helper.

But, worst of all, there are some who seem as if they could not lay hold on Christ because *their sense of sin has become so intolerable, and the wretchedness which follows upon conviction has become so fearful, that they have grown almost to be continually despairing*. I hardly know any condition of mind that is worse than chronic despair, when at last that which seemed alarming enough to drive to madness settles down into a lifeless, sullen moroseness. These Israelites had at last sunk so low that they said, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians." But your lot is terrible. "We know it is," they said, "but we shall never get out of it." But your bondage is horrible. "Yes, but you may make it worse by interfering. You will only aggravate our taskmasters, and bring upon us that last straw which breaks the back. Let us alone. We are doomed to suffer: we are predestined to be bondsmen. Let us go on as quietly as we may in our slavery. It may be that like poor fishes in the cave, we may lose our eyes yet, and then we shall not know that it is dark, for we shall have lost the capacity for light." Oh, it is a dreadful thing when a heart gets to that—when a man desires that Christ would depart from him, and let him alone to perish. Do not some men virtually say, "I know I am lost. Let me enjoy myself as well as I can; I cannot—I cannot enjoy sin; but don't vex my conscience. Do not worry me with your talk here, for I shall suffer enough hereafter. Do not tantalize me about saving faith, for I shall never believe. Do not begin talking to me about repentance. I shall never have a soft and tender heart; I know I never shall." A man who has begun to be numbed with cold, cries to his comrades, "Leave me to sleep myself to death"; and thus do despairing ones ask to be left in their misery. Dear soul, we cannot, we dare not, thus desert you. I will tell you what you shall do, dear soul; do give me a hearing. In the name of God, believe that there is hope yet—that even now Christ Jesus invites men, and especially such as you, to put their trust in him. O you who are burdened with sin, he calls you to let him be your Saviour. If there is a man in the world he died for, you are the man. If I see a physician hurrying down the street in his brougham, and anybody says to me, "Where is that doctor going?" if I knew every house in the street, I should pick out the case of a man that I knew to be in the worst condition, and most near to death's door. "Sir," I should say, "the doctor is going there. That dying person needs him most, and I believe that he is hurrying to his bedside." If there is one man here that is worse than any other, more sad, more sick, more sorry, more despairing than another, my Lord Jesus Christ, who is here, has come to meet with such a one. O troubled heart, Jesus has come to seek and to save *you!* I am sure it is so. Hope thou! Hope thou! Hope thou! Thou art not beyond hope of salvation.

See, O soul, thou'rt yet alive,

Not in torment; not in hell.

Still doth his good Spirit strive,

With the chief of sinners dwell.

Lift up thy eyes, for thou art not yet where the rich man was after his death and burial. Do not yet despair. May be, there awaits thee yet a happy life of joy in God. The sun may yet bring thee brighter days, days of peace, and rest, and usefulness. Did you never hear the story of John Newton, on the coast of Africa? He had got himself into such a state by his sins, his drunkenness, his vice, that at last he was left on the coast of Africa, and virtually became a slave. Did John Newton dream, when he wandered up and down with a hungry belly, full of fever, and at death's door, that the day would come when he would be the companion and dear friend of Cowper, and when the church of St. Mary Woolnoth, over there in the city, would be crowded every time he stood up to preach of

free grace and dying love? He did not think it, but it was so predestined. Something equally gracious may be ordered for you. Blasphemer, you may preach the gospel yet. O thou Magdalene, full of filthiness, thou wilt yet wash his feet with thy tears, and wipe them with the hairs of thy head. Thou black villain, thou mayest yet stand among that white-robed host, of whom the angel asked, "Who are these, and whence came they?" You, even you, will sing more sweet and loud than any of them unto him that loved you and washed you from your sins in his precious blood. God make it so, and unto his name shall be praise for ever and ever!

III. I have many more things to say, but I might weary you with them rather than bless you. The message was at first not received by Israel by reason of their anguish of soul, but **IT WAS TRUE FOR ALL THAT, AND THE LORD MADE IT SO.** What did the Lord do when he found that those people did not hearken to Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage? What did the Lord do? He was not going to give them up because of their wretched condition. He had said, "I will bring them out," and he meant to do it.

The first thing the Lord did to prove his persevering grace was *to commission Moses again.* (Ex. 6:1; 7:2.) So the Lord God, in everlasting mercy, says to his minister, "You have to preach the gospel again to them. Again proclaim my grace." It seems a terrible thing to have to pour our souls into deaf ears. Yet I shall not give it up, for I have done it with some here for nearly thirty-three years, and I may as well go on. Why should I lose so much labour? I will try again, like Peter, who, after toiling all night and taking nothing, yet let down the net at the Lord's bidding. One of these days those dead ears will be made to live. God in mercy says, "Go on with it. As long as there is breath in your body, tell them to believe in my Son, and they shall live. Tell them till you die that 'He that with his mouth confesseth, and with his heart believeth that God hath raised Christ from the dead shall be saved.'"

But the Lord did more than that for Israel. As these people had not listened to Moses, he called Moses and Aaron to him, and *he renewed their charge.* He laid it upon them—gave them again their marching orders: "He gave them a charge unto the children of Israel, and unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." A monstrous thing it did look. They would not even hear Moses but the Lord will have his servants stand to their work. Moses and Aaron have to do it, however impossible it may appear. There is to be no backing out of it. They must know of a surety that Israel is to be delivered by their means. It is a grand point when the Lord lays the conversion of men on the hearts of his ministers, and makes them feel that they must win souls. Moses was bound to bring out Israel. "But there is Pharaoh" Pharaoh is included in the divine charge. They have to beat Pharaoh into submission. "But those children of Israel will not obey." The Lord put them in the charge: did you not observe the words, "He gave them a charge unto the children of Israel, and unto Pharaoh"? Moses and Aaron, you have to bring Israel out, Pharaoh is to let them go, and Israel is to go willingly. God has issued his royal decree, and be you sure it will stand. I believe that God is saying to his church "You have to do it. You have to gather out mine elect out of every nation under heaven." To the church in London, he says, "Bring this people out of the bondage of sin." That terrible London with all its poverty, its drunkenness, its infidelity, and licentiousness: you are to save it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Its darkness is dense; you are to shine till it is enlightened. You have to save London. So do not back out of it. "Oh," says one man, who lives down some street near this place, "Sir, I can hardly live in the street. It teems with ill-living women." You have to save them. Passing a little shop as I did the other day, I saw written up in the window, "If any poor girl that wishes to lead a better life will only step inside she

will find a friend." That is one of our dear members. I felt so pleased as I saw it. I should like to see such a notice in a great many windows. I would like to see you live among the wicked, and put up in your windows, "If anybody wants a friend, there is one inside. Come in." You are called to save them! They must not be lost. Somebody says, "What are you talking about, Mr. Spurgeon? We cannot save them." I am talking as God said, when he told Moses and Aaron that he gave them a charge to bring his people out of Egypt. They could not do it: but yet they did it. Anyone can do what he can do, but it is only God's servant that can do what he cannot do. We, my brethren, are called to perform the impossible; we are to be familiar with miracles. Look at Ezekiel. There is a valley full of dry bones. Ezekiel is to go and say to them, "Thus saith the Lord, Ye dry bones, live." What a preposterous thing! An able divine of good repute once said that, to preach the gospel to dead sinners, was as preposterous as to wave a pocket-handkerchief over a grave. Ah, just so! Therefore, I would not have him do it. If the Lord has not sent him to do it he would do no good if he were to attempt to preach to the sinner dead in sin; but it is a different thing when it is my case, for I feel that I am sent to do it, and therefore I am not vexed at being thought to be acting absurdly. If God had sent me to wave a pocket-handkerchief over the dead in Nunhead cemetery, that they might live, I would go and wave that pocket-handkerchief, and they would live. To the eye of reason there is no use in preaching to men dead in sin. I freely admit that; but if it is a commission from God, then it is not ours to raise questions, but to do as we are bidden. God has commissioned his servants to preach the gospel to every creature. Whatever those creatures may be, we are to say to them, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." This is our message and our mission, and we are just to tell the truth, and leave God to apply it to the heart. Oh that he may give us grace to tell out the gospel, and to keep on doing it till he has brought his own elect out of the bondage of sin and Satan, and saved them with an everlasting salvation!

Once more. As I told you in the reading, I greatly admire this chapter. I cannot help admiring the next thing that God did when he told his servant what to do. *The Lord began to count the heads of those whom he would redeem out of bondage.* You see the rest of the chapter is occupied with the children of Reuben, and the children of Simeon, and the children of Levi. God seemed to say, "Pharaoh, let my people go!" "I will not," said the despot. Straightway the Lord goes right down into the brick-town where the poor slaves are at work, and he makes out a list of all of them, to show that he means to set free. So many there of Simeon. So many here of Reuben. So many here of Levi. The Lord is counting them. Moreover he numbers their cattle, for he declares, "There shall not a hoof be left behind." Men say, "It is of no use counting your chickens before they are hatched"; but when it comes to God's counting those whom he means to deliver, it is another matter; for he knows what will be done, because he determines to do it and he is almighty. He knows what is to come of the gospel, and he knows whom he means to bless. And so let Satan rage, and let adversaries do what they will, "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his"; and to prove this, he goes on writing down their names, and taking an account of them. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." Now, my hearers, if you do not come to Christ, it will be your own loss, and not his. If you refuse him, it will be because you are not Christ's sheep, as he said to you. He has a people, and he will save *them*, whether you, my hearer, believe in Jesus or wilfully refuse to do so. Out of the mass of mankind a company shall come to him, and shall glorify his name, as it is written, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." Oh, that you had such a mind in you that you would

accept his gospel! Will you do so even now? Trust Christ, and you are saved. Look unto him, and be ye saved The Lord bless you, for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus 4:31 to 6:14.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—397, 540, 502.

* Since this sermon was preached, brother Bilborough has gone to his reward.

Let Him Deliver Him Now

A Sermon

(No. 2026)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day, June 17, 1888, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"He trusted in God; let him deliver him now; if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God."—Matthew 27:43.

THESE WORDS ARE a fulfilment of the prophecy contained in the twenty-second Psalm. Read from the seventh verse—"All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." Thus to the letter doth our Lord answer to the ancient prophecy.

It is very painful to the heart to picture our blessed Master in his death-agonies, surrounded by a ribald multitude, who watched him and mocked him, made sport of his prayer and insulted his faith. Nothing was sacred to them: they invaded the Holy of holies of his confidence in God, and taunted him concerning that faith in Jehovah which they were compelled to admit. See, dear friends, what an evil thing is sin, since the Sin-bearer suffers so bitterly to make atonement for it! See, also, the shame of sin, since even the Prince of Glory, when bearing the consequences of it, is covered with contempt! Behold, also, how he loved us! For our sake he "endured the cross, despising the shame." He loved us so much that even scorn of the most cruel sort he deigned to bear, that he might take away our shame and enable us to look up unto God.

Beloved, the treatment of our Lord Jesus Christ by men is the clearest proof of total depravity which can possibly be required or discovered. Those must be stony hearts indeed which can laugh at a dying Saviour, and mock even at his faith in God! Compassion would seem to have deserted humanity, while malice sat supreme on the throne. Painful as the picture is, it will do you good to paint it. You will need neither canvas, nor brush, nor palette, nor colours. Let your thoughts draw the outline, and your love fill in the detail; I shall not complain if imagination heightens the colouring. The Son of God, whom angels adore with veiled faces, is pointed at with scornful fingers by men who thrust out the tongue and mockingly exclaim, "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him."

While thus we see our Lord in his sorrow and his shame as our substitute, we must not forget that he also is there as our representative. That which appears in many a psalm to relate to David is found in the Gospels to refer to Jesus, our Lord. Often and often the student of the Psalm will say to himself, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this?" He will have to disentangle the threads sometimes, and mark off that which belongs to David and that which relates to the Son of God; and frequently he will not be able to disentangle the threads at all, because they are one, and may relate both to David, and to David's Lord. This is meant to show us that the life of Christ is an epitome of the life of his people. He not only suffers for us as our substitute, but he suffers before us as our pattern. In him we see what we have in our measure to endure. "As he is, so are we also in this world." We also must be crucified to the world, and we may look for somewhat of those tests of faith and taunts of derision which go with such a crucifixion. "Marvel not if the world hate

you." You, too, must suffer without the gate. Not for the world's redemption, but for the accomplishment of divine purposes in you, and through you to the sons of men, you must be made to know the cross and its shame. Christ is the mirror of the church. What the head endured every member of the body will also have to endure in its measure. Let us read the text in this light, and come to it saying to ourselves, "Here we see what Jesus suffered in our stead, and we learn hereby to love him with all our souls. Here, too, we see, as in a prophecy, how great things we are to suffer for his sake at the hands of men." May the Holy Spirit help us in our meditation, so that at the close of it we may more ardently love our Lord, who suffered for us, and may the more carefully arm ourselves with the same mind which enabled him to endure such contradiction of sinners against himself.

Coming at once to the text, first, *observe the acknowledgment* with which the text begins: "He trusted in God." The enemies of Christ admitted his faith in God. Secondly, consider *the test which is the essence of the taunt*: "Let him deliver him, if he will have him." When we have taken those two things into our minds, then let us for a while consider *the answer* to that test and taunt: God does assuredly deliver his people: those who trust in him have no reason to be ashamed of their faith.

I. First, then, my beloved brethren, you who know the Lord by faith and live by trusting in him, let me invite you to OBSERVE THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT which these mockers made of our Lord's faith: "He trusted in God." Yet the Saviour did not wear any peculiar garb or token by which he let men know that he trusted in God. He was not a recluse, neither did he join some little knot of separatists, who boasted their peculiar trust in Jehovah. Although our Saviour was separate from sinners, yet he was eminently a man among men, and he went in and out among the multitude as one of themselves. His one peculiarity was that "he trusted in God." He was so perfectly a man that, although he was undoubtedly a Jew, there were no Jewish peculiarities about him. Any nation might claim him; but no nation could monopolize him. The characteristics of our humanity are so palpably about him that he belongs to all mankind. I admire the Welch sister who was of opinion that the Lord Jesus must be Welch. When they asked her how she proved it, she said that he always spoke to her heart in Welch. Doubtless it was so, and I can, with equal warmth, declare that he always speaks to me in English. Brethren from Germany, France, Sweden, Italy—you all claim that he speaks to you in your own tongue. This was the one thing which distinguished him among men—"he trusted in God," and he lived such a life as naturally grows out of faith in the Eternal Lord. This peculiarity had been visible even to that ungodly multitude who least of all cared to perceive a spiritual point of character. Was ever any other upon a cross thus saluted by the mob who watched his execution? Had these scorners ever mocked anyone before for such a matter as this? I trow not. Yet faith had been so manifest in our Lord's daily life that the crowd cried out aloud, "He trusted in God."

How did they know? I suppose they could not help seeing that *he made much of God* in his teaching, in his life, and in his miracles. Whenever Jesus spoke it was always godly talk; and if it was not always distinctly about God, it was always about things that related to God, that came from God, that led to God, that magnified God. A man may be fairly judged by that which he makes most of. The ruling passion is a fair gauge of the heart. What a soul-ruler faith is! It sways the man as the rudder guides the ship. When a man once gets to live by faith in God, it tinctures his thoughts, it masters his purposes, it flavours his words, it puts a tone into his actions, and it comes out in everything by ways and means most natural and unconstrained, till men perceive that they have to

do with a man who makes much of God. The unbelieving world says outright that there is no God, and the less impudent, who admit his existence, put him down at a very low figure, so low that it does not affect their calculations; but to the true Christian, God is not only much, but all. To our Lord Jesus, God was all in all; and when you come to estimate God as he did, then the most careless onlooker will soon begin to say of you, "He trusted in God."

In addition to observing that Jesus made much of God, men came to note that he was *a trusting man, and not self-confident*. Certain persons are very proud because they are self-made men. I will do them the credit to admit that they heartily worship their maker. Self made them, and they worship self. We have among us individuals who are self-confident, and almost all-sufficient; they sneer at those who do not succeed, for *they* can succeed anywhere at anything. The world to them is a football which they can kick where they like. If they do not rise to the very highest eminence it is simply out of pity to the rest of us, who ought to have a chance. A vat of sufficiency ferments within their ribs! There was nothing of that sort of thing in our Lord. Those who watched him did not say that he had great self-reliance and a noble spirit of self-confidence. No, no! They said, "He trusted in God." Indeed it was so. The words that he spake he spake not of himself, and the great deeds that he did he never boasted of, but said "the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." He was a truster in God, not a boaster in self. Brethren and sisters, I desire that you and I may be just of that order. Selfconfidence is the death of confidence in God; reliance upon talent, tact, experience, and things of that kind, kills faith. Oh that we may know what faith means, and so look out of ourselves and quit the evil confidence which looks within!

On the other hand, we may wisely remember that, while our Lord Jesus was not self-reliant, *he trusted, and was by no means despondent*: he was never discouraged. He neither questioned his commission, nor despaired of fulfilling it. He never said, "I must give it up: I can never succeed." No; "He trusted in God." And this is a grand point in the working of faith, that while it keeps us from self-conceit, it equally preserves us from enfeebling fear. When our blessed Lord set his face like a flint; when, being baffled, he returned to the conflict; when, being betrayed, he still persevered in his love, then men could not help seeing that he trusted in God. His faith was not mere repetition of a creed, or profession of belief, but it was childlike reliance upon the Most High. May ours be of the same order!

It is evident that the Lord Jesus *trusted in God openly* since even yonder gibing crowd proclaimed it. Some good people try to exercise faith on the sly: they practise it in snug corners, and in lonely hours, but they are afraid to say much before others, for fear their faith should not see the promise fulfilled. They dare not say, with David, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad." This secrecy robs God of his honour. Brethren, we do not glorify our God as he ought to be glorified. Let us trust in him, and own it. Wherefore should we be ashamed? Let us throw down the gauge of battle to earth and hell. God, the true and faithful, deserves to be trusted without limit. Trust your all with him, and be not ashamed of having done so. Our Saviour was not ashamed of trusting in his God. On the cross he cried, "Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast." Jesus lived by faith. We are sure that he did, for in the Epistle to the Hebrews he is quoted as saying, "I will put my trust in him." If so glorious a personage as the only begotten Son of God lived here by faith in God, how are you and I to live except by trust in God? If we live unto God, this is the absolute necessity of our spiritual life "the just shall live by faith." Shall we be ashamed of that which brings life to us? The cruel ones who saw Jesus die did not say, "He now and then trusted in God"; nor "he trusted in the Lord years ago"; but they

admitted that faith in God was the constant tenor of his life: they could not deny it. Even though, with malicious cruelty, they turned it into a taunt, yet they did not cast a question upon the fact that "he trusted in God" Oh, I want you so to live that those who dislike you most may, nevertheless, know that you do trust in God! When you come to die, may your dear children say of you, "Our dear mother did trust in the Lord"! May that boy, who has gone furthest away from Christ, and grieved your heart the most, nevertheless say in his heart, "There may be hypocrites in the world, but my dear father does truly trust in God"! Oh, that our faith may be known unmistakably! We do not wish it to be advertised to our own honour. That be far from our minds. But yet we would have it known that others may be encouraged, and that God may be glorified. If nobody else trusts in God, let us do so; and thus may we uplift a testimony to the honour of his faithfulness. When we die, may this be our epitaph—"He trusted in God."

David, in the twenty-second Psalm, represents the enemies as saying of our Lord—"He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him." This *practical faith* is sure to be known wherever it is in operation, because it is exceedingly rare. Multitudes of people have a kind of faith in God, but it does not come to the practical point of trusting that God will deliver them. I see upon the newspaper placards, "*Startling New! People in the Planets!*" Not a very practical discovery. For many a day there has been a tendency to refer God's promises and our faith to the planets, or somewhere beyond this present every-day life. We say to ourselves, "Oh yes, God delivers his people." We mean that he did so in the days of Moses, and possibly he may be doing so now in some obscure island of the sea. Ah me! The glory of faith lies in its being fit for every-day wear. Can it be said of you, "He trusted in God, that he would deliver him"? Have you faith of the kind which will make you lean upon the Lord in poverty, in sickness, in bereavement, in persecution, in slander, in contempt? Have you a trust in God to bear you up in holy living at all costs, and in active service even beyond your strength? Can you trust in God definitely about this and that? Can you trust about food, and raiment, and home? Can you trust God even about your shoes, that they shall be iron and brass, and about the hairs of your head that they are all numbered? What we need is less theory and more actual trust in God.

The faith of the text was personal: "that he would deliver him." Blessed is that faith which can reach its arm of compassion around the world, but that faith must begin at home. Of what use were the longest arm if it were not fixed to the man himself at the shoulder? If you have no faith about yourself, what faith can you have about others? "He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him." Come, beloved, have you such a faith in the living God? Do you trust in God through Christ Jesus that he will save you? Yes, you poor, unworthy one, the Lord will deliver you if you trust him. Yes, poor woman, or unknown man, the Lord can help you in your present trouble, and in every other, and he will do so if you trust him to that end. May the Holy Spirit lead you to first trust the Lord Jesus for the pardon of sin, and then to trust in God for all things.

Let us pause a minute. Let a man trust in God; not in fiction but in fact, and he will find that he has solid rock under his feet. Let him trust about his own daily needs and trials, and rest assured that the Lord will actually appear for him, and he will not be disappointed. Such a trust in God is a very *reasonable* thing; its absence is most unreasonable. If there be a God, he knows all about my case. If he made my ear he can hear me; if he made my eye he can see me; and therefore he perceives my condition. If he be my Father, as he says he is, he will certainly care for me, and will help me in my hour of need if he can. We are sure that he can, for he is omnipotent. Is there anything unreasonable, then, in trusting in God that he will deliver us? I venture to say that if all the forces

in the universe were put together, and all the kindly intents of all who are our friends were put together, and we were then to rely upon those united forces and intents, we should not have a thousandth part so much justification for our confidence as when we depend upon God, whose intents and forces are infinitely greater than those of all the world beside. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man; it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." If you view things in the white light of pure reason, it is infinitely more reasonable to trust in the living God than in all his creatures put together.

Certainly, dear friends, it is extremely *comfortable* to trust in God. I find it so, and therefore speak. To roll your burden upon the Lord, since he will sustain you, is a blessed way of being quit of care. We know him to be faithful, and as powerful as he is faithful; and our dependence upon him is the solid foundation of a profound peace.

While it is comfortable, it is also *uplifting*. If you trust in men, the best of men, you are likely to be lowered by your trust. We are apt to cringe before these who patronize us. If your prosperity depends upon a person's smile, you are tempted to pay homage even when it is undeserved. The old saying mentions a certain person as "knowing on which side his bread is buttered." Thousands are practically degraded by their trusting in men. But when our reliance is upon the living God we are raised by it, and elevated both morally and spiritually. You may bow in deepest reverence before God, and yet there will be no fawning. You may lie in the dust before the Majesty of heaven, and yet not be dishonoured by your humility; in fact, it is our greatness to be nothing in the presence of the Most High.

This confidence in God makes men *strong*. I should advise the enemy not to oppose the man who trusts in God. In the long run he will be beaten, as Haman found it with Mordecai. He had been warned of this by Zeresh, his wife, and his wise men, who said, "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." Contend not with a man who has God at his back. Years ago the Mentonese desired to break away from the dominion of the Prince of Monaco. They therefore drove out his agent. The prince came with his army, not a very great one, it is true, but still formidable to the Mentonese. I know not what the high and mighty princeling was not going to do; but the news came that the King of Sardinia was coming up in the rear to help the Mentonese and therefore his lordship of Monaco very prudently retired to his own rock. When a believer stands out against evil he may be sure that the Lord of hosts will not be far away. The enemy shall hear the dash of his horse-hoof and the blast of his trumpet, and shall flee before him. Wherefore be of good courage, and compel the world to say of you, "He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him."

II. Secondly, I want you to follow me briefly in considering THE Test WHICH IS THE ESSENCE OF THE TAUNT which was hurled by the mockers against our Lord—"Let him deliver him now, if he will have him."

Such a test will come to all believers. It may come as a taunt from enemies; it will certainly come as a trial of your faith. The arch-enemy will assuredly hiss out, "Let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him."

This taunt has about it *the appearance of being very logical*, and indeed in a measure so it is. If God has promised to deliver us, and we have openly professed to believe the promise, it is only natural that others should say, "Let us see whether he does deliver him. This man believes that the Lord will help him; and he must help him, or else the man's faith is a delusion." This is the sort of test to which we ourselves would have put others before our conversion, and we cannot object to

be proved in the same manner ourselves. Perhaps we incline to run away from the ordeal, but this very shrinking should be a solemn call to us to question the genuineness of that faith which we are afraid to test. "He trusted on the Lord," says the enemy, "that he would deliver him: let him deliver him"; and surely, however malicious the design, there is no escaping from the logic of the challenge.

It is peculiarly painful to have this stern inference driven home to you in the hour of sorrow. Because one cannot deny the fairness of the appeal, it is all the more trying. In the time of depression of spirit it is hard to have one's faith questioned, or the ground on which it stands made a matter of dispute. Either to be mistaken in one's belief, or to have no real faith, or to find the ground of one's faith fail is an exceedingly grievous thing. Yet as our Lord was not spared this painful ordeal, we must not expect to be kept clear of it, and Satan knows well how to work these questions, till the poison of them sets the blood on fire. "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him;" he hurls this fiery dart into the soul, till the man is sorely wounded, and can scarcely hold his ground.

The taunt is specially *pointed and personal*. It is put thus: "*He* trusted on the Lord that he would deliver *him*: let him deliver *him*"; "Do not come to us with your fiddle-faddle about God's helping all his chosen. Here is a man who is one of his people, will he help *him*? Do not talk to us big things about Jehovah at the Red Sea, or in the Desert of Sinai, or God helping his people in ages past. Here is a living man before us who trusted in God that he would deliver him: let him deliver *him* now." You know how Satan will pick out one of the most afflicted, and pointing his fingers at him will cry, "Let him deliver HIM." Brethren, the test is fair. God will be true to every believer. If any one child of God could be lost, it would be quite enough to enable the devil to spoil all the glory of God for ever. If one promise of God to one of his people should fail, that one failure would suffice to mar the veracity of the Lord to all eternity; they would publish it in the "Diabolical Gazette," and in every street of Tophet they would howl it out, "God has failed. God has broken his promise. God has ceased to be faithful to his people." It would then be a horrible reproach—"He trusted in God to deliver him, but he did not deliver him."

Much emphasis lies in its being *in the present tense*: "He trusted in God that he would deliver him: let him deliver him *now*." I see Thee, O Lord Jesus, thou art now in the wilderness, where the fiend is saying, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." No. Thou art nailed to the tree; thine enemies have hemmed thee in. The legionaries of Rome are at the foot of the cross, the scribes and Pharisees and raging Jews compass thee about. There is no escape from death for thee! Hence their cry—"Let him deliver him *now*." Ah, brothers and sisters! this is how Satan assails us, using our present and pressing tribulations as the barbs of his arrows. Yet here also there is reason and logic in the challenge.

If God does not deliver his servants at one time as well as another he has not kept his promise. For a man of truth is always true, and a promise once given always stands. A promise cannot be broken now and then, and yet the honour of the person giving it be maintained by his keeping it at other times. The word of a true man stands always good: it is good *now*. This is logic, bitter logic, cold steel logic, logic which seems to cut right down your backbone and cleave your chine. "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him *now*." Yet this hard logic can be turned to comfort. I told you a story the other day of the brother in Guy's Hospital to whom the doctors said that he must undergo an operation which was extremely dangerous. They gave him a week to consider whether he would submit to it. He was troubled for his young wife and children, and for his work for the Lord. A friend left a bunch of flowers for him, with this verse as its motto,

"He trusted in God; let him deliver him now." "Yes," he thought, "*now*". In prayer he cast himself upon the Lord, and felt in his heart, "Come on, doctors, I am ready for you." When the next morning came, he refused to take chloroform, for he desired to go to heaven in his senses. He bore the operation manfully, and he is yet alive. "He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him" then and there, and the Lord did so. In this lies the brunt of the battle.

A Christian man may be beaten in business, he may fail to meet all demands, and then Satan yells, "Let him deliver him *now*." The poor man has been out of work for two or three months, tramping the streets of London until he has worn out his boots; he has been brought to his last penny. I think I hear the laugh of the Prince of Darkness as he cries, "Let him deliver him *now*." Or else the believer is very ill in body, and low in spirit, and then Satan howls, "Let him deliver him *now*." Some of us have been in very trying positions. We were moved with indignation because of deadly error, and we spoke plainly, but men refused to hear. Those we relied upon deserted us; good men sought their own ease and would not march with us, and we had to bear testimony for despised truth alone, until we were ourselves despised. Then the adversary shouted, "Let him deliver him *now*." Be it so! We do not refuse the test. Our God whom we serve will deliver us. We will not bow down to modern thought nor worship the image which human wisdom has set up. Our God is God both of hills and of valleys. He will not fail his servants, albeit that for a while he forbears that he may try their faith. We dare accept the test, and say, "Let him deliver us *now*."

Beloved friends, we need not be afraid of this taunt if it is brought by adversaries; for, after all, no test will come to us apart from any malice, for *it is inevitable*. All the faith you have will be tried. I can see you heaping it up. How rich you are! What a pile of faith! Friend, you are almost perfect! Open the furnace door and put the heap in. Do you shrink? See how it shrivels! Is there anything left? Bring hither a magnifying glass. Is this all that is left? Yes, this is all that remains of the heap. You say, "I trusted in God." Yes, but you had reason to cry, "Lord, help my unbelief." Brethren, we have not a tithe of the faith we think we have. But whether or not, all our faith must be tested. God builds no ships but what he sends to sea. In living, in losing, in working, in weeping, in suffering, or in striving, God will find a fitting crucible for every single grain of the precious faith which he has given us. Then he will come to us and say—You trusted in God that he would deliver you, and you shall be delivered now. How you will open your eyes as you see the Lord's hand of deliverance! What a man of wonders you will be when you tell in your riper years to the younger people how the Lord delivered you! Why, there are some Christians I know of who, like the ancient mariner, could detain even a wedding guest with their stories of God's wonders on the deep.

Yes, the test will come again and again. May the gibes of adversaries only make us ready for the sterner ordeals of the judgment to come. O my dear friends, examine your religion. You have a great deal of it, some of you; but what of its quality? Can your religion stand the test of poverty, and scandal, and scorn? Can it stand the test of scientific sarcasm and learned contempt? Will your religion stand the test of long sickness of body and depression of spirit caused by weakness? What are you doing amid the common trials of life? What will you do in the swellings of Jordan? Examine well your faith, since all hangs there. Some of us who have lain for weeks together, peering through the thin veil which parts us from the unseen, have been made to feel that nothing will suffice us but a promise which will answer the taunt, "Let him deliver us *now*."

III. I shall finish, in the third place, dear friends, by noticing The Answer to the test. God does deliver those who trust in him. God's interposition for the faithful is not a dream, but a substantial

reality. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." All history proves the faithfulness of God. Those who trust God have been in all sorts of troubles; but they have always been delivered. They have been bereaved. What a horrible bereavement was that which fell to the lot of Aaron, when his two sons were struck dead for their profanity in the presence of God! "And Aaron held his peace"! What grace was there! Thus will the Lord sustain you also should he take away the desire of your eyes with a stroke. Grave after grave has the good man visited till it seemed that his whole race was buried, and yet his heart has not been broken; but he has bowed his soul before the will of the ever-blessed One. Thus has the Lord delivered his afflicted one by sustaining him. In other ways the bush has burned, and yet has not been consumed. Remember the multiplied and multiform trials of Job. Yet God sustained him to the end so that he did not charge God foolishly, but held fast his faith in the Most High. If ever you are called to the afflictions of Job you will also be called to the sustaining grace of Job. Some of God's servants have been defeated in their testimony. They have borne faithful witness for God, but they have been rejected of men. It has been their lot, like Cassandra, to prophesy the truth, but not to be believed. Such was Jeremiah, who was born to a heritage of scorn from those whose benefit he sought. Yet he was delivered. He shrank not from being faithful. His courage could not be silenced. By integrity he was delivered.

Godly men have been despised and misrepresented, and yet have been delivered. Remember David and his envious brethren, David and the malignant Saul, David when his men spake of stoning him. Yet he took off the giant's head; yet he came to the throne; yet the Lord built him a house.

Some of God's servants have been bitterly persecuted, but God has delivered them. Daniel came forth from the lions' den, and the three holy children from the midst of the burning fiery furnace. These are only one or two out of millions who trusted God and he delivered them. Out of all manner of ill the Lord delivered them. God brought this crowd of witnesses through all their trials unto his throne, where they rest with Jesus, and share the triumph of their Master at this very day. O my timid brother, nothing has happened to you but what is common to men. Your battle is not different from the warfare of the rest of the saints; and as God has delivered them he will deliver you also, seeing you put your trust in him.

But *God's ways of deliverance are his own*. He does not deliver according to the translation put upon "deliverance" by the ribald throng. He does not deliver according to the interpretation put upon "deliverance" by our shrinking flesh and blood. He delivers, but it is in his own way. Let me remark that, *if God delivers you and me in the same way as he delivered his own Son, we can have no cause of complaint*. If the deliverance which he vouchsafed to us is of the same kind as that which he vouchsafed to the Only Begotten, we may well be content. Well, what kind of a deliverance was that? Did the Father tear up the cross from the earth? Did he proceed to draw out the nails from the sacred hands and feet of his dear Son? Did he set him down upon that "green hill far away, beyond the city wall," and place in his hand a sword of fire with which to smite his adversaries? Did he bid the earth open and swallow up all his foes? No; nothing of the kind. Jehovah did not interpose to spare his Son a single pang; but he let him die. He let him be taken as a dead man down from the cross and laid in a tomb. Jesus went through with his suffering to the bitter end. O brothers and sisters, this may be God's way of delivering us. We have trusted in God that he would deliver us; and his rendering of his promise is, that he will enable us to go through with it; we shall suffer to the last, and triumph in so doing.

Yet God's way of delivering those who trust in him is *always the best way*. If the Father had taken his Son down from the cross, what would have been the result? Redemption unaccomplished, salvation work undone, and Jesus returning with his life-work unfinished. This would not have been deliverance, but defeat. It was much better for our Lord Jesus to die. Now he has paid the ransom for his elect, and having accomplished the great purpose of atonement, he has slept a while in the heart of the earth, and now has ascended to his throne in the endless glories of heaven. It was deliverance of the fullest kind; for from the pangs of his death has come the joy of life to his redeemed. It is not God's will that every mountain should be levelled, but that we should be the stronger for climbing the Hill Difficulty. God will deliver; he must deliver, but he will do it in our cases, as in the case of our Lord, in the best possible manner.

Anyhow, he will deliver his chosen: the taunt of the adversary shall not cause our God to forget or forego his people. I know that the Lord will no more fail me than any other of his servants. He will not leave a faithful witness to his adversaries. "I know that my Avenger liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." Is this also your confidence? Then do not sit down in sorrow, and act as though you despaired. Quit yourselves like men. Be strong, fear not. Cast yourselves on the love that never changeth and never fainteth, and the Lord will answer all the revilings of Rabshakeh, and the blusterings of Sennacherib.

There are times when we may use this text to our comfort. "Let him deliver him now," saith the text, "if he will have him." You, dear friends, who have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ before, how I wish you could try him now! You feel this morning full of sin, and full of need. Come, then, and trust the Saviour *now*. See whether he will not save you *now*. Is there one day in the year in which Jesus cannot save a sinner? Come and see whether the 17th of June is that day. Try whether he will not deliver you *now* from the guilt, the penalty, the power of sin. Why not come? You have never, perhaps, been in the Tabernacle before, and when coming here this morning you did not think of finding the Saviour. Oh, that the Saviour may find you! Jesus Christ is a Saviour every day, all the year round. Whoever cometh to him shall find eternal life *now*. "Oh," you say, "I am in such an unfit state; I am in all the deshabelle of my carelessness and godlessness." Come along, man, come along, just as you are. Tarry not for improvement or arrangement, for both of these Jesus will give you; come and put your trust in the great Sacrifice for sin, and he will deliver you—deliver you *now*. Lord, save the sinner, *now*!

Others of you are the children of God, but you are in peculiar trouble. Well, what are you going to do? You have always trusted in God before; are you going to doubt him now? "O my dear sir, you do not know my distress; I am the most afflicted person in the Tabernacle." Be it so; but you trusted in the Lord the past twenty years, and I do not believe that you have seen any just cause for denying him your confidence now. Did you say that you have known him from your youth up? What! you seventy years of age? Then you are too near home to begin distrusting your heavenly Father. That will never do. You have been to sea, and have weathered many a storm in mid-ocean, and are you now going to be drowned in a ditch? Think not so. The Lord will deliver you even now. Do not let us suppose that we have come where boundless love and infinite wisdom cannot reach us. Do not fancy that you have leaped upon a ledge of rock so high as to be out of reach of the everlasting arm. If you had done so I would still cry—Throw yourself down into the arms of God, and trust that he will not let you be destroyed.

It may be that some of us are in trouble about the church and the faith. We have defended God's truth as well as we could, and spoken out against deadly error; but craft and numbers have been against us, and at present things seem to have gone wrong. The good are timid, and the evil are false. They say, "He trusted in God: let him deliver him now." Sirs, he will deliver us now. We will throw our soul once more into this battle, and see if the Lord does not vindicate his truth. If we have not spoken in God's name we are content to go back to the dust from whence we sprang; but if we have spoken God's truth we defy the whole confederacy to prevail against it.

Peradventure, I speak to some missionary, who is mourning over a time of great trial in a mission which is dear to his heart. Ah, dear friend! Christ intended that the gospel should repeat his own experience, and then should triumph like himself. The gospel lives by being killed, and conquers by defect. Cast it where you will, it always falls upon its feet. You need not be afraid of it under any trial. Just now, the wisdom of man is its worst foe, but the Lord will deliver it *now*. The gospel lives and reigns. Tell it out among the heathen, that the Lord reigneth from the tree, and from that tree of the curse he issues his supreme commands. The self-same day in which Jesus died, he took with him into his kingdom and his inmost paradise a thief who had hung at his side. He liveth and reigneth for ever and ever, and calleth to himself whomsoever he hath chosen. Let us drown the taunts of the adversary with our shouts of Hallelujah! The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah. Amen!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 119.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—196, 34, 37 (Part II).

Sown Among Thorns

A Sermon

(No. 2040)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, August 19th, 1888, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them"—Matthew 13:7.

"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful—Matthew 13:22.

WHEN that which comes of his sowing is unfruitful, the sower's work is wasted: he has spent his strength for nothing. Without fruit the sower's work would even seem to be insane, for he takes good wheat, throws it away, and loses it in the ground. Preaching is the most idle of occupations if the Word is not adapted to enter the heart, and produce good results. O my hearers, if you are not converted, I waste time and energy in standing here! People might well think it madness that one whole day in the week should be given up to hearing speeches—madness, indeed, it would be if nothing came of it to conscience and heart. If you do not bring forth fruit to holiness, and the end is not everlasting life, I would be better employed in breaking stones on the road-side than in preaching to you.

Fruit-bearing made the difference appear in the various soils upon which the sower scattered seed. You would not so certainly have known the quality if you had not seen the failure or success of the seed. We do not know your hearts until we see your bearing toward the Gospel. If it produces in you holiness and love to God and humanity, then we know that there is good soil in you; but if you are merely promising people, but not performing people, then we know that the ground of your heart is hard, or stony, or thorny. The Word of the Lord tries the hearts of the children of men, and in this it is as the fire which distinguishes between metal and dross. O my dear hearers, you undergo a test today! Peradventure you will be judging the preacher, but a greater than the preacher will be judging you, for the Word itself shall judge you. You sit here as a jury upon yourselves; your own condition will be brought clearly out by the way in which you receive or refuse the Gospel of God. If you bring forth fruit to the praise of God's grace, well; but if not, however you may seem to hear with attention and may retain what you hear in your memories, if no saving effect is produced upon your souls we shall know that the soil of your heart has not been prepared of the Lord and remains in its native barrenness.

What fruit have you born hitherto from all your hearing? May I venture to put the question to each one of you very pointedly? Some of you have been hearers from your childhood—are you any the better? What long lists of sermons you must have heard by now! Count over your Sundays; how many they have been! Think of the good men now in heaven to whom you once listened! Remember the tears that were drawn from you by their discourses! If you are not saved yet, will you ever be saved? If you are not holy yet, will you ever be holy? Why has the Lord spent so much on one who makes no return? To what purpose is this waste? Surely you will have much to answer for in that great day when the servants of God shall give in their accounts, and shall have no joy

when they come to mention you. How will you excuse yourselves before God for having occasioned them so much disappointment?

At this time I will only deal with one class of you. I will not speak to those of you who hear the Word, and retain none of it because of the hardness of your hearts; such are the wayside hearers. Neither will I address myself to those who receive the truth with sudden enthusiasm, and as readily quit it when trial befalls them; such are the rocky-ground hearers. But I will deal with those of you who hear the Word attentively, and, in a sense, receive it into your hearts and understandings, so that the seed grows in you, though its fruit never comes to perfection. You are religious persons, and to all appearance you are under the influence of godliness. You exhibit plenty of leaf, but there is no corn in the ear, no substance in your Christianity. I cannot speak with any degree of physical vigor to you by reason of the infirmity under which I struggle; but what I do say to you is steeped in earnest desire that the Lord may bless it to you. An eloquent congregation will make any preacher eloquent: help me then this morning. If you will give me your ear, you will make up for my deficiency of tongue: especially if you give to God your hearts, He will bless His truth, however feebly I may utter it.

First, I desire to talk to you a little about *the seed* which you have received; secondly about *the thorns*; thirdly about *the result*.

I. First a little about THE SEED. Remember, first, that *it was the same seed in every case*. Yonder it has brought forth thirty-fold; it was the same seed which was lost upon you. In a still better case, the seed has brought forth a hundred-fold; it was precisely the same corn with which your field has been sown. The sower went to his master's granary for all his seed; how is it that in your case it is all lost? If there were two Gospels, we might expect two results without fault in the soil which failed. But with many of you to whom I speak there has been only one Gospel throughout the whole of your lives. You have been attending in this house of prayer, where we have never changed our seed, but have gone on sowing the one eternal truth of God. Many have brought forth fruit a hundred-fold from the seed which has been scattered broadcast from this platform. They heard no more than you have heard, but how much better they treated it than you have done! I want you to consider this. How covered with briars and thorns must your mind be that the Gospel which converted your sister or friend never touched you! Though you may be nominally a believer in the Word of God, it has never so affected you as to make you gracious and holy. You are still a hearer only. How is this? The fault is not in the seed, for it is the same which has been so useful to others.

You have heard the Gospel with *pleasure*. "Heard it!" You say, "I heard it when a little child." Your mother brought you to the house of God in her arms. You have heard it and still hear it, though it is rather like an old song to you: but is this to be all? I am very grateful that you do hear the Gospel, for I hope that one of these days God may cause it to grow in you and yield fruit. But still a grave responsibility is upon you. Think how favored you have been! How will you answer for this privilege if it is neglected and rendered useless by that neglect? Dear hearers, if we lived in the heart of Africa and we died without believing in a Christ of whom we had not heard, we could not be blamed for that. But here we are in the heart of London where the Gospel is preached in all our streets, and our blood will be on our own heads if we perish. Do you mean to go down to hell? Are you so desperate that you will go there wearing the garb of Christians? If you do persist ruining your souls, my eyes shall follow you with tears; and when I cannot warn you any longer, I will weep in secret places because of your perversity.

Those described in my text were not only hearers, but in a measure *they accepted the good Word*. The seed fell not only on this ground, but into it, so that it began to grow. Of you it is true that you do not refuse the Gospel, or raise disputes concerning it. I am glad that you have no difficulties about the inspiration of Scripture, or the Deity of our Lord, or the fact of His atonement. You do not befog yourselves with "modern thought," but you avow your belief in the old, old Gospel. So far so good; but what shall I make of the strange fact that your acceptance of the truth has no effect upon you? It is a very lamentable case, is it not, that a person should believe the Gospel to be true, and yet should live as if it were a lie? If it is the truth, why do you not yield obedience to it? The person knows that there is an atonement for sin, but he has never confessed his sin and accepted the great sacrifice. Those great truths, which circle about the Cross like a coronet of stars, he has seen their beauty and enjoyed their brilliance, but he has never allowed their light to enter his heart and find a reflection in his moral character. This is evil, only evil. If you believe the truth, what do you more than the Devil? No, you are behind him, for he believes, *and trembles*, and you have not gone so far as the trembling. It should be so, that every great truth which is believed should influence the mind, sway the thoughts, and mold the life. This is the natural fruitage of great spiritual truth. The doctrine of grace, when it takes possession of the mind and governs the heart, produces the purest results; but if it is held in unrighteousness, it is a curse rather than a blessing to have a head knowledge. Is it not a dreadful thing to believe God's revelation without receiving God's Spirit? This is to accept a well, but never to drink of the water; to accept corn in the barn, and yet die of hunger. God have mercy upon the possessors of a dead faith!

The seed sown among thorns *lived and continued to grow*. And in many people's minds the Gospel of divine truth is growing after a fashion: they understand it better, can defend it more valorously, and speak of it more fluently. Moreover, it does influence them in some form and degree, for gross vices are forsaken. They are decent imitations of believers: you can see the shape of an ear: the stalk has struggled up through the thorns until you can see its head, and you are led to expect corn. But go to that apparent wheat-ear, and feel it: there are the sheaths but there is nothing in them; you have all the makings of an ear of wheat, but it will yield no grain. I would speak to those before me who, perhaps, have been baptized and are members of the church; I want to ask of them a question or two. Do you not think that there is a great deal of empty profession nowadays? Do you not think that many have a name to live and are dead? "Yes," say you, "I know a neighbor whom I judge to be in that condition." May not another neighbor judge the same of you? Would it not be well to raise the question about yourself? Have you really believed in the Lord Jesus? Are you truly converted from sin and self? Turn that sharp eye of yours homeward for a while. Examine your own actions, and judge your condition by them. Put yourself into the crucible. O my God, what if I should be a preacher to others, and should be myself a castaway! Will not every deacon and elder, and every individual church member, speak to himself after the same fashion. You will go to your Sunday school class this afternoon; will you be teaching the children what you do not know? You mean to go to a meeting this evening and talk to others about conversion; will you be exhorting them to that which you have never yourself experienced? Will it be so? You do not need fine preaching, but you do need probing in the conscience. A thorough examination will do the healthy no harm, and it may bless the sick. "Lord, let me know the worst of my case," is one of my frequent prayers, and I suggest it to you.

So much then about the seed: it was good seed, it was sown, it was received by the soil, it grew and promised well, but yet in the end it was unfruitful. No doubt multitudes, who receive Christianity,

become regular attendants at our place of worship, and are honest in their moral character; but Christ is not all in all to them. He holds a very secondary place in their affections. Their wheat is overshadowed with a thicket of thorns, and is so choked that it comes to nothing. Their religion is buried beneath their worldliness. Sad will their end be. God in mercy save us from such a doom!

II. But now, secondly, I would speak a little about THE THORNS. They are by Matthew described as "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches." Luke adds, "and pleasures of this life," and Mark still further mentions, "the lusts of other things." I suppose that the sower did not see any thorns when he threw the handful of corn; they had all been cut down level with the surface. He probably hoped that it was all good ground, and therefore he sowed it little suspecting that the thorns were in possession.

Note well that *thorns are natural to the soil*. Since the fall these are the firstborn children of the ground. Any evil which hinders religion is not at all an extraordinary thing—it is what we ought to expect among fallen human beings. Grace is an exotic; thorns are indigenous. Sin is very much at home in the human heart and, like an ill weed, it grows apace. If you wish to go to heaven, I might take a little time to show you the way, and I would need to stir you up to diligence; but if you must go to hell—well, "easy is the way to destruction"—it is only a little matter of neglect. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Evil things are easy things: for they are natural to our fallen nature. Right things are rare flowers that need cultivation. If any of you are being injured by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, I am not astonished; it is natural that it should be so. Therefore, be on your guard against these mischiefs. I pray you say to yourself, "Come, there is something in this man's talk. He is very slow and dull, but still there is something in what he says. I may, after all, be tolerating those thorns in my heart which will kill the good seed, for I am of like passions and infirmities with other people." I beseech you look to yourselves, that you be not deceived at the last.

The thorns were already established in the soil. They were not only the natural inhabitants of the soil, but they were rooted and fixed in it. Our sins within us claim the freehold of our faculties, and they will not give it up if they can help it. They will not give way to the Holy Spirit, or to the new life, or to the influences of divine grace, without a desperate struggle. The roots of sin run through and through our nature, grasp it with wonderful force, and keep up their grasp with marvelous tenacity. O my dear hearer, whoever you may be, you are a fallen creature! If you were the Pope himself, or the President of the United States, or the Queen of England, it would be true of you that you were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and your unregenerate heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The established church of the town of Mansoul has the Devil for its archbishop. Sin has enclasped our nature as a boa constrictor encircles its victim, and when it has maintained its hold for twenty, forty, or sixty years, I hope you are not so foolish as to think that holy things will easily get the mastery. Our evil nature is radically conservative, and it will endeavor to crush out every attempt at a revolution by which the grace of God should reign through righteousness. Wherefore, watch and pray, lest temptation choke that which is good in you. Watch earnestly, for grace is a tender plant in a foreign soil, in an uncongenial clime, while sin is in its own element, and is strongly rooted in the soil.

Do you know why so many professing Christians are like the thorny ground? It is because processes have been omitted which would have gone far to alter the condition of things. It was the husbandman's business to uproot the thorns, or burn them on the spot. Years ago when people were converted, there used to be such a thing as conviction of sin. The great subsoil plow of soul-anguish

was used to tear deep into the soul. Fire also burned in the mind with exceeding heat: as people saw sin and felt its dreadful results, the love of it was burned out of them. But now we are dinned with braggings about rapid salvations. As for myself, I believe in instantaneous conversions, and I am glad to see them; but I am still more glad when I see a thorough work of grace, a deep sense of sin, and an effectual wounding by the law. We shall never get rid of thorns with plows that scratch the surface. Those fields grow the best corn which are best plowed. Converts are likely to endure when the thorns cannot spring up because they have been plowed up. Dear hearer, are you undergoing today a very severe conviction of sin? Thank God for it. Are you in awful trouble and anguish? Do not think that a calamity has happened to you. May God Himself continue to plow you, and then sow you, and make sure work in you for years to come! So you see these thorns were natives, and old-established natives, and it would have been well had they been cut up.

The thorns were bound to grow. There is an awful vitality in evil. First the thorns sent up a few tiny shoots. These shoots branched out, and more and more came to keep them company, until the wheat stood as a lonely thing in a thicket of briars, and was more and more overtopped and shadowed by them. The thorns aspired to the mastery, and they soon obtained it; that done, they set to work to destroy the wheat. They blocked it up, crowded it out, and some of the thorn shoots twisted around it, and held the wheat by the neck until it was choked.

The thorns sucked away all the nutriment from the wheat, and it was starved, for there is only a certain quantity of nourishment in the soil, and if the thorns have it, the wheat must go without it. There is only a certain amount of thought and energy in a person; and if the world gets it, Christ cannot have it. If our thoughts run upon care and pleasure, they cannot be eager about true religion: is not that clear? That is the way in which those thorns served the wheat; they starved it by devouring its food, and they choked it by keeping off the air and sun; the poor thing became shriveled and weak, and quite unable to produce the grain which the sower expected of it. So it is with many professing Christians. They are at first worldly, but not so very worldly. They are fairly religious, though by no means too zealous. They seek the pleasures of the world, but by no means quite so much as others we could name. But very soon the thorns grow, and it becomes doubtful which will win, sin or grace, the world or Christ. Two masters there cannot be, and in this case it is especially impossible since neither of the contending powers will brook a rival. Sin has sprung from a royal though evil stock, and if it be in the heart, it will struggle for the throne. So it came to pass that the tares, being tolerated, choked the good seed.

Let me describe these thorns a little. Putting together Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find that there were four sorts of thorns. The first is called "*the care of this world.*" This assuredly comes to the poor; they are apt to grow anxious and mistrustful about temporal things. "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" This trinity of doleful questions much afflicts many. But anxiety comes to rich people also. Care dwells with wealth as well as with poverty. "How shall I get more? How shall I lay it up? How shall I still increase it?"—and so on. It is "the care of the age" which we are most warned against. Each age has its own special fret. It is not a care for God—that is not the care of any age; but the care of the age is some vanity or another, and as a standing thing it is the ambition to keep up with your fellows, to be respectable, and to keep up appearances. This is the care which eats as does a canker in the case of many. Grim care turns many a black hair white, and furrows many a brow. If you let care grow in your soul, it will choke up your religion: you cannot care for God and for mammon too. "We must have care," says one. There is a care which is proper, and there is an anxiety which is improper. That is proper

care which you can cast upon God—"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." That is an improper care which you dare not take to God but have to bear yourself. Take heed of anxiety; it will eat the heart out of your religion.

There were others who felt "*the deceitfulness of riches.*" Our Lord does not say "riches," but "the deceitfulness of riches." The two things grow together: riches are evermore deceitful. They deceive people in the getting of them, for people judge matters very unfairly when a prospect of gain is before them. The jingle of the charming guinea, or of "the almighty dollar," makes a world of difference to the ear when it is hearing a case. People cannot afford to lose by integrity and so they take the doubtful way, and either sail near the wind or speculate until it amounts to gambling. They would not endure the idea of such conduct were it not that the hope of gain deceives them. Our line of conduct ought never to be ruled by gain or loss. Do right if the heavens fall. Do no wrong, even though a kingdom should be its reward. People turn to Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations," a wonderful book, and there they find certain laws which I believe to be as fixed and unalterable as the laws of gravitation; led on by the deceitfulness of riches, people make these laws into an excuse for grinding the faces of the poor. They might as well take people to the top of a rock, fling them down, and dash them to pieces, and then cry out, "This is the natural result of the law of gravitation." Of course, the law of gravitation operates remorselessly, and so will the law of supply and demand. We must not use either of these laws as a cover for cruelty to the poor and needy, yet many do so through "the deceitfulness of riches."

Riches are very deceitful when they are gained, for they breed in men and women many vices which they do not themselves suspect. One man is purse-proud, but he thinks he is humble. He is a self-made man and worships him that made him. Is it not natural that a person should worship his maker? In his heart he thinks: "I am somebody. I came up to London with half-a-crown in my pocket, and now I could buy a whole street!" People ought to respect someone of that kind, ought they not, even though he may have made his money by very queer practices? It little matters how you make money nowadays; only get it, and you will have plenty of admirers and the deceitfulness of riches will enable you to admire yourself. With pride comes a desire for wealthy society and vain company, and thus again religion receives severe injury. There is apt to grow up in the mind an idolatry of this world and its treasures. "I don't love money," says one. "You know it is not money that is the root of all evil, but the love of it." Just so; but are you sure that you do not love it? Your thoughts run a good deal after it. You hug it rather closely and you find it hard to part with it. I will not accuse you, but I would have you awake to the fact that riches worm themselves into a person's heart before he is well aware of it.

You may perceive the deceitfulness of riches if you note the excuses which people make for getting so much and withholding it from the cause of God. "They intend to do a great deal of good with it." Did you hear the Devil laugh? I am not speaking of many dear people in this place who are doing a great deal of good with their means, but I am speaking of those who are simply living to accumulate wealth, and who say that they will one day do a great deal of good with it. They say so. Will it ever be more than saying? I fear that in this thing many rich people deceive themselves. They go on accumulating the means but never using them; making bricks, but never building. All they will get with it will be a corner in "The Illustrated London News" to say that they died worth so much. O sirs, how can you be content thus to have your good things choked? Wherever this deceitfulness of riches is allowed the upper hand, it chokes the good seed. A person cannot be eager

to get, and eager to keep, and eager to increase, and eager to become a millionaire, and at the same time be a true servant of the Lord Jesus. As the body grows rich, the soul grows poor.

Luke tells us of another kind of weed, namely, "*the pleasures of this life.*" I am sure that these thorns play a dreadful part nowadays. I have nothing to say against recreation in its proper place. Certain forms of recreation are needful and useful; but it is a wretched thing when amusement becomes a vocation. Amusement should be used to do us good "like a medicine"; it must never be used as the food of the individual. From early morning until late at night some spend their time in a round of frivolities, or else their very work is simply carried on to furnish them funds for their pleasures. This is vicious. Many have had all holy thoughts and gracious resolutions stamped out by perpetual trifling. Pleasure, so called, is the murderer of thought. This is the age of excessive amusement. Everybody craves for it, like a babe for its rattle. In the more sober years of our fathers, men and women had something better to live for than silly sports. The thorns are choking the age.

Mark adds, "*and the lusts of other things.*" I will not enumerate all those other things, but all things except the things of Christ and of the Father are "other things." If anybody spends his life on any object, however good, short of the glory of God, the good seed is choked by the inferior object. One person is eminently scientific, and he will do well if his science is used for holy purposes, but it can be used to choke the seed. Another person is a great proficient in the arts, and he does well if the arts are used as a mule for Christ to ride upon, but if art is to ride upon Christ, then it is ill enough. I met with a clergyman many years ago who was going a long distance to find a new beetle. He was a great entomologist, and I did not blame him for it, for to a thoughtful person entomology may yield many profitable lessons. But if he neglected his preaching to catch insects, then I do not wonder that a parishioner would wish that the beetles would nibble his old sermons, for they were very stale. I call it choking the seed when any inferior pursuit becomes the master of our minds, and the cause of God and truth takes a secondary place. The seed is choked in our souls whenever Christ is not our all in all. You see my drift: be it what it may—gain, glory, study, pleasure—all these may be briars that will choke the seed.

Mr. Jay was never more pleased than when at Bristol he had a note sent up to him which ran as follows: "A young man, who is prospering in business, begs the prayers of God's people that prosperity may not be a snare to him." Take care that you look thus upon your prosperity. My dear friend Dr. Taylor, of New York, speaks of some Christians nowadays as having a "butterfly Christianity." When time, and strength, and thought, and talent are all spent upon mere amusement, what else are men and women but mere butterflies? "Society" is just a mass of idle people keeping each other in countenance. O dear hearers, surely we did not come into this world to play away our days! I do not think we came into this world either to slave ourselves to death, or to rust away in laziness. We have come here as a man enters into the porch that he may afterward enter the house. This life is the doorway to the palace of heaven. Pass through it in such style that you may enter before the King with holy joy. If you give your minds and thoughts to these passing things, be they what they may, you will ruin your souls, for the good seed cannot grow.

III. So I close in the last place by noticing THE RESULT. The seed was unfruitful.

These briars and thorns could not pull the seed up, or throw it away. It remained where it was, but they choked it. So it may be that your business, your cares, your pleasures have not torn up your religion by the roots—it is there still, such as it is. But these things suffocate your better feelings. Someone that is choked is not good for much. If a thief gets into his house, and he desires to defend his property, what can he do while he is choked? He must wait until he gets his breath

again. What an amount of choked religion we have around us! It may be alive. I do not know whether it is or not; but it looks very black in the face. God save you from having your religion choked!

I have already told you it was drained of all its sustenance. Look at many Christians; I call them Christians for they call themselves so. A boy in the streets, selling mince pies, kept crying, "Hot mince pies!" A person bought one of them, and found it quite cold. "Boy," said he, why did you call these pies hot?" "That's the name they go by, sir," said the boy. So there are plenty of people that are called Christians, but they are not Christians—that's the name they go by; but all the substance is drained out of them by other matters. You see the shape of a Christian, the make of a Christian, and some of the talk of a Christian, but the fruit of a Christian is not there. That is the result of the choking by the thorns of care, riches, pleasure, and worldliness in general.

What life there was in the wheat was very sickly. Let me remind certain persons that their spiritual lives are growing weak at this time. Morning prayer this morning, how long did it take? Do not grow red in the face. I will say no more about it. You are not coming out tonight, are you? Half a Sunday is enough worship for you. Would you not like to live in some country place where you did not need to go out to a place of worship even once? Bible reading, how much do you do of that? Family prayer, is that a delight to you? Why, numbers of so-called Christians have given up family religion altogether. How about week-day services? You are not often at a prayer-meeting. No, the distance is too great! Thursday night service? "Well, well, you see I might come, but there happens to be a lawn tennis party that night." Will you come in the winter'? "Yes, I would, but then a friend drops in, and we have an evening at bagatelle." How many there are in this condition! I am not going to judge them, but I remember that an eminent minister used to say, "When weekday services are forsaken, farewell to the life of godliness." Such people never seem to bathe in their religion, but they give themselves a wetting with the end of the towel; thus they try to look decent, but they are not inwardly cleansed.

As to confessing Christ before men and women, many fall altogether. If you were pushed into a corner, and were asked if you are a Christian, you would say, "Well, I do go to a place of worship," but you are by no means anxious to own the soft impeachment. Our Salvation Army friends are not ashamed of their religion; why should you be? Our Quaker friends used to wear broad brims, but they are very properly giving up their peculiar garb. I hope it is not to be to you an indication that you may conceal your religion and be as much as possible like the world. Do you hope to be soldiers and yet never wear your regimentals? This is one of the marks of feeble religion.

When it comes to defending the Gospel, where do you see it in this age? I hoped that many would be found among Baptists who would care for the truth; but now I come to the conclusion that it is with many, as with the showman when asked which was Wellington, and which was Bonaparte: "Whichever you please, my little dears. Pay your money, and take your choice!" Free will or free grace, human merit or Christ's atonement, it does not matter now. New theology or old theology, human speculation or divine revelation—who minds? What do they care whether God's truth stands or the Devil's lies? I am weary of these drivellers! The thorns have choked the seed in the pulpits and in the churches as well as in private individuals. Oh, that God would return! Oh, that His Spirit would raise up among us people who believe indeed, and prove the power of their belief!

The fruit of much modern piety is *nil*. I sat down one day with three or four old Christian men. We had no sooner met than we began to speak of the providential dealings of God with His people.

We related instances of answers to prayer, and we spoke of the sovereign grace of God, and His faithfulness to His saints. When we had gone a little forward in the conversation, one remarked how he had enjoyed the talk. "Alas!" said he, "nobody talks about God now. His providence and His readiness to hear prayer are seldom mentioned now. The talk is all about the markets, and the weather, and Home Rule, and Mr. Gladstone, and Disestablishment, but little enough about the Lord Jesus Christ." That witness was true. In old times the Lord's people spoke often one to another, and the Lord stood at the window and listened:—"The Lord hearkened, and heard it." He liked their talk so well that He said He would print it—"A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." Where do you get experimental Christian talk now? The thorns choke holy communion upon the best things.

Fervent prayer! Mighty prayer! Where do you meet with it? Thank God, we have some brothers and sisters here whose prayers could unlock the windows of heaven, or shut them up; but it is not so with many. Go to the prayer-meetings of most of the churches. What poor things! Of course I find in country places that many drop the prayer-meeting during hay-time and harvest. In London they do not drop the prayer-meetings in summer because they are too small to need dropping. They take up the fragment of a prayer-meeting and mend with it the worn-out lecture, so that it becomes neither lecture nor prayer meeting. How can we expect a blessing when we are too lazy to ask for it? Is it not evidence of a dying religion when, to cover their carelessness about meeting for prayer, we even hear ministers doubting the value of prayer-meetings and calling them "religious expedients"?

Where do you meet with intense enjoyment of the things of God? The spiritual life is low when there is little delight in holy service. Oh, for the old Methodistic fire! Oh, to feel our hearts dance at the sound of Jesus' name! Oh, to flame up like beacon fires, and blaze toward heaven with holy ecstasy! It is a sorrowful day when religion goes abroad without wearing her ornaments of joy. When an army has left its flag behind, it has evidently given up all idea of victory.

If there is a declension in spiritual life, we cannot expect to see deeds of holy consecration. Oh, for men and women who bring their alabaster boxes to Jesus! I am glad when I hear this kind of lamentation. "My dear sir, I have not done for the Lord what I ought to have done. I have been a believer now for many years, but I have not given to His cause what I ought to have given; tell me what I can do." There are hopeful signs in such inquiries and therefore they are well, but it would be better to begin early and avoid such regrets.

I would put it to you, my dear hearer, have you been fruitful? Have you been fruitful with your wealth? Have you been fruitful with your talent? Have you been fruitful with your time? What are you doing for Jesus now? Salvation is not by doings, you are saved by grace, but if you are so saved, prove it by your devoted life. Consecrate yourself anew this day wholly to your Master's service. You are not your own, but bought with a price, and if you would not be like these thorn-choked seeds, live while you live, with all-consuming zeal.

"Well," says one, but there are the thorns." I know there are. They were here when our blessed Lord came among us, and they made Him a cruel crown. Are you going to grow more of them? May I urge you to give up cultivating thorns? They are useless; they come to no good. Whatever the pursuit is, short of the glory of God, it is a thorn and there is no use in it. It will in the end be painful to you as it was to your Lord. A thorn will tear your flesh, aye, tear your heart. Especially when you come to die will these thorns be in your pillow. Even if you die in the Lord, it will grieve your heart to think you did not live more to Jesus. If you live for these things, you will rue the day,

for they are like thorns, painful in the getting, painful in the keeping, and painful in the extraction. You who have had a thorn in your hand know what I mean. Worldly cares come with pain, they stay with pain, and they go with pain.

Still, there is a use for thorns. What is that use? First, if you have thorns about you today, make a child's use of them. What does a child do? If he gets a thorn in his finger, he looks at it, and cries. How it smarts! Then he runs off to his mother. That is one of the sweet uses of his adversity, it admits him to his mother at once. She might say, "What are you coming in for? Run about the garden." But he cries, "Please, mother, I've got a thorn in my finger." This is quite enough argument to secure him the best attention of the queen of the house. See how tenderly she takes out the little dagger! Let your cares drive you to God. I shall not mind if you have many of them if each one leads you to prayer. If every fret makes you lean more on the Beloved, it will be a benefit. Thus make good use of the thorns.

Another service to which thorns may be put is to make a hedge of them, to keep the goats of worldly pleasure from eating the young shoots of your graces. Let the sorrows of life keep off temptations which else might do you serious mischief.

May we meet in heaven! Oh, may we all meet in heaven! What a congregation I have addressed this morning! I feel overawed as I look at you. From the ends of the earth have many of you come. The Lord bless you! Strangers are here in vast numbers, for the most of our regular hearers are at the seaside. I may never see you again on earth. May we all meet in heaven, where thorns will never grow! May we be gathered by the angels in that day when the Lord shall say, "Gather the wheat into my barn"! Amen. So let it be.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew 13:1-23.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—916, 643, 30.

No Compromise

A Sermon

(No. 2047)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, October 7th, 1888, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again."—Genesis 24:5-8.

Genesis is both the book of beginnings and the book of dispensations. You know what use Paul makes of Sarah and Hagar, of Esau and Jacob, and the like. Genesis is, all through, a book instructing the reader in the dispensations of God towards man. Paul saith, in a certain place, "which things are an allegory," by which he did not mean that they were not literal facts, but that, being literal facts, they might also be used instructively as an allegory. So may I say of this chapter. It records what actually was said and done; but at the same time, it bears within it allegorical instruction with regard to heavenly things. The true minister of Christ is like this Eleazar of Damascus; he is sent to find a wife for his Master's son. His great desire is, that many shall be presented unto Christ in the day of his appearing, as the bride, the Lamb's wife.

The faithful servant of Abraham, before he started, communed with his master; and this is a lesson to us, who go on our Lord's errands. Let us, before we engage in actual service, see the Master's face, talk with him, and tell to him any difficulties which occur to our minds. Before we get to work, let us know what we are at, and on what footing we stand. Let us hear from our Lord's own mouth what he expects us to do, and how far he will help us in the doing of it. I charge you, my fellow-servants, never to go forth to plead with men for God until you have first pleaded with God for men. Do not attempt to deliver a message which you have not first of all yourself received by his Holy Spirit. Come out of the chamber of fellowship with God into the pulpit of ministry among men, and there will be a freshness and a power about you which none shall be able to resist. Abraham's servant spoke and acted as one who felt bound to do exactly what his master bade him, and to say what his master told him; hence his one anxiety was to know the essence and measure of his commission. During his converse with his master he mentioned one little point about which there might be a hitch; and his master soon removed the difficulty from his mind. It is about that hitch, which has occurred lately on a very large scale, and has upset a good many of my Master's servants, that I am going to speak this morning: may God grant that it may be to the benefit of his church at large!

I. Beginning our sermon, we will ask you, first, to **THINK OF THE SERVANT'S JOYFUL BUT WEIGHTY ERRAND**. It was a joyful errand: the bells of marriage were ringing around him.

The marriage of the heir should be a joyful event. It was an honourable thing for the servant to be entrusted with the finding of a wife for his master's son. Yet it was every way a most responsible business, by no means easy of accomplishment. Blunders might very readily occur before he was aware of it; and he needed to have all his wits about him, and something more than his wits, too, for so delicate a matter. He had to journey far, over lands without track or road; he had to seek out a family which he did not know, and to find out of that family a woman whom he did not know, who nevertheless should be the right person to be the wife of his master's son: all this was a great service.

The work this man undertook was *a business upon which his master's heart was set*. Isaac was now forty years old, and had shown no sign of marrying. He was of a quiet, gentle spirit, and needed a more active spirit to urge him on. The death of Sarah had deprived him of the solace of his life, which he had found in his mother, and had, no doubt, made him desire tender companionship. Abraham himself was old, and well stricken in years; and he very naturally wished to see the promise beginning to be fulfilled, that in Isaac should his seed be called. Therefore, with great anxiety, which is indicated by his making his servant swear an oath of a most solemn kind, he gave him the commission to go to the old family abode in Mesopotamia, and seek for Isaac a bride from thence. Although that family was not all that could be desired, yet it was the best he knew of; and as some heavenly light lingered there, he hoped to find in that place the best wife for his son. The business was, however, a serious one which he committed to his servant. My brethren, this is nothing compared with the weight which hangs on the true minister of Christ. All the Great Father's heart is set on giving to Christ a church which shall be his beloved for ever. Jesus must not be alone: his church must be his dear companion. The Father would find a bride for the great Bridegroom, a recompense for the Redeemer, a solace for the Saviour: therefore he lays it upon all whom he calls to tell out the gospel, that we should seek souls for Jesus, and never rest till hearts are wedded to the Son of God. Oh, for grace to carry out this commission!

This message was the more weighty because of the person for whom the spouse was sought. Isaac was an extraordinary personage; indeed, to the servant he was unique. He was a man born according to promise, not after the flesh, but by the power of God; and you know how in Christ, and in all that are one with Christ, the life comes by the promise and the power of God, and springeth not of man. Isaac was himself the fulfillment of promise, and the heir of the promise. Infinitely glorious is our Lord Jesus as the Son of man! Who shall declare his generation? Where shall be found a helpmeet for him? a soul fit to be espoused unto him? Isaac had been sacrificed; he had been laid upon the altar, and although he did not actually die, his father's hand had unsheathed the knife wherewith to slay him. Abraham in spirit had offered up his son; and you know who he is of whom we preach, and for whom we preach, even Jesus, who has laid down his life a sacrifice for sinners. He has been presented as a whole burnt-offering unto God. Oh! by the wounds, and by the bloody sweat, I ask you where shall we find a heart fit to be wedded to him? How shall we find men and women who can worthily recompense love so amazing, so divine, as that of him who died the death of the cross? Isaac had also been, in a figure, raised from the dead. To his father he was "as good as dead," as said the apostle; and he was given back to him from the dead. But our blessed Lord has actually risen from an actual death, and stands before us this day as the Conqueror of death, and the Spoiler of the grave. Who shall be joined to this Conqueror? Who is fit to dwell in glory with this glorious One? One would have thought that every heart would aspire to such

happiness, and leap in prospect of such peerless honour, and that none would shrink back except through a sense of great unworthiness. Alas! it is not so, though so it ought to be.

What a weighty errand have we to fulfil to find those who shall be linked for ever in holy union with the Heir of the promise, even the sacrificed and risen One! Isaac was everything to Abraham. Abraham would have said to Isaac, "All that I have is thine." So is it true of our blessed Lord, whom he hath made Heir of all things; by whom also he made the worlds, that "it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." What a dignity will be put upon any of you who are married to Christ! To what a height of eminence will you be uplifted by becoming one with Jesus! O preacher, what a work hast thou to do to-day, to find out those to whom thou shalt give the bracelet, and upon whose face thou shalt hang the jewel! To whom shall I say, "Wilt thou give thy heart to my Lord! Wilt thou have Jesus to be thy confidence, thy salvation, thine all in all? Art thou willing to become his that he may be thine?"

Said I not truly that it was a joyful, but a weighty errand, when you think *what she must be to whom his master's son should be espoused?* She must, at least, be willing and beautiful. In the day of God's power, hearts are made willing. There can be no marriage to Jesus without a heart of love. Where shall we find this willing heart? Only where the grace of God has wrought it. Ah, then, I see how I may find beauty, too, among the sons of men! Marred as our nature is by sin, only the Holy Spirit can impart that beauty of holiness which will enable the Lord Jesus to see comeliness in his chosen. Alas! in our hearts there is an aversion to Christ, and an unwillingness to accept of him, and at the same time a terrible unfitness and unworthiness! The Spirit of God implants a love which is of heavenly origin, and renews the heart by a regeneration from above; and then we seek to be one with Jesus, but not till then. See, then, how our errand calls for the help of God himself.

Think what she will become who is to be married to Isaac? She is to be his delight; his loving friend and companion. She is to be partner of all his wealth; and specially is she to be a partaker in the great covenant promise, which was peculiarly entailed upon Abraham and his family. When a sinner comes to Christ, what does Christ make of him? His delight is in him: he communes with him; he hears his prayer, he accepts his praise; he works in him and with him, and glorifies himself in him. He makes the believing man joint-heir with himself of all that he has, and introduces him into the covenant treasure-house, wherein the riches and glory of God are stored up for his chosen. Ah, dear friends! it is a very small business in the esteem of some to preach the gospel; and yet, if God is with us, ours is more than angels' service. In a humble way you are telling of Jesus to your boys and girls in your classes; and some will despise you as "only Sunday-school teachers"; but your work has a spiritual weight about it unknown to conclaves of senators, and absent from the counsels of emperors. Upon what you say, death, and hell, and worlds unknown are hanging. You are working out the destinies of immortal spirits, turning souls from ruin to glory, from sin to holiness.

"Tis not a work of small import
Your loving care demands;
But what might fill an angel's heart,
And filled the Saviour's hands."

In carrying out his commission, *this servant must spare no exertion*. It would be required of him to journey to a great distance, having a general indication of direction, but not knowing the way. He must have divine guidance and protection. When he reached the place, he must exercise great common-sense, and at the same time a trustful dependence upon the goodness and wisdom

of God. It would be a wonder of wonders if he ever met the chosen woman, and only the Lord could bring it to pass. He had all the care and the faith required. We have read the story of how he journeyed, and prayed, and pleaded. We should have cried, "Who is sufficient for these things?" but we see that the Lord Jehovah made him sufficient, and his mission was happily carried out. How can we put ourselves into the right position to get at sinners, and win them for Jesus? How can we learn to speak the right words? How shall we suit our teaching to the condition of their hearts? How shall we adapt ourselves to their feelings, their prejudices, their sorrows, and their temptations? Brethren, we who preach the gospel continually may well cry, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." To seek for pearls at the bottom of the sea is child's play compared with seeking for souls in this wicked London. If God be not with us, we may look our eyes out, and wear our tongues away in vain. Only as the Almighty God shall lead, and guide, and influence, and inspire, can we perform our solemn trust; only by divine help shall we joyfully come back, bringing with us the chosen of the Lord. We are the Bridegroom's friends, and we rejoice greatly in his joy, but we sigh and cry till we have found the chosen hearts in whom he will delight, whom he shall raise to sit with him upon his throne.

II. Secondly, I would have you CONSIDER THE REASONABLE FEAR WHICH IS MENTIONED. Abraham's servant said, "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land." This is a very serious, grave, and common difficulty. If the woman be not willing, nothing can be done; force and fraud are out of the question; there must be a true will, or there can be no marriage in this instance. Here was the difficulty: here was a will to be dealt with. Ah, my brethren! this is our difficulty still. Let me describe this difficulty in detail as it appeared to the servant, and appears to us.

She may not believe my report, or be impressed by it. When I come to her, and tell her that I am sent by Abraham, she may look me in the face, and say, "There be many deceivers nowadays." If I tell her that my master's son is surpassingly beautiful and rich, and that he would fain take her to himself, she may answer, "Strange tales and romances are common in these days; but the prudent do not quit their homes." Brethren, in our case this is a sad fact. The great evangelical prophet cried of old, "Who hath believed our report?" We also cry in the same words. Men care not for the report of God's great love to the rebellious sons of men. They do not believe that the infinitely glorious Lord is seeking the love of poor, insignificant man, and to win it has laid down his life. Calvary, with its wealth of mercy, grief, love, and merit, is disregarded. Indeed, we tell a wonderful story, and it may well seem too good to be true; but it is sad indeed that the multitude of men go their ways after trifles, and count these grand realities to be but dreams. I am bowed down with dismay that my Lord's great love, which led him even to die for men, should hardly be thought worthy of your hearing, much less of your believing. Here is a heavenly marriage, and right royal nuptials placed within your reach; but with a sneer you turn aside, and prefer the witcheries of sin.

There was another difficulty: *she was expected to feel a love to one she had never seen.* She had only newly heard that there was such a person as Isaac, but yet she must love him enough to leave her kindred, and go to a distant land. This could only be because she recognized the will of Jehovah in the matter. Ah, my dear hearers! all that we tell you is concerning things not seen as yet; and here is our difficulty. You have eyes, and you want to see everything; you have hands, and you want to handle everything; but there is one whom you cannot see as yet, who has won our love because of what we believe concerning him. We can truly say of him, "Whom having not seen, we love: in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and

full of glory." I know that you answer our request thus: "You demand too much of us when you ask us to love a Christ we have never seen." I can only answer, "It is even so: we do ask more of you than we expect to receive." Unless God the Holy Ghost shall work a miracle of grace upon your hearts, you will not be persuaded by us to quit your old associations, and join yourselves to our beloved Lord. And yet, if you did come to him, and love him, he would more than content you; for you would find in him rest unto your souls, and a peace which passeth all understanding.

Abraham's servant may have thought: *She may refuse to make so great a change* as to quit Mesopotamia for Canaan. She had been born and bred away there in a settled country, and all her associations were with her father's house; and to marry Isaac she must tear herself away. So, too, you cannot have Jesus, and have the world too: you must break with sin to be joined to Jesus. You must come away from the licentious world, the fashionable world, the scientific world, and from the (so-called) religious world. If you become a Christian, you must quit old habits, old motives, old ambitions, old pleasures, old boasts, old modes of thought. All things must become new. You must leave the things you have loved, and seek many of those things which you have hitherto despised. There must come to you as great a change as if you had died, and were made over again. You answer, "Must I endure all this for One whom I have never seen, and for an inheritance on which I have never set my foot?" It is even so. Although I am grieved that you turn away, I am not in the least surprised, for it is not given to many to see him who is invisible, or to choose the strait and narrow way which leadeth unto life. The man or woman who will follow God's messenger to be married to so strange a Bridegroom is a rare bird.

Moreover, it might be a great difficulty to Rebekah, if she had had any difficulties at all, to think that *she must henceforth lead a pilgrim life*. She would quit house and farm for tent and gipsy life. Abraham and Isaac found no city to dwell in, but wandered from place to place, dwelling alone, sojourners with God. Their outward mode of life was typical of the way of faith, by which men live in the world, and are not of it. To all intents and purposes Abraham and Isaac were out of the world, and lived on its surface without lasting connection with it. They were the Lord's men, and the Lord was their possession. He set himself apart for them, and they were set apart for him. Rebekah might well have said, "That will never do for me. I cannot outlaw myself. I cannot quit the comforts of a settled abode to ramble over the fields wherever the flocks may require me to roam." It does not strike the most of mankind that it would be a good thing to be in the world, and yet not to be of it. They are no strangers in the world, they long to be admitted more fully into its "society." They are not aliens here with their treasures in heaven, they long to have a good round sum on earth, and find their heaven in enjoying it themselves, and enriching their families. Earthworms as they are, the earth contents them. If any man becomes unworldly, and makes spiritual things his one object, they despise him as a dreamy enthusiast. Many men think that the things of religion are merely meant to be read of, and to be preached about; but that to live for them would be to spend a dreamy, unpractical existence. Yet the spiritual is, after all, the only real: the material is in deepest truth the visionary and unsubstantial. Still, when people turn away because of the hardness of holy warfare, and the spirituality of the believing life, we are not astonished, for we hardly hoped it could be otherwise. Unless the Lord renews the heart, men will always prefer the bird-in-the-hand of this life to the bird-in-the-bush of the life to come.

Moreover, it might be that the woman *might not care for the covenant of promise*. If she had no regard for Jehovah and his revealed will, she was not likely to go with the man, and enter upon marriage with Isaac. He was the Heir of the promises, the inheritor of the covenant privileges which

the Lord by oath had promised. His chosen would become the mother of that chosen seed in whom God had ordained to bless the world throughout all the ages, even the Messiah, the seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head.

Peradventure the woman might not see the value of the covenant, nor appreciate the glory of the promise. The things we have to preach of, such as life everlasting, union with Christ, resurrection from the dead, reigning with him for ever and ever, seem to the dull hearts of men to be as idle tales. Tell them of a high interest for their money, of large estates to be had for a venture, or of honours to be readily gained, and inventions to be found out, they open all their eyes and their ears, for here is something worth knowing; but the things of God, eternal, immortal, boundless—these are of no importance to them. They could not be induced to go from Ur to Canaan for such trifles as eternal life, and heaven, and God.

So you see our difficulty. Many disbelieve altogether, and others cavil and object. A greater number will not even listen to our story; and of those who do listen, most are careless, and others dally with it, and postpone the serious consideration. Alas! we speak to unwilling ears.

III. In the third place, I would ENLARGE UPON HIS VERY NATURAL SUGGESTION. This prudent steward said, "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: *Must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?*" If she will not come to Isaac, shall Isaac go down to her? This is the suggestion of the present hour: if the world will not come to Jesus, shall Jesus tone down his teachings to the world? In other words, if the world will not rise to the church, shall not the church go down to the world? Instead of bidding men to be converted, and come out from among sinners, and be separate from them, let us join with the ungodly world, enter into union with it, and so pervade it with our influence by allowing it to influence us. Let us have a Christian world.

To this end let us revise our doctrines. Some are old-fashioned, grim, severe, unpopular; let us drop them out. Use the old phrases so as to please the obstinately orthodox, but give them new meanings so as to win philosophical infidels, who are prowling around. Pare off the edges of unpleasant truths, and moderate the dogmatic tone of infallible revelation: say that Abraham and Moses made mistakes, and that the books which have been so long had in reverence are full of errors. Undermine the old faith, and bring in the new doubt; for the times are altered, and the spirit of the age suggests the abandonment of everything that is too severely righteous, and too surely of God.

The deceitful adulteration of doctrine is attended by a falsification of experience. Men are now told that they were born good, or were made so by their infant baptism, and so that great sentence, "Ye must be born again," is deprived of its force. Repentance is ignored, faith is a drug in the market as compared with "honest doubt," and mourning for sin and communion with God are dispensed with, to make way for entertainments, and Socialism, and politics of varying shades. A new creature in Christ Jesus is looked upon as a sour invention of bigoted Puritans. It is true, with the same breath they extol Oliver Cromwell; but then 1888 is not 1648. What was good and great three hundred years ago is mere cant to-day. That is what "modern thought" is telling us; and under its guidance all religion is being toned down. Spiritual religion is despised, and a fashionable morality is set up in its place. Do yourself up tidily on Sunday; behave yourself; and above all, believe everything except what you read in the Bible, and you will be all right. Be fashionable, and think with those who profess to be scientific—this is the first and great commandment of the modern school; and

the second is like unto it—do not be singular, but be as worldly as your neighbours. Thus is Isaac going down into Padan-aram: thus is the church going down to the world.

Men seem to say—It is of no use going on in the old way, fetching out one here and another there from the great mass. We want a quicker way. To wait till people are born again, and become followers of Christ, is a long process: let us abolish the separation between the regenerate and unregenerate. Come into the church, all of you, converted or unconverted. You have good wishes and good resolutions; that will do: don't trouble about more. It is true you do not believe the gospel, but neither do we. You believe something or other. Come along; if you do not believe anything, no matter; your "honest doubt" is better by far than faith. "But," say you, "nobody talks so." Possibly they do not use the same words, but this is the real meaning of the present-day religion; this is the drift of the times. I can justify the broadest statement I have made by the action or by the speech of certain ministers, who are treacherously betraying our holy religion under pretence of adapting it to this progressive age. The new plan is to assimilate the church to the world, and so include a larger area within its bounds. By semi-dramatic performances they make houses of prayer to approximate to the theatre; they turn their services into musical displays, and their sermons into political harangues or philosophical essays—in fact, they exchange the temple for the theatre, and turn the ministers of God into actors, whose business it is to amuse men. Is it not so, that the Lord's-day is becoming more and more a day of recreation or of idleness, and the Lord's house either a joss-house full of idols, or a political club, where there is more enthusiasm for a party than zeal for God? Ah me! the hedges are broken down, the walls are levelled, and to many there is henceforth, no church except as a portion of the world, no God except as an unknowable force by which the laws of nature work.

This, then, is the proposal. In order to win the world, the Lord Jesus must conform himself, his people, and his Word to the world. I will not dwell any longer on so loathsome a proposal.

IV. In the fourth place, NOTICE HIS MASTER'S OUTSPOKEN, BELIEVING REPUDIATION OF THE PROPOSAL. He says, shortly and sharply, "*Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again.*" The Lord Jesus Christ heads that grand emigration party which has come right out from the world. Addressing his disciples, he says, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." We are not of the world by birth, not of the world in life, not of the world in object, not of the world in spirit, not of the world in any respect whatever. Jesus, and those who are in him, constitute a new race. The proposal to go back to the world is abhorrent to our best instincts; yea, deadly to our noblest life. A voice from heaven cries, "Bring not my son thither again." Let not the people whom the Lord brought up out of Egypt return to the house of bondage; but let their children come out, and be separate, and the Lord Jehovah will be a Father unto them.

Notice how Abraham states the question. In effect, he argues it thus: *this would be to forego the divine order.* "For," says Abraham, "the Lord God of heaven took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred." What, then, if he brought Abraham out, is Isaac to return? This cannot be. Hitherto the way of God with his church has been to sever a people from the world to be his elect—a people formed for himself, who shall show forth his praise. Beloved, God's plan is not altered. He will still go on calling those whom he did predestinate. Do not let us fly in the teeth of that fact, and suppose that we can save men on a more wholesale scale by ignoring the distinction between the dead in sin and the living in Zion. If God had meant to bless the family at Padan-aram by letting his chosen ones dwell among them, why did he call Abraham out at all? If Isaac may do good by dwelling there, why did Abraham leave? If there is no need of a separate church now, what

have we been at throughout all these ages? Has the martyr's blood been shed out of mere folly? Have confessors and reformers been mad when contending for doctrines which, it would seem, are of no great account? Brethren, there are two seeds—the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent—and the difference will be maintained even to the end; neither must we ignore the distinction to please men.

For Isaac to go down to Nahor's house for a wife *would be placing God second to a wife*. Abraham begins at once with a reference to Jehovah, "the God of heaven"; for Jehovah was everything to him, and to Isaac also. Isaac would never renounce his walk with the living God that he might find a wife. Yet this apostasy is common enough nowadays. Men and women who profess godliness will quit what they profess to believe in order to get richer wives or husbands for themselves or their children. This mercenary conduct is without excuse. "Better society" is the cry—meaning more wealth and fashion. To the true man God is first—yea, all in all; but God is placed at the fag-end, and everything else is put before him by the base professor. In the name of God I call upon you who are faithful to God and to his truth, to stand fast, whatever you lose, and turn not aside, whatever you might gain. Count the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. We want Abraham's spirit within us, and we shall have that when we have Abraham's faith.

Abraham felt that this would be *to renounce the covenant promise*. See how he puts it: "The God that took me from my father's house sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land." Are they, then, to leave the land, and go back to the place from which the Lord had called them? Brethren, we also are heirs of the promise of things not seen as yet. For the sake of this we walk by faith, and hence we become separate from those around us. We dwell among men as Abraham dwelt among the Canaanites; but we are of a distinct race: we are born with a new birth, live under different laws, and act from different motives. If we go back to the ways of worldlings, and are numbered with them, we have renounced the covenant of our God, the promise is no longer ours, and the eternal heritage is in other hands. Do you not know this? The moment the church says, "I will be as the world," she has doomed herself with the world. When the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took them wives of all which they chose, then the flood came, and swept them all away. So will it again happen should the world take the church into its arms: then shall come some overwhelming judgment, and, it may be, a deluge of devouring fire. The covenant promise and the covenant heritage are no longer ours if we go down to the world and quit our sojourning with the Lord.

Besides, dear friends, *no good can come of trying to conform to the world*. Suppose the servant's policy could have been adopted, and Isaac had gone down to Nahor's house, what would have been the motive? To spare Rebekah the pain of separating from her friends and the trouble of travelling. If those things could have kept her back, what would she have been worth to Isaac? The test of separation was wholesome, and by no means ought it to be omitted. She is a poor wife who would not take a journey to reach her husband. And all the converts that the church will ever make by softening down its doctrine, and by becoming worldly, will not be worth one bad farthing a gross. When we get them, the next question will be, "How can we get rid of them?" They would be of no earthly use to us. It swelled the number of Israelites when they came out of Egypt that a great number of the lower order of Egyptians came out with them. Yes, but that mixed multitude became the plague of Israel in the wilderness, and we read that "the mixt multitude fell a lusting." The Israelites were bad enough, but it was the mixed multitude that always led the way in murmuring.

Why is there such spiritual death to-day? Why is false doctrine so rampant in the churches? It is because we have ungodly people in the church and in the ministry. Eagerness for numbers, and especially eagerness to include respectable people, has adulterated many churches, and made them lax in doctrine and practice, and fond of silly amusements. These are the people who despise a prayer-meeting, but rush to see "living waxworks" in their schoolrooms. God save us from converts who are made by lowering the standard, and tarnishing the spiritual glory of the church! No, no; if Isaac is to have a wife worthy of him, she will come away from Laban and the rest, and she will not mind a journey on camel-back. True converts are never daunted by truth or holiness—these, in fact, are the things which charm them.

Besides, Abraham felt that *there could be no reason for taking Isaac down there*, for the Lord would assuredly find him a wife. Abraham said, "He shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence." Are you afraid that preaching the gospel will not win souls? Are you despondent as to success in God's way? Is this why you pine for clever oratory? Is this why you must have music, and architecture, and flowers, and millinery? After all, is it by might and by power, and not by the Spirit of God? It is even so in the opinion of many. Brethren beloved, there are many things which I might allow to other worshippers which I have denied myself in conducting the worship of this congregation. I have long worked out before your very eyes the experiment of the unaided attractiveness of the gospel of Jesus. Our service is severely plain. No man ever comes hither to gratify his eye with art, or his ear with music. I have set before you, these many years, nothing but Christ crucified, and the simplicity of the gospel; yet where will you find such a crowd as this gathered together this morning? Where will you find such a multitude as this meeting, Sabbath after Sabbath, for five-and-thirty years? I have shown you nothing but the cross, the cross without the flowers of oratory, the cross without the blue lights of superstition or excitement, the cross without diamonds of ecclesiastical rank, the cross without the buttresses of a boastful science. It is abundantly sufficient to attract men first to itself, and afterwards to eternal life! In this house we have proved successfully, these many years, this great truth, that the gospel plainly preached will gain an audience, convert sinners, and build up and sustain a church. We beseech the people of God to mark that there is no need to try doubtful expedients and questionable methods. God will save by the gospel still: only let it be the gospel in its purity. This grand old sword will cleave a man's chine, and split a rock in halves. How is it that it does so little of its old conquering work? I will tell you. Do you see this scabbard of artistic work, so wonderfully elaborated? Full many keep the sword in this scabbard, and therefore its edge never gets to its work. Pull off that scabbard. Fling that fine sheath to Hades, and then see how, in the Lord's hands, that glorious two-handed sword will mow down fields of men as mowers level the grass with their scythes. There is no need to go down to Egypt for help. To invite the devil to help Christ is shameful. Please God, we shall see prosperity yet, when the church of God is resolved never to seek it except in God's own way.

V. And now, fifthly, observe HIS RIGHTEOUS ABSOLUTION OF HIS SERVANT. "If the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again."

When we lie a-dying, if we have faithfully preached the gospel, our conscience will not accuse us for having kept closely to it: we shall not mourn that we did not play the fool or the politician in order to increase our congregation. Oh, no! our Master will give us full absolution, even if few be gathered in, so long as we have been true to him. "If the woman will not be willing to follow

thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath; only bring not my son thither again." Do not try the dodges which debase religion. Keep to the simple gospel; and if the people are not converted by it, you will be clear. My dear hearers, how much I long to see you saved! But I would not belie my Lord, even to win your souls, if they could be so won. The true servant of God is responsible for diligence and faithfulness; but he is not responsible for success or non-success. Results are in God's hands. If that dear child in your class is not converted, yet if you have set before him the gospel of Jesus Christ with loving, prayerful earnestness, you shall not be without your reward. If I preach from my very soul the grand truth that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will save my hearers, and if I persuade and entreat them to believe in Jesus unto eternal life; if they will not do so, their blood will lie upon their own heads. When I go back to my Master, if I have faithfully told out his message of free grace and dying love, I shall be clear. I have often prayed that I might be able to say at the last what George Fox could so truly say: "I am clear, I am clear!" It is my highest ambition to be clear of the blood of all men. I have preached God's truth, so far as I know it, and I have not been ashamed of its peculiarities. That I might not stultify my testimony I have cut myself clear of those who err from the faith, and even from those who associate with them. What more can I do to be honest with you? If, after all, men will not have Christ, and his gospel, and his rule, it is their own concern. If Rebekah had not come to Isaac she would have lost her place in the holy line. My beloved hearer, will you have Jesus Christ or not? He has come into the world to save sinners, and he casts out none. Will you accept him? Will you trust him? "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Will you believe him? Will you be baptized into his name? If so, salvation is yours; but if not, he himself hath said it, "He that believeth not shall be damned." Oh, do not expose yourselves to that damnation! Or, if you are set upon it; then, when the great white throne shall be seen in yonder skies, and the day of wrath has come, do me the justice to acknowledge that I bade you flee to Jesus, and that I did not amuse you with novel theories. I have brought neither flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, nor any other kind of music to please your ears, but I have set Christ crucified before you, and bidden you *believe and live*. If you refuse to accept the substitution of Christ, you have refused your own mercies. Clear me in that day of all complicity with the novel inventions of deluded men. As for my Lord, I pray of him grace to be faithful to the end, both to his truth, and to your souls. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis 24.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—166, 928, 884.

A Paradox

A Sermon

(No. 2050)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, November 4th, 1888, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"When I am weak, then am I strong."—2 Corinthians 12:10.

The expression is paradoxical, and seems somewhat singular; yet it was the experience of the apostle Paul, a man of calm spirit, by no means fanciful, a wise man, and far removed from a fanatic. It was the experience of one who was led of the Spirit of God, and therefore it was a gracious experience: the experience of one who was a father in Israel, who could safely bid us to be imitators of him, even as he imitated the Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore it was a safe experience. If we are weak, so was Paul; and if, like him, we are strong in our weakness, we shall be in the best of company. If the same things be seen in us which were wrought in the apostle of the Gentiles, we may join with him in glorying in infirmities, because the power of Christ doth rest upon us, and we may count ourselves happy that with such a saint we can cry, "When I am weak, then am I strong."

I. Perhaps I can expound the text best if I first TURN IT THE OTHER WAY UP, and use it as a warning.

When I am strong, then am I weak. Perhaps, while thinking of the text thus turned inside out, we shall be getting light upon it to be used when we view it with the right side outwards, and see that *when we are weak, then we are strong.*

I am quite sure that some people think themselves very strong, and are not so. Their proud consciousness of fancied strength is the indication of a terrible weakness. We have among us *certain persons who think that they can do all that is needful for their own salvation* whenever they please to do so. They can perform all sorts of good works, or at least quite enough to carry them to heaven. Their first idea is that they are to be saved by their own doings; and they really expect to be so saved. They may admit that they have a few faults and flaws in their character; but these are so trifling as to be hardly worth mentioning, and God Almighty is too merciful to be very particular. Their lives have been excellent, their tempers amiable, their manners courteous, their spirit generous, and they quite believe that by keeping on at the same pace they will win the prize: if they do not, who will? The ship of their character is in fine condition; they have no leaks which the pumps cannot keep down; their sails are not rent, and they hope to sail into the haven of peace with a glorious cargo of merit, having an abundant entrance, and hearing a loud, "Well done!" Ah, my friend! that consciousness of legal strength is a mere delusion, and it will have to be taken out of you. There is no going to heaven that way—by self and the works of self. Your error is a common one, but it is fatal. I have seen many epitaphs of persons, placed by the mistaken kindness of friends upon their tombstones, which I felt sure would have been sufficient to shut them out of heaven if they had been true. These departed worthies do not appear to have been sinners at all: their virtues were superlative, their faults non-existent. Such wonderful people would appear from their epitaphs to have flown up to the gates of heaven upon the wings of their own virtues, and to have entered

there without a passport of mercy, as burgesses by their own right of the New Jerusalem. I wonder how they would behave themselves in heaven, if they were really admitted there! All the rest are singing, "We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"; but these needed no washing, and so they would be likely to strike up a little song by themselves, and sing, "Our robes never needed washing; we kept them white as snow." What a discord that would create in the music of the skies! What a division of character and feeling would be found among celestials! I cannot see how there could be any harmony of sentiment amongst sinners saved by grace and righteous ones who owed nothing to mercy, nothing to the atoning sacrifice.

No, my strong and virtuous hearer, you are under a grave delusion. There is a great similarity between your talk and the talk of that religious individual who went up to the temple in our Saviour's days, and, standing before the thrice-holy God, dared to say, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." He was not justified that day, nor will you be. A poor tax-gatherer, despised by himself, and an off-cast from his own people, stood in the temple at the same time, and all that he dared to say was, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This unworthy sinner when to his house justified, while the other worthy person was not accepted. If you think yourselves strong enough to procure heaven by your own efforts, you are ignorantly insulting the cross of Christ, for you seem to insinuate that your virtues can avail you without Jesus. If you really mean this, there is no more venom of rebellion against God in your self-righteousness than in the outward vice of those who make no pretence to godliness. For you to put your works in the place of Jesus is a blasphemy against the Saviour's blood and righteousness. Why needed Christ to die if men could save themselves? Why need he bleed upon the cross if your merits will suffice to gain you a place among the blessed? There is a fatal weakness in the claim of that man who thinks himself strong enough to force his own passage to the throne of God; that weakness lies in the pride which insults the Crucified, the disloyalty which prefers itself to the royal Saviour.

"Perish the virtue, as it ought—abhorred,
And the fool with it who insults his Lord."

Listen to me a moment, and quit your fancied strength: you, my hearer, cannot keep the law of God, for you have already broken it. How can you preserve a crystal vase entire when you have already dashed it to atoms? You must now be saved by the merits and the strength of another, or not at all; for your own merit is out of the question, through past failure. That strength of yours, upon which you dote so much, is perfect weakness. May the Lord show you this, and make you faint at heart on that account; for then you shall be strong, with real and saving strength! Now your imaginary strength is making you really weak, and that boasted merit of yours is shutting you out from true righteousness. He that is strong in the notion of merit is weak even to utter folly before the God of truth.

"Yes," we hear you reply, "there is a gospel way of salvation. We know that there is, for you preach it continually. You tell us that men must repent, and believe the gospel; that they must be renewed in the spirit of their minds, and must both overcome sin, and follow after holiness." Yes, I do say all that; but what do you say to it? Is it really so that you find here a ground for your own strength? Do you say, "*I feel that I can repent whenever I please, and believe in Jesus when I choose?*" Ah! then I must assure you that when you are strong in that way, you are weak. I never yet knew anybody repent who gloried in his power to repent; I never yet knew a man heart-broken for sin who boasted that he could break his own heart when and where he pleased. "What!" cries one, "surely I can believe in Jesus Christ when I please!" I have not denied that statement, have I?

But I tell you that your notion of power to believe is your weakness; and I would rather by half hear you cry, with deep solemnity, "Oh, that God would give me faith! Lord, help my unbelief!" Your sense of inability to believe in Christ would be a far better token for good, in my judgment, than your present flippant talk about believing when you like. Men who are in earnest talk not so: whatever their strength may be, they find it little enough in the hour of need. I beg to assure you that I have never known a man believe in Jesus who trusted that he could so believe; for his trust in his own believing kept him from trusting to Jesus; but I have known many a poor, struggling soul lie at the cross-foot, and say, "Lord, help me to look to Jesus, and live;" and God has helped him to give that look in which there is eternal life. While he has been praying, his prayer, yes, his weeping prayer, has had in it that very look to Jesus for which he was pleading. His sense of inability to believe has made him look to Jesus for believing, and he has found it in him.

You say that you can turn your heart towards God whenever you please. I am not going into any dispute with you about your assertion, nor the doctrine, which is supposed to support you in your profession of strength; but I will say this, that your idea of having personal strength, with which to purify and renew your own heart—your idea that you can create in yourself a right spirit—your idea that you can raise yourself from your death in sin—is to me a prophecy of much evil for yourself. where self is conspicuous, I see an omen of mischief, I see no good in this fine opinion of yourself; but if I heard you cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God"—if I heard you say, "Lord, quicken me out of my death in sin"—if I saw you lying down before the Most High, and praying, "Turn me, and I shall be turned"—I should have a far brighter hope of you. In your weakness you would become strong; but in your present strength, I am sure I see a great weakness, which is likely to be your ruin. O dear hearts, your best friend does not lie within your own doors. Your hope for better things shines yonder at the right hand of God, where the living Saviour has all power given to him in heaven and earth. Sinner, if you grow no sweeter flowers than the dunghill of your own nature can nourish, you will die amid poisonous weeds. If you never drink of better water than the filthy well of your own heart will yield, you will perish of thirst, or of a deadly draught. Another, and a better helper than one born in your house, must come this way. Help must be laid upon one that is mighty, exalted of the Lord out of the people, and endowed with divine power and Godhead, for only such a Saviour, infinitely good and great, can save a soul so lost as yours. When you get down, down, down, into utter weakness, then you will be strong, because then you will rest upon the Lord's salvation; but as you are strong in your thoughts of yourself, you are kept from Jesus, and are weakness itself.

So far I have spoken by way of warning to unconverted people.

I desire now to say a word to those who profess to be Christians, and, let us hope, are so; but they are, in a measure, erring in the same way as those to whom I have spoken. They are remarkably strong: at least in their own esteem they are very Samsons, although others fear that the Philistines will capture them. By this token may they know their own weakness—even by this, that they think themselves strong.

First, *many are wonderfully strong as to knowledge*. They know almost everything. If in any department they are a little short, they make up for it by knowing so much more in the other direction. If they are too narrow here, they overlap there. They are knowing men, and need no man to tell them so. They are instructed in the faith from pole to pole: they know both that which is afar off, and that which is nigh. An argument is a pleasure to them. They go into company where the eternal verities are denied, and feel a delight in taking sides. They will sit where the vital simplicities of

God's word are set up like marks for boys to throw at; and they like the amusement, for it exercises their knowing faculty, and gives them a chance of showing their mental power. They are not children, but quite able to think for themselves. They are not credulous, but amazingly clear-headed and cultured. I have noticed these fine gentlemen have been the first to deny the faith, and to fall into all manner of heresies. Do you wonder? Those who are so very sure are always the most uncertain. I could instance some that had such confidence in themselves that they would have argued with the very fiend of hell on any question, for they felt that not even Satanic craft could conquer them; but at this present moment the prince of darkness holds them in his power. They hold no controversy with the devil now, for they are very largely agreed with him in assailing the gospel of God's grace. They have gone entirely over to the denial of everything that is gracious and holy and scriptural, and the main cause of their apostasy is their own invincible self-confidence. They were so strong that they became weaker than others. O brethren, when we are very wise in our own esteem, we are bordering upon fools, even if we have not already entered into that company. When we tremblingly sit at Jesus' feet, to learn everything afresh, and fresh from him; when we shudder at anything that questions his Deity, or lowers his sacrifice; when we shut up a book and cast it from us, because we feel that it pollutes us with unbelief—then are we wise and strong. When the Word of the Lord is enough, then are we in the way of wisdom and strength. The man of one book is proverbially a terrible man; but the man of ten thousand books, who can baffle all adversaries and foil all foes, shall soon lie wounded on the plain, if he be not slain outright. Let us take heed unto ourselves, that we fall not through being headstrong, or strong in the head, which is much the same thing.

Again, I have noticed some professedly Christian people *wonderfully strong through experience*. Their experience has been very extensive, and the knowledge it has brought them they consider to be specially profound, and, consequently, they are not afraid of temptation, for they feel that they are too wise to be entrapped. They are so experienced now, that things which young people ought not to think of, they can do with impunity—so they foolishly dream. They can go just so far, and then stop, for they are fitted with the patent brakes of prudence. They are such good mountain climbers that they can stand on the edge of a precipice, and look over, and even hang over, without fear of their ever being giddy and falling over. Of course they would not advise other people to go quite so far as they may safely go; but then, what is temptation to other men is no temptation to them. Their vessel is so tight and trim, and they understand navigation so perfectly, that they rather like a tempest than not, just to show how well their vessel can behave in a storm. Ah me! When you next read the list of wrecks, you may expect to see the name of their ship among the castaways. Old birds may not be caught with chaff, but they can be shot with a gun. No one is out of danger, and no one is more in danger than the man who is carnally secure. Those who feel that their experience, be it what it may, only teaches them that the farther they can keep from temptation the better, these are in a better state. When experience drives us to pray with emphasis the prayer "Lead us not into temptation," then it is working aright. In the idea of strength and wisdom lurks an awfully perilous weakness; but in a sense of personal weakness dwells a real strength. If you are extremely jealous, conscientious, and watchful, many will tell you how weak you are; but you are, in reality, a strong man, because of your fear to encounter evil influences: in that fear lies one essential element of holy strength. While he that rather braves temptation, because he feels so strong, shall find, it may be to his everlasting sorrow, how great his weakness is; he that shuns the appearance of evil, because of conscious weakness, shall find therein his security and strength. Oh, let none of us,

because we are getting gray, suppose that we are vulnerable to sin! Let us not dream that because we have been church-members so many years, or even because we have sustained a long and useful ministry, we are therefore beyond gun-shot of the enemy, or without necessity to seek daily strength for daily duty. My brethren, we cannot perform the smallest duty aright apart from the help of God; neither can we be secure against even the grossest sin, apart from the perpetual guard of him that keepeth Israel. If we, in our self-conceit, write ourselves down among the mightiest, and forget our entire dependence upon heavenly grace, we may be left to prove, by unhappy experience, that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Let us note another point. I have known certain Christian people who thought themselves *singularly strong in the matter of wisdom and prudence*. They have been gifted with clear insight and a measure of shrewdness, and have, therefore, felt that their judgment on most subjects was that of an umpire. Have you ever noticed that the raw material of a very grossly foolish person is a cautious individual? The cunning are the readiest dupes when craft is busy in taking its prey. So, too, a wise man is needed if there is to be exhibited the worst form of folly. If we were called upon to select a man who, as to his life as a whole, perpetrated the greatest folly, we should mention Solomon. Yet he was the wisest of man. Yes, the cream of wisdom, when curdled, makes the worst of folly. Was ever man so insanely enthusiastic in vain pursuits as this master of all knowledge? Then, brethren, whenever we feel sure of our own superior intelligence, let us suspect ourselves of weakness. Let the same fear come upon us when we feel sure about our way, so sure that we think we need not pray about it, or in any manner wait for divine direction. Beware of those matters in which you think you cannot err. Men who have been wise in great difficulties have blundered fearfully where all was simple. The Israelites thought that the men who came to them begging for a league of brotherhood could not deceive them. It must be safe to be on good terms with these interesting strangers. Why, look, their shoes are well-nigh worn from their feet, and patched and clouted to the last degree! Their clothes, which we doubt not were new when they left their distant homes, are now threadbare, and their biscuit, which they took fresh from the oven, is stale with age. It is evident, upon the face of it, that they must have come from a very remote part of the world, and therefore a treaty with them will not interfere with the divine command. There can be no need to pray about a case so clear. Thus the Gibeonites overreached them, as we also shall be overreached when we are so exceeding sure of our course. Brethren, let us not be wise as to dispense with our heavenly Counsellor and Guide. Would not that be the height of madness? It is a salutary thing to feel that your case requires you to trust the helm of your ship with the divine Pilot. It is even a blessed thing to feel that you are shut up to faith, and must by absolute trust in God throw the responsibility of your action upon him. I will give you an instance. Abraham, the father of the faithful, is placed in a peculiar position. God has commanded him to take his son Isaac, and offer him for a sacrifice. Here is a terrible puzzle. Here was enough to stagger any human mind. Surely it could not be right for a father to slay his son! How could it be wise to kill the son in whom all the promises of God were vested? The more you think of the case from a father's standpoint, the more it will perplex you. Abraham could not make any thing out of it by his judgment, but he met it all by faith. All that he could say to Isaac was, "My son, God will provide himself a Lamb." He was thus saying to himself, "The Lord will get me out of this difficulty." He had no wisdom with which to conjecture how the affair would end: he had to cease from guessing, and just trust in his God. Abraham made no mistake in this. Oh that we could do the same! Observe that same Abraham when he goes down to Egypt. His wife is exceedingly beautiful, and he fears that the king of Egypt

will kill him in order to obtain his wife; what will he do? I can see a great many ways in which he might have warded off that evil. He was not called upon to go to Egypt at all, if he thereby risked his wife's honour; or, if he must go, he should have gone boldly, acknowledging his wife, and trusting both her and himself with the Lord. Instead of that, the patriarch begins by inducing Sarah to join with him in equivocation. "Say thou art my sister." She was in some sense his sister; but it was using a word in a double sense for a deceitful purpose, and it was a pitiful thing for Abraham to do. Nor was it a prudent scheme after all: in fact it was the cause of the very trouble which it sought to prevent. Sarah would not have been taken away from Abraham at all if Pharaoh had known that she was his wife; so that the wise was snared by his own craftiness. The Lord graciously delivered him, but in that very act left a root of bitterness behind to be his future plague. Pharaoh gave to him women- servants, and I doubt not among the rest was Hagar, who became the object of sin, and the source of sorrow to the household. In the fancied strength of Abraham, by which he emulated the craft of other Orientals, he displayed his weakness; but in the other case, where no wit or wisdom could assist him, he cast himself upon the Lord, and in his weakness he behaved like the grand man that he really was. Brothers, let us confess ourselves fools, that we may be wise; for otherwise we shall fall into that other condition, of professing ourselves wise, and becoming fools. Let us ignore our wisdom, even if we have any. God alone is wise: he that trusteth either his own heart or head is a fool. Lean not to thine own understanding, but lean wholly upon the Lord; so shalt thou be established.

Further, dear friends, *we shall often find that our strength will lie in patience*—in extreme weakness which yields itself up to the will of God without the power or will to murmur. We sang in our hymn just now—

"And when it seems no other chance or change
From grief can set me free,
Hope finds its strength in helplessness,
And, patient, waits on thee."

I am sure that in reference to power, either to do or to suffer rightly, we are not strong when we compliment ourselves upon our ability; and we are strong when, under a sense of absolute inability, we depend wholly upon God. That sermon preached in the glory of our oratory turned out to be mere husks for swine; while that discourse which we delivered in weakness, with a humble hope that God would use it, proved to be royal meat for the Lord's chosen. That work which you performed in the vigour of your unquestioned talent came to nothing, while that quiet act which you washed with your tears, and perfumed with your prayers, will live and yield you sheaves. Creature strength brings forth nothing which has life in it: only the seed which the Creator puts into the hand of our weakness will produce a harvest. It is well to be nothing: it is better still to be "less than nothing." We ought to dread a sense of capacity, for it will render us incapable; but a sense of utter incapacity apart from God is a fit preparation for being used by the Lord. "Unto them that have no might he increaseth strength."

So it is in bearing as well as acting. If we say concerning sickness, "I shall never be impatient. I can bear it like a stoic." What if that? You will then have done no more than many have done before you, with no great gain to themselves or to others. But if, bowing your head before the Lord, you wait his sovereign will, and say, "Lord help me. If thy left hand shall smite me, let thy right hand sustain me. I am willing to drink this bitter cup, saying, 'Not as I will, but as thou wilt.' Lord, help me!"—you shall bear up triumphantly, and come out of the furnace refined, to the praise and

the glory of your God. When you fancy that you are strong to suffer, you will fail; but in conscious weakness you will be enabled to play the man.

I have now done with the text, as I have turned it upside down. May God bless it to any here who feel high and mighty, by causing it to put them in their proper place.

II. Now, let us take our text THE RIGHT WAY UPWARDS. "When I am weak, then am I strong." "When" and "then" are the two pivots of the text—the hinges upon which it turns.

"When I am weak." What does that mean? It means when the believer is *consciously weak*, when he painfully feels, and distinctly recognizes that he is weak, then he is strong. In truth, we are always weak, whether we know it or not; but when we not only believe this to be the fact, but see it to be the fact—then it is that we are strong. When it is forced home upon us, that we are less than nothing and vanity—when our very soul echoes and re-echoes that word, "Without me ye can do nothing."—then it is that we are strong.

When he is *growingly weak*. Yes, for he sees his own weakness more and more clearly as he advances: as he grows stronger in faith he is much more conscious of the weakness of the flesh. I talked about my weakness from this platform five-and-twenty years ago; but I stand here and tremble under it now to a far greater degree than I did in my younger and more vigorous time. I knew it three-and-thirty years ago, when I first spoke to you, but I did not know it as I know it now. I was then weak, and I owned it: but I am now weak, and groan about it almost involuntarily. Yes, and I sometimes sing because of my weakness, learning to glory in my infirmities because the power of Christ doth rest upon me. When we are growingly weak, when we become weaker and weaker, when we seem to faint into a deeper swoon than ever as to our own strength, till death is written upon every power that we once thought we had, and we feel that we can do absolutely nothing apart from the Holy Spirit, then we are strong indeed.

We are strong, too, when we feel *painfully weak*. It is well when we mourn because we are so weak, and cry out to ourselves, "My weakness, my weakness, woe unto me! When I would do good, evil is present with me. When I would rise to heaven, the body of this death detains me. I would do great things for God, but I have no might. Alas for my weakness!" At such a time we are really rising, and are bringing most glory to God. These are growing pains—agonies such as none know but the truly and growingly spiritual. A painful weakness is strength. It may seem a paradox, but it is true.

We are strong when we are *contritely weak*. When we confess that much of our weakness is our fault—a weakness which we ought to have overcome—even then we have in that weakness a real strength. The sort of weakness that makes a man say, "I cannot be any stronger, I am doing my best," is not strength but folly; but that weakness which makes you lament your failures and deplore your shortcomings, has in it a holy stimulus and force. That weakness which makes you dissatisfied with all you are and all you do, is goading you on to better and stronger things. If you feel that even when most earnest you have not prayed as you could wish, there is evidently strength in your desires, and your desires are prayers. If after any service you pour forth showers of penitential tears because the service was imperfect, there is evidently a strong soul of obedience within you. When you can neither repent, nor believe, nor love as you wish to do, you are repenting, believing, and loving with a strength which is more true than apparent. It is the will with which we act which is the strength of the action; and when the will is so powerful that it makes us mourn because we cannot find how to perform its bidding, then are we strong according to the divine measurement of strength. Contrite weakness is spiritual strength.

When a man is *thoroughly weak*—not only partially, but altogether weak—then is he strong. When apart from the Lord Jesus, he is utter weakness, and nothing more—then it is that he is strong. Let me persuade you to make a full confession of weakness to the Lord. Say, "Lord, I cannot do what I ought to do: I cannot do what I want to do: I cannot do what I used to do: I cannot do what other people do: I cannot do what I mean to do: I cannot do what I am sure I shall do: I cannot do what I feel impelled to do; and over this sinful weakness I mourn." Then add, "Lord, I long to serve thee perfectly, yet I cannot do it. Unless thou help me I can do nothing aright. There will be no good in my actions, my words, my feelings, or my desires, unless thou continue to fill me with thine own holy energy. Lord, help me! Lord, help me!" Brother, you are strong while you plead in that fashion. You can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you; and he will strengthen you, now that you are emptied of self. How true it is, "When I am weak, then am I strong!"

I have brought out the "when." Now lend me your ears and hearts for just a minute, while I bring out the "then." "*Then* am I strong." When is that?

Why, a man is strong when he is consciously weak, because now he has reached the truth. He really is weak; and if he does not know that he is so, he is under the influence of a falsehood. Now a lie is a thing of weakness. Lying strength is all fluff and foam: a mere appearance, a mockery, a delusion. Nothing hinders from getting the reality like contentment with a mere appearance. The true heart is heartily sick of shows and shams, and it cries, "Lord, help me to get rid of these shadows! Help me to come at the truth! Help me to deal with realities!" When you are made to feel your utter weakness you are on sure ground of truth—unpleasant truth, no doubt, yet sure truth. You are now on safe ground touching fundamentals, and making sure work. What you now do will be soundly done. All the while that we keep building on a sandy made-up foundation, we are piling up that which will, in all probability, come down even faster than we put it up. While the rotten rubbish remains on the spot, you cannot do anything worth doing; but if that accumulation can be carted away, there will seem to be a great hole, but you will get down to the real bottom, and get a foundation; and then what you build will be worth putting up, because it will stand. Therefore, a man becomes strong when he is consciously weak, because he is on the truth, and is not being flattered by false hopes.

Next, he will be strong because *he will only go with a commission to support him*. He will not be eager to run without being sent. He says within himself, when he proposes a service to himself, "No, I am too weak to undertake anything of my own head." He will wait for a call. This is not the kind of man that will climb up into a pulpit, and from a dizzy brain pour out nonsense. He will not crave to lead, for he feels that he needs much help even to follow. He feels himself too weak to set up for a master in Israel. This is not the kind of man that will venture into argument with sceptics for the fun or for the glory of the thing. Oh, no; he is too weak for that. He says, "If I am called to defend the faith, I will do it in God's strength, hoping that it will be given me in the same hour what I shall speak. If I am called to preach, I will preach, and nobody shall stop me; for the Lord will be with my mouth. But, you see, until the man is conscious of his own weakness, he will run without being sent; and there is nobody so weak as that man. No one so weak as the man who has no commission from God, and no promise of help from him. Such a man will be thinking of this, and thinking of that, and running for this, that, and the other, because he has a lot of waste energy which he wants to use somewhere or somehow. Could we once see him consciously weak we should hear him say, "Here am I, send me!" in answer to the question, "Whom shall I send?" Then he would

not go a warfare at his own charges, but he would draw upon the all-sufficiency of God, and find himself equal to every emergency.

The man who is consciously weak is strong, next, because *of the holy caution that he will be sure to use*. He will be on his guard, because he does not feel able to cope with adversaries. He will ask for a convoy for his little barque, for he is aware of pirates. If this weak man has to pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, depend upon it he will carry in his hand the weapon of All-prayer, like a drawn sword. The man that has strength goes hurrying on over hedge and ditch, and soon comes into mischief; but the consciously weak pilgrim keeps to the high-road, and travels carefully; and hence he is strong. Fear is a notably good housekeeper: she may not keep a luxurious table, but she always locks the doors at night, and takes care of all under her charge. Holy caution begets prudence; and prudence, by fostering vigour, and crying for heavenly aid, becomes strength.

Moreover, when a man is weak, then is he strong, because *he is sure to pray*, and prayer is power. The man who laments his weakness is sure to cry to the strong for strength. The more his weakness presses on him, the more he will pray. While he can do without his God he will do without his God; but when his own weakness becomes utter and entire, and he is ready to perish, then he turns unto his Lord, and is made strong. The utterly weak cry out unto God as nobody else does. He is too weak to play at praying: he groans, he sighs, he weeps. In his abject weakness he prevails, as Jacob did. He wrestled all night; but now at last the angel has touched the hollow of his thigh, and made his sinew shrink, and he cannot wrestle any longer. What will he do now? He falls; and as he falls he grasps his antagonist, and holds him fast, crying, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." As much to say, "I cannot wrestle with thee, I cannot try another fall; but I can and will hold thee fast. The dead weight of my weakness makes me hold thee as an anchor holds a ship. I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

The weaker a man is in himself the stronger he is in prayer, if he makes use of his weakness as an appealing argument—"Lord, if I were strong, thou mightest leave me. Do not leave me, for I am weakness itself. I am the feeblest child in all thy family, leave me not, neither forsake me. If thou leavest any, leave not thy poor dying infant, that can hardly wail out its griefs." Weakness, as a plea with God in prayer, becomes a source of strength.

When we are weak we are strong, again, because then *we are driven away from self to God*. All strength is in God, and it is well to come to the one solitary storehouse and source of might. There is no power apart from God. As long as you and I look to the creature, we are looking to a cracked, broken cistern, that holds no water; but when we know that it is broken, and that there is not a drop of water in it, then we hasten to the great fountain and well-head. While we rest in any measure upon self, or the creature, we are standing with one foot on the sand; but when we get the right away from human nature because we are too weak to have the least reliance upon self whatever, then we have both feet on the rock, and this is safe standing. If thou believest in the living God, and if all thine own existence is by believing, thou livest at a mighty rate. But if thou believest in God in a measure, and if, at the same time, thou trustest thyself in a measure, thou art living at a dying rate, and half the joy which is possible to thee is lost. Thou art taking in bread with one hand, and poison with the other: thou art feeding thy soul with substance and with shadow, and that makes a sorry mixture. When the shadow is clean taken away, and thou hast nothing but the substance, then art thou a strong man, fed upon substantial meat.

Last of all, dear friends, I believe that, when a man is weak, he becomes strong to a large extent, because *his weakness compels him to concentrate all his faculties*.

A sense of weakness brings out all the forces of a resolute spirit, and leads him to call in all the energy within his reach. When I have preached to you in extreme weakness, as I have often done, when I have afterwards read the sermon, I have been much more satisfied with it than I have been with others in which I felt more pleasure at the time.

God helps us most when we most need his help; and, besides that, the man himself is, by his weakness, forced to use himself right up. When a man feels himself to be rather a large vessel, he puts in the tap somewhere near the top, and only a small supply flows out to the people; but when he is, in his own feelings, like a poor little cask with only a small supply in it, he puts the tap right down at the bottom, and permits all that is in the barrel to flow forth. Many a poor, weak brother, who says all the little that he knows, give forth more instruction than the learned divine who only favours his people with a small portion of his vast stores. When a man, in serving God, spends himself to the last farthing, he will often far more enrich his hearers than the man of ten talents who uses his resources with a prudent parsimony. Dear brother, it will often be a good thing for you to feel, "Now, God helping me, I must do my very utmost at this time. I have so little ability that every faculty within me must be wide awake, and serve God at its best." Thus your weakness will arouse you, and set you on fire, and, by the blessing of God, it will be the means of gaining you strength.

Very well, then, let us pick up our tools and go to our work rejoicing, feeling—Well, I may be weaker, or I may be stronger in myself, but my strength is in my God. If I should ever become stronger, then I must pray for a deeper sense of weakness, lest I become weak through my strength. And if I should ever become weaker than I am, then I must hope and believe that I am really becoming stronger in the Lord. Whether I am weak or strong, what matters it? He who never fails and never changes will perfect his strength in my weakness, and this is glory to me. Amen.

The Evidence of Our Lord's Wounds

A Sermon

(No. 2061)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

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"Then said he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."—John 20:27.

Among us at this day we have many persons who are like Thomas—dubious, demanding signs and tokens, suspicious, and oftentimes sad. I am not sure that there is not a slight touch of Thomas in most of us. There are times and seasons when the strong man fails, and when the firm believer has to pause a while, and say, "Is it so?" It may be that our meditation upon the text before us may be of service to those who are touched with the malady which afflicted Thomas.

Notice, before we proceed to our subject in full, that *Thomas asked of our Lord what he ought not to have asked*. He wanted to put our risen Lord to tests which were scarcely reverent to his sacred person. Admire his Master's patience with him. He does not say, "If he does not choose to believe he may continue to suffer for his unbelief." But no; he fixes his eye upon the doubter, and addresses himself specially to him; yet not in words of reproach or anger. Jesus could bear with Thomas, though Thomas had been a long time with him, and had not known him. To put his finger into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into his side, was much more than any disciple had a right to ask of his divine Master; and yet see the condescension of Jesus! Rather than Thomas should suffer from unbelief, Christ will let him take great liberties. Our Lord does not always act towards us according to his own dignity, but according to our necessity; and if we really are so weak that nothing will do but thrusting a hand into his side, he will let us do it. Nor do I wonder at this: if, for our sakes, he suffered a spear to be thrust there, he may well permit a hand to follow.

Observe that *Thomas was at once convinced*. He said: "My Lord, and my God." This shows our Master's wisdom, that he indulged him with such familiarity, because he knew that, though the demand was presumptuous, yet the act would work for his good. Our Lord sometimes wisely refuses—saying, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended"; but at other times, he wisely grants, because, though it be too much for us to ask, yet he thinks it wise to give.

The subject for our present meditation is just this: *the cure of doubts*. Thomas was permitted to put his finger into the print of the nails for the curing of his doubts. Perhaps you and I wish that we could do something like it. Oh, if our Lord Jesus would appear to me for once, and I might thrust my hand into his side; or, if I might for once see him, or speak with him, how confirmed should I be! No doubt that thought has arisen in the minds of many. We shall not have such proofs, my brethren, but we shall have something near akin, to them, which will answer the same purpose.

I. The first head of my discourse shall be this: CRAVE NO SIGNS. If such signs be possible, crave them not. If there be dreams, visions, voices, ask not for them.

Crave not wonders, first, because *it is dishonouring to the sacred Word to ask for them*. You believe this Bible to be an inspired volume—the Book of God. The apostle Peter calls it "A more

sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed." Are you not satisfied with that? When a person, in whose veracity you have the utmost confidence, bears testimony to this or that, if you straightway reply, "I would be glad of further evidence," you are slighting your friend, and casting unjust suspicion upon him. Will you cast suspicion upon the Holy Ghost, who, by this word, bears witness unto Christ? Oh, no! let us be content with his witness. Let us not wish to see, but remain satisfied to believe. If there be difficulties in believing, is it not natural there should be, when he that believes is finite, and the things to be believed are, in themselves, infinite? Let us accept the difficulties as being in themselves, in some measure, proofs of the correctness of our position, as inevitable attendants of heavenly mysteries, when they are looked at by such poor minds as ours. Let us believe the Word, and crave no signs.

Crave no signs, because *it is unreasonable that we should desire more than we have already*. The testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, contained in the Word, should alone suffice us. Beside that, we have the testimony of saints and martyrs, who have gone before us, dying triumphant in the faith. We have the testimony of many still among us, who tell us that these things are so. In part, we have the testimony of our own conscience, of our own conversion, of our own after-experience, and this is convincing testimony. Let us be satisfied with it. Thomas ought to have been content with the testimony of Mary Magdalene, and the other disciples, but he was not. We ought to trust our brethren's word. Let us not be unreasonable in craving after proofs when already proofs are afforded us without stint.

Crave no signs, because *it may be you will be presumptuous in so doing*. Who are you, to set God a sign? What is it he is to do before you will believe in him? Suppose he does not choose to do it, are you therefore arrogantly to say, "I refuse to believe unless the Lord will do my bidding"? Do you imagine that any angel would demean himself to pay attention to you, who set yourself up to make demands of the Most High? Assuredly not. It is presumption which dares to ask of God anything more than the testimony of himself which he chooses to grant us in his Word

It is, moreover, damaging to ourselves to crave signs. Jesus says, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Thomas had his sign, and he believed; and so far so good, but he missed a blessing peculiar to those who have not seen, and yet have believed. Do not, therefore, rob yourselves of the special favour which lights on those who, with no evidence but the witness of the Spirit of God, are prepared at once to believe in the Lord Jesus unto eternal life.

Again, crave no signs, for *this craving is highly perilous*. Translated according to many, and I think translated correctly, our Saviour said, "Reach hither thy finger, and put it into the print of the nails; and *become* not faithless, but believing," intending to indicate that Thomas, by degrees, would become faithless. His faith had grown to be so little that, if he continued insisting upon this and that, as a sign or evidence, that faith of his would get down to the very lowest; yea, he would have no faith left. "Become not faithless, but believing." Dear friends, if you began to seek signs, and if you were to see them, do you know what would happen? Why, you would want more; and when you had these, you would demand still more. Those who live by their feelings judge of the truth of God by their own condition. When they have happy feelings, then they believe; but if their spirits sink, if the weather happens to be a little damp, or if their constitution happens to be a little disordered, down go their spirits, and, straightway, down goes their faith. He that lives by a faith which does not rest on feeling, but is built upon the Word of the Lord, will remain fixed and steadfast as the mount of God; but he that craves for this thing and that thing, as a token for good at the hand of the Lord, stands in danger of perishing from want of faith. He shall not perish, if he has even a

grain of living faith, for God will deliver him from the temptation; but the temptation is a very trying one to faith.

Crave, therefore, no sign. If you read a story of a person who saw a vision, or if you hear another declare that a voice spake to him—believe those things, or not, as you like; but do not desire them for yourself. These wonders may, or may not, be freaks of the imagination. I will not judge; but we must not rely upon them, for we are not to walk by sight, but by faith. Rely not upon anything that can be seen of the eyes, or heard of the ears; but simply trust him whom we know to be the Christ of God, the Rock of our salvation.

II. Secondly, when you want comfort, crave no sign, but **TURN TO THE WOUNDS OF OUR LORD**. You see what Thomas did. He wanted faith, and he looked for it to Jesus wounded. He says nothing about Christ's head crowned with glory. He does not say that he must see him "gird about the paps with a golden girdle." Thomas, even in his unbelief, is wise; he turns to his Lord's wounds for comfort. Whenever your unbelief prevails, follow in this respect the conduct of Thomas, and turn your eyes straightway to the wounds of Jesus. These are the fountains of never-failing consolation, from which, if a man doth once drink, he shall forget his misery, and remember his sorrow no more. Turn to the Lord's wounds; and if you do, what will you see?

First, you will see *the tokens of your Master's love*. O Lord Jesus, what are those wounds in thy side, and in thy hands? He answers, "These I endured when suffering for thee. How can I forget thee? I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands. How can I ever fail to remember thee? On my very heart the spear has written thy name." Look at Jesus, dead, buried, risen, and then say, "He loved me, and gave himself for me"! There is no restorative for a sinking faith like a sight of the wounded Saviour. Look, soul, and live by the proofs of his death! Come and put thy finger, by faith, into the print of the nails, and these wounds shall heal thee of unbelief. The wounds of our Lord are the tokens of his love.

They are, again, *the seals of his death*, especially that wound in his side. He must have died; for "one of the soldiers, with a spear, pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare witness." The Son of God did assuredly die. God, who made the heavens and the earth, took to himself our nature, and in one wondrous person he was both God and man; and lo! this wondrous Son of God bore sufferings unutterable, and consummated all by his death. This is our comfort, for if he died in our stead, then we shall not die for our sins; our transgression is put away, and our iniquity is pardoned. If the sacrifice had never been slain we might despair; but since the spear-wound proves that the great Sacrifice really died, despair is slain, hope revives, and confidence rejoices.

The wounds of Jesus, next, are *the marks of identity*. By these we identify his blessed person after his resurrection. The very Christ that died has risen again. There is no illusion: there could be no mistake. It is not somebody else foisted upon us in his place; but Jesus who died has left the dead, for there are the marks of the crucifixion in his hands and in his feet, and there is the spear-thrust still. It is Jesus: this same Jesus. This is a matter of great comfort to a Christian—this indisputably proven doctrine of the resurrection of our Lord. It is the keystone of the gospel arch. Take that away, or doubt it, and there remains nothing to console you. But because Jesus died and in the selfsame person rose again, and ever lives, therefore does our heart sweetly rest, believing that "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him"; and also that the whole of the work of Jesus is true, is completed, and is accepted of God.

Again, those wounds, those scars of our Lord, were *the memorials of his love to his people*. They set forth his love so that his chosen can see the tokens; but they are also memorials to himself. He condescendingly bears these as his reminders. In heaven, at this moment, upon the person of our blessed Lord, there are the scars of his crucifixion. Centuries have gone by, and yet he looks like a Lamb that has been slain. Our first glance will assure us that this is he of whom they said, "Crucify him; crucify him." Steadily look with the eyes of your faith into the glory, and see your Master's wounds, and say within yourself, "He has compassion upon us still: he bears the marks of his passion." Look up, poor sufferer! Jesus knows what physical pain means. Look up, poor depressed one! he knows what a broken heart means. Canst thou not perceive this? Those prints upon his hands, these sacred stigmata, declare that he has not forgotten what he underwent for us, but still has a fellow-feeling for us.

Once again, these wounds may comfort us because in heaven they are, before God and the holy angels, *the perpetual ensigns of his finished work*. That passion of his can never be repeated, and never needs to be: "After he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, he sat down on the right hand of God." But the memorials are always being presented before the infinite mind of God. Those memorials are, in part, the wounds in our Lord's blessed person. Glorified spirits can never cease to sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain"; for every time they gaze upon him they perceive his scars. How resplendent shine the nail-prints! No jewels that ever gemmed a king can look one-half so lustrous as these. Though he be God over all blessed for ever, yet to us, at least, his brightest splendour comes from his death.

My hearer, whensoever thy soul is clouded, turn thou to these wounds which shine like a constellation of five bright stars. Look not to thine own wounds, nor to thine own pains, or sins, or prayers, or tears, but remember that "with his stripes we are healed." Gaze, then; intently gaze, upon thy Redeemer's wounds it thou wouldest find comfort.

III. This brings me to my third point, whenever faith is staggered at all, **SEEK SUCH HELPS FOR YOUR FAITH AS YOU MAY**. Though we cannot literally put our finger into the print of the nails, and may not wish to do so, yet let us use such modes of recognition as we do possess. Let us put these to their utmost use; and we shall no longer desire to put our hand into the Saviour's side. We shall be perfectly satisfied without that. Ye that are troubled with doubts and fears, I give you these recommendations.

First, if you would have your faith made vivid and strong, *study much the story of your Saviour's death*. Read it: read it: read it: read it. "*Tolle: lege*," said the voice to Augustine, "Take it: read it." So say I. Take the four evangelists; take the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah; take the twenty-second psalm; take all other parts of Scripture that relate to our suffering Substitute, and read them by day and by night, till you familiarize yourself with the whole story of his griefs and sin-hearing. Keep your mind intently fixed upon it; not sometimes, but continually. *Crux lux*: the cross is light. Thou shalt see it by its own light. The study of the narrative, if thou pray the Holy Ghost to enlighten thee, will beget faith in thee; and thou wilt, by its means, be very greatly helped, till, at last, thou wilt say, "I cannot doubt. The truth of the atonement is impressed upon my memory, my heart, my understanding. The record has convinced me."

Next, if this suffice not, *frequently contemplate the sufferings of Jesus*. I mean by that, when you have read the story, sit down, and try and picture it. Let your mind conceive it as passing before you. Put yourself into the position of the apostles who saw him die. No employment will so greatly strengthen faith, and certainly none will be more enjoyable!

"Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
 which before the cross I spend,
 Life and health and peace possessing
 From the sinner's dying Friend."

An hour would be grandly spent if occupied in turning over each little detail, item, and incident in the marvellous death by which you are redeemed from death and hell. You will be surprised to find how this familiarizing of yourself with it, by the help of the Holy Spirit, will make it as vivid to you as if you saw it; and it will have a better effect upon your mind than the sight of it would have done; for probably the actual sight would have passed away from your mind, and have been forgotten, while the contemplation of the sorrowful scene will sink deep into your soul, and leave eternal lines! You will do well, first, to read and know the narrative, and then to contemplate it carefully and earnestly—I mean, not to think of it for a minute or two at chance times, but to take an hour or two that you can specially set apart on purpose to consider the story of your Saviour's death. I am persuaded, if you do this, it will be more helpful to you than putting his finger into the print of the nails was to Thomas.

What next? why, dear friends, the Lord has a way of *giving his people wonderful realizations*. I hope I shall not say anything incorrect when I remark that there are times with us when the Lord is present with us, and we are strongly impressed with that fact, and therefore we act under a sense of that presence as if the divine glory were actually visible. Do you know what it is to write a letter to a friend feeling as if the Lord Jesus were looking over your shoulder? I know what it is at times to stand here and preach, and feel my Lord so near me that if I had literally seen him it would not have surprised me. Have you never, in the watches of the night, lain quiet when there was no sound but the ticking of the watch, and thought of your Lord till, though you knew there was no form before you, you were just as certain that he was there as if you could see his sorrowful countenance? In quiet places all alone—you scarcely like to tell the story—in the lone wood, and in the upper chamber—you have said, "If he spake I should not be more certain of his presence; and if he smiled upon me I should not be surer of his love." These realizations have sometimes been so joyfully overwhelming that for years you have been lifted by them beyond all power of doubt. These holy summer days banish the frosts of the soul. Whenever a doubt is suggested to me about the existence of my Lord and Master, I feel that I can laugh the tempter to scorn, for I have seen him, and spoken with him. Not with these eyes, but with the eyes of my inner life, I have beheld my Lord, and communed with him. Wonder not that I am not among the crew of the black, piratical ship of "Modern Thought."

Nor is it merely in seasons of enjoyment that we get these helps, but in times of *deep distress*. Prostrate with pain, unable to enjoy any comfort, unable even to sleep, I have seen the soul of the believer as happy as if all sounds were marriage peals. Some of us know what it is to be right gleesome, glad, and joyous in hours of fierce trial, because Christ has been so near. In times of losses and bereavements, when the sorrow stung you to the quick, and you thought before it came, that you never could bear it, yet have you been so sustained by a sight of the sacred head once wounded, and by fellowship with him in his sufferings, that you have said, "What are my griefs compared with his?" You have forgotten your sorrows and sung for joy of heart, as those that make merry. If you have been helped in this way, it will have all the effect upon you that ever could have come of putting your finger into the print of the nails. If, perchance, you have been given up to die, and have, mentally, gone through the whole process of dying, expecting soon to stand before the

bar of God, and have been happy, and even exultant, then you could not doubt the reality of a religion that bore you up above the surging billows. Now that you are again restored to life for a little longer time, the recollection of your buoyant spirits, in what you thought to be your dying hours, will answer all the purpose to you, I think, of putting your finger into the nail-prints.

Sometimes the strengthening influence may be afforded under the stress of *temptation*. If ever, young man, you have had a strong temptation hurling itself against you, and your feet have almost gone—ay, let me not say "young man"; but if ever a man or a woman of any age has had to cry out, "God, help me: how shall I escape out of this?" and you have turned your eyes and seen your Lord and beheld his wounds; and if you have felt at that moment that the temptation had lost all power, you have had a seal from the Lord, and your faith has been confirmed. If at the sight of your Lord you have exclaimed, in presence of the temptation, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" after that, you have had the best proof of your Redeemer's power to save. What better or more practical proof could you desire?

In these times, when the foundations of our faith are constantly being undermined, one is sometimes driven to say to himself, "Suppose it is not true." As I stood, the other night, beneath the sky, and watched the stars, I felt my heart going up to the great Maker with all the love that I was capable of. I said to myself, "What made me love God as I know I do? What made me feel an anxiety to be like him in purity? Whatever made me long to obey my God cannot be a lie." I know that it was the love of Jesus for me that changed my heart, and made me, though once careless and indifferent to him, now to pant with strong desires to honour him. What has done this? Not a lie, surely. A truth, then, has done it. I know it by its fruits. If this Bible were to turn out untrue, and if I died and went before my Maker, could I not say to him, "I believed great things of thee, great God; if it be not so, yet did I honour thee by the faith I had concerning thy wondrous goodness, and thy power to forgive"? and I would cast myself upon his mercy without fear. But we do not entertain such doubts; for those dear wounds continually prove the truth of the gospel, and the truth of our salvation by it. Incarnate Deity is a thought that was never invented by poet's mind, nor reasoned out by philosopher's skill. Incarnate Deity, the notion of the God that lived, and bled, and died in human form, instead of guilty man, it is itself its own best witness. The wounds are the infallible witness of the gospel of Christ.

Have you not felt those wounds very powerful to you in the from of *assistance in time of duty*? You said, "I cannot do it, it is too hard for me." You looked to Jesus wounded, and you could do anything. A sight of the bleeding Christ has often filled us with enthusiasm, and so with power: it has rendered us mighty with the omnipotence of God. Look at the church of Christ in all ages. Kings and princes did not know what to do with her. They vowed that they would destroy her. Their persecuting edicts went forth, and they put to death thousands upon thousands of the followers of Christ. But what happened? The death of Jesus made men willing to die for him. No pain, no torture, could keep back the believing host. They loved Jesus so that though their leaders fell by bloody deaths, another rank came on, and yet another, and another, till despots saw that neither dungeon, nor rack, nor fire could stop the march of the army of Christ. It is so now. Christ's wounds pour life into the church by transfusion: the life-blood of the church of God is from Jesus' wounds. Let us know its power and feel it working within us to will and to do of his good pleasure.

And as for those who do not trust him, what shall I say? The Lord help you to do so at once; for as long as you do not trust him, you are under an awful curse, for it is written, "If any man love

not the Lord Jesus, let him be Anathema Maranatha"—cursed at the coming of the Lord. May it not be so with you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 20:18-31.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—785, 937, 282.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

BELOVED READERS,—Thanks be unto God for thirty-four volumes of sermons thus completed. May they continue to be blest of God long after the preacher and his present readers have entered into rest. The speaker is still laid aside by weakness, but the word of the Lord never loses its power. His voice can only be heard of a few thousands, but the printed page will talk to multitudes. Let us pray that the still small voice of the Holy Spirit may sound in the heart of readers for many generations to come.

A book may enclose the spikenard of a truth, which, when forgotten, it shall give back to men with all its first perfume. The generation which now is may treat the doctrines of grace as if they were worthless, but these priceless gems will yet be prized by a more enlightened age, and judged to be of infinitely more value than all the tinsel which amuses our contemporaries. I am content to preach today to a comparatively small circle, since I believe that the truths I deliver are revealed of God for the salvation of multitudes innumerable, and that in some future day the Lord whom I serve will vindicate every faithful testifier of them from the reproach of men. At the same time, I praise God that even so many have been found faithful to the ancient faith of our fathers. Grace be with them all.

At the close of the year I salute my brethren, and entreat a place in their daily prayers. Ask that I may be allowed to return to my pulpit in health, and may see the cause of our Lord prospering everywhere.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, Dec. 20th, 1888.

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