



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 38: 1892

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 38: 1892* by Charles Spurgeon

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Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave

A Sermon

(No. 2237)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, January 3rd, 1892,

Delivered By

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

In connection with the dedication of the Jubilee House, which commemorated the fifth year of a life often threatened by grievous sickness. [Will the reader kindly note the remarks at the end of this sermon, before he reads the discourse?— C.H.S.]

"I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore; but he hath not given me over unto death."—Psalm 118:17, 18.

HOW very differently we view things at different times and in differing states of mind! Faith takes a bright and cheerful view of matters, and speaks very confidently, "I shall not die, but live." When we are slack as to our trust in God, and give way to misgivings and doubts and fears, we sing in the minor key, and say, "I shall die. I shall never live through this trouble. I shall one day fall by the hand of the enemy; and that day is hastening on. Hope is failing me. Bad times are at the door. I shall not live through this crisis." Thus our tongues show the condition of our inner man. We talk according to our frames and feelings, and would make others think that things are as we see them with our jaundiced eyes. Is it not a pity that we give a tongue to our unbelief? Would it not be better to be dumb when we are doubtful? Muzzle that dog of unbelief! Dog did I call him? He is a wolf; or should I call him hound of hell? His voice is as that of Apollyon: it is full of blasphemy against God. Unbelieving utterances will do no good to yourself, and will do harm to those who listen to your babblings. It would be wise to say, "If I should speak thus, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me." Let us be dumb with silence when we cannot speak to the Glory of God. But, oh, it is a blessed thing, when faith is in our spirit reigning and powerful, to let it have ample opportunity to proclaim the honours of his name! To give his heart a tongue, is wise in man when his heart itself is wise. The more talk we get from the mouth of faith, the better: her lips drop sweet-smelling myrrh. A silent faith, if there be such a thing, robs others of benedictions; and at the same time it does worse, for it robs God of his glory. When we have a joyous faith in full operation, let us be communicative, and let us openly and boldly say, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." I would follow my own advice, and crave a patient hearing of you.

You know, perhaps, that this text was inscribed by Martin Luther upon his study wall, where he could always see it when at home. Many Reformers had been done to death—Huss, and others who preceded him, had been burnt at the stake; Luther was cheered by the firm conviction that he was perfectly safe until his work was done. In this full assurance he went bravely to meet his enemies at the Diet of Worms, and indeed, went courageously whenever duty called him. He felt that God had raised him up to declare the glorious doctrine of justification by faith, and all the other truths of what he believed to be the gospel of God; and therefore no faggots could burn him, and no sword could kill him till that work was done. Thus he bravely wrote out his belief, and set it where many

eyes would see it, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." It was no idle boast; but a calm and true conclusion from his faith in God and fellowship with him. May you and I, when we are tried, be able, through faith in God, to meet trouble with the like brave thoughts and speeches! We cannot show our courage unless we have difficulties and troubles. A man cannot become a veteran soldier if he never goes to battle. No man can get his sea legs if he lives always on land. Rejoice, therefore, in your tribulations, because they give you opportunities of exhibiting a believing confidence, and thereby glorifying the name of the Most High. But take heed that you have faith, true faith in God; and do not become a puppet of impressions, much less a slave of the judgments of others. To have David's faith, you must be as David. No man may take up a confidence of his own making: it must be a real work of the Spirit, and growth of grace within, grasping with living tendrils the promise of the living God.

I will read the passage from the psalm over again, and we will then consider it by God's help. "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over to death."

First, here is *the believer's view of his afflictions*. "The Lord hath chastened me sore." Secondly, here is *the believer's comfort under those afflictions*. "He hath not given me over to death. I shall not die, but live." And, thirdly, here is *the believer's conduct after his afflictions and after his deliverance from them*— "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord."

I. At the outset, here is THE BELIEVER'S VIEW OF HIS AFFLICTIONS. "The Lord hath chastened me sore."

On the surface of the works we see the good man's clear observation that *his afflictions come from God*. It is true he perceived the secondary hand, for he says, "Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall." There was one at work who aimed to make him fall. His afflictions were the work of a cruel enemy. Yes; but that enemy's assaults were being overruled by the Lord, and were made to work for his good; so David, in the present verse, corrects himself by saying, "*The Lord* hath chastened me sore. My enemy struck at me and he might make me fall; but in very truth my gracious God was using him to chasten me that I might *not* fall. The enemy was moved by malice, but God was working by him in love to my soul. The second agent sought my ruin, but the Great First Cause wrought my education and establishment."

It is well to have grace enough to see that tribulation comes from God: he fills the bitter cup as well as the sweet goblet. Troubles do not spring out of the dust, neither doth affliction grow up from the ground, like hemlock from the furrows of the field; but the Lord himself kindles the fiery furnace, and sits as a refiner at the door. Let us not dwell too much upon the part played by the devil, as though he were a power co-ordinate with God. He is a fallen creature, and his very existence depends upon the will and permission of the Most High. His power is borrowed, and can only be used as the infinite omnipotence of God permits. His wickedness is his own, but his existence is not self-derived. Blame the devil, and blame all of his servants as much as you will; but still believe in the mysterious but consoling truth that, in the truest sense, the Lord sends trials upon his saints. "Explain that statement," say you. Oh, no; I am not called upon to explain it, but to believe it. A great many things, when they are said to be explained by modern thinkers, are merely explained away, and I have not yet begun to learn that wretched art. Remember how Peter told the Jews that he, whom God by his determinate counsel and foreknowledge decreed to die, even his son Jesus Christ, nevertheless taken by them with wicked hands, when they had crucified and slain him. The death of Christ was pre-determined in the counsel of God, and yet it was none the less an atrocious

crime on the part of ungodly men. The omnipotence and providence of God are to be believed; but man's responsibility is not therefore to be questioned. Our afflictions may come distinctly from man, as the result of persecution or malice; and yet they may come with even greater certainty from the Lord, and may be the needful outcome of his special love to us.

For this reason we may wisely moderate our anger against second causes. If you strike a dog with a stick, he will bite the stick; if he were more intelligent, he would snap at the person using the stick; and, if that intelligence were governed by the spirit of obedience, he would yield to the blow, and learn a lesson from it. Thus, when Shimei reviled David, and Abishai, the son of Zeruah, said unto king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head;" David meekly replied, "So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hath thou done so?" A sight of God's hand in a trial is the end of rebellion against it in the case of every good man. He says, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." We may lie at his feet, and cry, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me;" but, if the reason does not appear, we must bow in reverent submission, and say with one of old, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." Job saw the Lord in his many tribulations, and therefore praised him, saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord that taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Surely there is nothing better for a man of God than to perceive that his smarts and sorrows come from his Father's hand, for then he will say, "The will of the Lord be done." This is the great point in the believer's view of his afflictions: "*He maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole.*"

Next, the believer perceives that *his trials come out as a chastening*. "The Lord hath *chastened* me sore." When a child is chastised, two things are clear: first, that there is something wrong in him, or that there is something deficient in him, so that he needs to be corrected or instructed; and, secondly, it shows that his father has a tender care for his benefit, and acts in loving wisdom towards him. This is certainly true if his father is an eminently kind and yet prudent parent. Children do not think that there can be any need for chastening them; but when years have matured their judgment, they will know better. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous;" if it did seem joyous, it would not be chastening. The "need be" is not only that we have manifold trials, but that we be in heaviness through them. In the smart of the sorrow lies the blessing of the chastisement. God chastens us in the purest love, because he sees that there is an absolute necessity for it: "for he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." Our fathers, according to the flesh, too often corrected us according to their own pleasure, and yet we gave them reverence; but the Father of our spirits corrects us only of necessity—a necessity to which he is too wise to close his eye. Shall we not, therefore, pay greater reverence to him, and bow before him, and live? When Hezekiah was recovered of his sickness, he wrote, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." I find not that men live by carnal pleasure, nor that the life of the spirit is ever found in the wine-vat or in the oil-press; but I do find that life and health often come to saints through briny tears, through the bruising of the flesh, and the oppression of the spirit. So have I found it, and I bear my willing witness that sickness has brought me health, loss has conferred gain, and I doubt not that one day death will bring me fuller life.

Be wise then, dear child of God, and look upon your present affliction as a chastening. "What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." There is not a more profitable instrument in all God's house than the rod. No honey was sweeter than that which dropped from the end of Jonathan's rod; but that is nothing to the sweetness of the consolation

which comes through Jehovah's rod. Our brightest joys are the birth of our bitterest griefs. When the woman has her travail pangs, joy comes to the house because the man-child is born; and sorrow is to us also, full often, the moment of the birth of our graces. A chastened spirit is a gracious spirit; and how shall we obtain it except we are chastened? Like our Lord Jesus, we learn obedience by the things which we suffer. God had one Son without sin, but he never had a son without sorrow, and he never will have while the world stands. Let us, therefore, bless God for all his dealings, and in a filial spirit confess, "Thou, Lord, hast chastened me."

Consider the psalmist's view of his affliction a little more carefully. *He noted that his trials were sore*: he says, "The Lord hath chastened me sore." Perhaps we are willing to own in general that our trouble is of the Lord; but there is a soreness in it which we do not ascribe to him, but to the malice of the enemy, or some other second cause. The false tongue is so ingenious in slander that it has touched the tenderest part of our character, and has cut us to the quick. Are we to believe that this also is, in some sense, of the Lord? Assuredly we are. If it be not of the Lord, then it is a matter for despair. If this evil comes apart from divine permission, where are we? How can a trial be met which is independent of divine rule, and outside of the sacred zone of providential government? It is hopeful when we find that all our ills lie within the ring-fence of omnipotent overruling. It is one comfort that we see a wall of fire round about us, a circle so complete that even the devil, malicious as he is, cannot break through it, to do more than the Lord allows. The camels are gone, the sheep, the oxen, the servants, all are destroyed: all this is most trying; but still it is true—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." But, see, another messenger comes, and cries, "There came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead." Might not Job, then, have said, "This is a blow which I cannot bear; for it is evidently from the prince of the power of the air"? No, but even after that, he said, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." When his wife said, "Curse God, and die," he still blessed God, and held his integrity. He told her that she spoke as one of the foolish women speaketh, and then he wisely added, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." May we stand fast in patience as he did, even when our troubles overflow!

It is folly to imagine, as we have sometimes done, that we could bear anything except that which we are called upon to endure. We are like the young man who says that he wants a situation. What can you do? He can do anything. That man you never engage, because you know that he can do nothing. So it is with us. If we say, "I could bear anything but this," we prove our universal impatience. If we had the choice of our crosses, the one we should choose would turn out to be more inconvenient than that which God appoints for us; and yet we will have it that our present cross is unsuitable and specially galling. I would say to any who are of that mind, "If your burden does not fit your shoulder, bear it till it does." Time will reconcile you to the yoke if grace abides with you. It is not for us to choose our affliction; that remains with him who chooses our inheritance for us. Read well this word, "The Lord hath chastened me sore," and see the Lord's hand in the soreness of your trial. Even while the wound is raw, and the smart is fresh; be conscious that the Lord is near.

Yet there is in the verse a "but", for the *psalmist perceives that his trial is limited*; "but he hath not given me over to death." Certain of the *buts* in Scripture are among the choicest jewels we have. Before us is a "but" which shows that, however deep affliction may be, there is a bottom to the abyss. There is a limit to the force, the sharpness, the duration and the number of our trials.

"If God appoints the number ten,
They ne'er can be eleven."

Whenever the Lord mixes a potion for his people, he weighs each ingredient, measures the bitters, grain by grain, and allows not even a particle in excess to mingle in the draught. Like a careful dispenser, he will not pour out a drop too little or too much.

"To his church, his joy, and treasure,
Every trial works for good:
They are dealt in weight and measure,
Yet how little understood;
Not in anger,
But from his dear covenant love."

Our Father's anger at our sin will never blaze into wrath against us, though in mercy he will smite our sins. Remember, then, this gracious boundary. "The Lord hath chastened me sore: *but* he hath not given me over unto death." We have never yet experienced a trouble which might not have been worse. One affliction kills another: the wind never blows east and west at the same time. When the Lord smites you abound, so do consolations abound through Christ Jesus. The whole band of troubles never comes forth at once. Everything painful is graded and proportioned to the man and his strength, and the object for which it is sent. With the trial the Lord makes the way of escape that we may be able to bear it. Faith can see an end and limit where nature's dim eye sees endless confusion. Where carnal sense—

"Sees every day new straits attend,
And wonders where the scene will end,"

faith looks over the intervening space, and comforts herself with that which is yet to come. Faith sings pleasant songs when she foots it over weary roads.

"The road may be rough, but it cannot be long,
So let's smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

The Lord keep your faith alive, my brethren and sisters, and then whatever trials surge around you, you will sit on the Rock of ages, above the waves, and joyfully sing praises unto your divine Deliverer! Oh, how sweet to say, as I now do, "The Lord hath chastened me sore: *but he hath not given me over unto death!*"

II. This brings me secondly, to consider THE BELIEVER'S COMFORT UNDER HIS AFFLICTIONS. The believer's comfort under his afflictions is this—"I shall not die, but live."

Occasionally this comes in the form of a presentiment. I do not think that I am superstitious: I fancy that I am pretty clear of that vice; yet I have had presentiments concerning things to come or not to come; and, moreover, I have met with so many Christian men who, in the time of trouble have received singular warnings, or sweet assurances of coming deliverance, that I am bound to believe that the Lord does sometimes whisper to the heart of his children, and assure them in trial that they shall not be crushed, and in sickness that they shall not die. How do you understand the story of John Wycliffe, at Lutterworth, in any other way than this? He had been speaking against the monks, and various abuses of the church. He was the first man known to history that preached the gospel in England during the Popish ages—we know him as the Morning Star of the Reformation. He was a man so great that, if he had possessed a printing-press, we might never have needed a Luther; for he had an even clearer light than that great Reformer. He lacked the means of spreading his doctrine, which the art of printing supplied. He did much: he prepared everything to Luther's

hand: and Luther was but the proclaimer of Wycliffe's doctrine. Wycliffe was ill—very ill, and the friars came round him, like crows round a dying sheep. They professed to be full of tender pity; but they were right glad that their enemy was going to die. So they said to him, "Do you not repent? Before we can give you viaticum—the last oiling before you die—would it not be well to retract the hard things which you have said against the zealous friars, and his Holiness of Rome? We are eager to forget the past, and give you the last sacrament in peace." Wycliffe begged an attendant to help him sit up; and then he cried with all his strength, "I shall not die, but live, to declare the works of the Lord, and to expose the wickedness of the friars." He did not die, either: death himself could not have killed him then; for he had more work to do, and the Lord made him immortal until it was done. How could Wycliffe know that he spoke truly? Certainly he was free from all foolhardy brag; but there was upon his mind a foreshadowing of future work that he had to do, and he felt that he could not die until it was accomplished. Now, do not be making up presentiments about all sorts of things because I have said that sometimes the Lord grants them to his saints. This would be a mischievous piece of absurdity. I remember a young woman, who lived not far from here, who had a presentiment that she would die. I do not think that there was really much the matter with her; but she refused to eat, and was likely to be starved. I went to see her, and she told me that she had a presentiment that she should die, and therefore she should not waste food by eating it. She spoke to me very solemnly about this presentiment, and I replied, "I believe there may be such things." Yes: she was sure I was on her side! Then I went on to say, I once had a presentiment that I was a donkey, and it turned out true in my case; and now I had much the same presentiment about her. This surprised her, and I asked her friends to bring her food. She said she would not eat it; and then I told her that if she was resolved on suicide, I would mention it at church-meeting that evening, and put her out of the church, since would could not have suicides in our membership. She could not bear to be put out of the church, and began to eat, and it turned out that my presentiment about her was correct; she had been foolish, and she had the good sense to see that it was so. I felt bound to tell you this story, lest you should fancy that I would support you in sentimental nonsense. While there are so many stupid people in the world, we have no need to give cautions where the wise do not need them. Forecasts of good from the Lord may come to those who are sore sick; and when they do, they help them to recover. We are of good courage when an inward confidence enables us to say, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord."

This, however, I only mention by the way. When a believer is in trouble *he derives great comfort from his reliance upon the compassion of God*. The Lord scourges his sons, but he does not slay them. The believer says, "My Father may make me smart with the blow of a cruel one; but he will do me no real harm, nor allow anyone else to injure me. He will not lay upon me more than is right, nor above what I am able to bear. He will stay his hand when he sees that I have no strength left. Moreover, I know that even when he brings me very low, still underneath me are the everlasting arms. If the Lord kill, it is to make alive: if he wound, it is that he may heal. I am sure of that." O believer, never let anything drive you away from this confidence, for it has sure truth for its foundation! The Lord is good, and his mercy endureth forever. It is not killing, but curing, that God means when he takes the sharp lancet in his hand. The nauseous medicine, which makes the heart sick, works the cure of a worse sickness. "His compassions fail not." He may often put his hand into the bitter box, but he has sweet cordials ready to take the taste away. For a small moment has he forsaken us, but with great mercies will he return to us. You have an effectual comfort if your faith can keep its hold upon the blessed fact of the Lord's fatherly compassion.

Next, faith comforts the tried child of God by assuring him of the forgiveness of his sin, and his *security from punishment*. Please to notice the very distinct difference between chastisement and punishment. I do not say between the meaning of the words, but between the two things which just now I would indicate by those terms. Here is a boy who has committed a theft. He is brought before the magistrate that he may be punished. Punitive justice will be executed upon him by imprisonment or by a birch rod. Another boy has also stolen—stolen from his father, and he is brought before his father, not to be punished as a law-breaker, but to be chastised. There is a great difference between the punishment awarded by justice and the chastisement appointed by love. They may be alike in painfulness, but how different in meaning! The father does not give to the child what he would deserve if it were a punishment according to the law, but what he thinks will cure him of wrong-doing by making him feel that his sin brings sorrow. The magistrate, although he desires the good of the offender, has mainly to consider the law in its bearings upon the whole mass of the population, and he punishes as a matter of justice that which wrongs the commonwealth; but the parent acts on other principles. "The Lord hath chastened me sore," and in that he has acted a fatherly part; "but he hath not given me over unto death" which would have been my lot if he had dealt with me as a judge. My heart trembles at his sword, and cries, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." The sentence of justice has been fulfilled upon our Lord, and our comfort is that now there is nothing punitive in all our troubles. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities;" nor will he do so, for he has already laid our sins upon Christ, and Christ has vindicated the law by bearing its penalty, so that nothing more in the way of penalty is demanded by the moral government of God. That which we receive from the rod of the Lord bears the blessed aspect of chastening from a father's hand; and this is a gladsome fact, which makes even the sharpest smart to be profitable. "Surely the bitterness of death is past," when, in the case of the believer, even death has ceased to be the penalty of sin, and is changed into a sweet falling asleep upon the bosom of the Well-Beloved, to wake up in his likeness. Every other affliction is changed in the same fashion. Our wasps have become bees: their sting is not the prominent thought, but the honey which they lay up in store. "All things work together for good to them that love God," and chastisement is chief among those "all things." What a well of comforting thought is here!

Furthermore, it is a great blessing to a child of God to feel *a full assurance that he has eternal life in Christ Jesus*. "The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death." Notice the words, "Given me over." It is the most awful thing out of hell to be *given over* by God. I fear that there are some such persons. Does not the psalmist refer to such when he says, "They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish"? While God's own people are chastened every morning, and plagued all the day long, the ungodly prosper in the world, and increase in riches. Of his chosen the Lord says, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." But those who are not the Lord's are left unchastened, because the Lord hath said of them, "Let them alone, they are given unto idols." They are allowed their transient mirth; let them make the most they can of it, for their end will be desolation.

Unbroken prosperity and undisturbed health may be the signs of being "given over unto death"; and they are in such cases where sin is committed without pangs of conscience, or apprehensions of judgment. Such freedom from fear may be maintained even in death: "There are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm." All goes quietly with them; "Like sheep they are laid in the

grave." But "in hell they lift up their eyes, being in torments." To be given over unto death is often followed by callousness, presumption, and bravado; but it is a dreadful doom, the direst sentence from the throne of judgment as to this life. But you, dear child of God, have this comfort, *he* has not given *you* over, he is thinking upon you. By scourging you, he is proving that he has not given you over. Men do not prune the vine they mean to uproot; nor thresh out the weeds which they mean to burn. He who is chastened is not given over unto destruction. Years ago, I was taken very ill, in Marseilles, while attempting to come home to England. As I lay in my bed, it seemed as if the cruel mistral wind was driving through my bones, and breaking them with agony. I ordered a fire to be kindled; but when I saw the man begin to light it with a bundle of little branches, I cried out to him, "Pray let me look at that." I found that he was using the dry prunings of the vine, and the tears were in my eyes as I remembered the words—"Men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Comfort followed, for I thought, "I am not unfeeling, like those dried-up shoots; but I am the bleeding vine, which is sharply cut with the pruning-knife; I feel the keen blade in every part of me." Then could I say, "The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over." What joy lies in this, "He hath not given me over"! As long as the father chastens his boy, he has hope of him; if he ceased to do so altogether, we might fear that he thought him too bad to be reclaimed. Be glad, then, dear child of God, that since the Lord chastens you sore, he has not erased your name from his heart, and his hands, nor yielded you up to your enemy's power.

Another meaning may be found in this text, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death." *We are comforted by reliance upon God's power for success in our life-work.* The critics said—and I must quote this because this sermon is very much a personal one—the critics said, when the lad commenced his preaching, that it was a nine days' wonder, and would soon come to an end. When the people joined the church in great numbers, they were "a parcel of boys and girls." Many of those "boys and girls" are here to-night, faithful to God unto this hour. Then there came upon us a heavy, heavy stroke—a sore chastening, which those of us who were present would never forget if we live for a century; and we seemed to be made the reproach of all men, through an accident which we could not have foreseen or prevented. But still the testimony for God in this place, by the same voice, has not ceased, nor lost its power. Still the people throng to hear the gospel after these thirty years and more, and still the doctrines of grace are to the front, notwithstanding all opposition. In the darkest hour of my ministry I might have declared, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." If you have been set on fire by a divine truth, the world cannot put an extinguisher upon you. That candle which God has lighted, the devils in hell cannot blow out. If you are commissioned of God to do a work, give your whole heart to it, trust in the Lord, and you will not fail. I bear my joyful witness to the power of God to work mightily by the most insignificant of instruments.

"The feeblest saint shall win the day,
Though death and hell obstruct the way."

Once more, though we may die, *we are sustained by the expectation of immortality.* When we gather up our feet in our last bed, we may utter this text in a full and sweet sense, "I shall not die, but live." When Wycliffe died as to his body, the real Wycliffe did not die. Some of his books were carried to Bohemia, and John Huss learned the gospel from them, and began to preach. They burnt John Huss, and Jerome of Prague; but Huss foretold, as he died, that another would arise after him, whom they should not be able to put down; and in due time he more than lived again in Luther. Is

Luther dead? Is Calvin dead to-day? That last man the moderns have tried to bury in a dunghill of misrepresentation; but he lives, and will live, and the truths that he taught will survive all the calumniators that have sought to poison it. Die! Often the death of a man is a kind of new birth to him; when he himself is gone physically, he spiritually survives, and from his grave there shoots up a tree of life whose leaves heal nations. O worker for God, death cannot touch thy sacred mission! Be thou content to die if the truth shall live better because thou diest. Be thou content to die, because death may be to thee enlargement of thine influence. Good men die as dies seed-corn which thereby abideth not alone. When saints are apparently laid in the earth, they quit the earth, and rise and mount to heaven-gate, and enter into immortality. No, when the sepulchre receives this mortal frame, we shall not die, but live. Then shall we come to our true stature and beauty, and put on our royal robes, our glorious Sabbath-dress.

III. So I finish with just two or three words on THE BELIVER'S CONDUCT AFTER TROUBLE AND DELIVERANCE. "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord."

Here is *declaration*. If we had no troubles, we should all have the less to declare. A person who has had no experience of tribulation, what great deliverance has he to speak of? Such persons despise the afflicted, and suspect the character of the choicest of men, for lack of power to understand them. What does the man know about the sea who has only walked on the beach? Get with an old sailor, who has been a dozen times around the world, and often wrecked, and he will interest you. So the much-tried Christian has great wonders to declare, and these are chiefly the works of the Lord; for "they that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep." Tried Christians see how God sustains in trouble, and how he delivers out of it, and they declare his works openly: they cannot help doing so. They are so interested themselves in what God has done that they grow enthusiastic over it; and if they held their peace, the stones would cry out.

If you read the chapter further down, you will find that they not only give forth a declaration, but they offer *adoration*. They are so charmed with what God has done for them, that they laud and magnify the name of the Lord, saying, "I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation." The saints of God, when they are rescued from their sorrows, are sure to sing, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour."

This done, they make a further *dedication* of themselves to their delivering God. As the psalm puts it, "God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light." It was very dark! It was very, very dark! We could not see our hand, much less the hand of God! We were frozen with fear. We thought we were as dead men, laid out for burial; when suddenly the Lord's face shown in upon us, and all darkness was gone, and we leaped into joyful security, crying "God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light." We were convinced that it was none other than the true God who had removed the midnight gloom. Doubts, infidelities, agnosticisms—they were impossible. We said, "God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light." In the fourth watch of the night, in the prison where the cold stone shut us in, where the darkness had never known a candle, there a light shone round about us, and an angel smote us on the side, and bade us put on our sandals, and gird ourselves, and follow him. We obeyed the word, and our chains fell off; and when we came to the iron gate which had always been our horror, it opened of its own accord, and we went out into the streets of the city, and we scarcely felt that it could be true, but thought we saw a vision. But when we had considered the thing, and found it was even ourselves, and ourselves set in a large place at perfect liberty, then we said, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." God hath showed us light, and we

will live to him for ever and for ever. Oh, you, tried believers, who have, nevertheless, not been given over unto death, who can say to-night, "I shall not die, but live," present yourselves anew unto your delivering Lord as living sacrifices through Jesus Christ your Lord! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON Psalm 118.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—708, 73 (Part II.), 710.

This sermon begins a new volume; in fact, it commences Vol. 38 of *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*. I have, myself, selected it, and prepared it for the press, because it is most suitable as my own personal testimony at the present moment. The subject is even more my own this day than it was seven and a half years ago; for I have been in deeper waters, and nearer to the mouth of the grave. With my whole soul I praise delivering grace. To the Lord God, the God of Israel, I consecrate myself anew. For the covenant of grace, for the revelation of infallible truth in the Bible, for the atonement by blood, and the immutable love of the ever blessed Three-in-One, I am a witness; and more and more would I abide faithful to the gospel of the grace of God. I see each day more reasons for faith, and fewer excuses for doubt. Those who will may ship their anchors and be drifted about the current of the age; but I will sing, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise!"

The whole passage, Ps. 118:13-18, is inscribed upon a marble slab on the Jubilee House at the back of the Tabernacle, and I am told that many went to read it while I lay in the greatest peril through sore sickness, and were comforted thereby. When the Lord permits me to return, I must raise yet another memorial to his praise.

"Thou Art Now the Blessed of the Lord."

A Sermon

(No. 2238)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, January 10th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-Day Evening, May 3, 1891.

"Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."—Genesis 26:29.

THESE words truly describe the position of many whom I address at this time. There are hundreds here upon whom my eye can rest, and to any one of whom I might point with this finger, or rather, to whom I might extend this hand, to give a hearty shake, and say, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." I need not say it in the same spirit, nor for the same reason, that the Philistines did. They had behaved basely towards Isaac, and now that he had prospered, they urged him to forget the past. They meant, "This is why we trust that you will deal kindly with us, and overlook our hard usage; for, in spite of all, God has so blessed you that you need not be fretful and pettish, and remember what we have done." I am glad that I am under no necessity to strive to make up a quarrel in this way. These many years we have dwelt in peace, and have enjoyed sweet fellowship together. You have borne with my weaknesses often, and bestowed upon me a wealth of affection which I am sure I do not deserve. So, though I use the language of Abimelech and his friends, my motive is a very different one. Yet the truth is the same concerning many a one here: "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

There is, however, much force in the argument which these Philistines used. If God has richly blessed us, notwithstanding all our faults and failures, surely we should learn to forgive many injuries done to ourselves. If the Lord forgives us our debt of ten thousand talents, we must be willing to forgive our fellow-servant his debt of a hundred pence. Child of God, if you are now the blessed of the Lord, you will often turn a blind eye towards the offenses of your fellow-men. You will say, "God has so blessed me, that I can well overlook any wrongs that you have inflicted, any hard words that you have said. I am now blessed of the Lord; so let bygones be bygones." May you have grace given to you to do that now, if any of you have had a little squabble with any other! If there have been any difficulties between any of you, I would hope that, before I really get into my subject, while with my finger I point you out and say to each one of you, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord," you will immediately say, "As surely as that is true, I do from my very heart forgive all who have offended me, whether Philistine, or Israelites, or Gentiles. How can I do otherwise who myself have received such grace while so unworthy?"

Remember, that this was spoken by the Philistine king as a reason why he wished to have Isaac for a friend. In your choice of friends, choose those who are the friends of God. If you would have a blessing upon your friendship, select a man whom God has blessed. Look out for one who is a disciple of Christ and say, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord; therefore I seek thine acquaintance. Come under my roof; you will bring a blessing with you." Speak to me in the street; your morning word will be a benediction to me." It was the old custom with apostolic men to say, as they entered

a house, "Peace be unto this house." We have given up all idea of blessing our fellow-men in that way. But why have you done so? Is it from a want of love, or want of faith in our own prayer that God would make it even so? For my part, I value a good man's blessing. As I drove up a hill, in the country, some time ago, a poor man and his wife were walking down the hill. I had never seen them before; but the woman pulled the husband by his coat; they both stood and looked at me, and at last she said, quite loudly, "It's him, God bless him!" and although her greeting was not quite grammatical, it evidently came from her heart, and I felt happier for it, as I went on my way. I saw her afterwards, and asked her the reason of her words, "Why," she said, "I have read your sermons for many a year, and I could not help saying, 'God bless him!' when I saw you, for you have been a blessing to me." Thus that humble woman, being blessed of the Lord, became a blessing to me; and we all of us, even the most obscure, who know the grace of God, might daily be like a great benediction in the midst of the people. When you think of your minister, say sometimes, "God bless him!" it will do him good to hear it. Say to your friend, "God bless you!" Say to your children, "God bless you, my dear boy! The Lord bless you, my dear girl!" They will be the better for it, if you yourself are the blessed of the Lord. You, grandsires, lay your hands on the children's heads, and bless them; they will not forget it when they grow up. It may be that you have done much more for them than you have thought. Concerning his flock the Lord says, "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing." God's people are blessed that they may bless; therefore, for the sake of others, as well as for your own, seek that my text may be abundantly true of you. May this be your prayer—

"Lord, I hear of showers of blessing,
Thou art scattering full and free;
Showers, the thirsty land refreshing;
Let some droppings fall on me,
Even me."

It was for this reason that the Philistines sought the friendship of Isaac, because they could truly say to him, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

I want not so much to preach from this text as to ask every believer in Christ to feel that it is personally true. Once you were condemned; but, being in Christ Jesus, "there is therefore now no condemnation." "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Once you were at enmity against God; but now, being reconciled to God by the death of his Son, you are his friend: "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." "Ye were sometimes in darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." How great the change for the man or woman to whom we can say "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord"!

There was a day when I was cursed, and there was a day when I loved sin, and opposed God's will; but now I love sin no longer, and I find my highest delight in doing the will of my Father in heaven. My soul, if this be true, "thou art now the blessed of the Lord"; thou art a miracle of mercy; thou art a prodigy of grace; and truly, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Sit still in your pews, ye people of God, and roll this sweet morsel under your tongue! Once, because you believed not, the wrath of God was resting upon you, but now you can say, "O Lord! I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." Surely then "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Thou art poor, perhaps, in this world's goods; but being an heir of the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you," why, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Or, perchance, you are weak and

ill, and scarcely able to be in your place; but though thy flesh and strength fail, "thou art now the blessed of the Lord," for by his grace, you will triumph over all. With many a fear and many a care oppressed, still "thou art now the blessed of the Lord," and on him thou canst cast thy care, and from him receive deliverance from all thy fears. Whatever thy distresses, this overwhelms them all as with a flood of joy. You can join with one who, though in a very humble station of life, says,—

"O joy! 'tis mine, this life divine,
 Life hid with Christ in God;
 Once sin-defiled, now reconciled,
 And washed in Jesus' blood.
 "Oft far astray from Christ the Way,
 I went with wilful feet;
 From hopeless track, love brought me back,
 With words of welcome sweet."

If thou canst truly sing this sweet song, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Thou art not yet perfect; thou art not yet taken out of the body to be with thy Lord in bliss; thou art not yet risen from the dead to stand before the throne of God in thy body of resurrection glory; but yet thou art now, even now, the blessed of the Lord. Will you let the flavour of this sweet truth be in your mouth, and in your heart, while I seek to open this subject to you?

I. I would remark upon it, first, that in the case of Isaac, **THIS WAS THE TESTIMONY OF ENEMIES**. It was the Philistines who said, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." There are some of God's people who are so evidently favoured of heaven that even those who despise and oppose them cannot help saying of them, "They are the blessed of the Lord." I wish that we were all such, so distinguished by piety, so marked out by strength of faith and prevalence of prayer, that even our Abimelechs might be forced to say to each of us, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." What caused this heathen king and his companions to use such an expression about Isaac? In seeking the reasons which led them to see the bounty of the Lord in the case of Abraham's son, we may find some signs of the blessing of God upon ourselves and upon our children.

I think, first, that *they saw it in his wonderful prosperity*. We read in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth verses, "Then Isaac sowed in the land, and received in the same year a hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: for he had possession of flocks and possession of herds, and great store of servants." Prosperity is not always a token of blessing. It may be proof of the Lord's favour, and it may not be. God sometimes gives most to those on earth who will have nothing in heaven; as if, seeing that he cannot bless them in eternity, he would let them enjoy the poor sweets of time. I have heard it said, that prosperity was the blessing of the old covenant and adversity the blessing of the new. Nevertheless, it is true that worldly prosperity may be sent, and has been sent, to the children of God, as a token of divine favour. It is not always when we eat the quails that they make us ill; God can send them in such a way that we may enjoy them, and be strengthened by them. He can give riches as well as poverty. That was the Philistines' reason, and it is a Philistine's reason. It is not a very satisfactory one, but it has some force, for the Lord Jesus himself gave the sign of blessing upon the meek, saying, "They shall inherit the earth;" and in the same memorable discourse upon the mount, he uttered the exhortation and promise, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things"—the things which the gentiles seek after—"shall be added unto you." So we may fairly construe the "mercies of God" as a sign of his blessing.

These Philistines had a further reason for thinking that Isaac was blessed of God; *they felt it by divine impression*. A secret spirit whispered to the king, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." God always has a way of making men feel "how awful goodness is." They may jest and jeer against a Christian, but his life vanquishes them. They cannot help it. They must do homage to the supremacy of grace. The promise is still true, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." God will impress upon the minds even of unbelievers this fact, that such a man, such a woman, is one whom God has blessed. Do you not know some believers who have such an air of other-worldliness about them, that though they mix freely with the people amongst whom they dwell, men instinctively acknowledge that "they have been with Jesus," and have been blessed by him? I do not care to see pictures of the saints of old with a nimbus of light round their heads, even though they have been painted by the old masters, yet there is a something about one who lives a saintly life, a brightness encircling him, like the symbol of God's presence, which separates him from those around him, and leads us to say to him, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Further, before the Philistines bore this testimony to Isaac, no doubt *they remarked his gentleness*. I do believe that there is nothing that has such power over ungodly men as meekness of spirit, quietness of behavior, patience of character, and the continual conquest over an evil temper. If you grow angry when people are angry with you, you will have lost your position; but if you can be patient under persecution, if you can smile when they ridicule you, if you can yield your rights, if you can bear and continue to bear, you are greater than the man who has taken a city. Remember the blessing promised to the disciples of Christ who are peacemakers. They are not only the children of God, but "*they shall be called the children of God*." People will say, "If any man is a true Christian, he is one;" they will have no doubt about it. When longsuffering, gentleness, and meekness are in the life, men begin to say to such a one, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." As the gentleness of the Lord makes us great, the gentleness of the saints brings to God great glory. Anger hath a temporary sovereignty, that melts in the heat of the sun. Quietness of spirit is king over all the land. If thou canst rule thyself, thou canst rule the world. Isaac conquered by his meekness; for when Abimelech saw that he yielded well after well rather than keep up a quarrel, he said to him, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Some of you do not understand this. "What!" you say, "are we not to stick up for ourselves?" That depends upon whose you are; if you are your own, take care of yourselves; but if you are Christ's, let him take care of you. "But," you say, "if you tread on a worm, it will turn." But surely you will not make a worm your pattern? Nay, but let the meek and lowly Christ be your example, and seek to be a partaker of his Spirit. He prayed even for his murderers, "Father, forgive them," and he ever sought to return good for evil. I pray you to do the same, cultivate a gentle spirit, and even worldlings will say to you, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Now, while these Philistines saw that God blessed Isaac, *they nevertheless envied him*, as we read in the fourteenth verse. How strange it is that men, who do not care to be blessed of God themselves, envy them who are blessed of him! I heard one say, "It is not just that God should have a chosen people." Sir, do you want to be one of God's people? These blessings which God gives to them, do you want to have them? You may have them, if you will. If you will not have them, I pray you do not quarrel with God because he chooses to give them where he wills. There are two great truths, which from this platform, I have proclaimed for many years. The first is, that salvation is free to every man who will have it; the second is, that God gives salvation to a people whom he

has chosen; and these truths are not in conflict with one another in the least degree. If you want the blessing of the Lord, have it even now, for my commission as an ambassador of Christ is to beseech men to be reconciled to God; if you do not want it, do not quarrel with God for giving it to his own chosen. It was so with those Philistines—they wanted not Jehovah's blessing, and yet they envied Isaac, who had it.

But while they envied him, *they feared him, and courted his favour*. Do I speak to some young believer who has gone into a house of business, or some Christian woman who has been placed in a family where her religion exposes her to opposition? Let me counsel you to go straight on, taking no notice of the hindrances thrown in your way. You will first be envied; after that you will be feared; and after that you will be sought after, and your company will be desired. If you can only keep as firm as Isaac did, never losing your temper, but always being gentle, and meek, and kind, you will conquer; and you who are to-day despised, will yet come to be honoured, even as Isaac was by the very Abimelech who had, just a little while before, asked him to go away.

A man of God, who was bearing testimony for the faith, on one occasion was pushed into a kennel by a person passing by, who said, as he thrust him in, "There, take that, John Bunyan." He took off his hat, and said, "I will take anything if you give me the name of John Bunyan. I count it such an honour to have that title, that you may do anything that you like with me." To be identified with those who have been blessed of the Lord is worth more than all the favours of the world. We are in good company. If men despise you, it matters little when God has blessed you. If they push you into the gutter for being a Christian, take your hat off, and thank the, for it is worth while to bear any scorn, that you may have the honour to be numbered with the followers of Christ. Rest assured that if you will count it a privilege even to be mocked for your faith, those who persecute you to-day, will acknowledge your high position to-morrow. It is a grand thing when any one of us thus gets the testimony of our enemies, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

II. Now, secondly, not only did his enemies thus bear witness to Isaac, saying, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord;" but **THIS WAS ALSO THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD**. It was because he had the witness of God that he was able so to behave as to secure the favourable verdict of the Philistines. Like Enoch before his translation, Isaac "had this testimony, that he pleased God." And was thus meekly able to bear the displeasure of the world. When they hunted him from one well, he digged another, yet all the time he with joy drew "water out of the wells of salvation." He might almost have sat for the picture which Jeremiah drew of the blessed man, centuries afterwards, when he said, "Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when the heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."

Let us see, then, how Isaac had the testimony of God as to his blessedness.

First, this was the Lord's testimony to him *in promises founded upon the covenant* which he had made with Abraham his father. God said to Isaac, "I will be with thee, and will bless thee." In the third verse of this chapter, the promise is made doubly sure to Isaac when God says, "I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father." And in the twenty-fourth verse of the chapter, where the promise is renewed, it is still on the ground of the covenant: "I am with thee, and I will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake." Now, do you know anything of the covenant relationship between God and his people? The bulk of Christians nowadays are wholly ignorant on this subject. The preachers have forgotten it; yet the covenant is the top and

bottom of all theology. He that is the master of the knowledge of the covenants has the key of true divinity. But the doctrine has gone out of date except with a few old-fashioned people, who are supposed to know no better, but who, in spite of all the taunts of their opponents, cling to the doctrines of grace, and find in them the very marrow and fatness of the truth of God. I love the promises of God because they are covenant promises God has engaged to keep his word with his people in the person of his dear Son. He has bound himself, by covenant with Christ, and will not, cannot go back from his word; and Christ has fulfilled the conditions of the covenant, and he who hath "brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant," will certainly, "make you perfect to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ." The promise is a double promise when it is confirmed in Jesus. Though we are poor and worthless creatures, yet can we say with David, "Although my house not be so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." Twice God says by Isaiah, "I have given him for a covenant to the people" thrice happy are they who receive what God hath given, and who, in Christ, enter into that blessed bond. Beloved, if God has laid the promise home to you by the Spirit, and let you see it as a covenant promise, the God has borne this testimony to you: "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Thou art blessed now; thou shalt be blessed all thy life long on earth;

"And when through Jordan's flood,
Thy God shall bid thee go,
His arm shall thee defend,
And vanquish every foe;
And in this covenant thou shalt view
Sufficient strength to bear thee through."

Further, the Lord bore testimony to Isaac *in secret manifestation*. He came to him in the watches of the night, and spake with him face to face. None but those who are the blessed of the Lord have such communion with him. "How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" asked Judas, not Iscariot, at the supper-table, before the Lord's betrayal. Ah, Judas! It is simply because thou art not Iscariot, but a true disciple; else hadst thou never known intimately the presence of Christ. If he manifests himself to us in this choice manner, it is because he has blessed us in a way in which he would not bless the ungodly world. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant." Do you ever get manifestations of Christ? Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto you? Then thou hast a divine attestation that "thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Isaac also found this testimony, I think, *in divine acceptance of his worship*. We find that "he builded an altar," and then he, "pitched his tent." Keep up the altar of God in your home, and keep to the right order—the altar first, and the tent second. When God accepts you there, and makes your family altar to be a place of refreshment and delight to you, you will feel that in thus doing he is giving you the sweet assurance that you are now the blessed of the Lord. It is a pity that there are so many houses nowadays without roofs—I mean, houses of Christian people without family prayer. What are some of you at? If your children turn out ungodly, do you wonder at it, seeing that there is no morning and evening prayer, no reading of the Word of God in your home? In every home where the grace of God is known, there should be an altar, from which should rise the incense of praise, and at which the one sacrifice for sin should be pleaded before God day by day. In the

midst of such family piety, which I fear is almost dying out in many quarters, you will get the witness, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Isaac had another proof that he was blessed of God *in swift chastisement for sin*. He told a lie; he said that Rebekah was his sister, whereas she was his wife. Although that might seem to prove that he was not blessed of the Lord, the proof of his blessedness was that he was found out, and became ashamed of it. Worldly people may do wrong, and very likely get off scot-free; but if a Christian man goes off the straight line, he will have an accident in his roguery, and be found out; while other men may do ten times as badly, and never be suspected. Rascals who know not God, and who despise the ordinary morality of honest men, may speculate on the Stock Exchange with other peoples' money and never be found out; but if you who really love God only do it once, and say, "Well, I feel driven to it," you will be caught as surely as you live. It is one mark of a child of God, that when he does wrong, he gets a whipping. If I were in the street, and saw strange boys breaking windows, I would say, "Go home, or I will find a policeman for you." But if it were my own boy, I would chastise him myself. I would not meddle with the other boys; but with my own I would. So it is with God; who saith, by the mouth of Amos, to his people, "You only have I known for all of the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." It is a mark of God's blessing a man, that if the man does wrong, he cannot do it with impunity. Whenever your sins make you smart, thank God; for it is better to smart than it is to sin, and better that the smart should wean you from sin than that something sweet should come in to make you the slave of that sin forever.

Well, I will not dwell further on this. God testified to Isaac's heart, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." May he testify that to each one of you who know his name, and have received his covenant promises! May the words come to you like a benediction from the throne of God, and send you out to testify of his goodness, and to bless him who hath blessed us, saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"!

III. Now, in the third place, I must draw your attention to the fact that, though Isaac was the blessed of the Lord, **THIS DID NOT SECURE HIM FROM TRIAL**. Already I have approached this part of my subject by speaking of the speedy discovery of his sin; but in addition to this, there were other sorrows not directly resulting from his own conduct, but permitted by God in order that he, who was now blessed, should be still further enriched in character and conduct.

Even before Abimelech saw the source of Isaac's grace, he was "the blessed of the Lord"; yet *he still had to move about*. He was a pilgrim and a stranger, as was his father, and he lived as an alien in the land. He was without any inheritance in the country, and though his flocks and herds increased, he dwelt but in tents, while others reared for themselves stately houses and palaces. But God had prepared some better thing for him, and "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." Thus, this trial became a means of blessing to him, as trials always do when sanctified by the Spirit of God. If these words reach any child of God whose nest on earth has been disturbed, whose house has been broken up, I would seek to cheer you by the thought of the "continuing city" which shall soon be your portion. If you have, through Christ, an assurance of an abundance entrance there, though you never have a house of your own on earth, and roam from place to place a stranger, seeming to be very often in the way of other people, yet remember that "thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Daily he doth load thee with benefits, and thou canst even now have thy home in his love.

"He loves, he knows, he cares,
 Nothing *that* truth can dim;
 He gives the very best to those
 Who leave the choice to him."

In spite of the position of blessedness in which Isaac was placed, *he had enemies to meet*. It is true that, at length, his foes became his friends; but the blessing of the Lord did not begin with their friendship; they then discovered and confessed the fact; but Isaac had been "the blessed of the Lord" all along. When Abimelech sent him away, and when "the herdsmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdsmen," he was not shut out from God's favour. Jehovah never bade him depart, nor took from him his good Spirit. So, tried heart, when foes press around thee, and one thing after another seems to go wrong, do not begin to write bitter things against thyself, as though God had forsaken thee. Remember that it is of the Lord that thou art blessed, and not of men. He will never forsake thee, and his deliverance shall soon make thy heart glad. Even in the midst of the trial, "thou art now the blessed of the Lord," and, like Isaac, after you have drunk of the waters of "contention" and "hatred", you will be brought to Rehoboth, where you shall have "room", yea, even to Beer-sheba, "the well of the oath", or "the seventh well", "the well of satiety", where your enemies shall seek your favour, and glorify your Lord.

Isaac had especially one trial that ate into his very soul; *he had domestic sorrow*. Esau's double marriage with Hittite women was a grief to his father and to his mother; and I mention this because there may be some of God's people who are suffering in the like way. I saw one, some days ago, who said, "I am like the Spartan who carried a fox in his bosom, that ate even to his heart, for I have a thankless, ungrateful child;" and, as he spoke to me, I saw the heart-break of the man. Ah! It may be that some of you are in that condition. If any young man or young woman here is causing that grief to a parent, I pray him or pray her to think of it. You are not heartless, I hope: you have not forgotten your mother's prayers or your father's care of you. Do not kill those who gave you being, or insult and vex those to whom you owe so much. But oh, dear brother or sister, if you have come here broken-hearted about your Esau, and all that he is doing, I want to take you by the hand and say, "But still thou art blessed of the Lord. Let this console thee." What if Abraham has his Ishmael? Yet God blessed him. Bear bravely this trial. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Give God no rest, day or night, till he save thy boy, and bring back thy girl. But still, be not despairing; be not cast down; for it is true of thee—and drink in, I pray thee, this cup of consolation—that "thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Let me speak two or three earnest words in closing. "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." *"Now."* Beloved, do labour to get a hold of a present blessing. If you are indeed saved, do not be always thinking of what you are to enjoy in heaven; but seek to be the blessed of the Lord now. Why not have two heavens, a heaven here and a heaven there? What is the difference between a believer's life here and a believer's life there? Only this: here Christ is with us, and there we are with Christ. If we live up to our privileges this is the only difference we need to know. Try to be "now the blessed of the Lord." I have heard of a traveller who was followed by a beggar, in Ireland, who very importunately asked for alms. As long as there seemed a chance of getting anything, the old woman kept saying, "May the blessing of God follow your honour all through your life!" but when all hope of a gift was vanished, she bitterly added, "and never overtake you." But the blessings which God has for his chosen are not of that slow-footed kind which never catch us up. It is written, "All these blessings shall come on thee, and *overtake thee*, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of

the Lord thy God." I beseech you, then, to lay hold of this overtaking blessing. Let it not pass unheeded. "Thou art *now* the blessed of the Lord."

Next, be very grateful that you are in this position of grace. You might have been in the drink-shop, you might have been speaking infidelity, you might have been in prison, you might have been in hell. But "thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Wherefore, praise the Lord, whose mercy endureth for ever. If you do not lift up your voice, yet lift up your heart, and bless him for the grace which hath made you to differ from other people.

Again, tell others about it. If "thou art now the blessed of the Lord," communicate to others the sacred secret that has been the means of bringing such joy to thee. Are we earnest enough about the souls of others? Christian men and women, do you love your fellow-creatures, or do you not? How few there are of us who make it our business to be constantly telling out the sweet story of Jesus and his love! I read, the other day, of a chaplain in the Northern army in the lamentable war in the United States, who, while he lay wounded on the battle-field, heard a man, not far off, utter an oath. Though he himself was so badly wounded that he could not stand, yet he wished to reach the swearer to speak a gospel message to him, and he thought, "I can get to him if I roll over." So, though bleeding profusely himself, he kept rolling over and over till he got to the side of the poor blasphemer, and on the lone battle-field he preached to him Jesus. Some of the other men came along, and he said to them, "Can you carry me? I fear that I am dying, but I do not want to be taken off the field. I should like you, if you would, to carry me from one dying man to another, all the night long, that I might tell them of a Saviour." What a splendid deed was this! A bleeding man talking to those who were full of sin about a Saviour's bleeding wounds! Oh, you who have no wound, who can walk, and possess all the faculties to fit you for the service, how often you miss opportunities and refuse to speak of Jesus! "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord," and at this moment I would have you think that the blessed Lord lays his pierced hand on thee saying, "Go and tell others what I have done for thee." Never cease to tell the divine tale, as opportunity is given, until thy voice is lost in death; then thy spirit shall begin to utter the story in the loftier sphere.

You are coming to the Lord's table, and I invite you, beloved, to come here with much love. Do not come with doubts and fears, with a cold or lukewarm heart. Remember "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Come, eat his flesh, and drink his blood. There, on the table, thou wilt see nothing but the embers of his flesh and blood; but if thou believest, Christ will feed thee spiritually upon himself, and as thou dost eat that bread of heaven, and drink that wine of life, thou mayest well hear a voice saying, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Well do I remember the time when I would have given away my eyes to be as a dog under the table, to have eaten only the crumbs which fell, as others feasted, and now for forty-and-one years to-day I have sat as a child at the table, blessed be his name!

As I told our friends this morning, this day is an anniversary of peculiar interest to me. Forty-and-one years ago I went down into the river, and was baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

"Yet have been upheld till now:

Who could hold me up but thou?"

May you, each of you, as you come to the table, hear a voice saying in your heart, "Now a believer; now justified; now quickened; now regenerate; now in Christ; now dear to the heart of God. "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Oh, that some who came in here without the blessing would get it before they go! He that believeth in Jesus hath all the blessing which Jesus can give to him; forgiveness for the past; grace for the present; and glory for the future. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," is the word of the Lord to thee, thou doubter. He was made a curse for thee, that he might redeem thee from the curse of the broken law, for it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." He hung on a tree for guilty man. Believe thou in him, and as thou believest, eternal joys shall come streaming down into thy dry and desolate heart, and it shall be said to thee, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." You shall be blessed now, and blessed for evermore! God grant it, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis 26

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—758, 757, 786.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

Dear Friends,—I have received letters from readers who speak of reading *with interest* the notes at the end of the sermons. I feared that these jottings had become monotonous, and therefore I am amazed that they should interest so many. I am not able, like Paganini, to discourse sweet music on a single string; and therefore I impute the *interest* spoken of the love of the reader rather than to the genius of the writer. We are always interested in the smallest details of the lives of those we greatly love.

This present note may record the fact that on the last evening of 1891, and in the morning of New Year's Day, 1892, I gave two short addresses to about a dozen friends in this hotel. My silence of more than half a year is ending. The chirping of the first spring birds is heard in my land. It is true that I sat down, and talked my little piece, and that I felt glad when it came to an end; but still it has been done, and be that was almost numbered with the dead is now beginning to speak in the ears of the living.

These two little talks, only of interest to my friends, will probably be preserved in *The Sword and the Trowel* for February, for Mr. Harrald took them down in shorthand. You will all guess how happy I am, for I have now some signs and tokens of returning strength; and I am praising God with all my heart for such a wonderful restoration.

To friends who have lovingly kept up the funds for the various institutions, I send my heartiest thanks, and to all well-wishers my kindest regards.

Yours to serve till death,

C.H. SPURGEON.

Hotel Beau Rivage, Menton,

January 2, 1892.

Is God in the Camp?

A Sermon

(No. 2239)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, January 17th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, April 9th, 1891.

"And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! For there hath not been such a thing heretofore"—1 Samuel 4:7.

Israel was out of gear with God. The people had forgotten the Most High, and had gone aside to the worship of Baal. They had neglected the things of God; therefore they were give up to their enemies. When Jehovah had brought them out of Egypt, he instructed them how they were to live in the land to which he would bring them, and warned them that if they forsook him they would be chastened. His words were very plain: "If ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins." In fulfillment of this threatening, the Philistines had been divinely permitted to make great havoc of the idolatrous Israelites, and to hold them in cruel slavery.

The only way for them to get out of their trouble was to return to God, who, by his judgments, seemed to say. "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." The only cure for their hurt was to go back with repentance, and renew their faith and their covenant with God. Then all would have been right. But this is the last thing that men will do. Our minds, by nature, love not spiritual things. We will attend to any outward duty, or to any external rite; but to bring our hearts into subjection to the divine will, to bow our minds to the Most High, and to serve the Lord our God with all our heart, and all our soul, the natural man abhors. Yet nothings less than this will suffice to turn our captivity.

Instead of attempting to get right with God, these Israelites set about devising superstitious means of securing the victory over their foes. In this respect most of us have imitated them. We think of a thousand inventions; but we neglect the one thing needful. I may be addressing some who, at this time, are passing through sore trial, and who therefore think that they must have forgotten some little thing in connection with the external religion, instead of seeing that it matters little what outward observance they may neglect, so long as they do not possess the faith, without which it is impossible to please God. They forgot the main matter, which is to enthrone God in the life, and to seek to do his will by faith in Christ Jesus. Get right with God; confess thy sin; believe in Jesus Christ, the appointed Saviour; be reconciled to God by the death of his Son; then all will be right between thee and the Father in heaven. We cannot bring men to this, apart from the Spirit of God.

In this sermon I shall have to show you how often, and in how many ways, men seek other methods of cure than the only one, namely, to take the case to God. They heal their hurt slightly. They cry, "Peace! Peace!" where there is no peace, and adopt a thousand devious devices rather than accept the only remedy provided by the Great Physician for sin-sick souls. Instead of seeking to become right with God, these Israelites thought that, if they could get the ark of the covenant,

which had been the symbol of Jehovah's presence, and bring it from the tent of Shiloh into the midst of their camp, they would then be certain of victory. So they sent and fetched the ark; and when it came into the camp, they were enthusiastic as if their banners already waved over a victorious; they lifted up their voices so loudly, that the earth rang again with their shouts, while the Philistines, hearing their exulting shout, and finding out the reason, were greatly afraid. With fearful hearts, and trembling lips, already counting that all was lost, their enemies turned to one another, and said, "God has come into the camp. Woe unto us! For there hath not been such a thing heretofore."

In considering this subject, we will think, first, of *the great mistake* which both Israel and the Philistines made. In the second place, we will consider *the great truth* of which their mistake was a caricature. God *does* come into the camp when his people go forth to fight in his name; and when he really comes, the tide of battle is turned. When I have spoken on these two things, I shall close, as God shall help me, by speaking upon *the great lessons* which lie almost upon the very surface of the narrative.

I. First, then, let us consider THE GREAT MISTAKE which both Israelites and Philistines made. The Israelites, instead of seeing to God himself, went to Shiloh to fetch the ark of the covenant. The ark was the sacred place where God revealed himself in the days when his people truly served him; but it was devoid of power, without the presence of him who dwelt between the cherubim. The Israelites were mistaken, for they shouted long before they were "out of the wood." Before they had won any victory, the sight of the ark made them boastful and confident. The Philistines fell into an error of a different kind, for they were frightened without any real cause. They said, "God has come into the camp;" whereas God had not come at all. It was only the ark with the cherubim upon it; God was not there.

The mistake they made was just this: *they mistook the visible for the invisible*. It has pleased God, even in our holy faith, to give us some external symbols—water, and bread, and wine. They are so simple, that it does seem, at first sight, as if men could never have made them objects of worship, or used them as instruments of a kind of witchcraft. One would have thought that these symbols would only have been like windows of agate and gates of carbuncle. Through which men would behold the Saviour, and draw near to him. Instead thereof, some have neither looked through the windows nor passed through the gates, but have ascribed to the gates and the windows that which is only to be found in him who is behind them both. It is sad, indeed, when the symbol takes the place of the Saviour! Man is by nature both an atheist and an idolater. These are two shades of the same thing. We want, if we do worship at all, something that we can see. But a God that can be seen is no God; and so the idolater is first cousin to the atheist. He has a god which is no god, for he cannot be a god if he can be apprehended by human senses. This ark of the covenant, which was but a chest of wood covered with gold, with angelic figures on the lid, was simply a token of the presence of God with his people; and these Israelites transformed it into a sacred object, to be highly revered, to be worshipped, and, as it appears, to be trusted in. The elders said, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when *it* cometh among us, *it* may save us out of the hand of our enemies." They ascribed to the ark what could only be done by God himself. This is the tendency of us all. Anything which we can see, we pine after. Hence we lean upon the arm of flesh: we trust in man, though it is written plainly enough, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Yet, still we want some symbol, some token, something before our eyes; and if it can be something artistic, so much the better. We lay hold of something beautiful, that will charm the eye, and produce

a kind of sensuous feeling, and straightway we mistake our transient emotion for spiritual worship and true reverence. This is the great mistake that many still make; they think that God has come into the camp merely because some outward religious rite or ceremony has been observed, or because some sacred shrine has been set up among them.

These Israelites fell into another mistake, which is also often made to-day: *they preferred office to character*. In their distress, instead of calling upon God, they sent for Hophni and Phinehas. Why did their hearts turn to them? Simply because they were priests, and the people had come to hold the sacred office in such superstitious reverence that they thought that was everything. But these young men were sinners against the Lord exceedingly; they were not even moral men, much less were they spiritual men. They made the house of God to be abhorred, and dishonored the Lord before all Israel. Yet, because they happened to hold the office of the priesthood, they were put in the place of God. Dear friends, this is a kind of feeling which many indulge. They think they shall be saved if they have a Levite for their priest. They imagine that the worship of God must be conducted properly, because the man who conducts it is in the apostolic succession, and has been duly ordained. You shall see a man eminent for the holiness of his life, for the disinterestedness of his character, for the fidelity of his preaching, for his power in prayer, for the blessing that rests upon his ministry in the conversion of sinners; but he is counted a mere nobody, because he lacks the superstitious qualification which deluded men think is so necessary. Here are Hophni and Phinehas, two of the grossest sinners in all the land of Israel; but then, you see, they are in the line of Aaron, and so they are trusted, and indeed are put in the place of God. Now, God forbid that we should say a word against the house of Aaron, or against any who speak the name of the Lord, whom God has truly called unto his work! But, beloved, this work is not a mere matter of pedigree; it is a question of the abiding presence of God with man and in a man. Unless God be with the minister whom you hear, to what purpose do you listen? If the leader of the church be not one who walks with God, where will he lead you? "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." The blind man may wear a badge on his arm to show that he is a certified guide; but will you be saved from the ditch simply because he belongs to the order of guides, and has his certification with him? Be not led away by any such vain notion. Yet this is the error into which many have fallen in all ages of the church.

But these people who faced the Philistines made another mistake; *they confounded enthusiasm with faith*. When they saw the ark, they shouted so that the earth rang again. "These are the kind of people I like," says one, "people that can shout." If that is all you want, why do you not go among the bulls of Bashan, and make your home in the midst of them? They can make more noise than any mortal men can make. These Israelites shouted, but there was nothing in their noise, any more than there is in their modern imitators. Anyone who has passed the camp of Israel, that day, might have said that they had "a bright, cheerful, happy service; just the kind of service the people like, you know, nothing dull about it." Hark! How the glad sound rises! Surely these people must have great faith! No, they had not a scrap of the real article. They were under a mistake all the time; and, shout as they might, they had very little to shout about; for in a short time their carcasses strewed the plain. The Philistines put an end to their shouting. Now, beloved, when you are worshipping God, shout if you are filled with holy gladness. If the ejaculation comes from your heart, I would not ask you to restrain it. God forbid that we should judge any man's worship! But do not be so foolish as to suppose that because there is loud noise there must also be faith. Faith is a still water, it floweth deep. True faith in God may express itself with leaping and shouting; and it is a happy

thing when it does: but it also sit still before the Lord, and that perhaps is a happier thing still. Praise can sit silent on the lip, and yet be heard in heaven. There is a passion of the heart, too deep for words. There are feelings that break the backs of words; the mind staggers and trembles beneath the weight of them. Frost of the mouth often comes with thaw of the soul; and when the heart's great deeps are breaking up, it sometimes happens that the mouth is not large enough to let the torrents flow, and so it has to be comparatively silent. Do not, therefore, make the mistake of confounding enthusiasm with faith in judging the externals of worship, else you may fall into a thousand blunders. He may worship God who shouts till the earth rings again, and God may accept him; but he may worship God as truly who sits in silence before the Most High, and says not even a word. It is the spiritual worship which is most acceptable to God, not the external in any form or shape. It is the heart that has fellowship with the Lord; and it needs little in the way of expressing itself, neither has God tied it down to this way or that. It may find its own methods of utterance so long as it is truly "moved by the Holy Ghost."

Another mistake these people made that day was this: *they valued novelty above Scriptural order*. "The Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! For there hath not been such a thing heretofore." The Israelites probably made the same mistake, fixing their hope on this new method of fighting the Philistines, which they hoped would bring them victory. We are all so apt to think that the new plan of going to work will be much more effective than those that have become familiar; but it is not so. It is generally a mistake to exchange old lamps for new. "There hath not been such a thing heretofore." There is a glamour about the novelty which misleads us, and we are liable to think the newer is the truer. If there has not such a thing heretofore, some people will take to it at once for that very reason. "Oh," says the man who is given up to change, "that is the thing for me!" But it is probably not the thing for a true-hearted and intelligent Christian, for if, "there hath not been such a thing heretofore," it is difficult to explain, if the thing be a good one, why the Holy Ghost, who has been with the people of God since Pentecost, and who came to lead us into all truth, has not led the Church of God to this before. If your new discovery is the mind of God, where has the Holy Scriptures been all these centuries? Believing in the infallible Word and the abiding Spirit, I rather suspect your novelty; at least I cannot say that I endorse it until I have tested it by the Word of God. "Oh, but we had such a meeting! There never was the like of it," you say. Probably you ought to pray that there may never be the like of it again, for, after all, the meetings in which hearts become broken before God, and in which men believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the same Saviour who saved their forefathers, who have entered into glory, are no novelty. Those meetings in which men come and give themselves up to God, where "the great transaction" is done, where they become the Lord's, and he becomes theirs, are very old-fashioned things; they have been heretofore. "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old:" and if we could only see the like, we would not ask to be able to say, "There hath not been such a thing heretofore." Philistines may like a thing that has not been heretofore; but we like the thing that has been since the days of Pentecost, the things that come from him who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever": the workings of that God who changes not, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Let him work his blessed will; and if he chooses to send a new thing on the earth, we will glorify his name; but because there are new things in the world, we will not ascribe them to him, for they may come from quite another quarter/ We remember that "Lo, here is Christ, or there!" was the cry against which our Lord warned his disciples. Concerning such a cry the Saviour said,

"Believe it or not." To you, dear friends, I would say—Stand fast by your great Leader, the blessed, unchangeable Christ, and by the faith once for all delivered to the saints, or else you will be on the road to a thousand blunders.

The mistake made on that battle-field is a mistake which nowadays is frequently imitated. It assumes many forms. We fall into their error when we *confound ritual and spirituality*. Now, every form of religion has its ritual. The Quaker, who sits still, and does not say a word, has a ritual so far; and he that has a thousand rites and ceremonies has a ritual so much farther. But if I have gone through the general routine of the worship of my church, and then think that I have done something acceptable to God, while yet my heart has not communed with him in humble repentance, or faith, or love, or joy, or consecration, I make a great mistake. You may keep on with your religious performances for seventy years or more; you may never miss what our Scotch friends call "a diet of worship"; you may not neglect a single rubric in the whole ritual; but it is all nothing unless the soul has fellowship with God. Godliness is a spiritual thing; for "God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." So far as our forms or worship help us towards this spiritual communion, they are good, but no farther. "Oh, well!" says one, "I never worship beneath a cathedral roof; I am quite content to meet with a few friends in a barn." Do not suppose, my friend, that the meagreness of your accessories has necessarily secured true worship. I thou hast met God in the barn, it is well; and if thy brother has met God in the right spirit, I care but little for thy barn, and I care even less for his cathedral. What does signify how thou hast garnished thine offering if it be not a living sacrifice, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ? A dead thing must not be brought to the altar of God. Remember that, under the Jewish law, they never offered fish upon the altar, because they could not bring it there alive. Everything brought to God as a sacrifice must be alive. Its blood must be poured out warm at the altar's foot. Oh that you and I might feel that lifting of the soul to God, and that buoyancy of heart, which true spiritual worship alone can bring to us! May our ritual, whether we have much or little, be our guide to God, and not our chain to hold us back from God!

We fall into the same blunder that the Israelites and the Philistines made is we *consider orthodoxy to be salvation*. We have secured much that is worth keeping when we have, intellectually and intelligently, laid hold on that divinely-revealed truth, "the gospel of the grace of God"; but we have not obtained everything even then. O sirs, if it were possible for you to believe every word of Christ's teaching, if it were possible to hold with only an intellectual faith the teaching of the apostles, rejecting all besides, and to hold it with an accuracy so great that in no joy or tittle you had made a mistake, it would profit you nothing; for "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." He may understand these things so as to be a theologian, but he must have them wrought into his soul by the Holy Ghost so as to make him a saint, or else he has not really understood them at all. Unless these are thy meat and thy drink, they are nothing to thee; unless thou findest Christ in them, thou wilt find in them thy ruin, they shall be the "saviour of death" unto thee. Remember, it was a beautiful tomb in which the dead Christ was laid; but he left it, and there was nothing there but grave-clothes after he had gone; and, in like manner, the best-constructed system of theology, if it has not Christ in it, and if he who holds it be not himself spiritually alive, is nothing more than a tomb in which are trappings for the dead. It is nothing better than a gilded ark, without the presence of God; and although you may shout, and say, "God is come into the camp," it will not be so.

We fall into the same error if we *regard routine as security*, and think that, because we have often done a thing, and have not suffered for it, therefore it will always be well with us. We are all such creatures of habit that, at length, our repeated actions seem to be natural and right. Because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. But though Pompeii may slumber long at the foot of Vesuvius, at length it is overwhelmed. It behooves every one of us to try our ways and specially to call in question things which have become a sort of second nature to us. This is the fault of which Peter gives warning concerning the scoffers of the last days, who will say with regret to the blessed truth of Christ's second advent, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." The apostle says of such that, "they willingly are ignorant," and therefore are they willfully ignorant of the terrible and unalterable doom that awaits them at the coming of their Judge.

Thus, like the Israelites, we may shout as we see the ark of the covenant, although our sins have driven the Lord far from us; or, like the Philistines, we may say, "God has come into the camp," and yet he may not be there at all in the sense in which they meant. Thus I might continue to illustrate my text; but time would fail me, and I have yet to speak upon two other points.

II. Having considered the great mistake these people made, I will draw your attention, in the second place, to THE GREAT TRUTH of which their mistake is caricature. Though what the Philistines said, and what the Israelites thought, on this occasion, was false, it is often true. God does come to the camp of his people, and his presence is the great power of his church. O Brethren, what joy comes to us at such a time! I will briefly sketch the scene that takes place when God comes into the camp.

Then, *the truth of the gospel becomes vital*. The doctrines of grace have then with them the grace of the doctrines. Then is Christ not only to us the Truth, but he is also the Way and the Life. The gospel then becomes a sword with two edges, and it does marvelous execution. The Word of God then shows itself to be both a hammer and a fire, smiting and melting those upon whom its power is proved. Whoever preaches the gospel, when God has come into the camp, speaks with power. He may have little eloquence, and less learning; but if God is with him, and if his heart is all aglow with divine love, he will speak with power, and the people will say, "Surely, God is in this place, and we know it."

When God comes into the camp, *new life is put into prayer*. Instead of the repetition of holy phrases in a cold, feeble, lifeless fashion, the soul empties itself out before the Lord, like water flowing from a fountain; and men and women cry mightily unto him, laying hold upon the horns of the altar; and they come away with both hands full of heaven's own blessing, for they have prevailed with God in mighty wrestling.

By the presence of God in the camp *fresh energy is thrown into service*. There is a way of serving the Lord in which men do the proper thing while they are fast asleep. I am afraid much of our service for God is done while we are asleep, and that it is accompanied by a kind of celestial snoring, instead of being performed when our spiritual faculties are all alert, and the whole man is wide awake. But when God comes into the camp, how he shakes men up, and awakens the slumberers from their dreams! What a quickening, what a vivifying, the presence of God gives! I remember a picture on the Continent that strangely represents the resurrection. Some of the people, who are pictured as being raised from the dead, have some of their bones coming together; others have their heads covered with flesh, but the rest of the body is a skeleton; and nothing seems complete in this

strange, wild conception of a mad artist. But there are hundred of Christian people who seem to be spiritually in as incomplete a stage as those people were supposed to be, They are, I hope, quickened from the dead, but they are not yet fully alive into God. Some of them are still dead in their head; their intellect has not yet been sanctified: some of them are dead at their hands; they cannot get them into their pockets, or if they manage so much as that, they cannot get them out again: some of them are dead at heart, they seem to know things very well with the brain, but not to feel them in the soul. But when the Lord comes to us with power, he makes us alive all over; every part of the man is quickened with a divine energy; then men really work for Jesus, and work successfully, too.

When God comes into the camp, his presence *convinces unbelievers*. Sinners turn to the Lord on the right hand, and on the left, in so marvellous a way that our weak faith is often quite astonished. The last persons in the world that we expected to be converted, come to our services, and there find Christ; and many have been hearers for years, but seem harder than the lower millstone, become soft as wax to the divine Word. When God comes into the camp, the Holy Ghost convinces men "of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment", the arrows of conviction fly fast and far, and pierce the hearts of the foemen of the King, and the slain of the Lord are many.

The presence of God, moreover, *comforts mourners*. When God comes into the camp, those who are troubled and tried begin to wipe away the tears of sorrow, and feel strengthened to bear their burdens; or, better still, they cast their care on him who is so manifestly near. Our hearts are also cheered by seeing anxious sinners turn their eyes towards the cross of Christ. Then Jesus reveals his love to them, and they perceive it; they fly into his arms, and find salvation there. Oh, what joyful times we have had of late in talking with many who have yielded themselves to Christ, and taken him to be all their salvation, and all their desire! May God stay in the camp with us till every sinner that comes within our ranks, and many also who are outside, shall come to Jesus, and be saved!

When God is in the camp, his presence *infuses daring faith*. Feeble men begin to grow vigorous, young men dream dreams and old men see visions. Many begin to plot and plan something for Jesus which, in their timid days, they would never have thought of attempting. Others reach a height of consecration that seems to verge on imprudence. Alabaster boxes get broken, and the precious ointment is poured out upon the Master's head, even though Judas shakes his money-bag, and cries, "To what purpose is this waste?" Adventurers for God are raised up—men like the Portuguese navigators, who passed the Cape of Storms, and called it afterwards the Cape of Good Hope. Men begin to mission the slums, the lodging-houses, the dark streets, and after a while those very places become happy hunting grounds for other Christian workers. Because God is in the camp, many take up the work which at first only the truly brave believer dared to try.

The fact of God being in the camp cannot be hidden, for in a delightful way it *distills joy into worship*. People do not think sermons dull when God is in the camp; and prayer-meetings are not then called "stupid affairs." The saints enjoy fellowship with one another; and when Christian people meet each other, and God is in the camp, they have many a happy word to exchange concerning their Master. Many such seasons we have enjoyed. It has been with us as with the people mentioned by the prophet Malachi: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." They had such holy talk that God himself turned eaves-dropper to listen to what they had to say; he liked it so well that he put it down; and he thought

so much of it that he said he would preserve it; and a book of remembrances was made for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. May there be many more such books of remembrance in our day!

I cannot tell you what innumerable blessings come to the camp of the spiritual Israel when God is there. I hope that we know a little of this even now; and I am sure we want to know a great deal more of it. It is hard work preaching when God is not in the camp. It must be slavery to teach in the Sunday-school when God is not in the camp. And any of you seeking souls must have a heavy drag on your spirits when the Lord is away. We might pray on Sabbath mornings, indeed, every day, and before every duty, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence;" but if the Lord be in the camp, then the wheels no longer drag heavily, but, like the chariots of Amminadib, we fly before the wind. Everything is done gladly, happily, thankfully, believingly, when "God is come into the camp." May he abide in our midst, and may our eyes be opened to see him!

"Thrice blest is he to whom is given
The instinct that can tell
That God is in the field, when he
Is most invisible."

III. Now, in closing our meditations upon this passage, let us try to learn THE GREAT LESSONS which this incident teaches us.

The first lesson is that which I have been insisting upon all through: *the necessity of the divine presence*. Dear friends, you acknowledge this. There is not one among us who does not know that the Holy Ghost is needful to effect any work. But I am afraid that it is something which we know so well, that we have put it up on a shelf, and there it lies unheeded. But it must not be so with thee, my brother, nor with me. We must pray in the Holy Ghost, or else we shall not pray at all; and we must preach under the influence of the Holy Ghost, or else we shall chatter like sparrows on the window-sill in the morning, and nothing will come of the chattering. Only the Holy Ghost can make anything we do to be effectual. Therefore never begin any work without the Holy Ghost, and do not dare go on with the impetus that you have gained, but cry again for the Holy Spirit. The "amen" of the sermon needs to be spoken in the power of the Holy Ghost just as much as the first word of the discourse, and every word between the first and the last. Let all your service for God be in the Spirit, or else it is all good for nothing.

Learn, next, that *we should do all we can to obtain the presence of God in the camp*. If there are any preparations which we can make for his coming, let us set about them at once. You who are out of Christ must not think that there is anything for *you* to do before you receive Christ. All the doing has been done.

"Jesus did it, did it all,
Long, long ago."

But I am now addressing the people of God, and if we would have God to come very nigh to us, we must prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight in the desert a highway for our God. What can we do to obtain the presence of God in our midst? My time has so far gone that I can only give you a few hints as to what we ought to do if we want to secure that end.

We must confess our helplessness without God, and honestly mean the confession. The first thing that is required of us is to bemoan the fact that, by and of ourselves, we can do nothing; even as our Lord said to his disciples, "Without me ye can do nothing." The sooner we recognize this

truth, the better. Our half-doing is our undoing; but when we cease from self, then we make way for God.

We must, next, have a universal desire for the presence of God with us. I mean by that, that every Christian man and every Christian woman must agonize with God that he would come into the camp; not merely some few of us desiring it, but all of us vehemently crying unto the Lord, "Come, Lord, and tarry not."

We must also be very careful in our lives. God will not come to an unholy church. The sacred Dove will never come to a foul nest. There must be a purging and a cleansing, or else he will not come.

Moreover, there must be a conscientious obedience to his word, a strict adherence to his truth, his doctrine, his precepts, to the whole of Christ's rule and law. He will not prosper us unless we are careful to follow every step that he has taken. God help us to have this conscientious care, this coming out from those who may not be thus careful, according to his word. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

If we desire this special sense of God's presence, there must be unbroken union. The Spirit of God does not love fighting. He is a dove, and he will not come where there is constant strife. We must be as one man in our love to one another. It was when the disciples were "with one accord in one place" that the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost; and thus it is in all our Pentecostal seasons. Often a stone seems to lie at the well's-mouth of our choicest blessings; and it cannot be rolled away "until the flocks be gathered together."

To crown all, there must be a hearty reliance upon God, and a childlike confidence in him. I would recommend you either believe in God up to the hilt, or else not believe at all. Believe this Book of God, every letter of it, or else reject it. There is no logical standing-place between the two. Be satisfied with nothing less than a faith that swims in the deeps of divine revelation; a faith that paddles about the edge of the water is poor faith, and is not good for much. Oh, I pray you, do believe in God, and his omnipotence!

Such are the conditions of obtaining the blessing of God's abiding presence. If these things be in us and abound, we shall be able to shout without making any mistake about the matter, "God has come into the camp."

When God does come to us, *we should seek by all means to retain his presence*. How can this boon be secured?

First, by humble walking with God. If we grow proud because we are honoured by our King's company, and begin to think that there must be, after all, something in us to attract God to us, and cause his face to shine upon us, we shall not long have the Lord among us. Seek, then, to be lowly in his presence.

Next, let much grateful praise be given to him from loyal hearts. If God is saving sinners, let us give him the glory of it. If he is at work among us, let us not go and talk about what *we* have been doing; but let us tell to men and angels, too, what HE has done. Let us never dare to handle God's jewels as if they were our own.

Moreover, there must be perpetual watchfulness. If God be with us, he may give us a great victory, and yet to-morrow we may be defeated because Achan has hidden the goodly Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold. Unless we are sober and vigilant, we may sadly have to mourn that the Lord has withdrawn his presence from us. There is a fierce light that beats around his throne.

"Our God is a consuming fire." Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? The Scriptural answer is, "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly." May God make us men of such calibre as can endure that heat!

And lastly, there must be an individual fellowship with God on the part of each one of us. It is hard work for the whole church to walk with God every day and all the day; but if each member will see to it that his own personal life is right, the church, as a whole, need fear nothing. Let us each one look after his own life, and see that all is right there; then the life of the church will soon be at flood-tide, and when we go forth to the battle, the Philistines will know of a truth that "God is come into the camp." May God speedily raise us all up to this point of personal consecration!

Dear friends, we are having sinners saved in our midst; pray for them. Some are struggling towards the light; seek to help them. If you meet with any such, love them, and cherish them, as a father does his child. I cannot speak longer. Your hearts must tell you what to do. Go on serving the Lord. May he abide with us in power for evermore! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE THE SERMON—1 Samuel 4

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—968, 448, 992

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

BELOVED FRIENDS,—The one want of the church in these times is indicated by the title of this sermon. The presence of God, in saving power, in the church, will put to end the present plague of infidelity. Men will not doubt his Word when they feel his Spirit. It will be the only security for the success of the missionary effort. If God be with his people, they will soon see crowds converted and added to the church. For a thousand reasons, we need that Jehovah should come into the camp, as aforetime he visited and delivered his people from bondage in Egypt.

Could we not all unite in prayer for this as fervently as all united in prayer for my life? It is a far greater and more necessary subject for intercession, and the Lord will not be slow to hear us. Come to thy church, O Lord, in fulness of power to save! If the Great Advent is not yet, indulge us with outpourings of grace and times of refreshing!

Oh, that all Christendom would take us this pleading, and continue it until the answer came!

Receive, dear readers, my hearty salutations. Personally, I scarcely make progress during this broken weather; but the doctor says I hold my own, and that is more than he could have expected. Whether I live or die, I would say, in the words of Israel to Joseph, "God shall be with you."

Yours ever heartily,

C.H. SPURGEON.

Menton, Jan 9, 1892.

A Challenge and a Shield

A Sermon

(No. 2240)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, January 24th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-Day Evening, August 24th, 1890.

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died."—Romans 8:34.

Here are two very wonderful challenges thrown out by the apostle Paul. First, he boldly defies anyone to charge the chosen of God with sin: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" and then, even if any charges should be brought against them, he defies all our foes to secure an adverse verdict: "Who is he that condemneth?" This would be a very bold challenge even for a man who had been righteous from his youth up. If there had been a man, in the history of the world, who from his infancy had known God, and who had grown up serving him, devoting himself entirely to the cause of the Lord Christ; and if he had kept the commandments without fail, as far as man could judge, it would be a very hazardous thing even for him to say. "Who is he that condemneth?" For human righteousness is only human; being human, it is finite; and, being finite, it falls short somewhere or other. The best of men are but men at the best; to be a man is to be a fallen creature, and being fallen creatures, we cannot of ourselves perfectly please the thrice-holy Jehovah. In many things we all offend.

The man who uttered this challenge, "Who is he that condemneth?" and uttered it under the inspiration of God, did not, however, occupy the position of a sinless man. His early years had been spent in opposition to his Saviour. He had been exceedingly mad against the disciples of Christ, and had persecuted them even unto strange cities. In another place he calls himself the very chief of sinners; and yet it is this man who dares to ask the question, "Who is he that condemneth?" It is a bold, brave challenge; but it never could have been uttered by Paul if it had not been accompanied by the next sentence, "It is Christ that dies." First, he flings down the gauntlet, and challenges a battle, crying, "Who is he that condemneth?" And then he holds up a shield so broad that he is completely concealed behind it, and every enemy is defeated in the conflict, because "It is Christ that dies." Happy shall you and I be if, though covered with sin, though guilty and unclean, we nevertheless shall have faith to believe in the Christ that dies, a faith so strong, and confident that we shall dare to stand both now, and at the judgment-seat of Christ, and say, "Who is he that condemneth?" May we have this faith on our dying bed, when the pulse is faint and feeble, and heart and flesh begin to fail! May we still, between the very jaws of death, have solid confidence in God, and dare to ask for the presence of men and devils, too, "Who is the that condemneth?" being made bold to do so because we have believed in the Christ that died.

Paul has, in this case, only one answer to the question, "Who is he that condemneth?" He meets it by the blessed fact that "It is Christ that died." I recommend that we should, each one of us, have but one hope of salvation. As long as we have half-a-dozen, we have half-a-dozen doubtful ones: but when it comes to only one, and that such a sufficient one as the truth that "It is Christ that died,"

we have a well-founded hope, in which we may rest with confidence. Such a hope as this is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast"; and the man who has this anchor on board the barque of his life can never suffer spiritual shipwreck. When the Emperor Charles the Fifth went to war with Francis the First, King of Naples, he sent a herald to him, declaring war in the name of the Emperor of Germany, King of Castille, King of Aragon, King of Naples, King of Sicily, and he went on with many more titles, giving his sovereign all the honours that were his due. When the herald of Francis the First took up the gage of battle, he would not be outdone in the list of honours, so he said, "I take up the challenge in the name of Francis the First, King of France; Francis the First, King of France; Francis the First, King of France; Francis the First, King of France; Francis the First, King of France." He just repeated his master's name and office as many times as the other gentleman had titles. So it is a grand thing, whenever Satan comes and begins to accuse you, just to say, "Christ has died, Christ has died." If any confront you with other confidences, still keep you to this almighty plea, "Christ has died." If one says, "I was christened, and confirmed," answer him by saying, "Christ has died." Should another say, "I was baptized an adult," let your confidence remain the same: "Christ has died." When another says, "I am a sound, orthodox Presbyterian," you stick to this solid ground, "Christ has died." And if still another says, "I am a red-hot Methodist," answer him in the self-same way: "Christ has died." Whatever may be the confidences of others, and whatever may be your own, put them all away, and keep to this one declaration, "It is Christ that died." There is enough in that one truth to include all that is excellent in the others, and to answer all the accusations that may be brought against you. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died." I would put the trumpet to my lips while I preach, and sound out this one note, praying that it may be a death-blast to all accusations that can be brought against believers in Christ.

I want you to notice that Paul does not even rest his confidence as to the believers' safety upon the fact that they are able to say, "We have trusted in Christ; we have loved Christ; we have served Christ." He allows nothing to mar the glory of this one blessed fact, "It is Christ that died." If he adds anything at all, it is still something about that same Christ—"yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

This is a subject upon which I delight to speak; for here is all my hope and confidence. In these words I see first, *a challenge to all comers*: "Who is he that condemneth?" Secondly, I see here, *a remedy for all sin*. If any take up the gage of battle, and say, "We condemn you," we shall have this for our complete answer to every one, "It is Christ that died." And lastly, I see here, *an answer to every accusation* arising from sin. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died."

I. Here is A CHALLENGE TO ALL COMERS. By the grace of God, the apostle stands defiantly in the midst of all the believer's foes, and flings down the gauntlet before them all. The encounter to which he challenges them is not to be a mere tilt in a tournament, but a battle for life or death. Who enters the lists against the believer? First comes Satan; then the world; then conscience; and last of all the law of God. Over them all the believer triumphs. "It is Christ that died," becomes both his sword and his shield; and when the dread conflict is over, and even while it is raging, he sings, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The first who takes up the believer's challenge is *Satan*. Some do not believe in the personality of the devil; but I am as sure of it as I am of the personality of his children who deny their own father. Those of us who have passed through any spiritual conflicts know that Satan is a terribly real personage. He attacks us on the right hand and on the left, from beneath and from above. Very dexterously, with infernal malice, he endeavours to condemn the child of God. It is his business to

be the accuser of the brethren, and he carries it on with very great vigour. He knows enough of our conduct to be able, truthfully, to bring to our memory much that might condemn us. When this fails, he never sticks at an accusation because it does not happen to be true. Being the father of lies, he will accuse us of things of which we are not guilty, or, when it suits his purpose, he will exaggerate our guilt, and make it appear worse than it is, in order that he may drive us to despair. There is only one way to successfully resist the onset of the arch-enemy; but that one way ensures certain victory. Up with your shield, and say, "Yes, it is all true, or it might have been, for my heart is so evil that it would have led me to any sin; but 'It is Christ that died.'" This will defeat your great adversary.

Suppose Satan should come to anyone who is seeking the Saviour, and say, "You will never find the Lord; you have sinned beyond all limit; you are too far gone for mercy to reach you; you must perish;" it will be your highest wisdom to give him this one reply, "It is Christ that died." That short sentence completely answers to all his accusations. There is no terror to him like the terror of the cross. He gloated over the crucifixion once, and he has been distressed and terrified by it ever since. Tell him that you are a sinner, and that if he should paint your sin in its blackest colours, you would not even then despair, for it would still be true that Christ "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Christ has died, and there is more than enough virtue in his death to atone for the blackest or most crimson sins ever committed by men. Close beside the bottomless pit of our iniquity stands the cross whereon Christ has made recompense for all our faults; and when we set Christ over against the gulf of our sin, we see that he far transcends it. Sin is great, but Christ is greater. His precious blood takes away every stain of guilt. Take care that you do not answer Satan with any other argument than this: "It is Christ that died." Again and again let this blow, from the sword of the Spirit, descend upon him, "It is Christ that died," and you will soon be acclaimed the victor over your greatest foe. In this way "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

When you have overcome Satan, *the world* will come forth to attack you, and to dispute your claim to be numbered amongst the people of God. As long as you go with evil companions, they will applaud you. You will be "a jolly good fellow" while you join them in their folly; but when you give up their ways, their habits, and their society, then they will say that you are melancholy, and no longer fit company for such, "hail fellows, well met", and they will turn away from you. If you follow after Christ, and find eternal life, when they hear of it, they will sneer at you, and bring up all your past life against you. They will say, "What! *you* converted? You are as bad as any one of us. What! *you* a saint? Well, certainly, you made no pretension to it six months ago; you were about as black as a man could be." The world will begin to throw in the believer's teeth all his former iniquities, when he sets forth with the cry, "Who is he that condemneth?" Tell the world, once for all, that it may condemn you, if it pleases, for it condemned the Lord Jesus long ago, and say that, therefore, you think but little of the condemnation of your fellow-men. Tell the men of the world that it is right that they condemn you for all your past life, for doubtless you have been what they say you are, you will not dispute that fact; but tell them also that what Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth is true of you, "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Tell even them that Christ died. If they say that Christ's death does not repair the injury you have done to your fellow-men, tell them that, as far as you can, you mean to make restitution to them; and wherein you have done the world an ill turn, let them know that your Master has done it more good than you ever did it harm. The influence of his holy religion has made abundant atonement to the world for any wrong that you ever did to it.

He has rendered more of good to men than you ever rendered of evil. In all your answers to the accusations of the world, take care that you base your hopes concerning forgiven sin upon the death of Christ. The world will, before long, understand what you mean by saying that Christ has made atonement for your sin; and, perhaps, here and there, a few of those who ridiculed you will be inclined to know more about this matter, and in private may come and ask you how the death of Christ has saved your soul. At any rate, meet the attack of the world as you met the attack of Satan, with this weapon only: "It is Christ that died," and you will be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."

The third foe that will seek to condemn you, and one that you have great cause to fear, is *your own conscience*; but the weapon which has discomfited your other foes will also avail you against this one. Still, this foe is fierce and terrible. Let me feel the worm that never dies rather than the stings of an offended conscience, if indeed this is not itself, "the worm that dieth not." Fire such as martyrs felt at the stake were but a plaything compared with the flames of a burning conscience. We read that, when David had cut off Saul's skirt. "It came to pass afterward that David's heart smote him." It is an ugly knock that a man's heart gives when it smites him. There is no getting away from yourself, and when you yourself condemn yourself, then you are condemned indeed. You go to your bed, but your conscience is there, and it will not sleep. You go out to your pleasures, but your conscience goes with you, and spoils your mirth. You would forget your guilt in your daily business, but your conscience calls out at such a rate that there is no hearing anything else. Thunderbolts and tornadoes are nothing in force compared with the charges of a guilty conscience.

What is to be done when a man condemns himself? Can he still be valiant, and maintain his ground, calling out, "Who is he that condemneth?" Yes, blessed be God, even this foe can be overcome by the weapon the believer wields in the power of God, for he can tell conscience, as he told his former opponents, "It is Christ that died." It is a wonderful story—this old, old story, of Jesus and his love to guilty sinners; let me tell it once again. God so loved me that he willed to forgive me; but for the sake of the world which he governs righteously he could not forgive me without an atonement for my sin. It would not have been consistent with his justice for him to pass by my sin. What was to be done? His own dear Son came, and stood in my place, and took my sin upon him. Knowing that my sin deserved death, he willingly died, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring me to God. God is well pleased with the death of Christ as the vindication of his justice, and for Christ's sake he says to me, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Tell conscience that Christ has died for your sins, according to the Scriptures, and it will be perfectly satisfied: it will not go to sleep, but it will use its voice for other purposes, and it will no longer seek to condemn you.

There is still another foe that answers your challenge, "Who is he that condemneth?" Forth it steps into the arena, and we behold *the law of God*. What shall we say to that? The law of God says, "Thou shalt," and we have not done what it commands. The law of God says, "Thou shalt not," and we have done exactly what we were forbidden to do. Only too true is that confession, "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us." The law condemned us in former days, and would again overthrow us if we ventured to meet it unarmed. It must condemn sin, for "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good." But when it has attacked us, and done its worst, there comes in the majesty of divine sovereignty. God is King over all, and able to govern the world according to his own mind, which mind is always infinitely just. He decrees that

Christ Jesus, the Well-Beloved, even his own other self, who is one with him, should come into the world and bear the sin of man, make amends to the injured honour of God, and magnify the law before the eyes of the whole universe. If the guilty sinner dies, the law is honoured; but if God shall assume human flesh, and die for that sinner, the law is even more honoured. When Christ Jesus took away our guilt, and "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree," justice was more terribly displayed than when guilty sinners sink to hell. We are only creatures after all, and when we are condemned, we sink down into destruction, and suffer for our sin; but he is the eternal God, and when he takes our nature, and cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and bleeds his life away in agony, then is the law of God abundantly honoured. Therefore do we say to that law, "Law, thou hast nothing to do with me; I am 'not under law, but under grace.' My Substitute has kept the law on my behalf. He has borne the penalty which I ought to have borne, and I am clear. I am now dead to the law. I have died in Christ, and my life now is that of a child of God, for I have been lifted to that high estate by my redeeming Lord."

There is now nobody left that I know of, that can condemn us, except the Judge; and if we have escaped our opponents—Satan, the world, conscience, and the law, we need not fear to stand even at God's judgment seat. The Judge is now on our side; and none of us need fear anybody's condemnation if the Judge does not condemn us. You come into court with your case, and the counsel on the other side condemns you. When he sits down, he has done his worst; and his witnesses also condemn you; but if the verdict is in your favour, and the judge says that you leave the court with a stainless character, you do not care about the condemnation of others. Now, there is but one Judge—the man Christ Jesus. It is he that died for us. He cannot bring us in debt to divine justice; for in his own hands and feet are the nail-prints, which are the receipts of justice in full settlement of all claims against us. He has paid all we owed and he will vindicate his own death, and claim for the travail of his soul its due reward, which is the forgiveness and the salvation of all guilty men who have come and put their trust in him. Wherefore, since it is only our Judge who can condemn us, and since he is the very Person who has paid our debt for us, and put our sin away, we dare to repeat again, with additional emphasis, our ringing challenge to all the universe, "Who is he that condemneth?"

"Who now accuseth them,
For whom their Ransom died?
Who now shall those condemn
Whom God hath justified?
Captivity is captive led;
For Jesus liveth, who was dead."

In the second place, I see in our text A REMEDY FOR ALL SIN. On this I shall speak very briefly. We stand boldly in front of all our foes, because we know that we are free from the evil which once condemned us: it is all gone. Our confidence is therefore strong, and it is so because Christ's dying has removed all sin from all believers.

"Look," says one, "*there is sin*. It is true that you are a believer, but you have sinned often, for years, in all sorts of way." Yes, as we look, we must confess that it is true, there is the sin. But *yonder is the Saviour*, and he is called Jesus, "For he shall save his people from their sins." He has come on purpose to put away our sin, and when he died, he made an end of it. The answer, therefore, to the statement, "There is sin," is this, "Christ has died."

Another says, "Yes, but then you have been specially guilty, *there is great sin* against a great God. You have continued in it, and persisted in it." True, we do confess that accusation; but then *there is a great sacrifice*, for he that came to save us, laid down his life for us; and greater sacrifice than this could never be. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." This is the grandest message of the gospel, that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The apostle Paul puts this "first of all", and every true preacher of the good tidings of salvation will follow his example. We have, indeed, in the death of Christ, a great atonement; an atonement so great, that none can measure its height and depth, its length and breadth. The glory of the Person who died, the anguish and the suffering he endured, the love that moved him to give himself up to death for us, all make us see how great the atonement is. There is great sin; that we know only too well: but we also rejoice in the knowledge that there is a great atonement to cover all our sin, "For it is Christ that died."

"But, interrupts another, "*God must punish sin*. It is not optional with him, it is an inevitable law of the universe. Transgress the law, and punishment will follow." It is even so; but listen: God must punish sin, and *God has punished sin*. He took the great mass of the sins of believers, and piled the whole on Christ; and when he hung upon the cross as his people's Substitute, even his Father hid his face from him. He died, the Prince of glory died the ignominious felon's death, in the room and place and stead of guilty men. *God has punished sin*; and when men say, "God must punish sin," we answer, "Sin has been punished, for Christ has died."

Not only is our sin punished, but *the sin is gone*. If my friend over yonder has paid my debt, it is gone. I owe no man anything after the debt has been paid, whether by myself, or by somebody else; and if Christ took our sin upon himself, and suffered for it, the sins for which he suffered are gone, plunged as in a shoreless sea, drowned in the Redeemer's blood. They are gone, and gone for ever!

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoners free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me."

And that my sins are gone is further clear, for he rose again from the dead. "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again." If he had not paid the debt, he would have remained in the prison of the grave; but he rose again. He has discharged the debt; and we have still another assurance that it is all gone, for the apostle goes on to speak of Christ "who is even at the right hand of God." He would not be there if he were a debtor. If Christ owed anything to the justice of God by reason of his suretyship engagements, he would not be at God's right hand: but he owes nothing whatever. Both the sinner and the Surety are now free. The debt is paid, and Christ is at the right hand of God. And as to our weaknesses and infirmities, he is there to plead for his people: "Who also maketh intercession for us." He ever liveth to secure effectually the eternal salvation of every soul for whom he died, even for every one who puts his trust in him. Are you among the number? Oh, if you, my dear hearers, knew the joy and peace that would come to you if you but trusted in the doctrine of substitution, you would not rest until you were able to say, "Christ was in my place, that I might stand in his place: my sins were laid on him, that his righteousness might be girded on me." If you understood how delightful it is to get out of yourself into Christ, and to live because Jesus died, you would not linger and doubt, and fear, but you would say, "If it be so, I will come to Christ, and

I will trust him, that with you I may say, "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." This, then is God's great remedy for sin: "It is Christ that died."

III. Now I want your attention while I try to show that this blessed sentence, "It is Christ that died," is AN ANSWER TO EVERY ACCUSATION which, under any circumstances, may arise from sin. We have seen that Christ's death enables us to conquer our foes, and frees us from our sins. It also delivers us from every fear and doubt. The death of Christ gives us a full salvation. I cannot mention all the accusations which sin makes, but I will mention a great many of them very quickly, and show how the man who believes in Christ, the dying Christ, the risen Christ, the reigning Christ, is able to meet and overcome them.

Sometimes the accusing whisper comes to your ear, "*You have sinned against a great God.* It will be a terrible thing to have to answer to the great and mighty God for having so sinned." I will make no answer to that accusation but this: "It is Christ that died." Christ himself, the great and mighty God is the "Interpreter, one among a thousand", able to stand between me and God. It is true that God is great, but he cannot ask for more than divine righteousness, and in Christ I present that. Nay, his law never asked for more than human righteousness divine. The law has, therefore, more than it asked for, and I am thus not afraid of the anger of the great God. It is the mighty God himself who came here to be a Man, and to die in our stead, for is it not written that God hath bought his people with his own blood? We read of "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." It is a strong expression, but as it is Scriptural, we cannot alter it; and we have no wish to do so. Oh, beloved, if we have a God for our Redeemer, though our sins against God be very many, and though they be very black and foul, yet Christ's infinite sacrifice meets them all.

"Love of God, so pure and changeless,
Blood of God, so rich and free,
 Grace of God, so strong and boundless,
 Magnify them all in me,
 Even me."

"*You have robbed God of his glory*," another voice seems to say. "You know how you used to blaspheme his name." Or, perhaps, you were more polite; you did not curse and swear, but the accusation comes: "You argued against God and his Son, and against his blessed gospel; you have robbed him of his glory." To that I give the same answer, "It is Christ that died." I know that I have robbed God of his glory, but Christ has brought all the glory back again. I see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." A dying Saviour brings more glory to the love of God, ay, and to the justice of God, than any mortal sinner could have done; more than any perfect man, though he lived throughout eternity, could have done. Thus, that doubt is answered by the same all-powerful argument: "It is Christ that died."

"Ah!" says the accuser "*but you sinned against light and knowledge.* You cannot deny it. When you sinned, you were not like the common people of the street, who know no better. You had a godly father; you had a Christian mother; you were trained in the fear of God. You read your Bible in early youth, and you went astray with a vengeance; for when you sinned, you knew that you were sinning, and yet you transgressed." Yes, I know that it was so; and Christ, to meet my sin against knowledge brings a sacrifice offered with his own full knowledge of all that it involved.

"This was compassion like a God,
 That when the Saviour knew
 The price of pardon was his blood,

His pity ne'er withdrew."

"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands," poured out water, and began to wash his disciples' feet, and then went, with full knowledge of all that was before him, to pour out his blood to wash their souls from guilt. In the midst of his agony on the tree, he still had full understanding concerning his sacrifice: "Knowing that all things were now accomplished," he bowed his head, and died. Thus my ill knowledge is met by the great and heavenly knowledge with which he went about the work of offering a complete atonement in my place and stead. "It is Christ that died."

"Ay, ay!" says yet another accuser; "but *you have sinned with delight*. You took a pleasure in it. You were not as some who were mere drudges to sin. You drank it down like sweet wine, and you could not have too much of it." Ah! It is so; but then my Lord Christ delighted to come to be my Saviour. In the volume of the Book it is written of him: "I delight to do thy will, O my God! Yea, thy law is within my heart.: I took pleasure in sin; but, "he, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." Therefore, over against my delight in sin, I set his delight in presenting to the Father his perfect righteousness and his all-sufficient substitutionary sacrifice: "It is Christ that died."

I do not seem to want to preach. I want to sit down, and suck all the sweetness out of this blessed truth: "It is Christ that died." Ah! But another bitter taunt comes to me, "*You have sinned in spirit*. You not only sinned with your body, with your eyes, your lips, your hands; but you have sinned in imagination and desire very horribly." Ah, brethren! Here we must bow our heads. All manner of evil things we commit in our thoughts; sin runs to riot in our spirit. Well, we confess that too; but then Christ suffered in his spirit. The sufferings of his soul were the very soul of his sufferings. He not only groaned in body, when beaten by the Roman soldiers, and pierced with nails and thorns; but in soul he was overwhelmed by exceeding heaviness, and by the desertion of his God. To atone for the sin of my soul there is the sorrow of his soul; if I poured out my soul in sin, he poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors. "It is Christ that died."

If the black thought then comes up, "Ah! but *you have aforesaid refused Christ*. Many times you put him away. You quenched conscience. You went to the house of God, not to pray, but to laugh. Ay, and when Christ would have pulled you away, you held hard on to your sin! You long rejected Christ." Yes; but I set over against that the fact that he always would have me. He loved me to the death; and albeit that he foresaw and foreknew that I should reject him, yet he would not take "No" for answer from me; but he resolved that his true grace should conquer me truly, and make me willing in the day of his power.

Still the accuser continues reminding us of our past life: "*you have trusted in others*, and turned away from Christ; you went everywhere before you came to him." Did you ever want to hire a horse in a market-town? You went to some place, and asked the price, and thought it too high; then you went away to half-a-dozen other stablekeepers, and could not do any better, so you came back to the first; but he, displeased with you, very possibly said, "I do not want your custom. You have been to everybody else; you may go to them now." I have known a surly man act in that way; but Christ never turns us away because we only come to him when others fail us. Many have gone round the world to look for a saviour other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and they have only come to him when all others have failed them. It is astonishing where men will go to seek salvation. Some go to Rome, and some to Oxford; some go I know not where. They seek in vain; for there is no Saviour to be found, except at Calvary; and after you have made the circuit of the globe, and

compassed heaven and hell to find another way of salvation, you will have to come back to Christ. Blessed be his name, he will not refuse you even then, if you will but believe him! The proof of love to the uttermost is that "It is Christ that died."

But I feel a darkness coming down over my spirit, and in the darkness there is a fiendish voice that says, "But *you have committed unknown sins*, sins that nobody else knows, and there have been sins which you yourself did not know. Hidden in your heart there is a damning spot which your eye has not discovered." Here comes in this blessed word taken out of the Greek litany, "By thine unknown sufferings." It is almost as good as Scripture; for Scripture leads us to think of the sufferings of Christ as an unfathomable deep. Who can tell us what Christ's suffering really was? It goes into the region of things unknown; it goes beyond the knowable; for flesh and blood will never be able to comprehend what Jesus suffered when the great flood of human sin came rushing down upon him, and filled his spirit to the brim. "It is Christ that died." My unknown sins are buried in the unknown deeps of his almighty sacrifice.

Ah! but another thought comes up, "You know that he died; but then *you have slain your Lord*. You had a share in his death. You know that every sinner is guilty of the murder of Christ." I know it; I know it to my shame and confusion; yet do I live by him I slew, I am saved by him I murdered; and I glory in the grace that makes such a miracle of mercy possible."

"With pleasing grief and mournful joy
My spirit now is filled,
That I should such a life destroy,
Yet live by him I killed."

Whether it was by mine or by any other wicked hands, yet it was by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," that Jesus died, in the stead of all who believe in him: I believe in him, therefore he has died for me. He died for his murderers, for those that mocked and insulted him; for he commanded his disciples to begin preaching the gospel at Jerusalem, where they crucified him, to preach it even to those who had hounded him to his doom. O dear friends, what comfort lies in this word, "It is Christ that died."!

"Ah!" says the accuser, but *you are still sinful*. What if Christ died for all your past sins? What about your present sinfulness?" Well, about that, I have this to say, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." I believe that, when Christ died, he took all the sins of all his people, past, present, and to come, and when the whole mass was condensed into one bitter cup, he drank it all up.

"At one tremendous draught of love,"

leaving not so much as a single drop of wormwood or gall for any to drink who put their trust in him. Come, my hearer, if what I say to you be true (and I will answer for its truth at God's great judgment-seat), then I pray you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; for "he that believeth in him shall not be ashamed, nor confounded, world without end." I am in this boat myself. If it sinks, I am lost; but it will not sink, for the Plot of the Galilean Lake is on board. Come in with me, let us sail together to glory. I will not say, "Let us sink or swim together," for there is no sinking to a soul that rests in Christ. This is a good seaworthy vessel: "It is Christ that died." God has accepted Christ in the place of his people; and you, accepting Christ to stand in your stead, shall find that your sin is put away, that his righteousness is yours, and that you are "accepted in the Beloved." I have once more preached the gospel to you as plainly and as simply as I can. Whether you will receive it, or

not, must rest with yourselves. May God the Holy Spirit lead you to trust in "Christ that died"! God bless you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 8:26-39.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—537, 553, 297.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

MY DEAR READERS,—Your weekly preacher is still weakly; but though his progress towards strength is slow, it has been steadily maintained during the late trying weather. When we consider how many have died, your chaplain is very grateful to be alive, to be able to send forth his usual discourse from the press, and to be, as he hopes, half an inch nearer to his pulpit. Happy will he count himself when he is able to preach with the living voice.

Would it not be well for all the churches to hold special meetings for prayer concerning the deadly scourge of influenza? The suggestion has, no doubt, been made by others; but I venture to press it upon Christians of all denominations that they may, in turn, urge all their pastors to summon such meetings. Our nation is fast learning to forget God. In too many instances ministers of religion has propagated doubt, and the result is a general hardening of the popular feeling, and a greatly-increased neglect of public worship. It is written, "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Let us, who believe in inspired Scripture, unite our prayers that it may be even so. With a court and a nation in deepest mourning, it is a time to cry mightily unto the Lord.

I have been able again to revise a sermon without assistance. It is upon Psalm 105:37; and, if the Lord will, it will be published next week.

Yours, in deep sympathy with all the sick and the bereaved,

C. H. SPURGEON

Menton, Jan. 17, 1892.

A Stanza of Deliverance

A Sermon

(No. 2241)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, January 31st, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, July 31st, 1890.

"He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes."—Psalm 105:37.

THIS verse has been making music in my heart for several days, and at times it has even claimed utterance from my tongue. I have caught myself singing a solo, with myself as the only hearer; and this has been the theme, "He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes." I love texts which sing to me, and make me join in their tune. If this verse should get into your hearts, and set you singing in a similar way, you will be entertaining a very pleasant visitor, and it will brighten a dark day for you.

Egypt may very fairly represent those states of sorrow and sadness, depression and oppression, into which God's people come far too frequently. Specially is the house of bondage a true picture of our condition when we are convinced of sin, but are ignorant of the way to escape from its guilt and power. Then sin, which was once our Goshen of pleasure, becomes our iron furnace of fear. Though we yield to sin when under conviction, yet we are no longer its willing subjects: we feel that we are slaves, and we sigh by reason of sore bondage. Glory be to God, he has now brought us out from that state of slavery, and we can sing of freedom given by his own right hand!

Since then we have been permitted, in the order of God's providence, to live among evil persons who have had power over us, and have used it maliciously. They have hated our God, and, therefore, they have hated us, and shown their dislike of us in many harsh and expecting ways. We find no rest with them; but our soul is among lions. They seem as though they would devour us, or else frighten us from following the road to heaven.

Full often has our gracious God delivered his persecuted people from such a sorrowful condition, and brought them into a large room, wherein he has made them happy with Christian fellowship, and enabled them to go about holy work without let or hindrance. At such times, when God's people have come out from under the yoke of their oppressors, the Lord has "brought them forth also with silver and gold, and there has not been one feeble person among their tribes."

It is possible to go down again into Egypt by reason of our own depression of spirit, inward conflict, and despondency. If you like the preacher, you are by no means a stranger to inward sinkings. Though you do not give up your faith, but are still, like father Jacob, keeping your hold while the sinew is shrinking, yet you are "sore broken in the place of dragons." You feel that you are like that bush in the desert, which burned with fire, and, only through a miracle, was not consumed. When under temptations of the flesh, and memories of old sins, Satan himself comes in with his fiery darts, and you have a hard time of it. He will insinuate dark and dreadful thoughts, and you will be haunted by them, day after day, till you feel like the poor Israelites under the lash

of the Egyptian taskmaster. Your covenant with God will bring you out of that state of anguish and distress; and when he does so, you will sing, "He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes."

God forbid we should repeat that senseless and wicked trust in man, which once made us do down into Egypt for help! We will not go there for pleasure: what have we to do with drinking the waters of the muddy river? We drink of a better river than the Nile, even of the river of the water of life. But we shall go to the region weakness and pain to die. Unless the Lord should suddenly come in his glory, we shall close our eyes in death as Jacob and Joseph did. Then when we go into the tomb, which will be a kind of Egypt for our body, we shall only tarry there for a season. We shall slumber for a while, each one in his bed of dust, but the trump of the archangel shall awaken us, and our bodies shall rise again. We shall not, however, come from the grave so poor and feeble as we went in. No, we shall be great gainers by our sojourn in the dark abode. Those who see the saints in the day of resurrection, ascending to their thrones from the Egypt of death, may fitly say, "He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes."

I am going to try to handle my very delightful subject in the following way:—First, *the deliverances of God's people are always wrought by divine power*. Lay the stress on the first word: "HE brought them forth." Secondly, *their deliverances are attended with enrichment*. "He brought them forth also *with silver and gold*." And, thirdly, *their deliverances are accompanied by a remarkable degree of strength*. "There was not one feeble person among their tribes." May the Holy Spirit make rare music for you upon this harp of three strings!

I. First, then, when we are led out of the Egypt of our sorrow, OUR DELIVERANCE IS BY DIVINE POWER. When Israel comes out of Egypt, it was Jehovah who brought forth her armies. When any man is saved from spiritual bondage, *it is the Lord Jesus who looseth the captive*. Some little time ago, I delivered an address at the Mildmay Park Conference upon "Following Jesus in the dark", and the Lord was pleased to bless that word to a great many who were then under a cloud. For this cause, I greatly rejoice, but from this happy result I have also had to suffer many things in the following way: it seems as if persons everywhere, having read that address, must needs write to me an account of their trouble, despondency, and darkness of the soul. Having written the doleful narrative, they very naturally ask me endless questions by way of trying to find light for themselves out of my experience and knowledge. I have been delighted to answer those questions as far as I can; but there is a limit to human power. I have lately been like a doctor who has suddenly had a new practice handed over to him, when he was already as busy as he could be, both night and day. He finds his door besieged by patients who cannot be dismissed with just a word of hope and a dose of medicine, but require a long time in which to tell their griefs and to receive their comfort. Spiritually, my night-bell is always going; and when I visit a sick soul, it requires long and weary nursing. I know, therefore, from that, as well as from my own experience, that if ever a man is delivered from spiritual bondage of heart, it is not by any easy work, or by a hasty word. Nay, all the power of sympathy and experience will fail with some souls. God alone can take away the iron when it enters into the soul. It is of small use for those afflicted in mind to write to me, or to others, if their distress is spiritual, for God only can deliver them. If they are in the dark, we can strike a match as well as anyone else; but since they need the shining of the sun, that remains with the Lord, who alone creates the light. Oh, that the Sun of righteousness would rise with healing beneath his wings, on every soul that now sits in the midnight of despair! Deliverance from a cruel captivity,

like that of Israel in Egypt, must be wrought by the hand and outstretched arm of Jehovah alone. When such a liberation is performed, then do we rapturously sing, "HE brought them forth."

But this does not exclude the use of means. The Lord used Moses and Aaron, and Moses used his rod and his tongue. Truly Jehovah brought forth Israel, and neither Moses nor Aaron nor the rod in Moses' hand; but yet the Lord's instruments were employed in the service. If the Lord delivers you, my dear afflicted friends, the work will not be done by the preacher, not by a consoling book, nor by any other means so as to prevent its being the Lord alone. The use of instrumentality does not hide divine power, but even makes it more apparent. The man Moses was not only very meek; but he was also so slow in speech that he needed Aaron's help; yet the Lord used him. Aaron was even inferior to Moses; but the Lord used him. As for the rod, it was probably nothing more than a hazel stick, which had been used by Moses in walking and keeping sheep; but it pleased the Lord to make of that rod a very remarkable use, so that no sceptre of kings was ever so greatly honoured. The Lord took care to employ means which could not pretend to share the honour with himself. Notwithstanding Moses, Aaron, and the rod, "HE brought them forth," and HE alone.

This work of the Lord *does not exclude the action of the will.* The people of Israel came forth freely from the country which had become the house of bondage. "He brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness." They set out exultingly, glad to escape from the intolerable oppression of Pharaoh, who was to them a tyrant indeed. God does not violate the human will when he saves men: they are not converted against their will, but their will itself is converted. The Lord has a way of entering the heart, not with a crowbar, like a burglar, but with a master-key, which he gently inserts in the lock, and the bolt flies back, the door opens, and he enters. The Lord brought Israel forth; but they had cried unto the Lord by reason of their sore bondage, and they did not receive the blessing without the desiring it, yea, and sighing for it; and when it came, they joyfully accepted it, and willingly trusted themselves with him whom the Lord had made to be their mediator and leader, even Moses. They did not share the honour of their deliverance with God, but still they gave their hearty assent and consent to his salvation. Willingly as they were to move, it was still true, "HE brought them forth."

Brethren, he must have brought them forth, for *they could never have come forth by themselves.* If you have read enough of Egyptian history to understand the position and power of the reigning Pharaohs, you will know how impossible it was for a mob of slaves, like the Israelites, to make headway against the imperious monarch, and his absolute power. If they had clamoured and rebelled, the only possible result would have been to slaughter many, and the still further enslavement of the rest. There was no hope for the most distinguished Israelite against the tyranny of the Pharaoh: He could simply cry, "Get you unto your burdens;" and they could do no less. Pharaoh crushed even his own Egyptians, and much more the strangers. You cannot look upon the pyramids and other vast buildings along the Nile, and remember that all these were built with unpaid labour, with the whip continually at the workman's back, without feeling that a pastoral unarmed race, long held in servitude, could never have obtained deliverance from the power of Pharaohs, if the omnipotent Jehovah had not espoused their cause. "HE brought them forth."

Beloved, *we* can never escape from the bondage of sin by our own power. Our past guilt, and the condemnation consequent thereon, have locked us up in a dungeon, whose bars we can never break. The prince of darkness, also, has such power over our evil natures that we cannot overcome him, or escape from under his dominion of ourselves. If we are ever set free from sin and Satan, it

will be eternally and infinitely true that the Lord brought us forth out of the house of bondage. "Salvation is of the Lord."

Moreover, *the spirit of the people was too crushed to have dared to come forth*, even if they could have achieved liberty by a brave revolt. Four hundred years of slavery had ground the very spirit out of the men of Israel. They toiled, they toiled, they toiled; and when Moses came and talked to them about freedom, at first they listened, and they hoped; but in a few hours they began to murmur, and to complain of Moses, and to cry, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians." That abject condition was ours before conversion; we were not easily aroused to seek redemption. I remember hearing the gospel, and getting a little comfort from it, and almost immediately falling back into my former hopelessness; and I said in my soul, "I may as well enjoy the pleasures of sin while I can, for I am doomed to perish for my iniquities." The slavery of sin takes away manliness and courage from the spirit; and where bright hope smiles upon us, we answer her with the sullen silence of despair. Was it not so with you, my brethren, in those gloomy days? Therefore, it must be true, that, if the prisoners of sin have some forth, the Lord himself brought them forth. They had not the spirit of men who could dare to care about their freedom; they were too enfeebled by their own servile spirit. There may be some before me, at this moment, before whom God has set an open door, and yet they dare not go through it. Christ is put before you; you may have him for your trusting; you may have him at once; but you dare not take him. You are commanded to believe, but you dare not believe what you know to be true. You hear us sing the hymn—

"Only trust him, only trust him,
Only trust him now;"

but you dare not trust the Lord Jesus, though this is your only hope of obtaining salvation. Your sin has left you paralyzed with despair. O God, bring forth these prisoners, even now! Though they lie in the inner prison, with their feet fast in the stocks, may it be said on earth and sung in heaven, "HE brought them forth."

Yet the Lord did bring them forth. Not in part, but as a whole, he redeemed his people. Every one of them was set free. Not only all the human beings, but all their cattle came forth, according to the word of the Lord. "Not a hoof shall be left behind." Christ Jesus, in redeeming his people, will have all or none. All that the Father gave him shall come to him; nor shall the power of sin, and death, and hell be able to hold in captivity one whom Jesus has effectually redeemed, nor one whom his Father chose. All the covenanted ones shall be his in the day when he makes up his jewels. He has paid too much for them to lose one of them. In the loss of one of them too much would be involved; his word, his covenant, his power, his faithfulness, his honour, would all suffer, should one of his little ones perish. Therefore, he makes their deliverance effectual, and in every deed he brings them forth.

This deliverance came when the lamb was slain. Pharaoh held Israel captive during all the plagues, but he could not go beyond a certain point. On that same night when they saw the lamb slain, and roasted with fire, while they sat in their houses protected by the blood sprinkled upon the lintel, and the two side posts of their doors, that selfsame night they quitted Egypt. They went forth under that seal of redemption, the blood-red mark of substitutionary sacrifice. My dear hearer, perhaps this very night you will also go forth into glorious liberty. I know you will, if you will by faith look to Jesus as the Lamb slain for you. Will you now accept him as your own, and trust him to be your redemption? Behold, then, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world! Take his precious blood, and let it be sprinkled on your door, yea, and upon your own self, that the angel

of vengeance may pass you by. Can you come and feed on Christ at once, as the Lamb of God's passover? Do you say that this would be a bold and venturesome faith? Yet be so bold and venturesome. Blessed to the name of the Lord, none were ever rejected, who dared to trust Jesus! We will sing about you and others if you have faith in the great sacrifice, and this will be our song, "HE brought them forth."

Israel cannot remain under slavery to Egypt when once the redemption price has been accepted, and the blood has been sprinkled. None know freedom from sin but those who trust the atoning blood. God forbid that I should point you to any way of hope but this one path; for without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin!

I have perhaps said enough on this point; but assuredly I have fallen short, unless I have made you know each one that deliverance from sin is solely by the power of God. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Unless a supernatural power is put forth in it, any form of deliverance from sin is worth nothing. If you have been born again from below, you will go below; you must be born again from above if you are to go above. There is no true liberty but that wherewith Christ make you free. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Do you know what it is, dear friends, to be brought out of prison by a miracle of grace, by a revelation of the Holy Ghost, by the blood of Jesus shed for many? If so, you will join with all the saints in singing, "As for his people, HE brought them forth."

II. But now we reach a very pleasing part of our theme, We have now to note that OUR DELIVERANCE WAS ATTENDED WITH ENRICHMENT: "He brought them forth *with silver and gold.*" "Oh!" says one, "I remember all that about that translation. That is the silver and gold which they borrowed from the Egyptians with no intent of repaying the loan. I have always thought that was a thievish trick." It was a very unfortunate mistake of our translators when they rendered the original by the word "borrowed", for it is not the correct word. Our Revised Version has it more accurately, "And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they asked of the Egyptians jewels of silver and jewels of Gold, and raiment: and the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked." Even if you were forced to read the word "borrowed", it might mean nothing amiss, for all borrowing and nonpayment is not thieving. "Oh!" say you, "that is a new doctrine." Let me state the case. If I borrow upon the security of my property, and leave the property in the hand of the lender, he will not complain if the security is worth more than the loan. These Israelites had lands and houses and other property which they could not carry with them, and now that their sudden removal involved a forced sale, they could say to those who lived near them, "Here is our land, what will you give us upon it?" The people took the immovable property of the Israelites, and they granted them a loan upon it, they were well aware of what they were doing, and were not defrauded. But we have no need thus to defend Israel. The Great Proprietor of all things bade them to ask, and influenced the minds of their neighbors to give. It was just that these poor people, who had been working without fee or reward, and had thereby screened the native Egyptians from much forced labour. The people of Egypt were, in part, afraid of them and of their God, and were also, in measure, sympathetic with them under their cruel oppression, and so they forced presents upon the Israelites hoping to get their blessing before they departed, to save them from further plague which might visit the land. The natives as good as said, "Take whatever you please of us, for we have treated you ill. Only leave us alone; for plagues and deaths fall upon us thick and fast so long as Pharaoh detains you here." However,

this is not my point. I am dealing with more spiritual things. When God brings his people out of bondage, they come out enriched in the best and most emphatic sense.

This seemed very unlikely. It looks to the afflicted as if they could not be profited by trials such as theirs. If they can only escape by the skin of their teeth, they will feel perfectly satisfied. Depressed spirits cannot lift their thought so high as to think of the gold of increased joy, or the silver of enlarged knowledge, or the jewels of holy graces. "I am," said one, "quite prepared to sit down behind the door in heaven, or at the feet of the least of the saints, so long as I may but get there." In some respects this is a very proper feeling. But this is not God's way of acting: he did not lead forth his people in a poverty-stricken way, but "He brought them forth also with silver and gold." Your Deliverer means to enrich you spiritually when he sets you free from your sorrow and trouble.

It was very far from being the design of their enemies to enrich Israel: Pharaoh had intended to work them down to the last ounce of strength, and keep them in abject poverty; in fact, one chief object of his oppression was to kill down the race, lest they should too greatly multiply. But the Lord turned the curse into a blessing; "The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew;" and the harder they worked, the healthier they became, so that "there was not one feeble person among their tribes." This was not according to their enemies' will; but the will of the Lord is paramount. Even so it is not the devil's will to drive a man nearer to Christ, but yet his temptations and assaults are often used of the Lord to make the best and most experienced Christians. Satan is the scullion in God's kitchen, and he has to scour the vessels of mercy. Trials and afflictions, which threaten to kill us, are made to sanctify us; and sanctification is the best form of enrichment. How much we owe to sorrow and sickness, crosses and losses! Our bondage ends in our coming forth with much that is better than silver and gold.

Thus do we come forth from conviction of sin. "Now tell me," says one, "what does man gain by being in a desponding, sorrowful condition, convinced of sin, and full of fears?" By the work of the Holy Spirit he will gain much. He will obtain a clearer knowledge of the evil of sin. This is a rare thing nowadays, when we have so many believers who were never penitent. It is a great thing for a child, who has a habit of stealing apples, to get himself well filled with the sourest of them, and feel the gripes strong within him. He will never touch such fruit anymore. It is a great thing for a man, in his early days, to know what a sour apple sin is, and to feel heartache and soul-anguish because of the exceeding bitterness of his evil ways. It is a lasting lesson. As the burnt child dreads the fire, and the scalded dog is afraid even of cold water, so the discipline of conscience, through divine grace, breeds a holy caution, and even a hatred of sin. We have few Puritans because we have few penitents. An awful sense of guilt, an overwhelming conviction of sin, may be the foundation stone of a gloriously holy character.

The tried and tempted man will also see clearly that salvation is all of grace. He feels that, if he ever rises from his despondency, he can never dare to take an atom of the honour of deliverance to himself; it must be of free grace only. He can do nothing, and he knows it. When a child of God can spell GRACE, and can pronounce it clearly, as with the true Jerusalem accent, he has gained a great deal of spiritual silver and gold. I have heard a brother stutter over that word, "free grace", till it came out very like "free will." As for myself, that Shibboleth I pronounce without faltering, for my free will is that which I daily try to master and I bring into complete subjection to the will of God, and to free grace I owe everything. Blessed is that man, who, by his experience, has been made to know that free grace is the source of every blessing and privilege, and that salvation is all

of grace from first to last. By a knowledge of the great gospel principle of grace, men are brought forth also with silver and gold.

Such persons gain by their soul trouble a fund of healthy experience. They have been in the prison, and have had their feet made fast in the stocks. "Well," says one, "I do not want to feel that sort of treatment." No, but suppose you had felt it, the next time you met with a brother who was locked up in the castle of the Giant Despair, you would know how to sympathize with him and help him. You who never felt a finger-ache cannot show much sympathy with broken bones. I take it to be a great gain to a man to be able to exhibit sympathy towards sufferers of all kinds, especially towards spiritual sufferers. If you can enter into the condition of a bondsman, because you have yourself been a bondsman in Egypt, and God has brought you out, then you will be qualified to comfort those that mourn.

Thus, you see, in various ways, the Lord's people are enriched by the sorrows from which they are delivered by God. "HE brought them forth also with silver and gold." Persons who come to Christ suddenly, and find peace immediately, have much to be grateful for; and they may be helpful to others of a similar character; but those who suffer long law-work, and have deep searchings of the heart, before they can enter into rest, have equal reasons for thankfulness, since they obtain a fitness for dealing with special cases of distressed conscience. Where this is the result of severe trial, we may well say that the Lord has brought them forth with silver and gold.

Thus do saints come out of persecution. The church is refined by the fires of martyrdom. The heap on the Lord's threshing-floor is more largely made up of real wheat after the winnowing fan has been used upon it. Individual piety is also deeper, stronger, nobler in persecuting times than in other seasons. Eminent saints have usually been produced where the environment was opposed to truth and godliness. To this day the bride of Christ has for her fairest jewels the rubies of martyrdom. Out of each period of fierce persecution the Lord has brought forth his people the better for the fires. "HE brought them forth also with silver and gold."

Thus do believers come out of daily afflictions. They become wealthier in grace, and richer in experience. Have you noticed how real those men are who have known sharp trial? If you want an idle evening of chit-chat, go and talk to the gentleman with a regular income, constant good health, and admiring friends; he will amuse your leisure hour. But if you are sad and sorrowful, and need conversation that will bless you, steer clear of that man's door. Look into the faces of the frivolous, and turn away as a thirsty man from an empty cistern. He that has never had his own cheek wet with tears, cannot wipe my tears away. Where will you go in the day of trouble? Why, to that good old man whose sober experience has not robbed him of cheerfulness, though it has killed his sinful folly. He has been poor, and he knows the inconvenience of straightened means; he has been ill, and can bear with the infirmities of the sick; he has buried his dearest ones, and has compassion for the bereaved. When he begins to talk, the tone of his voice is that of a sympathetic friend. His lips drop fatness of comfort. What a gain is his spiritual acquaintance! A man of God, whose life has been full of mental exercises and spiritual conflict, as well as outward tribulation, becomes, through divine grace, a man of a large wealth of knowledge, prudence, faith, foresight, and wisdom, and he is to the inexperienced like some great proprietor, by whom multitudes of the poorer classes are fed, and guided, housed and set to work. Those who have been much tried are in the peerage of the church. A man who has been in the furnace, and has come out of it, is a marked man. I think I should know Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego even now if I were to meet them. Though the smell of the fire had not passed upon them, I feel sure that it left a glow upon their countenances,

and a glory upon their persons, which we find no where else. They are, henceforth called "the three holy children": they were holy before, but now men own it. Do you not think that they were great gainers by the furnace, and is it not true of all the godly whose lives have been made memorable by special tribulation: "HE brought them forth also with silver and gold"?

When you and I reach the shores of heaven, *thus shall we come into glory*. When we come forth out of our graves, it will not be with loss, but with enrichment. We shall leave corruption and the worm behind us, and with them all that earthly grossness which made us groan in these mortal bodies. God will bring us forth also with silver and gold. What golden songs will we sing! What silver notes of gratitude will we pour forth! What jewels of communion with one another, and of communion with our Lord, will adorn our raiment! If we, too, have been men of sorrows and acquainted with grief, how much more fully shall we enter into the joy of our Lord, because we entered into his sorrow! We also have suffered for sin, and have done battle for God and for his truth against the enemy. We also have borne reproach. And become aliens to our mother's children; we too have been bruised in the heel, and yet in death have conquered death, even as he did; only by his grace. Hence the joy of fellowship with him through eternity. What news we shall have to tell to angels, and principalities, and powers! The gems of our grateful history will be our trials and deliverances. Coming up from death to eternal life, this will be the sum of it, "HE brought them forth also with silver and gold."

Dear friends, I am anxious to pass on to the third point, for time is flying fast; but I cannot neglect the application of what I have said. I beg those of you who are sad and despondent to notice the truths I have advanced. I want you to believe that your present affliction is for your enrichment. You will come out of this Egypt, with much profit of grace. "Let me out," cries one, "only let me out." I pray you, be not impatient. Why rush out naked, when a little patience will be repaid with silver and gold? If I were labouring in Egypt, and I heard that it was time for me to start for the land of Canaan, I should be eager to be gone at once; but if I found that I must be hindered for an hour or two, I should certainly utilize the delay by disposing of my lands, and endeavouring to get together treasures which I could carry with me. The delay would not be lost time. Therefore, beloved friend, if you cannot at once obtain comfort, make good use of your affliction. Be always more earnest to profit by your trials than to escape from them. Be more earnest after the heavenly silver and gold than about hurrying away from the scene of conflict and temptation.

III. Thirdly; here is a very wonderful thing. **OUR DELIVERANCE IS ACCOMPANIED WITH HEALTH AND STRENGTH**: "There was not one feeble person among their tribes." In the thousands of Israel there was not one person who could not march out of the land keeping rank as an efficient soldier. Everyone was fit for the journey through the wilderness. They numbered hard upon two millions, if not more; and it is a very surprising fact that there should not have been one feeble person among their tribes. Mark the word, no only no one sick, nut no one "feeble", none with the rheumatism, or other pains which enfeeble walking, or palsies which prevent bearing burdens. This was nothing less than a sanitary miracle, the like of which was never know in the natural order of things.

This fact is typical of the health and strength of the newly saved. The Lord's people, at conversion, are as a rule wonderfully strong in their love to Jesus, and their hatred of sin. In most cases our young converts, when they have truly come to Christ, even if they are a little timid, are vigorous, much in prayer, abounding in zeal, and earnest in speaking out the gospel. Many of them, I believe, would die at the stake readily enough, while they are in their first love. In their earliest days nothing

is too hot or too heavy for them, for the sake of Jesus Christ, their Lord. If I want a bit of work to be done which requires dash and self-sacrifice, give me a set of Israelites who have just come out of Egypt, for there is not one feeble person among their tribes. After they have gone some distance into the wilderness, they are apt to forget the right hand of the Lord, and to get fretting and worrying. Very soon many of them are sick, through being bitten by fiery serpents, or smitten with the plague. They begin grumbling and complaining, and run into all sorts of mischief in a short time; but when they first came out, they were so excellent that even the Lord said, "I remember thee, the love of thine espousals." I have know some of you, after you have been members of the church for a few months, greatly need a nice cushion to sit upon, and the cozy corner of the pew; whereas once you could stand in the aisle, and not know that you were standing. You have grown wonderfully particular about the singing, and the tunes, and the length of the prayer, and the preacher's attitude, and especially the respect paid to your own dear self. Only very choicest service suits you: it would almost insult you if you were put to common work. You were not like that when you were first converted. Do you recollect how the crowd pressed upon you, and yet you were so absorbed in listening to the preacher's voice that you never minded it? What walks you took then to reach the service! I notice, my friend, that when your grace grew short, the miles grew long. When you first joined the church, I said to you, "I fear you live too far off to attend regularly." But you took me up very quickly, and said, "Oh, that is nothing, sir! If I can only get spiritual food, distance is no object." When you get cold in hearts, you find it inconvenient to come so far, and you go to a fashionable place of worship, where your musical tastes can be gratified. Yes, when grace declines, fancy rules the mind, and love of ease controls the body, and the soul loses appetite, and grows greedy for empty phrases, and weary of the Word of God. May the Lord grant you grace to be among those of whom it is said, "There was not one feeble person among their tribes"!

Full often it is so with the persecuted. I do not wish that any of you should experience persecution, but I am persuaded it would do some of you good to have a touch of it. A man who has fulfilled an apprenticeship to this hard master, is likely to be a man indeed. If he has endured hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, he will be fit to become an officer in the army, and an instructor of recruits. If I could, by the lifting of my finger, screen every believer from persecution at home and in the workshop, I should hesitate long before I did it, since I am persuaded that the church is never more pure, more holy, more prayerful, or more powerful than when the world is raging against her. The dogs keep off the wolves. The hypocrite declines to enter the church where he will gain nothing by reproach, or worse. When there were the stakes at Smithfield, Protestantism meant heroism. When the Lord's covenanting people were meeting among the hills and mosses of Scotland, there were no "moderates" and "modern-thought" men among them. They knew and loved the truth for which they fought and that truth made them strong.

It could be a glorious day if it were so with all God's people, that there were none feeble. We should, as a church, labour to reach this high standard. We would have the weakest to be as David, and David as the angel of the Lord. We would have our babes become young men, and our young men fathers in Christ. Do we reach this standard at the Tabernacle? Alas! We do not, by a very long way. There are numbers of very feeble persons among our tribes. I will not say a word against them, dear hearts! For I trust they are sincere, though feeble. How greatly I wish that they were more concerned about their own feebleness, for it is a real loss to the cause we have at heart! The feeble hinder the strong. We want all the strength of the host for storming the enemies' ramparts, whereas some of us have to stop behind and nurse the infirm. We should not mind this so much,

only these are the same poor creatures that were nursed twenty years ago, and they have not made no advance. May the Lord strengthen us all, till we shall all be made fit for the service of Jesus!

Oh, when we meet in the home country, when we once get to glory, what a delight it will be that *there will be no sin or weakness there!* When the Lord has once brought us forth from the world and all its troubles, then all sinful weakness shall be unknown. We shall all be raised in power, and shall be as angels of God. Are you going there, dear friends? "Yes," says one, "I hope that I am going there; but I am a feeble person." Thank God that you are on the right road, even if you limp. It is better to enter into life halt, and maimed, and feeble, than to run and leap in the way of death. If I can give a lift to anyone who is feeble, I am sure I will. At the same time, I would urge you to cry to the Lord to make you strong, and bid you trust in Christ for the power, which he alone can give, of faith to overcome doubts and fears.

If any of you have not believe unto eternal life, now put your trust in the Lord Jesus. They serve a good Master who trust alone in Jesus, and take up their cross and follow him. In him is life for the perishing, joy for the sorrowing, rest for the weary, and liberty for the captives. Are you shut up, like a prisoner in a castle? Do but trust in Jesus, and he will batter the dungeon door, and bring you out. Yea, and he will not give you a penniless liberty, a liberty to perish of want. No, it shall be said of you, and of others like you, "HE brought them forth also with silver and gold." Amen, so be it! So be it, even at this moment, good Lord!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 105.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—30, 116, 126.

God's Will About the Future

A Sermon

(No. 2242)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, February 7th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, October 16th, 1890.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This Sermon was published the week of Spurgeon's death. The great preacher died in Mentone, France, January 31, 1892. This and the next few Sermons in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* were printed with a black mourning band circling the margins. A footnote appeared from the original editors, commenting on the providential selection of this message for that particular week:

*** It is remarkable that the sermon selected for this week should be so peculiarly suitable for the present trying time. It ought to be read with special solemnity. Oh, that it may be the means of leading many to make the great preparation for the future which only believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have made!**

"Go to now, ye that say, to day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."—James 4:13-17.

MEN to-day are just the same as when these words were first written. We still find people saying what they are going to do to-day, to-morrow, or in six months time, at the end of another year, and perhaps still further. I have no doubt there are persons here who have their own career mapped out before them pretty distinctly, and they feel well-nigh certain that they will realize it all. We are like the men of the past; and this Book, though it has been written so long, might have been written yesterday, so exactly does it describe human nature as it is at the end of this nineteenth century.

The text applies with very peculiar force when our friends and fellow-workers are passing away from us. Sickness and death have been busy in our midst. Perhaps in our abundant service we have been reckoning what this brother would do this week, and what that sister would be doing next week, and so on. Even for God's work we have had our plans, dependent in great measure on the presence of some beloved helpers. They have appeared amongst us in such buoyant health, that we have scarcely thought it possible that they would be struck down in a moment. Yet so it has often been. The uncertainty of life comes home to us when such things occur, and we begin to wonder that we have reckoned anything at all safe, or even probable, in such a shifting, changing world as this. With this in full view, I am going to talk about how we ought to behave with regard to the

future, and attempt to draw some lessons for our own correction and instruction from the verses before us.

Following the line of the text, and keeping as close to it as we can, we will notice, first, that *counting on the future is folly*. Then we will observe what is clear enough to us all, that *ignorance of the future is a matter of fact*. In the third place, I shall set before you the main truth of this passage, that *recognition of God in the future is wisdom*, our fourth point shall be that *boasting of the future is sin*; and our final thought will be, that the *using of the present is a duty*.

I. To begin with, it will need but few words to convince you that COUNTING ON THE FUTURE IS FOLLY. The apostle says, "Go to now!" as if he meant, "you are acting absurdly. See how ridiculous your conduct is." "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will do such and such a thing." There is almost a touch of sarcasm in the words. The fact of frail, feeble man so proudly ordering his own life and forgetting God seems to the apostle James so preposterous that he scarcely deems it worth while to argue the point, he only says "Go to now!"

Let us first look at *the form of this folly*, and notice what it was that these people said when they were counting on the future. The text is very full of suggestions upon this matter.

They evidently thought everything was at their own disposal. They said "*We will go, we will continue, we will buy, we will sell, we will get gain.*" But it is not foolish for a man to feel that he can do as he likes, and that everything will fall out as he desires; that he can both propose and dispose, and has not to ask God's consent at all? He makes up his mind, and he determines to do just what his mind suggests. Is it so, O man, that thy life is self governed? Is there not, after all, One greater than thyself? Is there not a higher power that can speed thee or stop thee? If thou dost not know this, thou hast not yet learned the first letter of the alphabet of wisdom. May God teach thee that everything is not at your disposal; but that the Lord reigneth, the Lord sitteth King for ever and ever!

Notice, that these people, while they thought everything was at their disposal, used everything for worldly objects. What did they say? Did they determine with each other "We will to-day or to-morrow do such and such a thing for the glory of God, and for the extension of his kingdom"? Oh, no, there was not a word about God in it, from beginning to end! Therein they are only too truly the type of the bulk of men to-day. They said, "*We will buy; then we will carry our goods to another market at a little distance; we will sell at a profit; and so we will get gain.*" Their first and their last thoughts were of the earth earthy, and their one idea seemed to be that they might get sufficient to make them feel that they were rich and increased in goods. That was the highest ambition upon their minds. Are there not many who are living just in that way now? They think that they can map out their own life; and the one object of their efforts seems to be to buy and sell, and get gain; or else to obtain honour, or to enjoy pleasure. Their heart rises not into the serene air of heaven; they are still groveling here below.

All that these men of old spoke of doing was to be done entirely in their own strength. They said, "*We will, we will.*" They had no thought of asking the divine blessing, nor of entreating the help of the Most High. They did not care for that, they were self-contained; they called themselves "*self-made men*"; and they intended to make money. Who cannot make money who has made himself? Who cannot succeed in business who owes his character, and his present standing, entirely to his own exertions, and to his own brain? So they were full of self-confidence, and began reckoning for the future without a shadow of doubt as to their own ability. Alas, that men should do so even to-day, that, without seeking counsel of God, they should go forward in proud disdain, or in complete

forgetfulness of "the arrow that flieth by day", and "the pestilence that walked in darkness", until they are suddenly overwhelmed in eternal ruin!

It is evident that to those men everything seemed certain. "We will go into such a city." How did they know that they would ever get there? "We will buy, and sell, and get gain." Did they regulate the markets? Might there be no fall in prices? Oh, no! they looked upon the future as a dead certainty, and upon themselves as people who were sure to win, whatever might become of others.

They had also the foolish idea that they were immortal. If they had been asked whether men might not die, they would have said, "Yes, of course all men must die some time or other," for all men count all men mortal; but in their hearts, they would have made an exception in their own case, if we may judge them by what we were apart from sovereign grace. "All men count all men mortal but themselves." Without any saving clause, they said, "We will continue there a year." How did they know that they would see a single quarter of that year through? But you must not press such men too closely with awkward questions. If you had done so, they would have said, "Do not talk about death; it makes one melancholy."

Having looked at the form of this folly of counting on the future, let us speak a little on *the folly itself*. It is a great folly to build hopes on that which may never come. It is unwise to count your chickens before they are hatched; it is madness to risk everything on the unsubstantial future.

How do we know what will be on the morrow? It has grown into a proverb that we ought to expect the unexpected; for often the very thing happens which we thought would not happen. We are constantly surprised by the events which occur around us. In God's great oratory of providence, there are passages of wondrous eloquence, because of the surprise-power that is in them. They come upon us at unawares, and overwhelm us. How can we reckon upon anything in a world like this, where nothing is certain but uncertainty?

Besides, the folly is seen in the fact of the frailty of our lives, and the brevity of them. "What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time." That cloud upon the mountain—you see it as you rise in the morning; you have scarcely dressed yourself before all trace of it has gone. Here in our streets, the other night, we came to worship through a thick fog, and found it here even in the house of prayer. But while we worshipped, there came a breath of wind; and on our way home a stranger would not have thought that London had been, but a few hours before, so dark with dirty mist; it had all disappeared. Life is even as a vapour. Sometimes these vapours, especially at the time of sunset, are exceedingly brilliant. They seem to be magnificence itself, when the sun paints them with heavenly colours; but in a little while they are all gone, and the whole panorama of the sunset has disappeared. Such is our life. It may sometimes be very bright and glorious; but still it is only like a painted cloud, and very soon the cloud and the colour on it are alike gone. We cannot reckon upon the clouds, their laws are so variable, and their conditions so obscure. Such also is our life.

Why, then, is it, that we are always counting upon what we are going to do? How is it that, instead of living in the eternal future, where we might deal with certainties, we continue to live in the more immediate future, where there can be nothing but uncertainties? Why do we choose to build upon clouds, and pile our palaces on vapour, to see them melt away, as aforetime they have often melted, instead of by faith getting where there is no failure, where God is all in all, and his sure promises make the foundations of eternal mansions? Oh! I would say with my strongest emphasis: Do not reckon upon the future. Young people, I would whisper this in your ears; Do not

discount the days to come. Old men, whispering is not enough for you, I would say, with a voice of thunder: Count not on distant years; in the course of nature, your days must be few. Live in the present; live unto God; trust him now, and serve him now; for very soon your life on earth will be over.

We thus see that counting on the future is folly.

II. Secondly, **IGNORANCE OF THE FUTURE IS A MATTER OF FACT.** Whatever we may say about what we mean to do, we do not know anything about the future. The apostle, by the Spirit, speaks truly when he says, "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Whether it will come to us laden with sickness or health, prosperity or adversity, we cannot tell. To-morrow may mark the end of our life; possibly even the end of the age. Our ignorance of the future is certainly a fact.

Only God knows the future. All things are present to him; there is no past and no future to his all-seeing eyes. He dwells in the present tense evermore as the great I AM. He knows what will be on the morrow, and he alone knows. The whole course of the universe lies before him, like an open map. Men do not know what a day may bring forth, but Jehovah knows the end from the beginning. There are two great certainties about things that shall come to pass—one is that God knows, and the other is that we do not know.

As the knowledge of the future is hidden from us, *we ought not pry into it.* It is perilous, it is wicked, to attempt to lift even a corner of the veil that hides us from things to come. Search into the things that are revealed in Holy Scripture, and know them, as far as you can; but be not so foolish as to think that any man or woman can tell you what is to happen on the morrow; and do not think so much of your own judgment and foresight as to say, "That is clear, I can predict that." Never prophesy until after the event, and then, of course, you cannot prophesy; therefore never attempt to prophesy at all. You know not what shall be on the morrow, and you ought not to make any unhallowed attempt to obtain the knowledge. Let the doom of King Saul on Mount Gilboa warn you against such a terrible course.

Further, *we are benefited by our ignorance of the future.* It is hidden from us for our good. Suppose a certain man is to be very happy by-and-by. If he knows it, he will be discontented till the happy hour arrives. Suppose another man is to have great sorrow very soon. It is well that he does not know it, for now he can enjoy the present good. If we could have all our lives written in a book, with everything that was to happen to us recorded therein, and if the hand of Destiny should give us the book, we should be wise not to read it, but to put it by, and say:—

"My God, I would not long to see
My fate with curious eyes,
What gloomy lines are writ for me,
Or what bright lines arise."

It is sufficient that our heavenly Father knows; and his knowledge may well content us. Knowledge is not wisdom. His is wisest who does not wish to know what God has not revealed. Here, surely, ignorance is bliss: it would be folly to be wise.

Because we do not know what is to be on the morrow, *we should be greatly humbled by our ignorance.* We think we are so wise; do we now? And we make a calculation that we are sure is correct! We arrange that this is going to be done, and the other thing; but God puts forth his little finger, and removes some friend, or changes some circumstance, and all our propositions fall to the ground. It is better for us, when we are low before the throne of God, than when we stand up and plume ourselves because we think we can say, "Oh, I knew it would be so! See how well I

reckoned! With what wondrous forethought I provided for it all!" Had God blown upon our plans, they would have come to nought. We know nothing surely. Let that thought humble us greatly.

Seeing that these things are so, *we should remember the brevity, the frailty, and the end of our life*. We cannot be here long. If we live to the extreme age of men, how short our time is! But the most of us will never reach that period wherein we may say to one another, "My lease has run out." How frail is our hold on this world! In a moment we are gone, gone like the moth; you put your finger upon it; and it is crushed. Man is not great; man is less than little. He is as nothing; he is but a dream. Ere he can scarcely say that he is here, we are compelled to say that he is gone.

We are glad that we do not know when our friends are to die; and we feel thankful that we cannot foretell when we shall depart out of this life. What good would it do to us? Some who are in bondage through fear of death might be in greater bondage still, while those who are now careless about it would probably feel more content in their carelessness. If they had to live another twenty years, they would say, "At any rate, we may sport away nineteen of them." As for those of us to whom this world is a wilderness, and who count ourselves as pilgrims hurrying through it, we know enough when we know that this is not our rest, because it is polluted, and that the day will soon come when we shall enter the Canaan of our inheritance, and be "for ever with the Lord." Meanwhile, the presence of the Lord makes a heaven even of the wilderness. Since he is with us, we are content to leave the ordering of our lives to his unerring wisdom. We ought, for every reason, to be thankful that we do not know the future; but, at any rate, we can clearly see that to count on it is folly, and that ignorance of it is a matter of fact.

III. Thirdly, RECOGNITION OF GOD WITH REGARD TO THE FUTURE IS TRUE WISDOM. What says our text? "For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." I do not think that we need always, in every letter and in every handbill, put "If the Lord will"; yet I wish that we oftener used those very words. The fashionable way is to put it in Latin, and even then to abbreviate it, and use only the consonants, "D.V.", to express it. You know, it is a fine thing when you can put your religion into Latin, and make it very short. Then nobody knows what you mean by it; or, if they do, they can praise your scholarship, and admire your humility. I do not care about those letters "D.V." I rather like what Fuller says when he describes himself as writing in the letter such passages as "God willing", or "God lending me life." He says, "I observe, Lord, that I can scarcely hold my hand from encircling these words in parenthesis, as if they were not essential to the sentence, but may as well be left out as put in. Whereas, indeed, they are not only of the commission at large, but so of the quorum, that without them all the rest is nothing; wherefore hereafter, I will write these words freely and fairly, without any enclosure about them. Let critics censure it for bad grammar, I am sure it is good divinity." So he quaintly puts the matter. Still, whether you write, "If the Lord will", or not, always let it be clearly understood; and let it be conspicuous in all your arrangements that you recognize that God is over all, and that you are under his control. When you say, "I will do this or that," always add, in thought if not in word, "If the Lord will." No harm can come to you if you bow to God's sovereign sway.

We should recognize God in the affairs of the future, because, first, *there is a divine will which governs all things*. I believe that nothing happens apart from divine determination and decree; even the little things in life are not overlooked by the all-seeing eye. "The very hairs of your head are numbered." The station of a rush by the river is as fixed and foreknown as the station of a king, and the chaff from the hand of the winnowing is steered as much as the stars in their courses. All things are under regulation, and have an appointed place in God's plan; and nothings happens, after

all, but what he permits or ordains. Knowing that, we will not always say, "If the Lord will"; yet we will always feel it. Whatever our purposes may be, there is a higher power which we must ever acknowledge; and there is an omnipotent purpose, before which we must bow in lowliest reverence, saying, "If the Lord will."

But while many of God's purposes are hidden from us, *there is a revealed will which we must not violate*. It is chiefly in reference to this that the Christian should always say, "I will do this or that, provided that, when the time comes, I shall see it to be consistent with the law of God, and with the precepts of the gospel." I say now, "I will do this or that," but certain other things may occur which will render it improper for me to do so. Hence, to be quite in accordance with the Word I so deeply reverence, I must always put in the saving clause, sometimes giving utterance to it, but in every case meaning, whether I put it into words or not, "I will do so and so, if it be right to do it; I will go, or I will stay, if it be the will of God."

In addition to this, *there is a providential will of God which we should always consult*. With this guidance, which comes from the circumstances that surround us, believers are familiar. Sometimes a thing may seem to us to be right enough morally, and yet we may not quite know whether we should do it or not. Or perhaps, there are two courses equally right, when judged by the Word of God, and you are uncertain which to follow. The highest wisdom, in such a case, is to wait for God to make a path plain by some act of providence. When you come where two roads meet, in your perplexity pull up, kneel down, and lift your hearts to heaven, asking your Father the way. And whenever we are purposing what we should do—and we ought to make some purposes, for God's people are not to be without forethought or prudence—we should always say, or mean without saying, "All my plans must wait till the Lord sets before me an open door. If God permit, I will do this; but if the Lord will, I will stop, and do nothing. My strength shall be to sit still, unless the Master wishes me to go forward." May I whisper into the ear of some very quick, impetuous, and hasty people, that it would be greatly to their soul's benefit if they knew how to sit still? Many of us seem as if we must always do everything at once, and hence we make no end to muddle for ourselves. There is often a blessed discipline in postponement. It is a grand word, that word, "wait"; especially in this particular connection. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Be patient; sometimes even to be passive in the hand of God will be our strength, and to stand still until the cloudy, fiery pillar moves in front of us, will be our highest wisdom.

There is yet another sense I would give to this expression: *there is a royal will which we would seek to fulfill*. That will is that the Lord's people should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. So, as the servants of the Most High, we go forth to do this or that, "if the Lord will", that is to say, if, by so doing, we can fulfil the great will of God in the salvation of men. I wish that this was the master-motive with all Christians; that we were each willing to say, "I will go and live in such a place, if there are souls to be saved there. I will take a house in such a street, if, by living there, I can be of service to my Lord and Master. I will go the China or Africa, or to the ends of the earth, if the Lord will; that is to say, if, by going there, I can be helping to answer that prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Dear Christian friends, do you put yourselves entirely at God's disposal? Are you really his, or have you kept back a bit of yourself from the surrender? If you have retained any portion for yourself, that little reserve that you have made will be the channel by which your life will bleed away. You say, "We are not our own; we are brought with a price:" but do you really mean it? I am afraid that there is a kind of mortgage on some Christians.

They have some part they must give, as they fancy, to their own aggrandisement. They are not all for Christ. May the Lord bring us all to his feet in whole-hearted consecration, till we can say, "We will not go to that city unless we can serve God there. We will not buy, and we will not sell, unless we can glorify God by not buying and selling; and we will not wish even for the honest gain that comes of trading; unless we can be promoting the will of God by getting it. Our best profit will consist of doing God's will." A man can as much as serve God by measuring calico, or by weighing groceries, as he can by preaching the gospel, if he is called to do it, and if he does it in a right spirit. This should always be our aim, and we should put this ever in the forefront of our life. "I go or stay, I ascend or I descend, if the Lord will; the Lord's will shall be done in my mortal body whether I live or whether I die."

May this be your resolve, then; let this clause, "if the Lord will", be written across your life, and let us all set ourselves to the recognition of God in the future. It is a grand thing to be able to say, "Wherever I go, and whatever happens to me, I belong to God; and I can say that God will prepare my way as well when I am old and grey-headed as he did when I was a boy. He shall guide me all the way to my everlasting mansion in glory; he was the guide of my youth, he shall be the guide of my old age. I will leave everything to him, all the way from earth to heaven; and I will be content to live only a day at a time; and my happy song shall be—

"So for to-morrow and its need
I do not pray,
But keep me, guide me, hold me, Lord,
Just for to-day."

IV. And now, fourthly, **BOASTINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE ARE EVIL.** "But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." I will not say much upon this point, but briefly ask you to notice the various ways in which men boast about the future.

One man says, about a certain matter, "*I will do it, I have made up my mind,*" and he thinks, "You cannot turn me. I am a man who, when he has once put his foot down, is not to be shifted from his place." Then he laughs, and prides himself upon the strength of his will; but his boasting is sheer arrogance. Yet he rejoices in it, and the Word of God is true of such a one: "All such rejoicing is evil."

Another man says, "*I shall do it, the thing is certain;*" and when a difficulty is suggested, he answers, "Tut, do not tell me about my proposing and God's disposing; I will propose, and I will also dispose; I do not see any difficulty. I shall carry it out, I tell you. I shall succeed." Then he laughs in his foolish pride, and rejoices in his proud folly. All such rejoicings are evil. They are foolish; but, what is worse, they are wicked. Do I address myself to any who have no notion about heaven or the world to come, but who feel that they are perfect masters of this world, and, therefore talk in the manner I have indicated, and rejoice as they think how great they are? To such I will earnestly say, "All such rejoicing is evil."

I heard a third man say, "*I can do it. I feel quite competent.*" To him the message is the same, his boasting is evil. Though he thinks of himself, "Whatever comes in my way, I am always ready for it," he is greatly mistaken, and errs grievously. I have often been in the company of a gentleman of this sort, but only for a very little while; for I have generally got away from him as soon as I could. He knows a thing or two. He has got the great secret that so many are seeking in vain. All of you ordinary people, he just snuffs you out. If you had more sense, and could do as he does—well, then, you could be as well off as he is. Poor man! "Nobody needs to be poor," says he. "Nobody

needs to be poor. I was poor a little while; but I made up my mind that I would not remain poor. I fought my own way, and I could begin again with a crust, and work myself up." You will notice his frequent use of the capital I, but ah, dear sir, God has thunder-bolts for these great I's! They offend him; they are a smoke in his nostrils. Pride is one of the things which his soul hates. No man should speak in such a strain: "All such rejoicing is evil."

But that young man yonder talks in a different tone. He has been planning he will do when he succeeds; for, of course, he is going to succeed. Well, I hope that he may, He is going to buy, and sell, and get gain; and he says, "*I will do so and so when I am rich.*" He intends then to live his fling, and to enjoy himself; he laughs as he thinks what he will do when his toilsome beginnings are over, and he can have his own way. I would ask him to pause and consider his life in a more serious vein: "All such rejoicing is evil."

There is, of course, a future concerning which you may be certain. There is a future in which you may rejoice. God has prepared for them that serve him a crown of life, and by humble hope you may wear the crown even now. You may, by the thoughts of such amazing bliss, begin to partake of the joy of heaven; and this will do you no harm. On the contrary, it will set your heart at rest concerning your brief stay on earth, for what will it matter to you whether your life is cloudy or bright, short or long, when eternity is secure? But concerning the uncertainties of this fleeting life, if you begin to rejoice, "All such rejoicing is evil."

V. That brings me to my last and most practical point, which is this: THE USING OF THE PRESENT IS OUR DUTY. "therefore to him that knoweth good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." I take this text with its context. It means that he who knows what he ought to do, and does not do it *at once*, to him it is sin. Tho text does not refer to men who live in guilty knowledge of duty, and neglect it; its message is to men who know the present duty, and who think that they will do it by-and-by.

In the first place, *it is sinful to defer obedience to the gospel*. "He that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Do you say, "I am going to repent"? Your duty is to repent now. "I am going to believe," do you say? The command of Christ is, "Believe now." "After I have believed," says one, "I shall wait a long time before I make any profession." Another says, "I am a believer, and I shall be baptized some day." But as baptism is according to the will of the Lord, you have no more right to postpone it than you have to postpone being honest or sober. All the commands of God to the characters to whom they are given come as a present demand. Obey them now. And if anyone here, knowing that God bids him to believe, refuses to believe, but says that he hopes to trust Christ one of these days, Let me read him this: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not,"—this word is in the present tense,—*"to him it is sin."*

In the next place, *it is sinful to neglect the common duties of life*, under the idea that we shall do something more by-and-by. You do not obey your parents, young man, and yet you are going to be a minister, are you? A pretty minister will you make! As an apprentice you are very dilatory and neglectful, and your master would be glad to see the back of you; he wishes that he could burn your indentures; and yet you have an idea you are going to be a missionary, I believe? A pretty missionary you would be! There is a mother at home, and when her children are neglected while she talks to her neighbours; but when her children are off her hands, she is going to be a true mother in Israel, and look after the souls of others. Such conduct is sin. Mind your children; darn the stockings, and attend your other home duties; and when you have done that, talk about doing something in other places. If present duties are neglected, you cannot make up for the omission by

some future piece of quixotic endeavour to do what you were never called to do. If we could all be quiet enough to hear that clock tick, we should hear it say, "Now! Now! Now! Now!" The clock therein resembles the call of God in the daily duties of the hour. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin," even though he may dream of how he will, in years to come, make up for his present neglect.

Then, dear friends, *it is sinful to postpone purposes of service*. If you have some grand project and holy purpose, I would ask you not to delay it. My dear friend, Mr. William Olney, whose absence we all mourn to-night, was a very prompt, energetic man. He was here, he was there, he was everywhere, serving his Lord and master; and now that he is suddenly stricken down, his life cannot be said to be in any sense unfinished; there is nothing to be done in his business; there is nothing to be done in his relation to this church. There is nothing left undone with regard to anybody. It is all as finished as if he had known that he was going to be struck down. Mr. Whitefield said that he would not go to bed unless he had put even his gloves in their right place. If he should die in the night; he would not like to have anybody asking, "Where did he leave his gloves?" that is the way for a Christian man always to live; have everything in order, even to a pair of gloves. Finish up your work every night; nay, finish up every minute. I have seen Mr. Wesley's Journal, though it is not exactly a "journal"; it does not give an account of what he did in a day, nor even what he did in an hour. He divided his time into portions of twenty minutes each; and I have seen the book in which there is the record of something done for his Lord and Master every twenty minutes of the day. So exactly did he live, that no single half-minute ever seemed to be wasted. I wish that we all lived in that way, so that we looked, not at projects in some distant future that never will be realized, but at something to be done now.

Last Thursday, when I was speaking, I said that some Christian people had never told out the story of the cross to others, and urged them to begin to do so at once. A young friend, sitting in this place, leaned over the front of the pew, and touched a friend sitting there, saying to her, "I would like to speak to you about that." He had never spoken to her before, he did not even know her, and he thus addressed her while the service was proceeding. A member of the church, sitting by her side, who heard what the young man said, was so pleased with his prompt action, that she stayed after the service to sympathize and help, while he explained the way of salvation. The young person, to whom he spoke, came to tell me, last Tuesday, that she had found the Saviour through that well-timed effort. Dear friends, that is the way to serve the Lord. If we were to do things at the moment when they occurred to us, we should do them to purpose. But, oh, how many pretty things you have always meant to do, and have never even attempted! You have strangled the infant projects that have been born in your mind; you have not suffered them to live, and grow into manhood of real action. First thoughts are best in the service of God, and the carrying of them out would secure great benefit to others and much fruit for ourselves. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." God help us, if we are saved, to get at this holy business of serving the Lord Christ, which as far exceeds buying and selling, and getting gain, as the heavens are higher than the earth. Let us do something for Christ at once. You young people that are newly converted, if you do not very soon begin to work for Christ, you will grow to be idle Christians, scarcely Christians at all; but I believe that to attempt something suited to your ability almost immediately, as God shall direct you, will put you on the line of a useful career. God will bless you, and enable you to do more as the years roll onwards.

I have this last word: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth is not, to him it is sin," that is, *it is sinful in proportion to our knowledge*. If there is any brother here, into whose mind God has put something fresh, something good, I pray him to translate it into action at once. "Oh, but nobody has done it before!" Somebody must be first, any why should not you be the first if you are sure that it is a good thing, and has come into your heart through God the Holy Ghost? But if you know to do good, and do not do it; it will be sin every minute that you leave it undone. Therefore get at it at once. And you, my sister, who to-night, while sitting here thinking of something you might have done which you have not yet attempted, attempt it at once. Do not let another sun rise, if you can help it, before you have begun the joyful and blessed service. "The time is short." Our opportunities are passing, "For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Be up and doing. Soon we shall be gone. May we never hear the summons to go home while there is anything left undone that we ought to have done for our Lord and Master!

I am conscious of having spoken but very feebly and imperfectly; but, you know, my heart is heavy because of this sore trial which has come upon us through the stroke that has fallen on our beloved deacon, William Olney; and when the heart is so sad, the brain cannot be very lively. May God bless this word, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Note:

** This sermon was preached at the time that Mr. William Olney, the senior deacon of the Tabernacle church, was lying unconscious, after a paralytic stroke. He fell asleep in Jesus the next morning. On the following Lord's-day evening, the Pastor preached, from Acts 13:36, the sermon that will be published next week, "if the Lord will."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—James 4.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—90, 39, 211.

When last week's sermon was sent to the printers. Mr. Spurgeon was unable to write a letter to go at the end of it, for he was suffering so severely that he could not even dictate a message to his sermon-readers. It was not then anticipated that his illness would take the terrible form it afterwards assumed: but on *Tuesday, January 26*, when the doctor came, he was obliged to report his patient's condition as "serious." Since then, the daily bulletins have carried the sad tidings far and wide; and most of the readers of the sermons probably know, by this time, that their beloved preacher has been suffering the same malady that so grievously afflicted him during last summer and autumn. His illness, on this occasion, has not developed exactly the same symptoms as before; but at the date of writing this note (Jan 31), the doctor reports that "*his condition gives cause for the greatest anxiety.*"

It is with profound regret that the Publishers record the death of the beloved Pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He was called to his rest, at Menton, on Sunday, January 31st, at 11 p.m.

To all who were privileged to know Mr. Spurgeon, this event has come as a great sorrow; a sorrow which will certainly be shared by every reader of the weekly sermons.

"I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."—*Revelation 14:13*.

The weekly Sermon and *The Sword and the Trowel* will be continued as usual, the Publishers having a large quantity of manuscripts and Sermons hitherto unpublished.

His Own Funeral Sermon

A Sermon

(No. 2243)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, February 14th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, October 19th, 1890.

* This sermon was preached on the Lord's-day evening after Mr. William Olney "fell on sleep." Long before the beloved preacher was "called home," it was selected for publication this week. Mrs. Spurgeon feels that her dear husband could not have delivered a more suitable discourse for "his own funeral sermon." She has, therefore, given it that title in the hope that many will be blessed by the message which "he, being dead, yet speaketh." Believing that many friends will wish to have this sermon for widespread circulation, the publishers will at once issue it, in book form, price one penny.

"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep."—Acts 13:36.

IT is remarkable that David should say, in the sixteenth Psalm, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption," and yet that Paul should say concerning him, when preaching at Antioch, that he "saw corruption." The key to this apparent contradiction is the fact that David did not speak of himself, but of his Lord. Peter, in his memorable sermon on the day of Pentecost, quotes the words of the psalmist, applies them to his risen Redeemer, and distinctly affirms that, in the Psalm, "David speaketh concerning him."

It is worthy of notice that Peter and Paul both use the same argument about this statement of David. These two apostles did not always agree; but however much they might differ about other matters, they were of one mind about the resurrection of Christ. I hope that, whatever differences there may be among true preachers of the gospel, they will always be one in declaring the resurrection of our Lord. This corner-stone of the gospel must never be displaced or dishonoured. The good news we are commissioned to declare is the same that Paul received and delivered, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." Chief among the Scriptures fulfilled by the resurrection of Christ stands this word, which David, inspired by the Holy Ghost, wrote so long before the event: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." The resurrection of Christ is the top-stone of our faith. Because "he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption," Paul was able to say this to his hearers, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that before are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

The argument of the apostle is this. David could not have meant himself when he said, "Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption;" because David died, and his body was buried, and it did see corruption. He must therefore have referred to Christ, who is indeed God's "Holy One." Of him the prophetic word was true, for God did not suffer him "to see corruption." He died,

and was laid in the grave, but he rose again on the third day. In that climate there was, while Christ lay in the grave, plenty of time for his body to become corrupt. The spices with which they perfumed the precious body would not have sufficed to keep back corruption; they would have helped conceal the unpleasant odour which putrefaction brings, but they would not have stopped the process of decay. But Christ rose again, and no corruption had come to his body, for that body was a holy thing; it had no defect, nor taint of sin, as our bodies have. Begotten of the Holy Ghost, it was a pure thing; though born of the Virgin Mary, it was united to the Godhead, and not separated from it even in death; it saw no corruption. There is the apostle's argument, then: David speaking not of himself, but of someone else, says that the Lord will not suffer him to see corruption; and this he spake by the Spirit of the very Christ whom we preach to you as the Author and Finisher of salvation. He is living and reigning to-day, King of kings and Lord of lords; he that believeth in him, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and live for ever with his risen, reigning Redeemer.

While Paul was speaking in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, he incidentally used the words of our text: "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep." That is to be my subject on this occasion; forgetting for the present the main argument, I would only look at this eddy in the current, and draw your attention to the expression which dropped from Paul's lips concerning David. Let us ask, first, *What is it to serve our own generation?* Secondly, *What parts of our generation can we serve?* And, lastly, with tender memories of many who have gone from us, let us ask, *What will happen to us when our service is done?* Even that which happened to David; we shall, like him, "fall on sleep."

I. First, then, WHAT IS IT TO SERVE OUR OWN GENERATION? This is a question which ought to interest us all very deeply. We live in the midst of our own generation, and seeing that we are part of it, we should serve it, that the generation in which our children shall live may be better than our own. Though our citizenship is in heaven, yet as we live on earth, we should seek to serve our generation while we pass as pilgrims to the better country.

What, then, is it for a man to serve his own generation?

I note, first, that *it is not to be a slave to it*. It is not to drop into the habits, customs, and ideas of the generation in which we live. People talk nowadays about *Zeitgeist*, a German expression which need frighten nobody; and one of the papers says, "Spurgeon does not know whether there is such a thing." Well, whether he knows anything about *Zeitgeist* or not, he is not to serve this generation by yielding to any of its notions or ideas which are contrary to the Word of the Lord. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not only for one generation, it is for all generations. It is the faith which needed to be only "once for all delivered to the saints"; it was given stereotyped as it always is to be. It cannot change because it has been given of God, and is therefore perfect; to change it would be to make it imperfect. It cannot change because it has been given to answer for ever the same purpose, namely, to save sinners from going down to the pit, and to fit them for going to heaven. That man serves his generation best who is not caught by every new current of opinion, but stands firmly by the truth of God, which is a solid, immovable rock. But to serve our own generation in the sense of being a slave to it, its vassal, and its varlet—let those who care to do so go into such bondage and slavery if they will. Do you know what such a course involves? If any young man here shall begin to preach the doctrine and the thought of the age, within the next ten years, perhaps within the next ten months, he will have to eat his own words, and begin his work all over again. When he has got into the new style, and is beginning to serve the present world, he will within a short time have to contradict himself again, for this age, like every other, is "ever

learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." But if you begin with God's Word, and pray God the Holy Ghost to reveal it to you till you really know it, then, if you are spared to teach for the next fifty years, your testimony at the close will not contradict your testimony at the beginning. You will ripen in experience; you will expand in your apprehension of the truth; you will become more clear in your utterance; but it will be the same truth all along. Is it not a grand thing to build up, from the beginning of life to the end of it, the same gospel? But to set up opinions to knock them down again, as though they were ninepins, is a poor business for any servant of Christ. David did not, in that way serve his own generation; he was the master of his age, and not its slave. I would urge every Christian man to rise to his true dignity, and be a blessing to those amongst whom he lives, as David was. Christ "hath made us kings and priests unto God his Father"; it is not meet that we should cringe before the spirit of the age, or lick the dust whereon "advanced thinkers" have chosen to tread. Beloved, see to this; and learn the distinction between serving your own generation and being a slave to it.

In the next place, in seeking to answer the question, "What is it to serve our own generation?" I would say, *it is not to fly from it*. If any man says, "The world is so bad, that I will avoid coming into contact with it altogether; even the teaching of Christianity has become so diluted, and is so thoroughly on the Down-grade, that I will have nothing to do with it," he is certainly not serving his own generation. If he shall shut himself up, like a hermit, in his cave, and leave the world to go to ruin as it may, he will not be like David, for he *served* his own generation before he fell asleep. She that goes into a nunnery, and he that enters a monastery are like soldiers who run away, and hide among the baggage. You must not do anything of the sort. Come forward and fight evil, and triumph over it, whether it be evil of doctrine, evil of practice, or evil of any other kind. Be bold for Christ; bear your witness, and be not ashamed. If you do not take your stand in this way, it can never truly be said of you that you served your generation. Instead of that, the truth will be that you allowed your generation to make a coward of you, or, to muzzle you like a dog, and to send you out, into the streets neither to bark nor to bite, nor to do anything by which you might prove that there is a soul within you.

If we ask again, What is it to serve our generation? I answer, *it is to perform the common duties of life*, as David did. David was the son of a farmer, a sheep-owner, and he took first of all to the keeping of the sheep. Many young men do not like to do the common work of their own father's business. You do not want to drudge, you say, you want to be a king. Well, there are not many openings in that line of business; and I shall not recommend anyone to be eager to enter them if there were. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." Before David swayed the sceptre, he grasped the shepherd's crook. He that at home cannot or will not undertake ordinary duties, will not be likely to serve his age. The girl who dreams about the foreign missionary field, but cannot darn her brother's stockings, will not be of service either at home or abroad. Do the commonplace things, the ordinary things that come in your way, and you will begin to serve your generation, as David served his.

But serving our generation means more than this. *It is to be ready for the occasion when it comes*. In the midst of the routine of daily life, we should, by diligence in duty, prepare for whatever may be our future opportunity, waiting patiently until it comes. Look at David's occasion of becoming famous. He never sought it. He did not go up and down among his sheep, sighing and crying, "Oh, that I could get away from this dull business of looking after these flocks! My brothers have gone to the camp; they will get on as soldiers; but here am I, buried among these rocks, too looks after

these poor beasts." He was wiser than that; he quietly waited God's time. That is always a wise thing to do. If you are to serve God, wait till he calls you to do his work; he knows where to find you when he wants you; you need not advertise yourself to his omniscience. At length the set time came for David. On a certain day, his father bade him go to his brethren, and take them some corn and some loaves, with cheeses for their captain; and he reached the camp just at the time when the giant Goliath was stalking forth, and defying all the armies of Israel to meet him. Now is David's time, and the young man is ready for it. If he had lost the opportunity he might have remained a shepherd all the rest of his days. He tells Saul how he slew both the lion and the bear, and prophesies that the uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he had defied the armies of the living God. Disdaining Saul's armour, he takes his sling, and his five smooth stones out of the brook, and soon he comes back with the gory head of the giant in his hand. If you want to serve the church and serve the age, beloved friend, be wide awake when the occasion comes. Jump into the saddle when the horse is at your door; and God will bless you if you are on the look-out for opportunities of serving him.

What is it, again to serve our generation? *It is to maintain true religion.* This David did. He had grave faults in his later life, which we will not extenuate; but he never swerved from his allegiance to Jehovah the true God. No word or action of his ever sanctioned anything like idolatry, or turning aside from the worship of Jehovah, the God of Israel. He bore a noble witness to his Lord. He said, "I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed;" and we may be sure that he was as good as his word, and that when he met with foreign potentates, he vindicated the living God before them. The whole set and current of his life, with the exception of his terrible fall, was to the glory of God in whom he trusted, and to the praise of that God who had delivered him. We, too, shall truly serve those amongst whom we dwell by maintaining true religion. Had ten righteous men been found in Sodom, it would have been spared, and the world to-day only escapes the righteous judgment of God because of the presence in it of those who fear him, and tremble at his word. The spread of "pure and undefiled religion" is a certain way to serve those around us. To help true religion, David wrote many Psalms, which were sung all over the land of Israel. A wonderful collection of poems they are; there is none like them under heaven. Not even a Milton, with all his mighty soarings, can equal David in the height of his adoration of God, and the depth of his experience. That man does no mean service for his time who gives the people new songs which they can sing unto their God. While none can equal the inspired psalms of the Hebrew king, which must ever form the choicest praise-book of the church, other men may, in lesser degree serve their own generation, by the will of God, in a similar way, and be blessed in the deed.

To serve our own generation is not a single action, done at once, and over for ever; *it is to continue to serve all our life.* Notice well that David served "his own generation"; not only a part of it, but the whole of it. He began to serve God, and he kept on serving God. How many young men have I seen who were going to do wonders! Ah, me! They were as proud of the intention as though they had already done the deed. They took a front seat, and they seemed to think that everybody ought to admire them because of what they were going to do; but they were so pleased with the project that they never carried it out. They thought that they might meet with some mishap if they really attempted to do the thing, and the project was so beautiful that they preserved it under a glass shade, and there it is now. Nothing has been accomplished; nothing has been done, though much has been thought of. This is folly. Some, too, begin well, and they serve their God earnestly for a time, but on a sudden their service stops. One cannot quite tell how it happens, but we never

hear of them afterwards. Men, as far as I know them, are wonderfully like horses. You get a horse, and you think, "This is a first-rate animal," and so it is. It goes well for a while, but on a sudden it drops lame, and you have to get another. So it is with church-members. I notice that, every now and then, they get a singular lameness. To very many we have to say, even as Paul said to the Galatians, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth?" But David continually served God to the end of his life. May we all, by divine grace, thus serve our whole generation, too!

Yet more is included in this faithful serving of our generation. *It is to prepare for those who are to come after us.* David served his generation to the very end by providing for the next generation. He was not permitted to build the temple; but he stored up a great mass of gold and silver to enable his son Solomon to carry out his noble design, and build a house for God. This is real service; to begin to serve God in early youth; to keep on till old age shall come; and even then to say, "I cannot expect to serve the Lord much longer, but I will prepare the way as far as I can for those who will come after me." Many years ago, Dr. Rippon, the minister of this church, which then worshipped in New Park Street, was wont to prophesy about his successor. When he was very old, after having been pastor for more than sixty years, it is in the memory of some still living that he was accustomed to pray for the minister who should come after him. The old man was looked forward to one who should come and carry on the work after he was obliged to leave it. So must you and I do. We must be looking ahead as far as ever we can, not with unbelieving anxiety or unholy curiosity; but after the fashion in which David prepared abundantly before his death. If we cannot find a successor to enter upon our service when we have to leave it, yet let us do all we can to make his work the easier when he comes to it.

II. In the second place, let us ask a question even more practical than the first; WHAT PARTS OF OUR GENERATION CAN WE SERVE? It is truly written, "None of us liveth to himself:" we either help or hinder those amongst whom we dwell. Let us see to it that we serve our age, and become stepping-stones rather than stumbling-blocks to those by whom we are surrounded. We shall serve our generation best by being definite in our aim. In trying to reach everybody we may help nobody. The wise man tries to serve somebody in particular: where, then, should we make the effort? In answering that question, I divide the generation in which we live into three parts.

First, there is *the part that is setting*. Some are like the sun going down in the west; they will be gone soon. Serve them, dear brethren. You that are in health and vigour, comfort them, strengthen them, and help them all you can. Be a joy to that dear old man, who has been spared to you even beyond the allotted threescore years and ten, and praise God for the grace that has upheld him through his long pilgrimage. Look on his grey hairs as a crown of glory; make his descent to the grave as easy as you can. He once was as young as you are; he once had the vigour that you have. Console him, cheer him, give him the respect that is due to his many years. Do not let him feel that you consider him an old fogey who lingers, superfluous, on the stage; but learn from his experience, imitate his perseverance, and ask God to be with you in your old age, as he is with him.

The second portion of our generation which we can serve is *the part that is shining*. I mean those in middle life, who are like the sun at its zenith. They are working hard, bearing the burden and heat of the day; as yet their bones are full of marrow, and they are strong men ready for service for the Lord. Seek to sustain their hands in every possible way. Help them all you can. As one of those in middle life, I especially ask the help of all my Christian brethren, members of this church, or of any other church, who can aid me by their sympathies and their prayers. Get closer to one

another, and fill up the vacant spaces that death's arrows continue to make in our ranks. Suffer nothing to be left undone which may further the work of Christ, or help the people around you who are so quickly passing away. Many of us have been together for nearly forty years, and when, one after another, our dear brethren are taken away, let it be everybody's ambition to try to make up what shall be lacking through their departure. This is what is due to those who are like the shining part of our generation.

Specially, however, I want to speak to you about serving your own generation in *the part that is rising*; the young people who are like the sun in the east, as yet scarcely above the horizon. This part of our generation is specially the care of parents and Sunday-school teachers; but let us not leave it entirely to them. We can, most of us, do something to serve this portion of our generation before we fall asleep. Beloved, I commend to your care and attention the children and young people who abound in our midst. In them lies our hope for the future of God's cause on earth.

In the first place, they are the most reachable. Happily, we can get at the children. The mass of people in London go to no place of worship now; the old habit of attending church or chapel seems to have been given up; but the people will still let the children go to Sunday-school, even if they do it from no better motive than that of getting them out of the way in the afternoon, or in order that the house may be quiet without them. Anyhow, if you open a school anywhere in London, you can quickly get it filled with children. If you cannot do one thing, do another. If you cannot reach the fathers and the mothers, though you should earnestly try to get at them, yet, if you can reach the children, take care that you lose no opportunity of teaching them the things of God. This is the work that lies nearest to you; seek to accomplish it; and "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

Moreover, the children are the most impressible. What can we do with the man who is hardened in sin? The grace of God can reach him, I know; but the children as yet have not known these evil ways; they are horrified when they hear about them. Teach them. While yet the clay is soft, mould it for God. May the Lord himself help you, dear Sunday-school teachers, and others who labour amongst the children, to do your work right well! Nobly are you serving your own generation, and the generation to follow.

The salvation of the children ought to be sought with double diligence, for they will last the longest. If a man of sixty or seventy is converted, he will have only a short time for serving God here; for he will soon be gone. If a child is converted, a long life of usefulness may enrich the church of God. Therefore, look after the children. If you had a gathering of Christian men and women, and were to put the question to them, "How many of you were converted before you were one-and-twenty?" you would be greatly surprised to find that probably five out of six would answer that, in early years, they were led to know the grace of God, and trust in Christ as their Saviour. I tried the experiment one evening with a number of friends who had come together from different places. "How many of you owe your salvation to your father's prayers, your mother's instruction, or your Sunday-school teachers' influence in youth?" I asked; and almost every one out of a company of about five-and-twenty said that it was in early youth that God blessed some instrumentality to their conversion.

Remember, too, that those who are converted when children usually make the best saints. These of whom I have just spoken, who gave the answer that they were converted in their youth, were ministers of the gospel. I do not know whether the same rule is true among ordinary Christians; but among those who have become leaders of men, in nearly every case they yielded to Christ while

they were young. Our thoughts at this time cannot but be occupied with our dear friend, William Olney, who has just been taken from us so suddenly, to our unutterable grief. He was as earnest as a youth as he was when he became an old man. Indeed, I never knew a moment when he was not earnest. I never even knew him to be dull or depressed; he seemed to be always joyous and glad. He would almost frighten me sometimes with his jubilation under pain; for when he was in agonies of suffering, and could only sit on the platform for a short time, there was never anything like depression about him. He was just as glad and happy as if he had been in perfect health. I wish that it were so with all of us. Young Christians do become the best Christians. Early piety is usually eminent piety; so seek to catch the children while they are young, and train them for the Lord, then they will be ready to serve their generation in their turn.

We ought to look after the children, again, for they are specially named by Christ. He said, "Feed my sheep;" but he also said, "Feed my lambs." I would almost be inclined to say that the Lord made the same division of the generation as I have done. When he said, the first time, "Feed my sheep," he may have meant the old sheep. When he said, the second time, "Feed my sheep," he may have had specially in mind the middle-aged ones. There is no doubt that when he said, "Feed my lambs," he meant the young people. Christ gave the lambs a place all to themselves: "Feed my lambs." I wish Christians would consider more seriously how the children ought to be looked after by the church. I read, the other day, of a boy who wished to join in membership with the people of God. His father said that he was too young, and kept him back. He was big enough, however, to be sent out to fold the sheep one night. When he came in, his father said, "Jack have you folded the sheep?" "Yes," he said; "I folded all the *sheep*," laying great stress on the last word. "And did you put the lambs in?" asked his father. "No," he replied, "I left the lambs outside; they were too young to go in." "Oh, boy!" said the father; "you know more than I do, after all; they were the very ones that needed most to be folded. You may go and see the minister about joining the church as soon as you like." If any believers in Christ need specially to be taken into the church, it is those who have come to Jesus in their youth. I pray you, serve your generation by giving the children and young people your most loving attention and care.

Look after the children of this generation, again, for the dangers around them at the present time are almost innumerable. What a time this is for boys! You cannot read the daily papers without being shocked by the amounts of wrong-doing of mere boys. This is an age which seems to make snares on purpose to entrap them. There are "penny dreadfuls" enough to poison the whole generation; they are full of stories of crime with a false halo about it, so that it is made to seem like heroism. These vile stories are everywhere; perhaps your own boy has one, unknown to you, and is reading it while you are sitting here. Everywhere traps are laid for the feet of our boys. Serve your generation by warning them of their danger and trying to keep them free from the evils by which they are surrounded. Satan gets the advantage over many a young life by causing even right things to be put to wrong uses; and in all sorts of ways he lays traps for young people. Oh, parents and teachers, do try to give your boys a backbone of moral honesty! Try to show them that they have not come into this world merely to please themselves; that there is something better to be done than that. Do not rest till you have led them to the Saviour, for no boy is safe until he is converted. No girl is safe in the streets of this city till she has a new heart and a right spirit. The times are perilous; yet if we speak a word of warning. We are called sour Puritans. It always makes me laugh when I am called a sour Puritan, because you know there is nobody with a quicker eye for fun, or with a deeper vein of mirth than I have. At the same time, I like to have humour, and anything of

cheerfulness and brightness in life, consecrated to God. But when mirth is made a plank on which a man can go into sin and iniquity, then we will saw that plank into pieces. You must be saved from sin, young men; you must be kept from evil, young women, if you are to be truly happy. May God's grace put in your way wise, godly friends, parents, and teachers, who shall serve their generation by leading you in the paths of peace!

III. Now, I have done when I have tried, for just a minute or two, to answer this question: WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US WHEN OUR SAVIOUR IS DONE? "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep." The day's work is done; the worker is weary; he falls on sleep: what can he do better? It was all "by the will of God.: To what part of the sentence do you think that clause belongs? Did David serve his generation by the will of God; or did he fall asleep by the will of God? Both. Guided by the will of God, he did his work on earth; and calmly resigned to the will of God, he prepared to die. Even when passing away, he served his generation by giving Solomon some last charges concerning the kingdom, saying, "I go the way of the earth; be thou strong, and show thyself a man." Over both his life and his death may be written the words, "By the will of God." Oh, that we may all so live, that even in death we may serve our generation; may it be true of us that "whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's"! Thus, "the will of God" shall be done both in our service and in our sleep.

David is an example of what will befall those who know Christ, at the end of their service. *He did not go to sleep till his work was done.* "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep." Do not want to die till you have done your work. When brethren say, "Oh, I wish I could go to heaven! Oh, when shall I get home?" they remind me of a man who, when he begins work on Monday, says, "I wish it was Saturday night." We do not want servants like that, nor does God either. Be willing to live for two hundred and fifty years, if God wills it. Be willing to live until strength fails you, if God wills it; you can still bear your dying testimony to the Lord's faithful and unchanging love. Do not be in a hurry to go home to heaven. Do not want to go to sleep till you also have served your generation well. When David had served his generation, he fell on sleep. We are told that, in the early days of Christianity, when believers were falling asleep in Jesus, their friends did not bid them "good-bye," but "good-night." So we say, in the words of that beautiful hymn—

"Sleep on beloved, sleep, and take thy rest;
Lay down thy head upon thy Saviour's breast:
We love thee well; but Jesus loves thee best—
Good-night! Good-night! Good-night!
Only 'good-night,' beloved-not 'farewell !'
A little while, and all his saints shall dwell
In hallowed union, indivisible—
Good-night!
Until we meet again before his throne,
Clothed in the spotless robe he gives his own,
Until we know even as we are known—
Good-night!"

But, next we are told that *when his work was done, he fell on sleep.* Did his soul sleep? By no means. It was not his soul that is spoken of here, for we read that he "saw corruption." Souls do no

see corruption. Paul is speaking of David's body. "He fell on sleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption." His body fell into its last, long sleep, and saw corruption. If you like to take the words in the wider sense, he was asleep as far as the world is concerned; he had done with it. No sorrow came to him, no earthly joy, no mingling with the strife of tongues, no girding his harness for the war. "He fell on sleep." He had nothing to do with anything that was under the sun. And that is the case with our dear friend whom we miss from his place to-day, and it will soon be the case also with you and with me. There is not much here worth stopping for; and when our work is finished, like David, we shall fall on sleep. We shall then be asleep to all the declensions of the age, all the strifes of men, and all else which gives us sorrow of heart.

Does this word further mean that *his dying was like going to sleep*? It usually is so with God's people. Some die with a considerable measure of pain; but, as a rule, when believers pass away, they just shut their eyes, and open them in heaven. I have had infinitely more pleasure at death-beds than I have had at weddings. I have been to many marriage-feasts, I have gone there at duty's call; but I can confirm what Solomon said, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for it is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." I am not aware that I have gained anything at a wedding, but I have gained much at the dying bed, as I have seen the joy and peace and rapture of girls and youths, and men and women, passing away joyfully to be "forever with the Lord." I have known some of our number here who were too bashful and backward to ever say much for Christ when they were well; but when I sent to see them die, there was not a bit of bashfulness about them. They spoke out so boldly that I have said to them, "Why, if you get better, you must preach for me one of these Sundays"; and they have smiled and said that they would never get better. They have known this, and they have rejoiced to think that they were going where they would not need any preacher, but would see their Lord Jesus face to face. How they have brightened up at the mention of his dear name! Some of them have sung then, though I never knew them to sing before; and some of them have told of things which they seemed to see and hear, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, till God has revealed them to the departing spirit. You remember such dying beds, do you not? Was it your mother, or your father, who passed away in that glorious style? Perhaps it was a brother beloved, or a sister, or a friend. Well, if we know Christ, it shall be ours by-and-by to sleep in him. You who believe in Christ ought no more to dread death than you dread going to sleep at night. You will, ere you sleep, commit yourself to God, and as you put your head on the pillow, the similitude of death will be upon you, even sleep which one has called "death's cousin." You will not be afraid of that. Why, then, should any dismay seize you in prospect of that which is but another sleep? Rather sing to yourself:—

"Since Jesus is mine, I'll not fear undressing,
But gladly put off these garments of clay;
To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,
Since Jesus to glory through death lead the way."

Let us follow where he leads. Perchance some of us may tarry until he comes again. There will be no death for such; they will but change the service of their generation for the service of the glorified. "Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." Then, when the trumpet shall sound, this corruptible shall put on incorruption, those who sleep in Christ shall awake in resurrection splendour, and together we shall serve our Lord day and night in his temple for ever. Meanwhile, serve you own generation by the will of God; and if the Lord tarry,

you will fall on sleep, even as David did. May God bless you who believe in Jesus, and save the unsaved who are in our midst, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts 13:14-43

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—879, 694, 844.

The note at the end of last week's sermon informed all readers that the long-dreaded blow had at length fallen, and that their much-loved preacher had been called to his heavenly home. His voice shall no more be heard on earth; but he will continue to speak for his Lord through the press, and especially by his sermons.

Attentions has been already directed to the overruling hand of God in the selection of the sermons to be published at this memorable time. The one for next week will be the third in the series preached in connection with the death of the late Mr. William Olney, the text being Ephesians v. 30; and the following week, the address by Mr. Spurgeon, at Mr. William Olney's funeral service in the Tabernacle, will be published. A considerable portion of this address was *revised by Mr. Spurgeon's own hand*. With it the publishers will give *a portrait of the beloved preacher*, and also a portrait of the late Mr. W. Olney.

The revision of the weekly sermons, and the editorship of *The Sword and the Trowel* will remain in the hands of those who have carried on the work during Mr. Spurgeon's long illness. He was only able, personally, to revise two sermons throughout the many months that he was laid aside. These will now have a special value in the estimation of his many friends. They are the two entitled, "Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave" (No. 2237), and "A Stanza of Deliverance" (No. 2241).

There is not much that can be recorded here concerning Mr. Spurgeon's last illness, and his falling asleep in Jesus. The Sword and the Trowel for March will contain an account of the varying experiences in the sunny land, from the time when he delivered his two New Years addresses until all that remained of him was borne away to the railway-station, en route for England, amid tokens of widespread sorrow and sympathy. Amongst other items of interest will be reports of the last two Sabbath evening services conducted by Mr. Spurgeon at the Hotel Beau Rivage; and later numbers of The Sword and the Trowel will furnish the readers with descriptions of "Mr. Spurgeon's last drives at Menton", with reproductions of photographs taken under his personal supervision.

Members of Christ

A Sermon

(No. 2244)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, February 21st, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, October 23rd, 1890.

"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."—Ephesians 5:30.

YESTERDAY, when I had the painful task of speaking at the funeral of our dear friend, Mr. William Olney, I took the text which I am going to take again now. I am using it again because I did not then really preach from it at all, but simply reminded you of a favorite expression of his, which I heard from his lips many times in prayer. He very frequently spoke of our being one with Christ in "living, loving, lasting union"—three words which, in addition to being alliterative, are very comprehensive as to the nature of our union with Christ. Those three words, you will remember, were the heads of my discourse, in the presence of that remarkable gathering which crowded this place to do honour to the memory of our brother, whose highest ambition was always to honour his Lord, whom he so faithfully served.

Paul here speaks only of true believers. Men who are quickened by divine grace and made alive unto God. Of them, he says, not by way of romance, nor of poetical exaggeration, but as an undisputed matter of fact, "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." That there is a true union between Christ and his people in no fiction or dream of a heated imagination. Sin separated us from God, and in undoing what sin has done, Christ joins us to himself in a union more real than any other in the whole world.

This union is very near, and very dear, and very complete. We are so near to Christ, that we cannot be nearer; for we are one with him. We are so dear to Christ, that we cannot be dearer. Consider how close and tender is the tie when it is true that Christ loved us, and gave himself for us. It is a union more intimate than any other which exists among men; for "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." We were his enemies when Christ died for us, that he might save us, and make us so one with himself, that from him our life should be drawn, and that in him our life should be hid. It is, then, a very near and dear union which Christ has established between himself and his redeemed; and this union could not be more complete than it is.

It is, also, a most wonderful union. The more you think of it, the more you will be astonished, and stand in sacred awe before such a marvel of grace. Well did Kent say—

"O sacred union, firm and strong,
How great the grace, how sweet the song,
That worms of earth should ever be
One with Incarnate Deity!"

But so it is. Even the incarnation of Christ is not more wonderful than his living union with his people. It is a thing to be considered often; it is the wonder of the skies; and is chief among those

things which "the angels desire to look into." On the surface of this truth you may not see much; but the longer you gaze, and the more the Holy Spirit assists you in your meditation, the more you will see in this wonderful sea of glass mingled with fire. My soul exults in the doctrine that Christ and his people are everlastingly one.

This is a very cheering doctrine. He that understands it has an ocean of music in his soul. He that can really grasp and feed upon it will often sit in the heavenly places with his Lord, and anticipate the day when he shall be with him, and shall be like him. Even now, since we are one with him, there is no distance between us, we are nearer to him than anything else can ever be. The very idea of union makes us forget all distance: indeed distance is altogether annihilated. Love joins us so closely with Christ, that he becomes more to us than our very selves; and though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

In passing, I may say that this doctrine is very practical. It is not merely a piece of sugar for your mouth; it is a light for your path, for "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." We must take care that the love that was round about Christ's feet, is always shining on our path. We must go about doing good, following in the steps of our Lord. It would be giving the lie to this doctrine if we lived in sin; for, if we are one with him, then we must be in this world even as he was; and being filled with his Spirit, must seek to reproduce his life before the world.

These thoughts may serve as an introduction to a fuller consideration of this great subject; and I shall begin by saying that, in Holy Scripture, *the union between Christ and his people is set forth under various forms*. Then I will try to show you that *the metaphor in our text is full of meaning*; and, in the third place, I will prove to you that *the doctrine of our union with Christ has its practical lessons*. As we delight our hearts in the glorious truth that "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his "bones," may we determine to live as those who are this closely joined to the Lord of life!

I. Our first thought is, that THIS UNION IS SET FORTH UNDER SEVERAL FORMS. The blessed fact is almost beyond our highest thought: what wonder, then that language fails adequately to describe it! Simile after simile is used. I am only going to mention four of them.

The union between Christ and the believer is described as the union of *the foundation and the stone*. "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house." We are built on Christ, and built up into him. We lie upon him just as the stone rests on the foundation. Well may we sing—

"All my hope on thee is stayed,
All my help from thee I bring"!

The stone is one with the foundation in its dependence. In the time of our need we press the closer to Christ; the heavier our hearts, the more we bear our weight upon him. It is the heavy stone that clings to the foundation; the light stone, perchance, might be blown away. But we cling at all times, depending wholly upon him, even as the stone rests upon the rock beneath. The stone does not bear up its own weight: it just rests where it is put. So do we rest on Christ. He is the foundation, and we repose on him.

Again, the stone is one with the foundation in its adhesion. In the course of time, the stone becomes more and more knit to it. When first the mortar is placed there, and is wet, you might also shake the stone. But, by-and-by, the mortar dries, and the stone seems to bite into the foundation, and holds fast to it. In old Roman walls, you cannot get a stone away; for the cement, which joins

the stone to its fellows is as strong as the stone itself; and, truly, that which joins us to Christ is stronger than we are. We might be broken, but the bond of love, which holds us like a mighty cement to Christ, who is our foundation, can never be broken away. We have actually become one with him, as I have often seen stones in the walls of an old castle become one with each other. You could not get them away; they are part and parcel of the wall, and it would have been necessary to blow the wall to pieces before you could separate the stones from one another. So have we, by God's grace, become one with Christ, experimentally and indissolubly. The course of years has bound us still faster to him.

The stone is one with the foundation, moreover, in its design. The architect, in placing the stone, was following out his plan. He planned the foundation, and thought of every course; and the stone is essential to the wall, even as the foundation is essential to the stone. Thus we are one with Christ in the design of God. Reverently we saw it, that God's purpose comprehends not only Christ, but the whole company of his elect; and without his chosen people, the design of Jehovah can never be accomplished. He is building a temple to his praise; but a temple cannot be all foundation. There is a necessity for every stone in the wall; in the divine purpose, there is a necessity that such a one should be a living stone, and such a one should be another living stone. The weakest and the meanest of the Lord's people are as necessary as the noblest and the most beautiful, though indeed all are without any praise until they are built into the wall. He that chose Christ, chose all his people; he arranged that they should be built up together, and in him "all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." Oh, I like to think of each one of us, however insignificant we may appear to be, as being bricks or stones in that great temple of almighty grace! Perhaps some of us may stand where everybody can see us; but what does it matter? If we are in the wall at all, it is well. Wherever you are placed, we are joined to Christ; and therefore no one has a pre-eminence over any other, because we are all alike built upon the one foundation, even Jesus Christ our Lord, into whom we daily grow, pressing closer and closer to him in experience, and holding tighter and tighter to him by faith.

The second aspect in which our union with Christ is represented in the Scripture, is that of *the vine and the branches*. "I am the vine, ye are the branches," is the word of Christ to his disciples. The former simile of the foundation and the stone does not suggest any idea of life. Hence, the apostle, in using it, had to speak of Christ as a living stone, and of us as living stones. It is a somewhat odd figure, and yet it is strictly true; for you and I have no more spiritual life in us than stones, except as a miracle makes us live; and then, though we are living, yet like stones, we are apparently inert and lifeless, albeit we are really quickened by a supernatural work, and made living stones. But the figure is not congruous.

This second simile, however, conveys to us the idea of life, for a vine is no vine if it is dead, and its branches are no true branches unless they are alive. There is a living union between Christ and his people; and I hope that I can appeal to the experience of many here present who know that there is a living union between them and Christ. Happy is the man who can say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"!

The union is even more than a union of life; it is a union of derived life. The branch is in such union with the stem that it receives all its sap from it; it could not live unless the living juices flowed from the stem into it. And such is our life. Christ pours his lifeblood into us. Perpetually, as long as he exists, he seems to be oozing out into his people. In fact, when his wounds were open, he

bled life into us; and when his heart was burst, he changed our hearts, and gave them life, though they once were hearts of stone. We are so one with Christ, that we at first received our life from him, and we continue to receive it from him every moment.

In consequence of the life of Christ in us, we grow. The growing of the branch is really the growing of the vine. It is because the stem grows that it sends its growth into the branch, and manifests it there. As Christ pours his life-force into us, he makes us grow, to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Fruit-bearing is the ultimate end of our union to Christ. We are one with him that we may bring forth fruit unto his praise. Dear friends, are we really doing this? Are we not satisfied with a nominal union to Christ, even though we bear no fruit to his honour? We ought to be very distressed when we are barren and unfruitful; remembering that the great Husbandman has a sharp knife, and that it is written, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." Oh, that none of my hearers may ever be in Christ in that false way, but may we all be in him in a union so true and vital as shall cause us to bear fruit to his praise; for then, though we shall be pruned, we shall never be cut from the vine!

The third metaphor which the Saviour deigns to give of this union is that of *the husband and the wife*. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church." Here you have a union, not only of life, but also of love. It is worthy of notice that the two words, "live" and "love", should be so like each other. In spiritual things, the two things are not only similar, they are exactly alike. Love is the life; and life is always first sent, and chiefly sent in the form of love.

With the true husband, his wife is himself. The Scripture saith, "He that loveth his wife loveth himself;" and I believe that Christ considers that, when he loves his church, he loves himself. His care for us is now his care for himself. Since he has taken us to be in eternal wedded union with himself, he regards us as himself, and he cares for us as he cares from himself: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." No sane man will injure his own flesh. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church." So Christ takes care of his people, because he regards them as being bound to himself by those bonds which make them to be as himself. Hence we are kept as the apple of his eye.

Remember that, in every family, the wife is the mother of the children; and so it is in the church of Christ. He would have us all bear unto him a holy spiritual seed. If we abide in him, we shall be able to propagate our faith, and bring others into the church. Every believer should have this object before him as the joy of his life; for thus shall Christ "see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."

The wife, too, is the keeper of the house. She takes care of the household concerns of her husband. And so would the Lord Christ have his people care for his interests, and for all that belongs to him; for he has committed these things unto us, as the husband commits his treasures to his wife. He has left us in custody of all that he has. In one sense we are the stewards of his household, but in another and a clearer sense, we are united to him by marriage bonds which can never be broken. It is a sweet subject; but I cannot linger upon it. You must let your own thoughts be fragrant with its aroma. However close may be the union of husband and wife, the union between the believer and Christ is closer still. Oh, to realize more and more of it each day!

"O Jesus! Make thyself to me

A living, bright reality;

More present to faith's vision keen
 More than any outward object seen.
 More dear, more intimately nigh,
 Than e'en the sweetest earthly tie!"

All human imagery fails to set forth the union between Christ and his people; but the figure in our text is that of *the head and the member*. The apostle says of Christ, that "we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Christ is the Head, and we are members of his body. Wonderful union this! In the first metaphor, the foundation and the stone, we had the idea of rest; in the second, the vine and the branches, the idea of life; the union of the husband and wife gave us the thought of love; now here we have the suggestion of identity. There are two lives in the husband and the wife, but there is only one life in the head and the body; and in this respect this metaphor brings out the true relation of Christ to his people more clearly than any other.

There is a wonderful union between the head and the members of the body. It is a union of life, and a union of the body which always continues. The husband may have to travel miles away from the wife; but it can never be that the head can travel away from the body. If I were to hear of any man whose head was a foot, or even an inch away from his body, I should say that he was dead. There must be perpetual union between the head and the members, or else death follows; and the death, mark you, not only of the body, but of the head as well. They are dead when they are divided. How glorious is this thought when we apply it to the Lord, and his redeemed people! Their union is everlasting. They would die if separated from him, and even he would cease to be did he lose them; for, somehow or other, they are so joined, that he will not be without them: he cannot be without them, for that were for the Head of the church to be divided from the members of his mystical body. Thus is we are able to sing—

"And this I do find, were two so joined,
 He'll not be in glory, and leave me behind."

II. Having thus shown you these four figures—and there are others, but I have not time to speak upon them—I now come to the one before us in the text, and remark that **THIS METAPHOR IS FULL OF MEANING**: "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." There are seven points to which I would ask your attention.

There is here *union of life, union of relationship, and union of service*. See what I mean. Your hand never studies what it can do for the head; but when the head wishes the hand uplifted, immediately up goes the hand; and when the head wishes that the hand should go down, down it goes in an instant. There is no deliberation or discussion about the matter. The head and the members, in a healthy body, are practically one. If you happen to be ill, it may be different. I have sometimes seen, in a person semi-paralyzed, the leg throw itself out without any guidance from the head; and sometimes—how often has it happened to me!—the head has willed that the hand should turn the pages of a book, and the hand has been unable to do it. Did you ever notice when you are falling, how, without thought, your hands always try to save your head? If any person were about to strike you, you would not deliberate; but up would go your arm to protect your head. This law is also true in spiritual life. All true Christians will do anything to save their Head. He saved us, and now our desire is to save him. We cannot bear that he should be insulted, that his gospel should be despised, or that anything would be done against his sacred dignity. We are so one with our glorious Head, that the moment anyone strikes at him, up goes our hand immediately in his defense. Oh! I trust that you know what this means; if you are ever put up to the pain of hearing Christ's gospel falsely

preached, or seeing professedly Christian men bringing disgrace upon his dear name, you feel at once that you would rather bear any pain, or any reproach, than that Christ should be injured. The hand is so one with the head, that it endeavours to screen it.

Between the head and the members there is also *union of feeling*. If the head aches, you feel it all over, you are altogether ill; and if your finger aches, your head does not feel well. There is such a sympathy between all parts of the body that, "whether one member suffer, a; members suffer with it; or one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now, ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Christ is our Head, and the Head specially suffers with the members. I do not know whether it is always so clear that one hand suffers with another hand, as it is clear that the head suffers with either hand. So is it with the church. It may not always be clear that all the members sympathize with each other, but it is always clear that Christ sympathizes with each one of his people. There is a quicker way, somehow, from the head to the hand, than there is from one hand to the other, and there is a keener sympathy between Christ and his people than there often is between one of his servants and another. It is written concerning his people that "In all their affliction he was afflicted." In all thy sorrows, child of God thy heavenly Head feels the pain!

There is, moreover, *a union of mutual necessity* between the members and the head. The head wants the body. Now, I must speak very guardedly here, when I refer to the thought to Christ, but still it is true. What would my head be without my body? It would be a ghastly sight. And Christ without his people would be incomplete. A dying Christ, redeeming nobody! A living Christ, with no one to live by his life, would be a grin failure! Christ on Calvary, and souls going down to hell, with none saved by his precious blood! Christ incarnate on the cross, without a single man saved by his incarnation and his death! It would be a fearful sight. The church is said to be Christ's fulness—"The church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." This is a wonderful expression. Now, the fulness of the head is the body; take the body away from the head, what is it? As to the body, what could it be without the head? If your head were gone, you could not have swiftness of foot, or deftness of hand, or strength of heart. No; there remains nothing for the head if it is severed from the body; and nothing for the body if it is separated from the head. There is between them a union of mutual necessity.

There is, farther, between the head and the members *a union of nature*. I will not attempt to describe the chemical composition of human flesh; but it is quite clear that my head is made of the same flesh as my members. There is no difference between the flesh of one and the flesh of the other. So, though our covenant Head is now in heaven, and his feet are on earth, yet still Christ is so one by nature with his people, that he is very man of very man, as much as he is very God of very God. If you deny his humanity, I do not think you till long hold his divinity. And if you deny his Deity, you have sadly destroyed the perfection of his humanity; for a perfect man he could not be if he so acted as to make men think that he was God, when he was not. To us he is God-Man in one person, whom we love and adore; his nature is the same as our nature, and we art joined to him forever.

"Lord Jesus, are we ONE with thee?

Oh, height! Oh depth of love!

With thee we died upon the tree,

In thee we live above.

"Oh, teach us, Lord, to know and own

This wondrous mystery,

That thou with us art truly ONE,
And we are ONE with thee!"

Between Christ and his people there is also a *union of possession*. Nothing belongs to my head that does not belong to my hand. Whatever my head can claim as its own, my hand may claim as its own. Whatever belongs to Christ belongs to you, poor believer! Christ is rich, can you be poor? Even his Father is your Father, and his heaven is your heaven; for you are so one with him that all the broad possession of his infinite wealth are given freely to you. He bestows upon you his bounty, not only "to the half of the kingdom", but the whole of it. Joined to him, all that he has is yours.

Between the Lord and his church there is also a *union of present condition*. Christ is very dear to his Father's heart. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," was the word which came from the opened heaven concerning Christ; and as God delights in Christ, so is he also well pleased with you who are in Christ. Yes, he is as pleased with you as he is with Christ; for he sees you in Christ, and Christ in you. God makes no division between you and him to whom he has joined you. "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Certainly God will never separate that which he has united in Christ. Do not put yourself asunder from Christ, even in your thoughts, by supposing that you are not well-beloved of God even as his own covenant Head.

Last of all, there is a *union of future destiny*. Whatever Christ is to be, you are to be a sharer of it all. How can you die while Jesus lives? How can the body die, while the head lives? If we go through the waters, they cannot overflow us until they overflow our head. While a man's head is above water, he cannot be drowned. And Christ up yonder, in the eternities of glory, can never be conquered: neither can those be vanquished who are one with him. For ever and for ever, till the Christ shall die, till the immortal Son of God expires, you who are united to him in the purpose of God, and in faith which now lays hold of him, shall live and reign. "Because I live, ye shall live also." Is it not that a quietus to every fear of destruction? You are so one with him that, when the sun becomes a burnt-out coal, and the moon is turned into a clot of blood, when the stars fall as the leaves of autumn, and the heaven and earth shall melt away, going back into nothingness from which Omnipotence hath called them, you shall live, for he shall live who is your Head. "We believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death shall have no dominion over him." Where he goes we shall follow. I have heard it said, that when a thief is able to get his head through the bars of the window, his body can easily follow. I am not sure of that; but I know that where my lord has gone, his members shall surely be. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore," is a word that is meant for your consolation. Take it home. "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," and, as Doddridge sings—

"Since Christ and we are one,
Why should I doubt or fear?
If he in heaven hath fixed his throne,
He'll fix his members there."

III. Lastly, and briefly, THIS DOCTRINE HAS ITS PRACTICAL LESSONS, which I will try to set forth plainly so that those of us who are members of Christ may bring greater joy and glory to our Head than we have brought aforetime.

To begin with, I would say, if we are indeed one with Christ, *we should have no doubt about it*. It used to be a fashion, and I fear in some quarters still, to think that mistrust of our own condition,

and doubt concerning our own salvation, is a kind of virtue. I have met with good people, who would not say that they were saved; they "hoped" that they were; and I have met with others who were not sure that they were cleansed by the precious blood of Christ; they "trusted" that they were. This state of mind is not a credit either to Christ, or to ourselves. If I told my son something, and he were to say to me, "I hope you will keep your word, father," I should not feel that he treated me as he ought. Surely, to believe Christ up to the hilt is the way to honour him. If we are one with him, we lose the comfort of it if we do not know certainly the fact of our blessed union; we miss much of the confidence that comes of it if we do not clearly apprehend the reality; and we are robbed of much of the joy which it brings, and how little of the meaning of that word "the joy of the Lord is your strength," unless we believe simply like children, and take the word to mean what it says, and are certain about it. This is an age of doubt; but, as for me, I will have none of it; I have doubted enough, and more than enough; I have done with it long ago; and I can say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep which I have committed unto him against that day." Salvation is by faith. Damnation comes by doubt. Doubt is the death of all comfort, the destruction of all force, the enemy of God and man.

If we are one with Christ, *we should go through the world like princes*; we should be like Abraham among his fellows, who claimed no princedom, and wore no crown, yet who could say to the King of Sodom what he had already vowed to God, "I will not take from a thread unto a shoe-latchet, and I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." If you are one with Christ, treat the world in that way. O world, thou canst not bless me! God hath blessed me. Thou canst not curse me! God hath blessed me. Dost thou laugh? Laugh if it pleaseth thee. Dost thou frown? What signifieth it to me? If God has smiled upon me, thou mayest spurn me. If I am one with Christ, I expect that thou shouldest think little of me; for thou didst spurn my Head. Should the body of Christ expect better treatment than the Head received?

If we are one with Christ, we shall remember that *to dishonour ourselves is to implicate our Lord*. If I dishonour any part of my body, my head feels the shame of it; and since we are the members of Christ, we should be very careful how to behave, lest we should cause him pain. Men will judge Christ by his people. If I caught sight of a pair of legs very unsteadily walking along the street, I should be inclined to say that they belongs to a drunken head. If our walk among men is not such "as becometh the gospel", what hard thoughts those around us may have of our Saviour! Of course, we know that any ill estimate of him will be false, for he is all fair, and there is no spot in him; but still his name and his cause will suffer dishonour. Let us not, then, injure or defile ourselves, lest we should bring reproach upon him whom we love!

In the next place, if we are one with him, *to think of him should be very natural*. There are many of us who could say, without any exaggeration, that though we do not think so much of our Lord as we should, and are not so much with him in contemplation as we desire, yet we have spent more time with him than we have spent with anybody else. Little as we know compared with what we hope to know, yet his love has become to us now the brightest, the most conspicuous fact in all our history. We know but few things; but we know that we are one with Christ in a union never to be broken. We know him, too, by our intercourse with him. We saw him this morning; we have seen him during the day; we shall see him again to-night. I should not like to go to bed with any other thought upon my mind than this—

"Sprinkled afresh with pardoning blood,
I lay me down to rest,

As in the embraces of my God,
Or on my Saviour's breast."

If we are one with him, *to live with him should be the most natural thing in our lives*. Have I not heard, however, of some professors who have not had communion with Christ for many a day? I talked once with a brother, who said a great deal about many things; and when he had complained of this and of that, I leant forward to him, and said, "Brother, how long is it since you have had close fellowship with Christ?" He answered, "Oh, there you have got me!" When I asked him, "What do you mean by that?" he answered, "I am afraid that I have not had fellowship with Christ for months." I had suspected that is must have been so, or else his conversation would not have been of the kind it was. What a sad thing it must be for a wife to live in her husband's house, and not speak to him for weeks! But how much worse it is for us to profess to be one with Christ, and yet have no sort of communication with him by the month together! This is something perfectly horrible. God save us all from such a thing! May we think continually of our Lord, and ever live with him, because we are one with him!

Again, being one with Christ, *to serve him should be very natural*. Indeed we exist, but to do his will, and to glorify his name. Of what use are my hands and feet unless they move at the impulse of my head? They are but encumbrances unless they are ready to obey the bidding of my mind. If your arms hang helpless, you do not know what to do with them; whichever side you turn, they are in the way. To be paralyzed is most unnatural, yet I fear me there are many of us of but little use to our Master. We hear his word, but do not obey it; he calls for helpers, and we run not at his bidding! Come, come, this will not do. We are members of Christ, and the one purpose of our life should be to serve our Head. God help us all to do it!

I will not continue longer. I leave you to draw the many inferences which naturally spring from our being one with Christ. Our heaven lies in our union with him. Ay, and sometimes when we realize our oneness with Christ, we can hardly think that we should be happier in heaven than we are now! May you all have this enjoyment! Oh, you would think that we raved, if we told you the unspeakable delight, the immeasurable bliss, which communion with Christ has brought into our souls. I desire that all of you should know the same rapture. I never enjoy a thing without wishing everybody to enjoy it; therefore when I come to this point of being one with Christ, and the delight it brings, I would to God that you all knew it, too! But alas! You do not; some of you do not even desire it. I have been talking something like Dutch to some of you to-night; you have not comprehended my language at all. May the very fact that you have not understood it, or cared about it, lead you to suspect that there is a joy which you have not known, and a life which you have not found; and when you know that it is son, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." If you seek him with all your heart, you will surely find him; and very soon you also will be brought into "living, loving, lasting union" with Christ.

Remember that the least touch of faith is sufficient to save the soul. That poor woman, who came behind Christ in the throng, only touched the hem of his garment, yet that timid touch brought healing and health to her. Virtue went out of him into her, and she was made whole of her plague. If thou canst only touch the Lord by the finger of thy faith, ay, though it be thy little finger; it shall be well with thee; though thy hand be quivering with the palsy of unbelief, yet, still, if thou hast faith enough to touch him, to come into contact with him, thou hast set the whole machinery of salvation in motion. God give thee to find eternal life even now! Why not? If my dear friend were here, of whom this drapery is a memorial, he would say unto me, "Oh, tell them to taste and see

that the Lord is good; blessed are all they that trust in him!" You know how fond he was of that verse we sang yesterday—

"Oh make but a trial of his love;
Experience will decide
How blest are they, and only they,
Who in his truth confide!"

God bless you all, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ephesians 5

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—760, 761, 762.

Readers of the Sermons have probably all seen the very full reports, published in the daily and weekly newspapers, of the memorial and funeral service relating to their now glorified preacher. Those who took part in the impressive meetings at the Tabernacle, or gazed upon the almost countless multitude that thronged the road from Newington to Norwood, or formed part of the privileged company that gathered around the grave, must have felt that they were spectators of a scene without parallel in the history of this generation, at least. Comparatively few were able to hear all the tributes of love to the dear departed one, the gospel he so faithfully preached, and the Saviour he so fondly loved. Many will be glad to know, therefore, that a *Memorial Volume* will be issued, as soon as possible, containing a complete report of all the public services of the past week. Full particulars will be announced in due course.

Mrs. Spurgeon, and all the members of the bereaved family, as well as the officers and members of Tabernacle Church, as deeply grateful for the almost innumerable expressions of sympathy which they have received from all parts of the world, and all sections of the Church. They cannot attempt to acknowledge these communications personally; but through various channels they have sought to convey the assurance of their heartfelt gratitude; and Mrs. Spurgeon has written a special "Message of Thanks" for the March issue of *The Sword and the Trowel*, which will be a Memorial number, containing all that can be recorded at present concerning its late beloved Editor. Mrs. Spurgeon continues to be very graciously upheld under her sore bereavement; but she is not yet strong enough to return home.

** This address will be issued next week, completing the series relating to the late Mr. W. Olney. Many friends may wish to preserve the whole set; they can readily do so, as the four discourses will be included in the February part of The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit (Price 5d.; post free, 6d.). The funeral address, to be published next week, will come to many with a peculiarly solemn sacredness just now, for a considerable portion of it was revised by Mr. Spurgeon with his own hand. With it the publishers will give a portrait of the beloved preacher, and also a portrait of the late Mr. W. Olney.*

Living, Loving, Lasting Union

Funeral Address

(No. 2245)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, February 28th, 1892.

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Funeral of Mr. William Olney,

October 22nd, 1890.

With new portraits of

Pastor C. H. Spurgeon

and

Mr. William Olney

"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones—Ephesians 5:30.

BEFORE the funeral, at Norwood Cemetery, of the late Mr. William Olney, senior deacon of the church at the metropolitan Tabernacle, a service was held in the Tabernacle. The building was crowded with sympathizing friends, who came to testify the affection they bore to the beloved deacon who had been so suddenly called from their midst. The senior Pastor presided.

The hymn, "They are gathering homeward one by one," was sung, and Pastor James A. Spurgeon offered prayer. The hymn "why do we mourn departing friends?" followed, and C.H. Spurgeon then read and expounded 1 Corinthians xv. The Rev. Burman Cassin, Rector of St. George's. Southwark, briefly engaged in prayer, and the assembly sang the thirty-fourth Psalm, in the version beginning—

"Through all the changing scenes of life,

In trouble and in joy,

The praises of my God shall still

My heart and tongue employ."

The hymn commencing, "For ever with the Lord!" was sung, and a concluding prayer was offered by Mr. James Spurgeon.

Pastor C.H. Spurgeon then rose, and said:—As I am in a very unfit condition to speak to you this morning, I shall try for once to keep away from my subject; for if I dwell upon it; it will master me, and I shall not be able to speak to you at all. I am trying to suppress my feelings, that I may be able to find words.

I am going to speak about the favorite expression of my brother William Olney, which he frequently used in prayer. I wonder whether you will agree with me as to what it was. As my memory serves me, I have heard him a score of times, at least, use the following sentence when he drew very near to the Lord his God in prayer. He said, "*Lord Jesus, we are one with thee. We feel that we have a living, loving, lasting union with thee.*" I think that you must remember that gem of his. Those three words have stuck by me; and ever since he has gone, I have found myself repeating them to myself quite involuntarily—"a living, loving, lasting union." He owed everything to that. He consciously enjoyed a living, loving, lasting union with the Lord Jesus Christ; and if you and I have that, we have all that we want for time and for eternity. If we have it not, we have nothing.

Take any one of us by himself alone; he is lost, ruined, and undone. Take that same person linked with Christ by a living, loving, lasting union, and he is a saint—saved, sanctified, and sure to be glorified.

I have taken for my text the words which occur in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the thirtieth verse. Concerning our Lord Jesus, the apostle Paul says, "*We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.*"

"We", that is his believing people, "are members of his body, and of his flesh, and of his bones." He is our Head, and we are the members of the body, and so we are joined to him by a living, loving, lasting union.

I am not going beyond those three words; they shall be my three points, but at the same time I will keep to my text.

I. BETWEEN THE BELIEVER AND CHRIST THERE IS A LIVING UNION. There was just that between my brother William Olney and his Lord. A living union! When he joined the church of Christ, he did not offer it the distinguished honour of his name, and then slip away, and give his life to politics, or to business, or to amusement; but when the church has his name on its roll, it receive the whole of the man, body, soul, and spirit; and this because there was life in him.

His union to Christ was not nominal, but actual. He was not merely covered with the Christian name, but he had the Christian spirit and the Christian life within him. Yes, his union to Christ was a living union; not merely that of reliance, by which the stone leans upon the foundation; though he had that, for never man, understood more clearly the doctrine of faith in Christ. Christ was his only trust and confidence, and he came to him as the stones come home to the foundation stone. But it was a living union in his case, for the fruits of life were produced. It was the union of the branch to the stem in that blessed vine which Christ himself, even as he says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches."

Now what does this living union to Christ mean?

It means, first of all, *Christ's life laying hold of us*. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." He is full of life, and when he takes hold of us, and raises our life into his, there is truly a living union between him and us.

But, further, this living union is *Christ's life in us*. It is given to him, not only to take us in our feebleness; but it is his divine prerogative to impart life to us, and to call dead men, and to make them live. "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." This is how we come to have life in connection with him. His life flows into us, as out of the tree into the branches: so that we can truly say, with the apostle, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith to the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." The living union begins with our Lord's life, and then that life flows into us, and we begin to live also.

It was so with our friend, whom we so sadly miss from our midst to-day. A new life, a life of holiness, a life of service, a life of communion with God, began in him, by oneness with Christ, and it was continued in him by the same means. There was a living union: the life of Christ had begotten life in him, and this was seen continually in the fruit that he bore. I should not know, if I had to describe my departed brother, which word to associate most fully with him, "life" or "love." He was as full of life as ever he could be. He used to amaze me by his energy—I mean not merely physical or even mental energy, but his never-ceasing, overflowing spiritual energy. If any of us were dull, *he* never was; and he would not let us be dull for long. He would often tell us, when we

were not well, that he thought we looked amazingly well, and he would try to cheer us up somehow or other, for he himself never seemed to lack for life, or fire, or force. I might almost say that, up to the last moment, he was energetic; he died full of life. He was intense in the very highest degree until struck down; and he was thus intense, not because of mere mental activity, but because of the burning zeal for God that was in his soul, and this zeal was the result of his living union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of this life of Christ which was in him, he bore suffering without flinching. If there was anything that could equal the industry of his work; it was the heroism of his patience. He has often amazed us by his fortitude. We have admired the way in which he has triumphed in Christ in spite of his sufferings; but we have felt that we could scarcely hope to imitate him to the letter. He went as far in the way of bearing pain with patience as he went in the direction of serving Christ with enthusiasm; and this is saying a very great deal for any man. Therefore I do not say it for the man; but in praise of the grace of God which helped him, whether he was active or passive, still to be buoyant and bright because of the living union which subsisted between him and Christ. A verse of the Psalms we have just sung, which was a great favorite of his, truly describes the resolution of his life:—

"Of his deliverance I will boast,
Till all that are distress'd,
From my example comfort take,
And charm their griefs to rest."

Christ dwelling in him in fulness could both work and suffer. The fact that Christ lives in the believer is as real as that he once lived on earth in a human body. He came then with a double-handed blessing. He came both to do his Father's will and to bear the burden of the souls of men. He was active in doing good; and when the appointed time came, he as willingly bore the burden of the sins of men, and suffered to the death without complaint. In like manner Christ lived in our dear friend, making him strong both to do and to suffer. God grant also to you and to me to have such a living union to Christ!

Do you know anything of this experience, my dear friends? Many of you do; it is your life to be one with Christ. But to some of you I must be talking an unmeaning jargon. O souls, if the life of Christ is not in you, you are dead while you live, and you will die for ever when you die! Unless you get linked to Christ, you will be driven from the presence of God, and away from all that makes true life and joy. Lay hold on Christ, and you will "lay hold on eternal life"; for he is "that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us," and living contact with him is our only hope either for the present or for the future. If you are vitally joined to Christ, it is well with your soul; but if you are divided from Immanuel, and have no living union to Christ, there is no eternal life for you. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

"Living or dying, Lord,
I ask but to be thine,
My life in thee, thy life in me,
Makes heaven for ever mine."

II. The next word to "living", in my dear brother's frequent use, was "loving." BETWEEN THE TRUE BELIEVER AND CHRIST THERE IS A LOVING UNION. And oh, the union of a soul to Christ is made so sweet because it is as loving as it is living! My brother William Olney truly

loved. He seemed to have a love to everybody. He never was so pleased as when he was pleasing other people; and he would go a long way, sometimes, to try and please people who would not be pleased. But still, his great ambition in life was to love others, and to make others love Christ. Love ruled supreme in his actions. His union to Christ was not cold, and formal, stiff and narrow; he had a union to Christ that was warm, human, intense, fervent, loving. There was fire in that man, and the fire was the ardent flame of great affection to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would like to have a talk about this loving union to Christ on some other occasion, when I could trust myself more than I can do now at this very solemn service. Still, there are a few things that may be said upon this subject even now.

Christ's love to us begins this loving union. Its source is not in ourselves; but in love eternal, love immeasurable, love which caused itself, free-grace love, love to the unworthy, love to enemies, love to those who had no life, no strength, and no hope apart from him. Christ loved us so that he deigned to join himself to us in eternal union. The great Artesian well from which we drink, and which has tapped the divine fountains, is the love of Christ. This is where all our hope, and our joy, and our love begin. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." In connection with this same truth of union with Christ, and fruitbearing as the result of it, our Lord himself says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." When this love thus made choice of us, he entered into covenant with his Father concerning his people; and before we were born he identified himself with us, so that in the purpose of God from all eternity we were accepted in him. But union with us meant union with our sins; and though the Son of God could never be overcome of evil, or become a sharer in human guilt, yet by the blessed mystery of his unity with his people, he could take their sin upon himself, and bear it in his own body on the tree. Thus, as there is no past or future to the eyes of him before whom all events are spread out in one eternal "now", the Son of God was able to atone for the iniquities of those who, through all the ages, would be truly joined to him. His love that chose us did not shrink back from the awful payment which our debt rendered necessary: it was stronger than death, and mightier than the grave. Many waters could not quench it; many floods could not drown it; nor will it cease to exert its blessed influence over us until it shall bring us home to the mansions above; and not even then, for Christ's love is everlasting. By this loving union Christ brings us safely through all the temptations of life; the ransomed spirits of such as are joined to him are taken to be with Christ the instant they are absent from the body; and at last out of the tomb that same love shall call the body, and on the glad day of resurrection it shall be clearly seen how wonderful is the love which made our Lord so one with us. This, then, is the way in which we came to a loving union with Christ; he began to love us with a love that had no beginning, which has no measure, and which shall know no change nor end, and therefore he united himself to us for ever. Well might Kent praise the name of the Lord for the wonders wrought by such love as this as he sang:—

"Heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus,
 Long ere time its race begun;
 To his name eternal praises!
 Oh! What wonders love hath done!
 One with Jesus
 By eternal union one."

Our love to Christ completes this loving union. We first learn of his love to us, and then as the result of that, we are brought to love him. Ours is a poor little love, not worthy of his acceptance;

but, such as it is, we give it all to him; and he will not refuse it, or despise it. Oh, that we all might be joined to Christ in love now! I am sure that my brother, who has gone from us, knew this union more than most of us. When we once got upon this glorious theme in private conversation, or when he touched upon it himself in his own public prayers, how his spirit seemed to burn and glow! He was always at home when speaking of the love of Christ, or of the love of Christ's people to their Lord. He could truly say, as I trust many of us will truly say now,—

"I give my heart to thee,
 O Jesus, most desired!
 And heart for heart the gift shall be,
 For thou my soul hast fired:
 Thou hearts alone would'st move,
 Thou only hearts dost love;
 I would love thee as thou lov'st me,
 O Jesus most desired!"

In this loving union, *Christ's love to us and our love to Christ flow in the same channel*. Together they make a stream of love of a glorious kind. We love one another for Christ's sake; we love sinners for Christ's sake. We love the truth as Christ loves the truth. We love the Father in the same manner that Christ loves the Father, though not to the same degree. There is, in fact, but one love in the Head and in all the members. What the Head loves all the body loves. As one man we go with Christ. Being united to him, his desires and longings become our desires and longings too; we grow into his likeness, and "are changes into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Do you know anything about loving union to Christ? I feel sure that the great mass of those assembled here both know it and rejoice in it. Oh, to know it more! Oh, that his love were shed abroad more richly in our hearts! Now, by the Holy Ghost that is given to us, may we experience, not only the tiny rivulets of love that some of us have had in the past days, but may we get to the torrents of love, may we be swept away by it, till, like a mighty ocean, it covers all our nature, and becomes to us a very heaven begun below!

III. Our third part is that, **BETWEEN THE TRUE BELIEVERS AND CHRIST THERE IS A LASTING UNION**. The whole phrase which our dear departed friend used so frequently was "living, loving, lasting union." O friends, what a sad thing it would be for anyone to have only a temporary union with Christ! If I am speaking to any who were members of this church years ago, but who are not even professors now—if I am addressing some who seemed to be earnest Christians once, but who have gone back from following Christ—I would earnestly remind you that no union with Christ is living and loving unless it is also lasting.

The man who is truly united to Christ does not become apostate. It is all in vain to seem to put on Christ for a time, and then, after a little while, to put him off again. That is the religion of the hypocrite, or of the merely temporary professor. But not so was it with our dear brother who is sleeping yonder. When he joined the church—I think that it is rather more than fifty-four years ago—he gave himself to the Lord, and he has been kept and sustained and upheld until now. Why, there are some of you who have been members of four or five denominations during that time! You have changed your views with the varying seasons, and have altered oftener than we care to remember, while here was he, keeping steadfast and immovable all the time, remaining ever a member of the same church, and going on steadily with his work. It seems to me that some of you

build for a year, and pull down, then build again, and pull down once more. Why, you are not building at all unless your building stands; and you are not truly in union with Christ unless the union is lasting union; and it will not be unless it is a living union! Your profession of Christ will be a lie, and will help to sink you lower than the lowest hell unless you endure to the end. Make sure work with what you do in religion. Do not play at being a Christian. If you are converted, be converted with your whole heart. If you have faith in Christ, have vital faith, or do not pretend to have any. Be real; be true to the core. Be satisfied with nothing short of that union which the Spirit of God works in the hearts of those who, without reserve, yield to his power; else that which you seem to have will not be a lasting thing with you, and at the end you will be utterly cast off.

Now think of the joy of this fact. *Our union with Christ is not only lasting, it is everlasting.* With great boldness we utter the challenge. "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" It is true that we hold Christ, and that we will hold him tighter still; but the greater mercy is that he holds us, and he will never let us go. Does he not say concerning his sheep, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand"? And will he not be true to his word? You may take Christ from our hand, but you cannot take us from Christ's hand; he holdeth us fast; he is married to us, and he himself declares, "The Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away." He will have no divorce between our soul and himself. This living, loving, lasting union, which we have already found to be such a glorious reality, is to last for ever and ever, blessed be the name of the Lord!

I want you, beloved friends, to draw much comfort from this truth, and then I will have done. *Christ will not lose his members.* My head would not willingly lose a little finger, and Christ our Head will not lose one of us if "we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Think you that Christ can be mutilated? Think you that he will lose even the least joint of the least finger? Never shall that be true. The word written of his body of flesh is equally true concerning his mystical body, which is his church. "A bone of him shall not be broken." Not even the smallest and most insignificant believer in Christ shall be lost, else would his body be incomplete. He is a perfect Christ, and you that are members of his body shall never be cut away from his by the wounds of Satan's sword, the surgery of infidelity, or any earthly accident or diabolical temptation. If you are one with him, you will be one with him for ever, for the union between you and your Lord is an eternal union, and to break it would be to disfigure and mutilate the Christ of God.

Furthermore, in that we are one with Christ, *he will raise our bodies.* "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones;" and, though I do not insist upon it, this verse has to me a kind of ring about it, which would lead us to believe that if we are members of his body, he will taken even our bodies to be members of himself. Christ will not leave our brother in the grave. His body will see corruption; but the tomb shall only be like a refining pot, to separate the precious from the vile. When Moses brought Israel out of Egypt, he said, "There shall not a hoof be left behind;" and when that One who is greater than Moses shall bring forth his people from their graves, there shall not a bone or a piece of a bone of his redeemed be left in the region of death. When the angel brought Peter out of prison, he told him to put his shoes on. "Bind on thy sandals," was the angelic direction. He would not leave even an old pair of slippers in the prison when he brought Peter out. The deliverance was to be absolutely complete. Thus, too, when Christ shall bid us put on our garments which he shall prepare for us in the resurrection, no integral part of the man shall be left behind. O grave, thou must give up thy prey! O death, thou must yield up thy spoils! Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and therefore they as well as our souls must be set free from the

power of the last enemy. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words," whether it be concerning your own death, or the death of this dear friend, on whose coffin we look just now.

Beloved, we are parting with our brother, William Olney, for a while; but *we shall meet again*. We are so one with each other in truth and experience, that we cannot be separated. He was a member of Christ's body, and of his flesh, and of his bones; so am I; and so are you, my fellow-believer. The members of one body must be one. And we shall meet our departed friend again before long. Perhaps another week, some of us may see his face. I wonder what he has been doing already in that land of light and liberty. Mr. Fullerton writes me, saying that he would not wonder if he spent last Sunday telling the spirits above how he had spent the Sunday previous, and making them all wonder at what the grace of God had done among poor sinners down here on earth. He could tell the tale of Haddon Hall, and of this Tabernacle, recounting the story of what the Lord has done in saving men and women; and I do not think the angels and the redeemed could be better occupied than in hearing what the Lord has been doing in his new creation here below. Very probably the conjecture is right, for the grace of God reaches us "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." When they hear the story yonder, they will take down their harps, and raise new hallelujahs to God, and to the Lamb. Think not that I talk strangely. The angels rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, and they will yet more rejoice when one messenger. Newly come from the midst to God's salvation—work, shall tell the, of scores that have been brought to the Saviour's feet.

Beloved friends, *eternity is ours*; and a joyous eternity it will be to those who are one with Jesus Christ, in "living, loving, lasting union." We shall ascend to "the realms of the blest" soon. There is a ladder waiting for us to climb; and when we mount it, we shall have no reason to mourn. It is but for a little time that we shall have to keep the night-watches. The watchman of the night doth cry, "The morning cometh." The night of weeping will soon be past. "Until the day beaks, and the shadows flee away," be of good courage. Patiently hope, "and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." He will surely come again; and even the tears of to-day shall be recompensed to you abundantly.

I pray that every blessing may rest upon every mourner this day. Indeed, dear friends, while we mourn with you, we cannot but congratulate you that you have had such a husband, such a father, such a brother, as our friend who is now taken home. I will not say that you have lost him, for that would not be true. God lent him to you for a long time, and now he has taken him back. I think that it is about fifteen years ago, since, in the ordinary course of things, he might have been expected to have died; at least, so it seemed at the time he was so sick; yet with many tears and intercessions we prayed him back, and God has given him something like Hezekiah's extra portion of life. We ought to be very thankful for that. In those fifteen years, how much has he done? How much has God done by him for us all! Wherefore we will not sorrow so as to complain, but we will sorrow only so as to submit. The Lord be with you evermore! Amen.

* On the following evening, Thursday, October 23rd, 1890, Mr. Spurgeon preached on this subject. The discourse, entitled "Members of Christ" (No. 2,244), delivered on that occasion, was published last week.

Come from the Four Winds, O Breath!

A Sermon

(No. 2246)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, March 6th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, May 15th, 1890.

"Thou wilt say unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."—Ezekiel 37:9.

ACCORDING to some commentators, this vision in the valley of dry bones may refer to three forms of resurrection. Holy Scripture is so marvellously full of meaning, that one interpretation seldom exhausts its message to us. The chapter before us is an excellent example of this fact; and supplies an illustration of several Scriptural truths.

Some think they see here a parable of the resurrection of the dead. Assuredly, Ezekiel's vision pictures what will happen in the day when "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised." No matter how dry the bones may be, the bodies of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall rise again. that which was sown shall spring up from the grave; and, in the case of the children of God, it shall wear a new glory. At the word of Christ is shall come to pass: "For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

Others see here the resurrection of the almost destroyed host of Israel, which had been divided into two companies, and carried away captive into Babylon. Plague and pestilence and the sword of the Chaldean had gone far to cut off the chosen nation; but God promised to restore his people, thus mingling mercy with judgment, and again setting in the cloud the bow of his everlasting covenant. A partial fulfillment of this promise was given when, for a while, the Lord set up again the tribes of Israel at Jerusalem, and they had a happy rest before the coming of Christ. But Israel's full restoration is yet to be accomplished. The people shall be gathered out of the graves in which, as a nation, they have so long lain buried, and shall be placed in their own land, and then will come to pass the word of Jehovah: "Then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord."

There are others who, looking beyond the literal for the spiritual teaching, see, and I think, rightly see, that here is a picture of the recovery of ungodly men from their spiritual death and corruption—a parable of the way in which sinners are brought up from their hopeless, spiritually dead condition, and made to live by the power of the Holy Ghost. I shall, at any rate, use the text in this sense, for I am not now aiming at the interpretation of prophesy, nor concerned greatly with what is to happen in the future. Neither do I wish to conduct you into the deep things of God; but I am just now thinking of practical uses to which I can put this incident, in order to stir up God's people to deal with the Holy Spirit as he should be dealt with, and to urge the unconverted to seek

the Lord, in the hope that some of them, as dead and dry as the bones in the valley of vision, may be made to live by his divine power.

Nothing gave me greater comfort, this week, than when I received a note from one saying that, last Thursday night, while I was preaching from the text "Let your soul delight itself in fatness," she was enabled to lay hold on Christ. I had rather have such tidings than to hear the gladdest news of a worldly kind that could be brought to me. Oh, that now also some poor heart may find rest in Christ while we are talking of that divine Spirit who becomes a Comforter to all those to whom he has been first a Quickener! May he come and cause men to live, and then afterwards make them full of gladness! It is his blessed office first to bestow life, and then to give light. Living unto God is the earliest experience of the redeemed, afterwards comes joy in God by the Holy Ghost.

I. Now, first, in using this text, as I have said, for practical purposes, I am going to make this remark upon it: WE ARE NOTHING WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT. I speak, my brethren, now, to you who love the souls of men. I know that there are some among you here who preach and teach with all earnestness, with broken-hearted love; and for the glory of Christ you try to bring men to believe in Jesus. In thus endeavouring to save the souls of the lost, and ruined men, you are engaged in a noble work. But I dare say that you have often felt, what I also fully realise, that you have not gone far in your holy service before you are brought face to face with the fact that, in itself, the work you propose to do is an utter impossibility. We begin our labour according to the Word of the Lord, and we prophesy. God helping us, we can do that; and, though the burden of the Lord be heavy, yet if we are told to prophesy again, we can, by his grace, do that also. We can prophesy to dry bones, or prophesy to the wind, according to God's commandment. We are not afraid of seeming to be foolish, since we know that, when "the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." But when we preach the Word, and, as the result of our preaching expect men to be saved, and so saved that we may know it, we come all of a sudden upon an iron-bound coast, and can get no further. We find that men are dead; what is wanted is that they shall be quickened; and *we* cannot quicken them. There are a great many things we can do—and God forbid that we should leave one of them undone!—but when we come to the creation of life, we have reached a mysterious region into which we cannot penetrate; we have entered the realm of miracles, where Jehovah reigns supreme. The prerogative to give life or to take it away must remain with the Most High; the wit and wisdom of man are altogether powerless to bestow life upon even the tiniest insect. We know of a surety, doctrinally, and we know it with equal certainty by experience, that we can do nothing towards the quickening of men apart from the Spirit of God. If he does not come, and give life, we may preach till we have not another breath left, but we shall not raise from the tomb of sin even the soul of a little child, or bring a single sinner to the feet of Christ.

How, then, should this fact affect us? Because of our powerlessness, shall we sit still, doing nothing, and caring nothing? Shall we say, "'the Spirit of God must do the work, therefore I may fold my arms, and take things easily'"? Beloved, we cannot do that. Our heart's desire and prayer for our fellow-men is that they might be saved; and we have sometimes felt that, for their sakes, we could almost be willing to be accursed, if we might bring eternal life to them. We cannot sit still: we do not believe that it was God's intent that any truth should ever lead us into sloth: at any rate, it has not so led us; it has carried us in quite the opposite direction. Let us try to be as practical in this matter as we are in material things. We cannot rule the winds, nor create them. A whole parliament of philosophers could not cause a capful of wind to blow. The sailor knows that he can

neither stop the tempest nor raise it. What then? Does he sit still? By no means. He has all kinds of sails of different cuts and forms to enable him to use every ounce of wind that comes; and he knows how to reef or furl them in case the tempest becomes too strong for his barque. Though he cannot control the movement of the wind, he can use what it pleases God to send. The miller cannot divert that great stream of water out of its channel, but he knows how to utilize it; he makes it turn his mill-wheel. Though he cannot resist the law of gravitation, for there seems to be an almost omnipotent force in it, yet he uses that law, and yokes it to his chariot. Thus, though we cannot command that mighty influence which streams from the omnipotent Spirit of God; though we cannot turn it which way we will, for "the wind bloweth where it listeth," yet we can make use of it; and in our inability to save men, we turn to God, and lay hold of his power.

What, then, are we to do? Face to face with spiritual death, conscious of the fact that we cannot remove it, and fully aware that only the Holy Spirit can quicken dead souls, what shall we do? There are certain ways and means by which we can act properly towards this divine Person; certain attitudes of heart which it would be well for us to take up; and certain results which will follow from a clear apprehension of the true state of the case.

First, by this fact, *we must feel deeply humbled, emptied, and cut adrift from self*. Look you, sir, you may study your sermon; you may examine the original of your text; you may critically follow it out in all its bearings; you may go and preach it with great correctness of expression; but you cannot quicken a soul by that sermon. You may go up into your pulpit; you may illustrate, explain, and enforce the truth; with mighty rhetoric you may charm your hearers; you may hold them spellbound; but no eloquence of yours can raise the dead. Demosthenes might stand for a century between the jaws of death; but the monster would not be moved by anything he or all human orators might say. Another voice than ours must be heard; other power than that of thought or suasion must be brought into the work, or it will not be done. You may organize your societies, you may have excellent methods, you may diligently pursue this course and that; but when you have done all, nothing comes of it if the effort stands by itself. Only as the Spirit of God shall bless men by you, shall they receive a blessing through you. Whatever your ability or experience, it is the Spirit of God, who must bless your labour. Therefore, never go to this service with a boast upon your lip of what you can do, or with the slightest trace of self-confidence; else will you go in a spirit which will prevent the Holy Ghost from working with or through you.

O brethren, think nothing of us who preach to you! If ever you do, our power will be gone. If you begin to suppose that such and such a minister having been blessed of God to so many thousands will necessarily be the means of the conversion of your friend, you are imputing to a son of man what belongs only to the Son of God; and you will assuredly so that pastor or that minister a serious mischief by tolerating in your heart so idolatrous a thought. We are nothing; you are nothing. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts," is a message that should make us lie in the dust and utterly despair of doing anything in and of ourselves, seeing that all the power is of God alone. It will do us good to be very empty, to be very weak, to be very distrustful of self, and so to go about our Master's work.

Next, because of our absolute need of the Holy Spirit, *we must give ourselves to prayer before our work, and after our work*. A man who believes that, so what he may, no soul will be quickened apart from the work of the Spirit of God, and who has a longing desire that he may save souls, will not venture to his pulpit without prayer. He will not deliver his message without a thousand groans and cries to God for help in every sentence that he utters; and when the sermon is done, his work

will not be done; it will have scarcely begun. His sermons will be but a text for long-continued prayer. He will be crying to God continually, to anoint him with the heavenly oil. His prayer will be "Let the Spirit of God be upon me, that I may preach deliverance to the captives; else men will still remain in the prisonhouse in spite of all my toil." And you, beloved, as you believe that doctrine, will not allow the preacher to go to his work without your prayers. You will bear him up in your supplications, feeling that your attendances at the house of God will all be vanity, and the coming together of the people will be as nothing, unless God the Holy Ghost is pleased to bless the Word. This thought will drive you to besiege the throne of grace with strong crying and tears that God would quicken the dead sons of men. If any of you are working without prayer, I will not advise you to cease your work; but I will urge you to begin to pray, not merely as a matter of form, but as the very life of your labours. Let the habit of prayer be constant with you, so that you neither begin any service for God, nor carry it on, nor conclude it, without crying to the Lord for his holy Spirit to make the work effectual by his almighty power.

We have already gathered much instruction from this truth, if we have learnt to lie low before the Lord, and before the mercy seat.

But we must go a little further. Since everything depends upon the Spirit of God, *we must be very careful to be such men as the Spirit of God can use*. We may not judge others; but have you not met with men whom you could not think the Spirit of God would be likely to bless? If a man is self-sufficient, can the Spirit of God to any large degree bless him? If a man is inconsistent in his daily life, if there is no earnestness about him, if you cannot tell when he is in character or creed, if he contradicts one day what he said the day before, if he is vain-glorious and boastful, is it likely that the Spirit of God will bless him? If any of us should become lazy, indolent, or self-indulgent, we cannot expect the Spirit, whose one end is to glorify Christ, to work with us. If we should become proud, domineering, hectoring how could the gentle Dove abide with us? If we should become despondent, having little or no faith in what we preach, and not expecting the power of the Holy Spirit to be with us, is it likely that God will bless us? Believe me, dear friends, that a vessel fit for the Master's use must be very clean. It need not be of silver or of gold; it may be but a common earthen vessel; but it must be very clean, for our God is a jealous God. He can spy a finger-mark where our eyes could not see it, even with a microscope; and he will not drink out of a vessel which a moment before was at the lips of Satan. He will not use us if we have been used by self, or if we have allowed ourselves to be used by the world. Oh, how clean should we be in our private life as well as in our ordinary walk and conversation! This is no small thing. See to it, my brethren and sisters, for much of the promises blessing may depend upon your carefulness.

Next, since we depend wholly upon the Spirit, *we must be most anxious to use the Word, and to keep close to the truth*, in all our work for Christ among men. The Word of God is the Holy Spirit's sword; he will not wield our wooden weapon. He will only use this true Jerusalem blade of God's own fashioning. Let us, then, set high value on the inspired Word; we shall defeat our adversaries by that sword-thrust, "It is written." So spake the Christ; and so he conquered Satan. So also the Holy Spirit speaketh. Be wise, therefore, and let your reliance be not on your own wisdom, but on the word to which you can add, "Thus saith the Lord." If our preaching is of that kind, the Holy Ghost will always set his seal to it. But if you have thought it out, and it is your own production, go, good sir, to Her Majesty's offices, and get letters patent for your invention; but the Holy Ghost will have nothing to do with it. He cares nothing about your "original mind." Our Lord Jesus laid aside all originality, and spake only the words of his Father, the words which the Holy

Ghost brought to him. He said to his disciples, in that memorable discourse, before he went out to Gethsemane, "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." Let us try to imitate him, being willing not to think our own thoughts, or to speak our own words, but those which God shall give to us. I would rather speak five words out of this Book than fifty thousand words of the philosophers. I had rather be a fool with God than be a wise man with the sagest scientist, for "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." You cannot work for Christ except by the Spirit of Christ, and you cannot teach for Christ except you teach Christ; your work will have no blessing upon it, unless it be God's Word spoken through your lips to the sons of men. If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God's Word into our sermons; even if we paraphrase it into our own words, it must still be his Word upon which we place our reliance, for the only power which will bless men lies in that. It is God's Word that saves souls, not our comment upon it, however correct that comment may be. Let us, then, be scrupulously careful to honour the Holy Spirit by taking the weapon which he has prepared for us, believing in the full inspiration of the sacred Scriptures, and expecting that God will prove their inspiration by their effect upon the minds and hearts of men.

Again, since we are nothing without the Holy Spirit, *we must avoid in our work anything that is not of him*. We want these dead people raised, and we cannot raise them; only the Spirit of God can do that. Now, in our part of the work, for which God condescendingly uses us, let us take care that there is nothing which would grieve the Spirit, or cause him to go away from us. I believe that, in places where the work of conversion goes on largely, God is much more jealous than he is anywhere else. He watches his church and if he sees, in the officers of the church, or in the workers, something unholy; if he beholds practices tolerated that are not according to his pure mind; and if, when they are noticed, these evils are winked at, and still further indulged, he will withdraw his blessing until we cease to have a controversy with him. Possibly he might give his blessing to a church which was worse than this in many respects, while he might withdraw it from this church, which has already been so highly favoured, if it countenanced anything contrary to his Word. An ordinary subject her Majesty might say certain things about her for which he would never be brought to book; but a favorite at court must mind how he behaves. So must we be very sensitive in this divine employment in which we come nearest to Christ; we must be careful to co-operate with him in our work of seeing to pluck brands from the burning. We must mind how we do it, for we may, perhaps, be led to adopt ways and methods which may grieve him; and if we persevere in those ways and methods, after we have learned that they are not according to his will, the Spirit of God will leave us, lest he should seem to be setting his seal upon that of which he does not approve. A headlong zeal even for Christ may leap into a ditch. What we think to be very wise may be very unwise; and where we deem that at least a little "policy" may come in, that little policy may taint the whole, and make a nauseous stench which God will not endure. You must have the Spirit of God; you can do nothing without him; therefore do nothing that would cause him to depart from you.

Moreover, *we must be ever ready to obey the Holy Spirit's gentlest monitions*; by which I mean the monitions which are in God's Word, and also—but putting this in the second place—such inward whispers as he accords to those who dwell near to him. I believe that the Holy Spirit does still speak to his chosen in a very remarkable way. Men of the world might ridicule this truth, and therefore we speak little of it; but the child of God knows that there are at times distinct movements of the

Holy Spirit upon his mind leading him in such and such ways. Be very tender of these touches of God. Some people do not feel these movements; but perhaps if they, with a more perfect heart, feared the Lord, his secret might be revealed to them. That great ship at sea will not be moved by a ripple; even an ordinary wave will not stir it; it is big and heavy. But that cork, out yonder, goes up and down with every ripple of the water. Should a great wave come, it will be raised to the crest of it, and carried wherever the current compels. Let your spirit be little before God, and easily moved, so that you may recognize every impulse of the Spirit, and obey it at once, whatever it may be. When the Holy Ghost moves thee to give up such and such a thing, yield to it instantly, lest you lose his presence; when he impels thee to fulfill such and such a duty, be not disobedient to the heavenly vision; or if he suggests to thee to praise God for such and such a favour, give thyself to thanksgiving. Yield thyself wholly to his guidance. You who are workers, do ask for the wisdom of the Spirit carefully and believingly. I do not understand a man going into the pulpit, and praying the Spirit of God to guide him in what he shall say, and then pulling it out of his pocket in manuscript. It looks to me as if he shut the Spirit of God out of any special operation; at least, all the help he can expect to have from the Spirit at that particular time must be in the manner of his reading, though of course he may have been guided in that he has written. Still there is but scant room for the Spirit to manifest his power. In the same way, if you make up your mind how you will deal with people, and what you will say, it may often happen that, in the process, if you forget all you meant to say, it would be the best thing that could happen to you; and if you said exactly what you did not think it would be prudent to say; the unaccustomed method might be the thing the Spirit of God would bless. Keep yourself, therefore, before that valley of dry bones free to do just what the Spirit of God would have you do, that he, through you, may raise the dead.

Once more: since, apart from the Spirit, we are powerless, *we must value greatly every movement of his power*. Notice, in this account of the vision in the valley, how the prophet draws attention to the fact of the shaking and the noises, and the coming of the sinews and the flesh, even before there was any sign of life. I think that, if we want the Spirit of God to bless us, we must be on the watch to notice everything he does. Look out for the first desire, the first fear! Be glad of anything happening to your people that looks as if it were the work of the Holy Spirit; and, if you value him in his earlier works, he is likely to go on and to do more and more, till at last he will give the breath, and the slain host shall arise, and become an army for God. Only you cannot expect the Spirit of God to come and work by you if you are half asleep. You cannot expect the Spirit of God to put forth his power if you are in such a condition that, if he saved half your congregation, you would not know it, and if he saved nobody, you would not fret about it. God will not bless you when you are not all awake. The Spirit of God does not work by sleepy men. He loves to have us alive ourselves, and then he will make others alive by us. See to this, dear friends. If we had more time at our disposal, I would speak longer on this part of the subject; but I have said enough now, if God the Holy Spirit blesses it, upon this first great truth that we are nothing without the Holy Spirit.

II. Now, secondly, we may learn, from the action of Ezekiel on this occasion, that **WE MAY SO ACT AS TO HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT**. When he first saw the dry bones, there was no wind nor breath; yet, obeying the voice of the Lord in the vision, the breath came, and life followed. How, then, shall we act? I will only give you in brief a few of the conditions to be observed by us.

If we want the Holy Spirit to be surely with us, to give us a blessing, *we must, in the power of the Spirit, realize the scene in which we are to labour*. In this case, the Holy Spirit took the prophet, and carried him out, and set him down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. This is

just a type of what will happen to every man whom the Spirit means to use. Do you want to save people in the slums? Then, you must go into the slums. Do you want to save sinners broken down under a sense of sin? You must be broken down yourself; at least, you must get near to them in their brokenness of heart; and be able to sympathize with them. I believe that no man will command power over a people whom he does not understand. If you have never been to a certain place, you do not know the road; but if you have been there yourself, and you come upon a person who has lost his way, you are the man to direct him. When you have been through the same perplexities that trouble others, you can say to them, "I have been there myself: I know all about it. By God's blessing I can conduct you out of this maze." Dear friend, we must have greater sympathy with sinners. You cannot pluck the brand out of the burning if you are afraid of being singed yourself; you must be willing to smut your fingers on the bars of the grate if you would do it. If there is a diamond dropped into a ditch, you must thrust your arm up to your elbow in the mud, or else you cannot expect to pick the jewel out of the mire. The Holy Spirit, when he blesses a man, sets him down in the midst of the valley full of bones, and causes him to pass by then round about until he fully comprehends the greatness and the difficulty of the work to be accomplished, even as the prophet said, "Behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry."

Next, if the Holy Spirit is to be with us, *we must speak in the power of faith*. If Ezekiel had not had faith, he certainly would not have preached to dry bones; they make a wretched congregation; and he certainly would not have preached to the wind, for it must have been a fickle listener. Who but a fool would behave in this manner unless faith entered into action? If preaching is not a supernatural exercise, it is a useless procedure. God the Holy Ghost must be with us, or else we might as well go and stand on the tops of the hills of Scotland, and shout to the east wind. There is nothing in all our eloquence unless we believe in the Holy Spirit making use of the truth which we preach for the quickening of the souls of men. Our prophesying must be an act of faith. We must preach by faith as much as Noah built the ark by faith; and just as the walls of Jericho were brought down, by faith, men's hearts are to be broken by faithful preaching, that is, preaching full of faith.

In addition to this, if we desire to have the Spirit of God with us, *we must prophesy according to God's command*. By prophesying, I do not mean foretelling future events; but simply uttering the message which we have received from the Lord, proclaiming it aloud so that all may hear. You will notice how it is twice said, in almost the same words, "So I prophesied as he commanded me." God will bless the prophesying that he commands, and not any other; so we must keep clear of that which is contrary to his Word, and speak the truth that he gives to us to declare. As Jonah, the second time he was told to go to Nineveh, was hidden by the Lord to "preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee," so must we do if we would have our word believed even as his was. Our message is received when it is the Word of God through us. When the Lord describes the blessing that comes upon the earth by the rain and snow from heaven, he saith, "So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth." Let us see to it that, before the word goes forth out of our mouth, we have received it from the mouth of God. Then we may hope and expect that the people will receive it also from us. The Spirit of God, that is, the breath of God, goes with the Word of God, and with that alone.

Notice, next, that if we would have the Spirit of God with us, *we must break out in vehemency of desire*. The prophet is to prophesy to the bones; but he does not begin in a formal manner by saying, "Only the winds coming can bring breath to these slain persons." No, he breaks out with

an interjection, and with his whole soul heaving with a ground-swell of great desire, he cries, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live!" He has the people before him in his eye, and in his heart; and he appeals, with mighty desire, to the Spirit of God, that he would come and make them live. You will generally find, in our service to-day, that the men who yearn over the souls of their fellow-men are those whom the Spirit of God uses. A man of no desire gets what he longs for; and that is nothing at all.

Then, if we would have more of the power of the Spirit of God with us, *we must see only the divine purpose, the divine power, and the divine working.* God will have his Spirit to go forth with those who see his hand. "When I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord." It is not my plan that God is going to work out; it is his own. It is not my purpose that the Holy Spirit is going to carry out; it is the purpose of the eternal Jehovah. It is not my power, or my experience, or my mode of thought, which will bring men from death to life; it is the Holy Spirit who will do it, and he only. We must apprehend this fact, and get to work in this spirit, and then God the Holy Spirit will be with us.

III. Bear with me, if I fill up all my time, or if I should even stray beyond it. I want now to address unconverted persons, or those who are afraid that they are still unsaved; and with the text before us, **WE WOULD SPEAK HOPEFULLY TO OUR HEARERS.**

You who are not yet quickened by the divine life, or are afraid you are not, *we would exhort you to hear the Word of the Lord.* Though you feel that you are as dead as these dry bones, yet if you want to be saved, be frequent in hearing the Word. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." If you wish to find the divine life, thank God that you have that wish, and frequent those houses where Christ is much spoken of, and where the way of eternal life is very plainly set forth. When you mingle with the worshippers, listen with both your ears; try to remember what you hear; and pray all the while that God will bless it to you. "O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord!"

Next, *we could remind you of your absolute need of life from the Spirit of God.* Put it in what shape you like, you cannot be saved except you are born again; and the new birth is not a matter within your own power. "Ye must be born again,"—"from above," as the margin reads, in the third chapter of John's gospel. All the religion of which you are capable will not save you, do what you will; strive as you may with outward ceremonies, or religious observances, there is no hope for you but in the Holy Ghost. There is something to be done for you which you cannot do for yourself. We will not water down that truth, but give it to you just as it stands in the Scriptures; we want you to feel its power.

But *we would have you note what the Holy Spirit has done for others.* There are some of your friends who have been born again. They were as hopeless as you are; but they are now saved. You know they are, for you have seen their lives. Take note of them, for what the Holy Spirit can work in one he can work in another. Let the grace of God in others comfort you concerning yourself, especially when you hear of great drunkards, or great swearers, or very vicious persons, who have been transformed into saints. Say to yourself, "If the Holy Spirit could make a saint out of such a sinner as that, surely he can make a saint out of me." As you see the flesh and sinews on others who were once as dry as bare bones, be encouraged to hope that it may be even so with you ere long.

May I go a little further, and say that, *we would have you observe carefully what is done in yourself?* I think I am speaking to some here who have already undergone a remarkable change. You cannot say that you have spiritual life; you are afraid that you have not. Still, you are not what you used to be. You have put away many things from you that were once a pleasure to you, and now you take delight in many things which you once despised. There is some hope in that, though it may be nothing more than the sinews coming on the bones, and the flesh upon the sinews. Yet I notice that, where the Holy Ghost begins, he does not leave off till he has finished his work. God takes such a delight in his work, that, having begun it, he completes it. Well did Job say, "Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands." Now, what he has done for you already, encourages me, and should encourage you, to hope that he will yet do much more, continuing his gracious work until life eternal is bestowed upon you.

Furthermore, *we would remind you that faith in Jesus is a sign of life.* If in your heart you can trust yourself to Christ, and believe in him that he can save you, you have eternal life already. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." If thou canst now, though it be for the first time, trust thyself alone on Christ, faith is the surest evidence of the work of the Holy Ghost. Thou "hast passed from death unto life" already. Thou canst not see the Spirit any more than thou canst see the wind; but, if thou hast faith, that is a blessed vane that turns in the way the Spirit of God blows. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." If thou believest, this is true of thee, and if thou dost cast thyself wholly upon Christ, remember that it is written, "He that believeth on him is not condemned;" wherefore be of good cheer.

We beg you not to be led aside to the discussion of difficulties. There are a great many difficulties. To tell dry bones to live, is a very unreasonable sort of thing when tried by rules of logic; and for me to tell you, a dead sinner, to believe in Christ, may seem perfectly unjustifiable by the same rule. But I do not need to justify it. If I find it in God's Word, that is quite enough for me; and if the preacher does not feel any difficulty in the matter, why should you? There is a difficulty, but you have nothing to do with it. There are difficulties everywhere. There is a difficulty in explaining how it is that bread sustains your body; and how that bread, sustaining your body, can be the means of prolonging your life. We cannot understand how the material can impinge upon the spiritual; and there are difficulties in almost everything connected with life. If a man will not do anything till he has solved every difficulty, we had better dig his grave. And you will be in hell if you will not go to heaven without having every difficulty solved for you. Leave the difficulties; there will be time enough to settle them when we get to heaven; meanwhile, if life comes through Jesus Christ, let us have it, and have done with nursing our doubts.

Further, *we would have you long for the visitation of God, the Holy Spirit.* Join with us in the prayer, "Come Holy Spirit, come with all thy power; come from the four winds, O breath!" One wind will not do it, it must come from all quarters. Your heart, filled with all sorts of evil, wants breaking; it wants throwing down like the house of Job's son when Job's children were in it, and "there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell." Oh, for a wind from the four quarters of heaven, to smite the four corners of the house of your sin, and lay it low! "Come from the four winds, O breath!" As the poet sings—

"Lifeless in the valley,
Come, O breath, and breathe!
New-create and rally!
Come, O breath, and breathe!"

Blowing where thou listest,
 Thou the word assistest,
 Thou death's power resistest,
 Come, O breath, and breathe!"

Be willing to have the Holy Spirit as he wills to come. Let him come as a north wind, cold and cutting, or as a south wind, sweet and melting. Say, "Come, from any of the four winds, O breath! Only come." He can come unexpectedly upon you in the pew during these five minutes that remain. You are perhaps thinking about whether you can catch an early train, and get home. May the Holy Spirit lay hold of you before you leave the building, and get you home in real earnest to you God and to your Father! He can come very mightily. There is a great deal about you that would shut him out. But it is hard to keep the wind out when it blows in the fulness of its strength. You may fill up the crevices of the door as you please, but still the wind gets in. Thus, too, is it with the Spirit of God: he comes in might; and he can also come very sweetly. Be not afraid of the Holy Spirit. He can charm you to Christ, as well as drive you to Christ. May he enter your heart even now!

We yearn to see all of you thus made to live. I am praying in my very soul that he would come to every one of you. I do not read that Ezekiel saw part of the valley of dry bones live, and the rest remain dry bones; but that they all lived, and stood upon their feet an exceeding great army. I long to see you all blessed at this service. Why should it not be so? Oh, that the Spirit of God would come and touch everyone of us! Many of you are alive already, blessed be his name! Well, you can have more life, for Christ has come not only that you might have life, but that you "might have it more abundantly." Let the blessed Spirit enter into greater fulness, I beseech you. But pray mightily, that every soul here that is dead may now feel the sacred breath, and begin to live. Then I shall not only hear of one, as last Thursday, but news shall be brought of many upon whom the divine Spirit has sweetly come and led them to Jesus, to be saved now, and to be saved for ever. God grant it! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ezekiel 37.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—464, 461, 451.

Praise for the Gift of Gifts

A Sermon

(No. 2247)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, March 13th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, July 27th, 1890.

"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."—2 Corinthians 9:15.

IN the chapter from which my text is taken, Paul is stirring up the Christians at Corinth to be ready with liberal gifts for the poor saints at Jerusalem. He finishes by reminding them of a greater gift that any they could bring, and by this one short word of praise, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift," he sets all their hearts a-singing. Let men give as liberally as they may, you can always proclaim the value of their gift; you can cast it up, and reckon its worth; but God's gift is unspeakable, unreckonable. You cannot fully estimate the value of what God gives. The gospel is a gospel of giving and forgiving. We may sum it up in those two words; and hence, when the true spirit of it works upon the Christian, he forgives freely, and he also gives freely. The large heart of God breeds large hearts in men, and they who live upon his bounty are led by his Spirit to imitate that bounty, according to their power.

However, I am not going, on the present occasion, to say anything upon the subject of liberality. I must get straight away to the text, hoping that we may really drink in the spirit of it, and out of full hearts use the apostle's language with intenser meaning than ever as we repeat his words: "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." I shall commence by saying that *salvation is altogether the gift of God*, and as such is to be received by us freely. Then I shall try to show that *this gift is unspeakable*; and, in the third place, that *for this gift thanks should be rendered to God*. Though it is unspeakable, yet we should speak our praise of it. In this way you will see, as of old preachers used to say, the text naturally falls apart.

I. We begin with the thought that SALVATION IS ALTOGETHER THE GIFT OF GOD. Paul said, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Over and over and over again, have we to proclaim that salvation is wholly of grace: not of works nor of wages, but it is the gift of God's great bounty to undeserving men. Often as we have preached this truth, we shall have to keep on doing so as long as there are men in the world who are self-righteous, and as long as there are minds in the world so slow to grasp the meaning of the word "grace", that is, "free favour", and as long as there are memories that find it difficult to retain the idea of salvation being God's free gift.

Let us say simply and plainly, that salvation must come to us as a gift from God, for salvation comes to us by the Lord Jesus, and *what else could Jesus be?* The essence of salvation is the gift of God's Only-begotten Son to die for us, that we might live through him. I think you will agree with me that it is inconceivable that men should ever have merited that God should give his Only-begotten Son to the,. To give Christ to us, in any sense, must have been an act of divine charity; but to give him up to die on yonder cruel and bloody tree, to yield him up as a sacrifice for sin, must be a free favour, passing the limits of thought. It is not supposable that any man could

deserve such love. It is plain that if man's sins needed a sacrifice, he did not deserve that a sacrifice should be found for him. The fact that his need proves his demerit and his guiltiness. He deserves to die; he may be rescued by Another dying for him; but he certainly cannot claim that the eternal God should take from his bosom his Only-begotten and Well-beloved Son, and put him to death. The more you look that thought in the face, the more you will reject the idea that, by any possible sorrow, or by any possible labour, or by any possible promise, a man could put himself into the position of deserving to have Christ to die for him. If Christ is to come to save sinners, it must be as a gift, a free gift of God. The argument, to my mind, is conclusive.

Besides that, over and over again, in God's Word, *we are told that salvation is not of works*. Although there are many who cling to the notion of man's works as a ground of salvation, yet as long as this Book stands, and there are eyes to read it; it will bear witness against the idea of human merit, and it will speak out plainly for the doctrine that men are saved by faith, and not by works. Not once only, but often it is written, "The just shall live by faith;" moreover, we are told, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." The very choice of the way of salvation by believing, rather than by works, is made by God on purpose that he might show that grace is a gift. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt: but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Faith is that virtue, that grace, which is chosen to bring us salvation, because it never takes any of the glory to itself. Faith is simply the hand that takes. When the beggar receives alms, he does not bless the hand that takes, but blesses the hand that gives; therefore we do not praise the faith that receiveth, but the God who giveth the unspeakable gift. Faith is the eye that sees. When we see an object, we delight in the object, rather than in the eye that sees it; therefore do we glory, not in our faith, but in the salvation which God bestows. Faith is appointed as the porter to open the gate of salvation, because that gate turns upon the hinges of free grace.

In the next place, be it always remembered, that we cannot be saved by the merit of our own works, because *holy works are themselves a gift*, the work of the grace of God. If thou hast faith, and joy, and hope, who gave them to thee? These did not spring up spontaneously in thy heart. They were sown there by the hand of love. If thou hast lived a godly life for years, if thou hast been a diligent servant of the church and of thy God, in whose strength hast thou done it? Is there not One who works all our works in us? Could you work out your salvation with fear and trembling if God did not first work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure? How can that, then, claim a reward, which is, in itself, the gift of God? I think the ground is cut right away from those who would put confidence in human merit, when we show, first of all, that, in Scripture, salvation is clearly said to be "not of works, lest any man should boast"; and, secondly, that even the good works of believers are the fruit of a renewed life; for "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

"All that I *was*, my sin, my guilt,
My death, was all mine own;
All that I *am*, I own to thee,
My gracious God, alone."

Further, if salvation were not a free gift, *how else could a sinner get it?* I will pass over some of you, who fancy that you are the best people in the world. It is sheer fancy, mark you, without any truth in it. But I will say nothing about you. There are, however, some of us, who know that we were not the best people in the world; we who sinned against God, and knew it, and who were

broken into pieces under a sense of our guilt. I know, for one, that there would have been no hope of heaven for me, if salvation had not been a free gift of God to those who deserved it not. After ministering among you for nearly thirty-seven years, I stand exactly where I stood when first I came to Christ, a poor sinner and nothing at all, but taking Christ as the free gift of God to me, as I took him at first, when, yet but a lad, I fled to him for salvation. Ask any of the people of God who have been abundant in service, and constant in prayer, whether they deserve aught at the hand of God, and those who have most to be thankful for will tell you that they have nothing that they have not received. Ask these, whom God has honoured to the conversion of many, whether they lay any claim to the grace of God, whether they have any merit, and whether in their hand they dare bring a price, and seek to buy of God his love; they will loathe the very thought. There is no way to heaven for you and me, my friends convinced of sin, unless all the way we are led by grace, and unless salvation is the gift of God.

But, once more: *look at the privileges which come to us through salvation!* I cannot, as I value those privileges, conceive for a minute that they are purchasable, or that they come to us as the result of our desert. They must be a gift; they are so many and so glorious as to be altogether outside the limit of our furthest search, and beyond the height of our utmost reach. We cannot by our efforts compass any salvation of any sort; but if we could, it certainly would not be such a salvation as this. Let us look, then, at our privileges.

Here comes, first, "the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." He that believes in Christ has no sin. His sin is blotted out. It has ceased to be. Christ has finished it, and he is unto God as though he had never sinned. Can any sinner deserve that?

"Here's pardon for transgressions past,
It matters not how black their cast,
And oh, my soul, with wonder view,
For sins to come, here's pardon too!"

Can any sinner bring a price that will purchase such a boon as that? No; such mercy must be a gift.

Next, everyone that believes in Christ is justified, and looked upon by God as being perfectly righteous. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is "accepted in the Beloved." By this he becomes not only innocent, that is pardoned, but he becomes praiseworthy before God. This is justification. Can any guilty man deserve that? Why, he is covered with sin, defiled from head to foot! Can he deserve to be arrayed in the sumptuous robe of the divine righteousness of Christ, and "be made the righteousness of God in him"? It is inconceivable. Such a blessing must be the gift of infinite bounty, or it can never come to man.

Furthermore, beloved, remember that "now we are the sons of God." Can you realise that truth? As others are not, believers are, the sons of God. He is their Father, and the spirit of adoption breathes within their heart. They are the children of his family, and come to him as children come to a father, with loving confidence. Think of being made a son of God, a son of him that made the heavens, a son of him who is God over all, blessed for ever. Can any man deserve that? Certainly not; this must also come as a gift.

Sonship leads on to heirship. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." My brother, if thou art a believer, all things are thine, this world, and the worlds to come. Could you ever deserve all that? Could such an inheritance have come to you through any merits of your

own? No, it must be a gift. Look at it, and the blaze of its splendour will strike all idea of merit blind.

Further than that, we are now made one with Christ. Oh, tell everywhere this wonder which God hath wrought for his people! It is not to be understood; it is an abyss too deep for a finite mind to sound. Every believer is truly united to Christ: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones." Every believer is married to Christ, and none of them shall ever be separated from him. Seeing, then, that there is such a union between us and Christ, can you suppose that any man can have any claim to such a position apart from the grace of God? By what merit, even of a perfect man, could we deserve to become one with Christ in an endless unity? Such a surpassing privilege is out of the line of purchase. It is, and can only be, the gift of God. Oneness with Christ cannot come to us in any other way.

Listen yet again. In consequence of our union with Christ, God the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. Our bodies are his temple. God dwelleth in us, and we dwell in God. Can we deserve that? Even a perfect keeping of the law would not have brought to men the abiding of the Holy Ghost in them. It is a blessing that rises higher than the law could ever reach, even if it had been kept.

Let me say, furthermore, that if you possess a blessed peace, as I trust you do, if you can say—
 "My heart is resting, O my God;
 I will give thanks and sing;
 My heart is at the secret source
 Of every precious thing;"

that divine peace must surely be the gift of God. If there is a great calm within your soul, an entire satisfaction with Christ your Lord, you never deserved that precious boon. It is the work of his Holy Spirit, and must be his free gift.

And when you come to die, as you may—unless the Lord comes, as he will—the grace that will enable you fearlessly to face the last enemy will not be yours by any right of your own. If you fall asleep, as I have seen many a Christian pass away, with songs of triumph, with the light of heaven shining on your brow, almost in glory while yet you are in your bed, why, you cannot deserve that! Such a death-bed must be the free gift of God's almighty grace. It cannot be earned by any merit; indeed, it is just then that every thought of merit melts away, and the soul hides itself in Christ, and triumphs there.

If this does not convince you, look once more. Let a window be opened in heaven. See the long line of white-robed saints. Hark to their hallelujahs. Behold their endless, measureless delight. Did they deserve to come there? Did they come to their thrones and to their palms of victory by their own merits? Their answer is, "We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;" and from them all comes the harmonious anthem, "Non nobis, Domine,"—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us; but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and thy truth's sake." From first to last, then, we see that salvation is all the gift of God. And what can be freer than a gift, or more glorious than the gift of God? No prize can approach it in excellence, no merit can be mentioned in the same hour. O my brethren, we are debtors indeed to the mercy of God! We have received much, and there is more to follow; but it is all of grace from first to last. We know but little yet at what a cost these gifts were purchased for us; but we shall know it better by-and-by, as McCheyne so sweetly sings:—

"When this passing world is done,
 When has sunk yon glaring sun;

When I stand with Christ in glory,
 Looking o'er life's finished story,
 Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
 Not till then, how much I owe.
 When I stand before the throne,
 Dressed in beauty not my own;
 When I see thee as thou art,
 Love thee with unsinning heart;
 Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
 Not till then, how much I owe."

II. Now I would try to lead your thoughts in another direction as we consider that THIS GIFT IS UNSPEAKABLE. Do not think it means that we cannot speak about this gift. Ah, how many times have I, for one, spoken upon this gift during the last forty years! I have spoken of little else. I heard of one who said, "I suppose Spurgeon is preaching that old story over again." Yes, that is what he is doing; and if he lives another twenty years, and you come here, it will be "the old, old story" still, for there is nothing like it. It is inexhaustible; it is like an Artesian well that springeth up for ever and ever. We can speak about it; yet it is unspeakable. What mean we, then, by saying it is unspeakable? Well, as I have said already, Christ Jesus our Lord is the sum and substance of salvation, and of God's gift. O God, this gift of thine is unspeakable, and it includes all other gifts beside!

"Thou didst not spare thine only Son,
 But gav'st him for a world undone,
 And freely with that Blessed One—
 Thou givest all."

Consider, first, that Christ is unspeakable *in his person*. He is perfect man, and glorious God. No tongue of seraph, or of cherub, can ever describe the full nature of him whose name is "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace." This is he whom the Father gave "for us men, and for our sakes." He was the Creator of all things, for "without him was not anything made that was made," yet he was "made of flesh and dwelt among us." He filleth all things by his omnipresence; yet he came and tabernacled on the earth. This is that Jesus, who was born of Mary, yet who lived before all worlds. He was that Word, who "was in the beginning with God, and the Word was God." He is unspeakable. It is not possible to put into human language the divine mystery of his sacred being, truly man and yet truly God. But how great the wonder of it! Soul, God gave God for thee! Dost thou hear it? To redeem thee, O believing man, God gave himself to be thy Saviour; surely, that is an unspeakable gift.

Christ is unspeakable, next, *in his condescension*. Can any one measure or describe how far Christ stooped, when, from the throne of splendour, he came to a manger to be swaddled and lie where the horned oxen fed. Oh, what a stoop of condescension was that! The Infinite becomes an infant. The Eternal is dandled on a woman's knee. He is there in the carpenter's shop, obedient to his parents; there in the temple sitting among the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions; there in poverty, crying, "The Son of man hath not where to lay his head;" and there, in thirst, asking of a guilty woman a drink of water. It is unspeakable. That he, before whom all the hosts of heaven veiled their faces, should come here among men, and among the poorest of the poor—that he who

dwelt amidst the glory and the bliss of the land of light, should deign to be a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, passes human thought! Such a Saviour is a gift unspeakable.

But if unspeakable so far, what shall I say of the fashion of Christ *in his death*? Beloved, I cannot speak adequately of Gethsemane and the bloody sweat, nor of the Judas kiss, nor of the traitorous flight of the disciples. It is unspeakable. That binding, scourging, plucking of the beard, and spitting in the face! Man's tongue cannot utter the horror of it. I cannot tell you truly the weight of the false accusations, the slanders, and the blasphemies that were heaped on him; nor would I wish to picture the old soldier's cloak flung over his bleeding shoulders, and the crown of thorns, the buffeting, the mailed fists, and the shame and sorrow he endured, as he was thrust out to execution. Do you wish to follow him along the streets, where weeping women lifted up their hearts in tender sympathy for the Lord of love about to die? If you do, it must be in silence, for words but feebly tell how much he bore on the way to the cross.

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When God, the mighty Maker died
For man, the creature's sin."

Oh, it was terrible that HE should be nailed to the gibbet, that HE should hang there to be ridiculed by all the mob of Jerusalem! The abjects flouted him, the meanest thought him meaner than themselves. Even dying thieves upbraided him. His eyes are choked, they become dim with blood. He must die. He says, "It is finished." He bows his head. The glorious Victim has yielded up his life to put away his people's sin. This is God's gift to you, divine, unspeakable, O ye sons of men!

But it is not all. Christ is unspeakable *in his glory*. When we think of his resurrection, of his ascending to heaven, and of his glory at the right hand of God, words languish on our lips; but in everyone of these positions, he is the gift of God to us, and when he shall come with all the glory of the Father, he will still he to his people the *Theo-dora*. the gift of God, the great unspeakable benediction to the sons of men. I wish that the people of Christ had this aspect of the Lord's glory more continually on their hearts, for though he seems to tarry, yet will he come again the second time, as he promised.

"With that blessed hope before us,
Let no harp remain unstrung;
Let the mighty Advent chorus
Onward roll on every tongue.
Maranatha,
Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come!"

To me, one of the most wonderful aspects of this gift is Christ *in his chosen*; all the Father gave him, all for whom he died, these he will glorify with himself, and they shall be with him where he is. Oh, what a sight will that be when we shall see the King in his beauty, and all his saints beautiful in his glory, shining like so many stars around him who is the Sun of them all! Then, indeed, shall we see what an unspeakable gift did God gave to men, when through that gift, he makes his saints all glorious, even as he predestined them, "to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the Firstborn among many brethren."

But we do not need to wait until we see his face to know his glory. Brethren, Christ is unspeakable as the gift of God *in the heart here*. "Oh," say you, "I trust I have felt the love of God

shed abroad in my heart!" I rejoice with you, but could you speak it? Often, when I have tried to preach the love of Christ, I have not been able to preach it rightly, because I did not feel it as I ought; but oftener still, I have not been able to tell it out because I have felt it so much. I would fain preach in that manner always, and feel Christ's love so much that I could speak it but little. Oh, child of God, if you have known much of Christ, you have often had to weep out your joys instead of speaking them, to lay your finger on your mouth, and be silent because you were overpowered by his glory. See how it was with John: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." Why did you not preach, John? If he were here to-night, he would say, "I could not preach then, the splendour of the Lord made me dumb. I fell at his feet as dead." This is one reason why the gift of God is unspeakable, because, the more you know about it, the less you can say about it. Christ overpowers us; he makes us tongue-tied with his wondrous revelations. When he reveals himself in full, we are like men that are blinded with excess of vision. Like Paul, on the Damascus road, we are forced to confess, "I could not see for the glory of that light." We cannot speak of it fully. All the apostles and prophets and saints of God have been trying to speak out the love of God as manifested in Christ; but yet they have all failed. I say, with great reverence, that the Holy Ghost himself seems to have laboured for expression, and, as he had to use human pens and mortal tongues, even he has never spoken to the full the measure and value of God's unspeakable gift. It is unspeakable to men by God himself. God can give it; but he cannot make us fully understand it. We have need to be like God himself to comprehend the greatness of his gift when he gives us his Son.

Though we make constant effort, it is unspeakable, even *throughout a long life*. Do you ministers, who have been a long time in one place, ever say to yourselves, "We shall run dry for subjects by-and-by"? If you preach Christ, you will never run short. If you have preached ten thousand sermons about Christ, you have not yet left the shore; you are not out in the deep sea yet. Dive, my brother! With splendour of thought, plunge into this great mystery of free grace and dying love; and when you have dived the farthest, you will perceive that you are as far off the bottom as when you first touched the surface. It is an endless theme; it is unspeakable!

"Oh, could I speak the matchless worth,
 Oh, could I sound the glories forth
 Which in my Saviour shine!
 I'd soar and touch the heavenly strings,
 And vie with Gabriel while he sings
 In notes almost divine."

But I can neither speak it nor sing it as I ought; yet would I finish Medley's hymn, and say,—
 "Well, the delightful day will come
 When my dear Lord will bring me home,
 And I shall see his face;
 Then with my Saviour, Brother, Friend,
 A blest eternity I'll spend,
 Triumphant in his grace."

But, even then, Christ will be still *in heaven for ever* a gift unspeakable. Perhaps we shall have another talk together, friends, on this subject when we get there. One good woman said to me, "We shall have more time in eternity than we have now;" to which I replied, "I do not know whether there is any time in eternity, the words look like a contradiction." "Oh, but," said she, "I shall get

a talk with you, anyhow; I have never had one yet." Well, I dare say we shall commune up there of these blessed things, when we shall know more about them. As we are to be there for ever and ever, we shall need some great subjects with which to keep up the conversation: what vaster theme can we have than this? Addison, in one of her verses, says—

"But, oh! Eternity's too short
To utter half thy praise."

And I have heard simpletons say that the couplet was very faulty; "you cannot make eternity short," they say. That shows the difference between a poet and a critic. A critic is a being all teeth, without any heart; and a poet is one who has much heart, and who sometimes finds that human language is not sufficient to express his thoughts. We shall never have done with Christ in heaven. Oh, my Lord, thy presence will make my heaven!

"Millions of years my wondering eyes,
Shall o'er thy beauties rove;
And endless ages I'll adore
The glories of thy love."

This wondrous gift of God is an utterly inexhaustible, unspeakable subject.

III. Now, lastly, I come to this point, that **FOR THIS GIFT THANKS SHOULD BE RENDERED**. The text says, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." By this the apostle not only meant that he gave thanks for Christ; but he thus calls upon the church, and upon every individual believer, to join him in his praise. Here do I adopt his language, and praise God on my own behalf, calling upon all of you who know the preciousness of Christ, the gift of God, to unite with me in thanksgiving. Let us as with one heart say it now, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Some cannot say this, for they never think of the gift of God. You who never think of God, how can you thank God? There must be "think" at the bottom of "thank." Whenever we think, we ought to thank. But some never think, and therefore never thank. Beloved friend, what are you at? That Christ should die; is it nothing to you? That God "gave his Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" is that nothing to you? Let the question drop into your heart. Press it home upon yourself. Will you say that you have no share in this gift? Will you deliberately give up any hope you may have of ever partaking of the grace of God? Are you determined now to say, "I do not care about Christ"? Well, you would hardly like to say that; but why do you practically declare this to be your intention, if you do not want to say it? Oh, that you might now so think of Christ as to trust him at once, and begin to raise this note of praise!

Some, on the other hand, do not thank God because they are always delaying. Have I not hearers here to-night who were here ten years ago, and were rather more hopeful then than they are now? "There is plenty of time," say you; but you do not say this about other matters. I admired the children, the other day, when the teacher said, "Dear children, the weather is unsettled. You can go out next Wednesday; but do you not think it would be better to stop a month, so that we could go when the weather is more settled?" There was not a child that voted for stopping a month. All the hands we up for going next Wednesday. Now, imitate the children in that. Do not make it seem as if you were in a no hurry to be happy; for as he that believeth in Christ hath eternal life, to postpone having it is an unworthy as well as unwise thing to do. No, you will have it, I hope, at once. There is a man here who is going to be a very rich man when his old aunt dies. You do not wish that she should die, I am sure; but you sometimes wonder why some people are spared to be ninety, do you not?

You are very poor now, and you wish that some of this money cold come to you at once; you are not for putting that off. Why should you put off heavenly riches and eternal life? I beseech you to believe in Christ now; then you will be willed with thankfulness and joy.

Some cannot say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift," for they do not know whether they have it or not. They sometimes think that they have; they oftener fear that they have not. Never tolerate a doubt on this subject, I implore you. Get full assurance. "Lay hold on eternal life." Get a grip of it. Know Christ; trust Christ wholly: and you have God's word for it, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Then you can say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Now, dear friends, let me ask you to join in this exercise. Let us first unitedly *thank God for this gift*. Put out of your mind the idea that you ought to thank Christ, but not thank the Father. It was the Father that gave Christ. Christ did not die to make his Father love us, as some say that we preach. We have always preached the very opposite, and we have quoted that verse of Kent—

"'Twas not to make Jehovah's love
Towards the sinner flame,
That Jesus, from his throne above,
A suffering man became.
" 'Twas not the death which he endured,
Nor all the pangs he bore,
That God's eternal love procured,
For God was love before."

He gave his Son because he already loved us. Christ is the exhibition of the Father's love, and the revelation of Christ is made because of "the love of the Spirit." Therefore, "Thanks be unto God"—the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost—"for his unspeakable gift."

While you saved ones, every one, raise your note of gratitude, be very careful to *thank God only*. Do not be thinking by whose means you were converted, and begin to thank the servant instead of the Lord whom he serves. Let the man who was used as the instrument in God's hand be told, for his comfort, of the blessing God sent you through him; but thank God, and thank only God, that you were led to lay hold of Christ, who is his unspeakable gift.

Moreover, *thank God spontaneously*. Look at the apostle, and imitate him. When he sounded this peal of praise, his mind was occupied at the time about the collection for the poor saints; but, collection or no collection, he will thank God for his unspeakable gift. I like to see thanks to God come up at what might be an untimely moment, When a man does not feel just as happy as he might be, and yet says, "Thank God," it sounds refreshingly real. I like to hear such a bubbling up of praise as in the case of old father Taylor, of New York, when he broke down in the middle of a sentence. Looking up at the people, he said, "There now! The nominative has lost its verb; but, hallelujah! I am on the way to glory;" and so he went on again. Sometime we ought to do just like that. Take an opportunity, when there comes a little interval, just to say, "Whether this is in tune or not, I cannot help it: thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Lastly, as you receive the precious gift, *thank God practically*. Thank God by doing something to prove your thanks. It is a poor gratitude which only effervesces in words, and skirts deeds of kindness. Real thankfulness will not be in word only, but in deed too, and so it will prove that it is in the truth.

"Well, what could I do that would please God?" you say. First, I should think you could look for his lost children. That is a sure way to please him. Go to-night, and see whether you cannot find one of the erring whom you might bring back to the fold. Would you not please a mother, if she had lost her baby, and you set to work to find it? We want to please God. Seek the lost ones, and bring them in.

If you want to please God, next, succour his poor saints. If you know anything of them, help them. Do something for them for Christ's sake. I knew a woman who used always to relieve anybody that came to her door in the dress of a sailor. I do not think that half those who came to her ever had been to sea at all; but, still, if they came to the door as sailors, she used to say, "Ah! my dear boy was a sailor. I have not seen him for years. He is lost somewhere at sea; but for dear Jack's sake, I always help every sailor that comes to my door." It is a right feeling, is it not? I remember, when I first came to London from my country charge, I used to think of that, if I came across a dog or a cat that came from Waterbeach, I would like to feed it. So, for the love of Christ, love Christ's poor people. Whenever you find them, say, "My Lord was poor, and so are you, and for his dear sake I will help you."

If you want to please God, next, bear with the evil ones. Do not lose your temper; I mean, by that, do not get angry with the unthankful and the evil. Let your anger be lost in praise for the gift unspeakable. Please God by bearing with evil men, as he bears with you. But if you have a very bad temper, I hope that, in another sense, you may lose it, and never find it any more.

And lastly, if you want to please God, watch, like the Thessalonians, "for his Son from heaven." The Lord Jesus is coming again, in like manner as he departed, and there is no attitude with which God is more delighted in his saved people than with that of watching for the time when "unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin unto salvation."

Beloved, may God help you thus to magnify his Son; and to him shall be all the praise! Let us again lift up our glad hallelujah: "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Corinthians 9.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—534, 236, 428.

Sad Fasts Changed to Glad Feasts

A Sermon

(No. 2248)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, March 20th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, September 7th, 1890.

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace."—Zechariah 8:19

MY time for discourse upon this subject will be limited, as we shall gather around the communion-table immediately afterwards. So in the former part of my sermon I shall give you an outline of what might be said upon the text if we had time to examine it fully. It will be just a crayon sketch without much light and shade. You will be able to think over the subject at your leisure, and fill up the picture for yourselves!

We have, in the chapters we have read, a blessed message of peace to God's people in the day of their trouble. In the land of their captivity the Jews were in great perplexity. Their sad lament is on record; "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof." But their trouble led many of them to seek the Lord and he was found of them. Welcome is such misery which leads to such mercy. In the seventh chapter we are told that, when they sent unto the house of God, to pray before the Lord, and to say, "Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years? *Then* came the word of the Lord." Jehovah has put their tears into his bottle, and in answer to their sighing sent them a message of hope. That message has in it much that is very practical. It is a letter full of mercy, but it is directed to certain characters. God does not send indiscriminate mercy. If men go on in their sin, he sends them words of judgment; but when they turn from their wickedness, and are renewed by his grace in the spirit of their minds, then it is that words of comfort are spoken to them.

Reviewing the whole message which Zechariah was commissioned to deliver, and which is summed up in our text, there are three things which stand out in clear prominence. The first is, that *God calls for transformation of character* in the people he is going to bless. The second is, that *he promises translation of condition* to those whose characters are thus changed and beautiful. And, lastly, *he ordains transfiguration of ordinances* as the result of the new character and condition. The whole subject is exceedingly suggestive, and well worthy of careful study when you reach your homes.

We must not lose sight of the fact that, primarily, this message is for Israel according to the flesh, and contains a prophesy of their latter-day glory. God hath not cast off his people whom he did foreknow, and there are majestic words here which still await their fulfillment when the set time shall have come. The Lord "will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem", and make the place of his

feet glorious in that day. But as "no prophesy of Scripture is of any private interpretation," so the message to the Jews also bears a message for us. Let us seek to learn its lessons well.

I. My text reminds me—and the chapter before us emphasizes the fact—that, when God means to bless his people, HE CALLS FOR TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER. The promise of the abiding presence of the Lord God Almighty is ever preceded by the call to separation and holiness. "The words which the Lord had cried by the former prophets" made it very clear that only with the righteous nation would God dwell; and Zechariah delivers a similar message.

Very remarkable will be the transformation of character which God shall work. According to the text, *love of truth* is to be one of the main effects of the change. These people certainly did not set much value on the truth before; they were in love with every lie, with every false god, and with every false prophet. But God would have them taste of his covenant blessings, and be set free from every false way. It is the only truth that can set men free; yet many there are even to-day who delight to be in bondage to error. How is it with you? Do you love the truth, or can you put up with that which is not true, if it is only pleasant? Say, dear heart, are you anxious after truth—truth in your head, truth in your heart, truth on your tongue, truth in your life? If you are false, and love falsehood, you are taken with a sore disease; and unless you are healed of the plague, you can never enter heaven. You must be transformed and made true, and only the Spirit of truth can effect the mighty change.

Another sign must follow: *love of peace*. The text also says: "Therefore love peace." In some men it is a plain proof of conversion when they desire peace. Some are naturally very hot-tempered, and soon boil over. These are the men of great force of character, or else of great shallowness: it is the small pot which is soon hot. Some are malicious; they can take enmity quietly, and keep it in the refrigerator of their cold hearts, even for years. Such love is not peace; they are at war with all who have in any degree disappointed or displeased them. When the grace of God takes away an angry, passionate, malicious disposition, it achieves a great wonder. But then grace itself is a great wonder; and unless this change is wrought in you who need it, you shall not see God, for you cannot enter heaven to go into a passion there. Depend upon it, unless you lose your bad temper, you will never be amongst the ranks of the glorified. It must be conquered and removed, if you are to join the happy hosts on high. "They are without fault before the throne of God;" and so must you be if you are to be numbered amongst that company.

Moreover, those whom God blesses have undergone a transformation as to their conduct with each other. *Righteous dealing* is another effect of the change. Notice the ninth verse of the seventh chapter: "Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts, saying, Execute true judgment." This is at all times a necessary admonition, but never more necessary than now, when so many never dream of justice and goodness: in business and in private life many seem to have no care for righteousness. If the thing will pay, they will rob right and left; and they will only be honest because there is an old saw that saith, "Honesty is the best policy." But he that is honest out of policy is the most dishonest man in the world. May God grant us grace to do what is right at all costs! Christian men, when the grace of God reigns in their souls, would rather be the poorest of the poor than get rich by a single act contrary to uprightness. O beloved members of this church, be upright in all your transactions, clear and straight in your dealings; for how shall you call yourselves the children of the righteous God if you make gain by unholy transactions?

Another point of transformation lies in the exercise of *compassion*. This comes out in that same ninth verse of the seventh chapter: "Shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother." A

great mark of a changed heart is when we become tender, pitiful, and kind. Some men have very little of the milk of human kindness about them. You may lay a case before them, and they will wonder why you should come to them; and when you see how little they do, you yourself wonder why you ever came to them. Many there are whose hearts are locked up in an iron safe, and we cannot find the key! They have hidden the key themselves; there is no getting at their hearts. One such said to a minister who preached a sermon, after which there was to be a collection, "You should preach to our hearts, and then you would get some money." The minister replied, "Yes, I think that is very likely, for that is where you keep your money." The answer was a very good one. That is just where a great many persons carry their treasure; but when the grace of God comes, and renews the miser's heart, he begins to be generous, he has pity upon the poor, and compassion for the fallen: he loves to bless those who are round about him, and make them happy. It is a mark of wonderful transformation in the character of some men, when their heart begins to go a little outside their own ribs, and they can feel for the sorrows of other men.

Notice, next, in the tenth verse of that same seventh chapter, that another mark of God's people is *consideration for others*: "Oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor." How can he be a child of the all-bountiful Father who would make men work for wages that scarcely keep body and soul together? How can he be a son of the God of love, who will defraud the poor woman whose fingers must go stitch, stitch, stitch, half through the night, before she can even get enough to give her even relief from her hunger? God's children will have nothing to do with this kind of thing. Those who take delight in oppressing the poor, and who make their gain thereby, will be themselves pinched in eternal poverty; they are little likely to enter the golden gates of paradise. There is many a child of God who has lived here in the depths of poverty; and when he gets to heaven, away from all the struggle and bitterness, is he to see the man who was his oppressor here below, coming into glory to sit side by side with him? I trow not.

Once more, where there is a work of grace, it leads men to *brotherliness* of character. "And let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart," saith the Lord in the tenth verse of this seventh chapter; and the same thing is repeated in the seventeenth verse of the eighth chapter. I should be sure that some women were converted if they left off imagining evil against others in their hearts. For there are some women—and there are some men, too, I am sorry to say—who cannot think of anybody without thinking evil of them. There are such dreadful persons about, and sometimes we come across them to our dismay. They paint the very saints of God black, and there is no getting away from their slander; nay, let a man live the life of Enoch, yet would some of these people report evil against him. Slander is no sign of a saint; it is the brand of one who is under the dominion of the devil. "For all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord." God save us from them all!

Thus I have given you a brief outline of the transformation of grace. They are great changes because God works them. When men come to him, and yield themselves up to his divine power, he takes away the heart of stone, and give them a heart of flesh. He turns their nature to the very reverse of what it was before; then they follow after truth and peace, they love righteousness, and learn kindness, through his good Spirit.

II. The second point to which I would draw your attention, with reference to the methods of God with his people, is that HE PROMISES TRANSMUTATIONS OF CONDITION to those men in whom are found the transformation of character. I have already read the eighth chapter through

to you; let us go through it again, and pick out just a note or two of the joy and gladness which are here written in full score.

First, *jealousy is a tunnel into communing love*. God represents himself, in the second verse, as being very jealous about his people; because he loved them so much, he was jealous for them with great fury. The people set up false gods in his own city, even in his own temple, and God was angry with them, and would not dwell with them; but when they repented, and he had cleansed them by his mercy, he says, "I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." What a change! God waits not until, by long obedience, his people win him back. He does not say that he will return when they merit his presence. No, the word comes to us full of surprise and power, "I am returned." Instantly on the repentance, God comes back. A jealous God fights against me. I fly to Christ. He is content. He comes and dwells with me, no longer full of fury, but full of tenderness and love. If any of you have had God fighting against you, in holy jealousy chasing out your sin, happy will you be if you yield yourselves to Christ at once; if you do so, God will come quickly, and make your hearts to be his abode. May many get that transformation at this good hour!

Next, *desolation is turned into population*. On account of sin, Jerusalem became desolate. "I scattered them with a whirlwind," saith the Lord, "among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate." Zion sat like a widow, nobody came up to her solemn feasts; but God returned to her and he says, in the fourth verse, "There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." So that when God comes to bless his people, where there was nobody, there seems to be everybody. When churches and congregations sin, God often minishes them, and brings them low; but when they return to their God, the old saints are seen there again, and there are new-born believers in plenty. God can soon change the estate of his people. It is the same with individual souls who have gone away from God, but afterwards repent and return to him. Then the desolation of heart is forgotten in the joy of the multitude of sweet and holy thoughts and interests, that crowd the heart and life. Old experiences revive, and new life and joy are born, where God comes near to us in grace and power. What a wonderful change this is! May we all taste its bliss!

Another change of condition follows: *scattering is turned into gathering*. God goes on to say that, as he scattered his people, so he will bring them together again from the east and from the west. This, as I have already said, has a first reference to the scattered Israel, but how true it also is of us! When the Lord leaves us, we are scattered like sheep without a shepherd in a cloudy and dark day; but when we turn to him, his word is sure. "I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness." May we know, in our new experience, the truth of that promise, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee," and may it be to us according to his word!

The next change is, that *poverty is turned into plenty*. Whereas they become poor, and were half-starved with famine, God tells them that the city shall be prosperous: "The vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew." God often changes men's circumstances when he changes their hearts. When he has been beating and bruising, if men will but yield to him, he turns to them in love and plenty. May the Lord do this with any of us who have grieved him, and brought his rod upon us! There is no truer word in the Book of God

than this, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." With the covenant blessings of grace, God often bestows the common blessings of this life, even as it is written in the chapter before us, "I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things."

Farther on in the chapter we are told of another change: *ill-will is turned into good-will*. Before the Lord graciously visited them, no man loved his neighbor. So we read in the tenth verse. But when God's grace came, and changed their character, then one city went to another, and said, "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also;" and they went up to the house of the Lord together. Oh, where the grace of God comes, it makes men friends! Enemies they may have been before, but then they go and seek one another out, and they say, "Come, old friend, let us end all this; give me your hand, and let bygones be bygones." There is nothing like love and unity among the people until the grace of God comes and conquers the natural ill-will which else would have had dominion. May such a transmutation take place between any here who may be at variance, and may all bitterness and hatred, if such things exist, be put away!

Did you not notice also, in the reading of this chapter, how these people had been a curse, and how by the presence of God *the curse is turned into a blessing*? "And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong." When a believer dishonours God, one of the worst results of it is, that he becomes a snare to the people round about him. The very heathen look upon him as a curse. Inconsistent professors are the greatest stumbling blocks to the spread of the cause of Christ. But when their character is changed by the abounding grace of God, they become like overflowing springs, sending streams of blessing far and wide.

Moreover, in the day of blessing, their *reproach is turned into honour*. The nation had been despised; nobody would honour a Jew; but when they honoured God, then God would honour them, and ten men would take hold of the skirts of a man that was a Jew, saying, "We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." A man of God would then become more precious than the gold of Ophir. Well, my friends, when we return to God, God very soon has ways of making us honourable, so that we are of value among men. He makes use of us, and men begin to perceive that we are not to be despised if God is with us, and his blessing rests upon us.

Thus have I hurried over these two points, because I want to dwell a little longer on the text itself; it was necessary, however, to introduce it in this way.

III. Now we come to this fact, which always accompanies God's presence. **HE ORDAINS TRANSMUTATIONS OF ORDINANCES**. Four fasts, which had been kept by the Jews, were to be turned into feasts, when the character of the men who observed them had changed, and God had dealt graciously with them. Before this, their feasts had been farces, occasions of self-glorification, and all manner of pride. Now, these days were to be festivals of gladness, and times of drawing near to God, rejoicing in his good gift. In like manner, when a man becomes a believer in Christ, and is renewed, this principle operates; many a fast is turned into a feast, and many a sorrow and sadness into joy and gladness.

When the communion-table shall be uncovered, you will see before you, in the emblems of *the death of our Lord*, what might have been the memory of a fast. The Lord of life and glory was nailed to the accursed tree. He died by the act of guilty men. We, by our sins, crucified the Son of God. We might have expected that, in remembrance of his death, we should have been called to a long, sad, rigorous fast. Do not many men think so even to-day? See how they observe Good Friday,

a sad, sad day to many; yet our Lord has never enjoined our keeping such a day, or bidden us to look back upon his death under such a melancholy aspect. Instead of that, having passed out from under the old covenant into the new, and resting in our risen Lord, who once was slain, we commemorate his death by a festival most joyous. It came over the passover, which was a feast of the Jews; but unlike that feast, which was kept by unleavened bread, this feast is brimful of joy and gladness. It is composed of bread and of wine, without a trace of bitter herbs, or anything that suggests sorrow and grief. The bread and the cup most fitly set forth the death of our Lord and Saviour, and the mode of that death, even by the shedding of his blood; but as they stand before us now, they evoke no tears, they suggest no sighs. The memorial of Christ's death is a festival, not a funeral; and we are to come to the table with gladsome hearts, ay, and go away from it with praises, for "after supper they sang a hymn." At both ends it was psalm-singing. The great Hallel of the Jews commenced it, and another psalm, full of joy and gladness out of the hallelujahs of the psalms finished it. Oh, what hath God wrought! We crucified the Christ of God; but in that crucifixion we have found our ransom. With wicked hands he was slain by us; but his blessed sacrifice hath put all our sin away for ever. Our hymn rightly asks—

"It is finished;' shall we raise
Songs of sorrow, or of praise?
Mourn to see the Saviour die,
Or proclaim his victory?"
But it justly answers—
"Lamb of God! Thy death hath given
Pardon peace, and hope of heaven:
'It is finish'd;' let us raise
Songs of thankfulness and praise!"

As the Lord's Supper leads the way in that direction, I may say that every other fast of the Christian has been transfigured in the same manner. *The Sabbath* is to many people a very dreary day; but to many of us it is a fast which has been turned into a feast. I am often amused when I read the accounts that are given by some people of an English Sabbath-day. In all soberness it is set forth what we Puritans do on this first day of the week. We wake up in the morning, and say to ourselves, "Another dreadfully miserable day come around," and then we go off to our places of worship, where we sit with frightfully long faces, and listen to terribly dismal sermons; we do not sing, or even smile; but we howl out some ugly psalm, and make ourselves as unhappy as ever we can be. When we come home, we draw down the blinds to keep the sun out. We never go into the garden to admire the flowers. Well, you know the rest of the story. I think we are descendants of the people who killed the cat on Monday because it cause mice on Sunday—at least, so I have heard. But if I had not read all this, I should not have known it. Often, when I see in the paper some description of myself, I say, "Well, people somehow seem to know me better than I know myself; I never thought anything of the kind; it has never entered my head. Yet here is it in black and white." O beloved friends! Our idea of the Lord's-day is altogether different from this hideous caricature of it. If I had to describe our Sabbaths, I should say that they are full of brightness, and joy, and delight. I should tell of our singing, with full hearts, of the happy prospect before us in that land—

"Where congregations ne'er break up,
And Sabbaths have no end."

I am sure we should not be likely to go to that heavenly country if our Sabbaths here were as dreary as some say they are. Why, here in this house, we have had our merriest times! Of old, when the prodigal came back, "they began to be merry," and I have never heard that they have left off; at any rate, I do not think that we have. We have rejoiced with the joy of harvest as we have heard of sinners saved, and have known that we are saved ourselves. I grant you that, before we knew the Lord, it did sometimes seem to our young minds rather a dull thing to read the Bible, and hear sermons, and to keep the Sabbaths; but now that we have come to Christ, and he has saved us, now that we are his; the first day of the week, which was a fast, has become a feast, and we look with eager delight for the Sundays to come round one after another. In fact, these Lord's-days are the beds of flowers in our gardens. The week-days are only the gravel paths that yield us little but weariness as we walk along them. Happy Sabbath! We hail thy coming with delight, and sing—

"Welcome sweet day of rest,
That saw the Lord arise;
Welcome to this reviving breast,
And these rejoicing eyes!
"The King himself comes near,
And feasts his saints to-day;
He we may sit, and see him here,
And love, and praise, and pray."

So, you see, this is a second instance in which what might have been a fast is turned into a feast.

There is another thing that is to some of us now a great feast, though formerly it was as full of weariness as a fast. It is *the hearing of the doctrine of grace*. I know some brethren who always sit very uneasily when I begin to preach the doctrines of grace. I am sorry that it is so, and I hope that they will grow wiser. Still, all of us did not always like to hear about God's electing love and absolute sovereignty; about the special redemption of Christ for his people; and about the union to Christ being an everlasting union, never to be broken. There was a time when we did not join very heartily in the lines—

"Once in Christ, in Christ forever,
Nothing from his love can sever."

But, oh, when your heart gets into full fellowship with God, if it is with you as it is with me, you will be glad to get on that string! Is there anything that gives us greater joy than to know our calling and election, and to make it sure; to know that the Father loved us as he loved Christ from before the foundation of the world, and that he loves us with such a love that can never end, and can never change, but will continue when the sun burns black as a coal? It was because they heard these grand doctrines that such crowds used to gather in the Desert in France to hear the old Calvinistic preachers. It was the hold these truths of grace had upon the minds and hearts of men that explains how it was that, under the gospel oaks in England, vast numbers used to come hear plain, and often illiterate men, preach the gospel. They preached a gospel that had something in it; and the people soon discover the real article when it is set before them. There is much that goes for gospel now, and if you could have a mile of it, you would not get an inch of consolation out of it, for there is nothing in it. But when your soul is heavy, and when your heart is sad, there is nothing like the old faith to put cheer and life into you. How often have I read *Elisha Coles on Divine Sovereignty* through and through when I have been ill! When the heart begins to sink, if one gets a grip of the sovereignty of God, and the way of his grace, whereby he saveth the unworthy, and

getteth unto himself glory by his faithfulness to his promises, what had been a fast becomes to the child of God a feast of fat things, and royal cheer of a goodly sort.

You will all go with me in the next point. Sometimes *the day of affliction* becomes as a fast which has been turned into a feast. It is a trying thing to lose one's health, and to be near to death; to lose one's wealth, and to wonder how the children will be fed; to have heavy tidings of disaster come to you day after day in doleful succession. But if you can grasp the promise, and know that "All things work together for good to them that love God;" if you can see a covenant God in all, then the fast turns into a feast, and you say, "God is going to favour me again. He is only pruning the vine to make it bring forth better grapes. He is going to deal with me again after his own wise, loving, and fatherly way of discipline." You then hear the Lord saying to you—

"Then trust me, and fear not: thy life is secure;
My wisdom is perfect, supreme is my power;
In love I correct thee, thy soul to refine,
To make thee at length in my likeness to shine."

I have met with some saints who have been happier in their sickness and in their poverty than ever they were in health and in wealth. I remember how one, who had been long afflicted, and had got well, but had lost some of the brightness of the Lord's presence, which he had enjoyed during his sickness, said, "Take me back to my bed again. Let me be ill again, for I was well when I was ill. I am afraid that I am getting ill now that I am well." It is often worth while being afflicted in order to experience the great lovingkindness of God, which he bestows so abundantly on us in the hour of trouble and perplexity. Yes, God turns our fasts into feasts, and we are glad in the midst of our sorrow; we can praise and bless his name for all that he does.

Once more: the solemn truth of *the coming of the Lord* is a feast to us, though at first it was a fast. With very great delight we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will shortly come. He is even now in the act of coming. The passage that we read, "Surely, I come quickly," would be better translated, "Surely, I am coming quickly." He is on the road, and will certainly appear, to the joy of his people, and for the emancipation of the world. There are certain writers who say they know when he is coming; do not you be plagued with them; they know no more about it than you do. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only;" said the Lord Jesus. Perhaps the Lord may come sooner than any of us expect; before this "diet of worship" shall break up, he may be here. On the other hand, he may not come for a thousand years, or twice ten thousand years. The times and the seasons are with him, and it is not for us to pry behind the curtain. Those of our number who are unsaved may well dread his coming, for he will come to destroy them that obey not the gospel. "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness, and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." That day will be terror, and not light to you. When he cometh, he shall judge the earth in righteousness, and woe unto his adversaries; for "He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken into shivers." You have grave need to keep the fast of the Second Advent, for to you it is *dies irae*, day of wrath and day of vengeance, day of dread and day of woe. But if you become a believer, and by grace are transformed, as I described in the earlier part of this discourse, then it shall be a feast to you. Then you will look out for his appearing as the day of your hope, and will gladly say, "Ay, let him come! Come Lord, nor let thy chariots wait! Come, Lord! Thy church entreats thee to tarry no longer! Come, thou absent love, thou dear unknown, thou fairest of ten thousand! Come to thy church, and make her glad!" To us the thought

of the glorious Advent of Christ is no fast; it is a blessed feast. Our songs never rise higher than when we get on this strain. With what fervor we lift up our voices, and sing—

"Brothers, this Lord Jesus
 Shall return again,
 With his Father's glory,
 With his angel train;
 For all wreaths of empire
 Meet upon his brow,
 And our hearts confess him
 King of glory now"!

Last of all, to come still more closely home, *the approach of death* is to most men a dreadful fast. Not the Mohammedan Ramadan can be more full of piteous grief than some men when they are obliged to think of death. If some of you were put into a room to-morrow and were compelled to stay there all day, and to think of death, it would certainly be a very gloomy time to you. You *will* die, however, perhaps suddenly, perhaps by slow degrees. There will come a time when people will walk very gently round your bed, when they will wipe the death-sweat from your brow, when they will bow over you to see whether you still breathe, or whether you have gone. Out of the six thousand persons here to-night, there are some, certainly, who will never see New Year's Day. Usually this is some one who does not see even another Sabbath-day. Almost every week we get an intimation that a hearer of the previous week has died before the next Lord's-day.

Who among us will first be gone? Dare you think of it? O beloved, when once you have peace with God, and you know that you are going to behold his face, whom though you have not seen, yet you love, then you can think of death without trembling. I think that there is nothing more delightful to the man who has the full assurance of faith, than to be familiar with the grace, and with the resurrection morning, and with the white robe, and with the harp of gold, and with the palm, and with the endless song. The thought of death is more a feast to us than a fast; for as Watts sings—

"Jesus can make a dying bed
 Feel soft as downy pillows are,
 While on his breast I lean my head,
 And breathe my life out sweetly there."

"Well, I shall soon be home," says one old saint; and she spoke of it as she used to speak, when a girl, of the holidays, and of her going away from school. "I shall soon behold the King in his beauty," says another; he speaks of it as he might have spoken, when a young man, of his marriage-day. Children of God can not only read *Young's Night Thoughts* without feeling any chill of solemnities there written out; but they can write in their diaries notes of expectation, at the thought of being with Christ, and almost notes of regret that they have not passed away to the glory, but are lingering here in the land of shadows. "What?" said one, who had been long lying senseless, when he came back again to consciousness, "And am I here still? I had half hoped to have been in my heavenly Father's home and palace above, long before this; and I am still here." Truly, beloved, the fast is turned into a feast, when we reach this experience. We will not hesitate to say, "Come, Lord, take us to thyself." Oh for a sight of the King in his beauty!

"Father, I long, I faint to see
 The place of thine abode;

I'd leave thy earthly courts, and flee
Up to thy seat, my God."

I knew right well a beloved brother in Christ with whom I was very familiar, who stood up one Sabbath morning, and announced just that verse. I thought of him when I repeated it, and I wondered whether it was quite as true to me as it was to him. He gave it out, and said—

"Father, I long, I faint to see
The place of thine abode;
I'd leave thy earthly courts, and flee
Up to thy seat, my God!"

Then he stopped, there was a silence; and at last, one of the congregation ventured upstairs into the pulpit, and found that the preacher was gone. His prayer was heard. He was gone to the place of God's abode. Oh, happy they who die thus! The Lord grant that we may never pray against a sudden death! We may almost pray for it when once our soul is right with God. I can join John Newton, and instead of dreading the change, say—

"Rather, my spirit would rejoice,
And long, and wish, to hear thy voice;
Glad when it bids me earth resign,
Secure of heaven, if thou art mine."

But is Christ yours? Has the fast been changed into a feast for you, by faith in the crucified Saviour? God help you to answer that question with a glad, hearty "Yes"! Then may he make all your life "joy and gladness", changing your fearful fasts into "cheerful feasts", until at length all of us, who believe in Christ, and who love his appearing, shall sit down at the marriage-supper of the Lamb! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Zechariah 7 and 8.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—181, 30.

Even Now

A Sermon

(No. 2249)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, March 27th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

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"Even now."—John 11:22

I HOPE that there are a great many persons here who are interested in the souls of those around them. We shall certainly never exercise faith concerning those for whose salvation we have no care. I trust, also, that we are diligent in looking after individuals, especially those who are amongst our own family and friends. This is what Martha did; her whole care was for her brother. It is often easier to have faith that Christ can save sinners in general, than to believe that he can come into our own home, and save some particular member of our household. But, oh, the joy when this comes to pass; when we are able to kneel beside some of our loved ones, and rejoice with them in being made alive by the power of the Holy Ghost! We cannot expect to have this privilege, however, unless like Martha we send our prayers to Jesus, and go to meet him, and tell him of our need. In the presence of Christ it seems very natural to trust him even at the worst extremity. It is when we are at our wits' end that he delights to help us. When our hopes seem to be buried, then it is that God can give a resurrection. When our Isaac is on the altar, then the heavens are opened, and the voice of the Eternal is heard. Art thou giving way to despair concerning thy dear friend? Art thou beginning to doubt thy Saviour, and to complain of his delay? Be sure that Jesus will come at the right time, though he must be the judge of which is the best time for him to appear.

Martha had a fine faith. If we all had such an honest belief in Christ as she had, many a man, who now lies dead in his sins, would, ere long, hear that voice which would call him forth from his tomb, and restore him unto his friends. Martha's faith had to do with a dreadful case. Her brother was dead, and had been buried, but her faith still lived; and in spite of all things which went against her, she believed in Christ, and looked to him for help in her extremity. Her faith went to the very edge of the gulf, and she said, "But I know, that *even now*, whatever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it to thee."

Still, Martha had not so much faith as she thought she had. But a few hours after she had confessed her confidence in the power of the Lord Jesus, or perhaps it was only a few minutes, she stood at the grave of her brother, and evidently doubted the wisdom of him she professed to trust. She objected to the stone being removed; and, strong in the admitted facts of the case, she urged her reason and said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh." Well, but, Martha, you said, not very long ago, "I know that even now Christ can interpose." Yes, she said it, and she believed it in the way in which most of us believe; but when her faith was sharply tried by a matter of fact, she did not appear to have had all the faith she professed. I suspect this also is true of most of us. We often fancy our confidence in Christ is much stronger than it really is. I think I have told you of my old friend, Will Richardson, who said, when he was seventy-five years of age, that it was a very curious

thing, that all the winter through, he had thought he should like to be a-harvesting, or out in the hay-field, because he felt so strong. He imagined that he could do so much as any of the youngsters. "But," he said, "do you know, Mr. Spurgeon, when the summer comes, I do not get through the haymaking; and when the autumn comes, I find I have not sufficient strength for reaping?" So it often is in spiritual things. When we are not called upon to bear the trouble, we feel wonderfully strong; but when the trial comes, very much of our boasted faith is gone in smoke. Take heed that ye examine well your faith; let it be true and real, for you will need it all.

However, Christ did not take Martha at her worst, but at her best. When our Lord says, "According to your faith be it unto you," he does not mean "According to your faith in its ebb," but "According to your faith in its flood." He reads the thermometer at its highest point, not at its lowest; not even taking the "mean temperature" of our trust. He gives us credit for our quickest pace; not counting our slowest, nor seeking to discover our average speed in this matter of faith. Christ did for Martha all she could have asked or believed; her brother did rise again, and he was restored to her, and to his friends. In thy case, too, O thou trembling, timorous believer, the Lord Jesus will take thee at thy best, and he will do for thee great things, seeing that thou desirest to believe greatly, and that thy prayer is, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!"

The point upon which Martha chiefly rested, when she expressed her faith, was the power of Christ in intercession with his Father. "I know," said she, "that, even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." Since the omnipotence of God could be claimed, she felt no anxiety as to the greatness of the request. "Whatsoever" was asked could easily be gained, if it was only asked by him who never was denied. Beloved in the Lord, our Christ is still alive, and he is still pleading. Beloved in the Lord, our Christ is still alive, and he is still pleading. Can you believe, even now, that whatever he shall ask of God, God will give it him, and give it you for his dear Son's sake? What an anchorage is the intercession of Christ! "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Here is a grand pillar to rest the weight of our souls upon: "He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Surely, we may have great faith in him who never wearies, and who never fails; who lives, indeed, for no other purpose than to plead for those who trust in his dying love, and in his living power. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Fall back upon the intercessory power of Christ in every time of need, and you will find comfort that will never fail you.

It is a grand thing to have faith for the present, not bemoaning the past, nor dreaming of some future faith which we hope may yet be ours. The present hour is the only time we really possess. The past is gone beyond recall. If it has been filled with faith in God, we can no more live on that faith now than we can live to-day on this bread we ate last week. If, on the contrary, the past has been marred by our unbelief, that is no reason why this moment should not witness a grand triumph of trust in the faithful Saviour. Let us not excuse our present lack of faith by the thought of some future blessing. No confidence which we may learn to put in Christ, in the days to come, can atone for our present unbelief. If we ever mean to trust him, why should we not do so now, since he is as worthy of our belief now as he will ever be, and since what we miss now we miss beyond recall.

"The present, the present, is all thou hast
 For thy sure possessing,
 Like the patriarch's angel, hold it fast,
 Till it gives its blessing."

In this verse, "I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it to thee," I want to fix your attention only on the two words, "Even now." We have just sung—

"Pass me not, O tender Saviour,
Let me love and cling to thee;
I am longing for thy favour;
When thou comest, call for me:
Even me."

Our hymn was "Even me." The sermon is to be "Even now." If you have been singing "Even me," and so applying the truth to your own case, say also, with an energy of heart that will take no denial, "Even now," and listen with earnest expectation to that gospel which is always in the present tense: "While it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation." Remember, too, that this is not only the preacher's word, for the Holy Ghost saith, "To-day": "Even now."

I shall use these words, first, in reference *to those who are concerned about the souls of others*, as Martha was about her dead brother. Believe that Christ can save even now. Then I shall speak *to you who are somewhat concerned about your own souls*. You believe, perhaps, that Christ can save. I want you to be persuaded that he can save you even now; that is to say, at this exact hour and minute, going by the clock, while you hear these words, even now, Christ can forgive; even now, Christ can save; even now, Christ can bless.

I. First, CAN WE BELIEVE THIS WITH REFERENCE TO OTHERS? If you are in the same position as Martha, I can bring out several points of likeness which should encourage you to persevere. You, mother, have prayer for your boy; you, father, have pleaded for your girl; you, dear wife, have been much in prayer for your husband; you beloved teacher, have frequently brought your class before God; and yet there is a bad case pressing upon your mind, and your heart is heavy about some dear one, whose condition seems hopeless. I want you to believe that now, even now, Christ can grant your prayer, and save that soul; that now, even now, he can give you such a blessing that the past delay shall be more than recompensed to you.

There is one, for instance, in whom we are deeply interested, and we can say that *the case has cost great sorrow*. So Martha could have said of Lazarus. "Blessed master", she might have said, "my brother took the fever"—(for I should think it was a fever that he had)—"and I watched him; I brought cold water from the well, and I laved his burning brow; I was by his bedside all night. I never took off my clothes. Nobody knows how my heart was wrung with anguish as I saw the hot beaded drops upon his brow, and tried to moisten his parched tongue and lips. I sorrowed as though I was about to die myself; but in spite of all that, I believe even now that thou canst help me; even now." Alas! There are many griefs in the world like this. A mother says, "Nobody knows what I have suffered through that son of mine. I shall die of a broken heart because of his conduct." "No one can tell," says the father, "what grief that daughter of mine has caused me. I have sometimes wished that she had never been born." There have been many, many such stories told into my ear, in which a beloved one has been the cause of anguish and agony untold to gracious, loving hearts. To those so sorely troubled I now speak. Can you believe that *even now* the living Intercessor is "mighty to save"? It may be that you are at this moment trembling on the verge of the blessing you so long have sought. God give you faith to grasp it "even now"!

With other persons we are met with a fresh difficulty. *The case has already disappointed us*. That is how some of you have found it, is it not? "Yes," you say, "I have prayed long for a dear

friend, and I believed, some time ago, that my prayer was heard, and that there was a change for the better; indeed, there was an apparent change; but it came to nothing." You are just like Martha. She kept saying to herself, "Christ will come. Brother is very ill, but Jesus will come before he dies; I know he will. It cannot be that he will stay away much longer; and when he comes, Lazarus will soon be well." Day after day, Mary and she sent their messenger to look toward the Jordan, to see if Jesus was not coming. But he did not come. It must have been a terrible disappointment to both these sisters; enough to stagger the strongest faith that had ever had in the sympathy of Christ. But Martha got the better of it, and she said, "Even now, though disappointed so bitterly, I believe that thou canst so whatsoever thou wilt." Learn from Martha, my discouraged brother. You thought that your friend was converted, but he wanted to go back again; you thought that there was a real work of grace upon his heart, but it turned out to be a mere disappointment, and disappeared, like the mist of the sun. But can you not believe over the head of your disappointment, and say, "I believe even now, even now"? Blessed shall your faith be, if it gets so far.

Perhaps further difficulties have met us. We have attempted to help someone, and *the case has proved our helplessness*. "Ah, yes," says one, "that exactly describes me. I never felt so helpless in my life. I have done all that I can do, and it amounts to nothing. I have been careful in my example. I have been prayerful in my words. I have been very patient and longsuffering. I have tried to induce my beloved one to go and listen to the gospel here and there. I have put holy books in his way, and all the while, I have seized opportunities to plead with him, often with tears in my eyes, and I can do nothing! I am dead beat." Yes, that is just where Martha got to; she had done everything and nothing seemed to be of the least use. None of the medicines she applied seemed to soothe the sufferer. She had gone down to the village, perhaps to the home of Simon the leper, who was a friend of hers, and he possibly advise some new remedies; but nothing seemed to make the least difference. Her brother grew worse and worse, until she saw that, though she had nursed him back to health the last time he had been ill, she was now utterly powerless. Then he died. Yet, even though things had gone as far as that, she had faith in Christ. In like manner, your case is beyond your skill; but you cannot believe that, even now, the end of nature will be the beginning of grace; can you not even now feel that you shall find that word true, "He shall not fail"? Christ never did fail yet, and he never will. When all the doctors give a patient up, the Great Physician can step in and heal. Can you believe concerning your friend "even now"?

But perhaps you are in a worse plight still. *The case has been given up*. I think I hear one kind, gracious soul, whose hope has been crushed, say, "Well, sir, that is just what we have come to about my boy. We held a little family meeting, and said we must get him to go away to Australia, if we can. If he will only go to America, or somewhere abroad, it will be a relief to have him out of our sight. He keeps coming home intoxicated, and gets brought before the magistrates. He is a disgrace to us. He is a shame to the name he bears. We have given him up." Martha had come to this. She had given her brother up, and had actually buried him; yet she believed in the power of Christ. Ah, there are many people that are buried alive! I do not know that such a thing ever happens in the cemetery; but I know it happens in our streets and homes. Many are buried morally, and given up by us before God gives them up. And, somehow, it is often the given-up people that God delights to bless. Can you believe that even now, *even now*, prayer can be heard, that even now the Holy Ghost can change the nature, and that even now Christ can save the soul? Believest thou this? I shall rejoice if thou canst, and thou too shalt rejoice ere long.

But there is still a lower depth. Here is one who is much concerned about an individual, and *the case is loathsome*. "Though we loved him once," he says, "his character has now become such that it is pestilential to the family. He leads others astray. We cannot think of what he has done without the very memory of his life spreading a taint over our conscience, and over our mind." There are persons alive in the world, who are just masses of living putridity. There may be such here. I should be glad if a word I said could reach them. It is a shocking thing that there are men and women, made in the image of God, with talents and ability, with capacity and conscience, who, nevertheless, seem to live for nothing else but to indulge their licentious passions, and to lead others into vices which else they had never known. There must come an awful day of reckoning to such when the Christ of God shall sit upon the throne, and shall weigh before all men the secret doings of libertines, of debauched men, and depraved women. If any of you have such a one related to you, can you believe that even now Christ can raise that one? Yours is just the same sort of case as Martha had. She could have said, "Brother is buried; worse than that, he stinketh." She did not like to say that of dear Lazarus, her own brother, but she could not help saying it. And there are some men of whom we are compelled to say, no matter how much our love seeks to shield them, that their character stinks. But can you still believe that, even now, there is hope that God can intervene, and that grace can save? Why, my dear friend, you and I know that it is so! I do believe it; we must all believe it. If it comes to a case very near and dear to you, and you begin to be a little bit staggered, recollect what you used to be yourselves—not openly so depraved, perhaps, but inwardly, quite the same, and take hope for these foul men and women from the remembrance of what you were: "and such were some of you; but ye are washed." When John Newton used to preach at St. Mary Woolnoth, he always believed in the possibility of the salvation of the worst of his hearers; for he had been himself one of the vilest of the vile. When he was very old, and they said, "Dear Mr. Newton, you are too old to preach; you had better not go into the pulpit now," he said, "What! Shall the old African blasphemer, who has been saved by grace, leave off preaching the gospel while there is a breath in his body? Never." I think while there is breath in the body of some of us, we must go on telling the gospel; for, if it saved us, it can save the worst of sinners. We are bound to believe that even now Christ can save even the most horrible and the most vile.

"His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me."

Perhaps there is even a more desperate difficulty still with reference to someone whom we would fain see living for God. *The case is beyond our reach*. "Yes," that brother quickly answers, "now you have come to my trouble. I do not even know where my boy is; he ran away, and we have not heard from him for years. How can I help him?" Why, believe that "even now" Christ can speak to him, and save him! He can send his grace where we can send our love. The great difficulty which lies like a stone at the door of the sepulchre will not prevent him speaking the life-giving word. He has all forces at his command, and when he says the word, the stone shall be rolled away, and the son, that is lost shall be found; the dead shall be made alive again. Though you cannot reach your son, or your daughter, Christ can meet with them. "the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither does his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." Though your prodigal boy or your wandering girl be at the end of the earth, Christ can reach them, and save them. "Have faith in God." "Even now" Christ can aid you.

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to God alone,

Laughs at impossibilities,
And says, 'It shall be done.'"

I know there are some Christian people who have drifted into the terribly wicked state of giving up their relatives as hopeless. There was a brother here, who is now in heaven, a good, earnest Christian man, whose son had treated him very shockingly indeed, and the father, justly indignant, felt it right to give his son up. He had often tried to help him, but the young man was so scandalous a scapegrace that I did not wonder that the old man turned him away. But one night, as I was preaching here, I spoke in something like the same way in which I have spoken now; and the next morning the old man's arm was about his child's neck. He could not help himself; he felt he must go and find his son out, and seek again to reclaim him. It seemed to have been the appointed time for that boy's salvation, for it pleased God that within a few months that son died, and he passed away with a good hope, through grace, that he had been brought to his Saviour's feet by his father's love. If any of you have a very bad son, go after him, seeking, until by the grace of God, you shall find him. And you that have grown hopeless about your relatives, you must try not to give them up. If other people cast them off, you must not, for they are allied to you by the ties of blood. Seek them out. You are the best person in the world to seek them, and the most likely to find them, if you can believe that even now, when the worst has come to the worst, "even now," almighty grace can step in, and save the lost soul.

Oh, that some here may have faith to claim at this moment the salvation of their friends! May desire be wrought into expectancy, and hope become certainty! Like Jacob at Jabbok, my we lay hold of God, saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." To such faith the Lord will give a quick response. He that will not be denied shall not be denied. My friend, Hudson Taylor, who has done such a wonderful work for China, is an instance of this. Brought up in a godly home, he, as a young man, tried to imitate the lives of his parents, and failing in his own strength to make himself better, he swung to the other extreme, and began to entertain skeptical notions. One day, when his mother was from home, a great yearning after her boy possessed her, and she went up to her room to plead with God that "even now" he would save him. If I remember aright, she said that she would not leave the room until she had the assurance that her boy would be brought to Christ. At length her faith triumphed, and she rose quite certain that all was well, and that "even now" her son was saved. What was he doing at that time? Having half an hour to spare, he wandered into his father's library, and aimlessly took down one book after another to find some short and interesting passage to divert his mind. He could not find what he wanted in any of the books, so, seeing a narrative tract, he took it up with the intention of reading the story, and putting it down where the sermon part of it began. As he read, he came to the words "the finished work of Christ", and almost at the very moment in which his mother, who was miles away, claimed his soul of God, light came into his heart. He saw that it was by the finished work of Christ that he was to be saved; and kneeling in his father's library, he sought and found the life of God. Some days afterwards, when his mother returned, he said to her, "I have some news to tell you." "Oh, I know what it is!" she answered, smiling, "You have given yourself to God." "Who told you?" he asked in astonishment. "God told me," she said, and together they praised him, who, at the same moment, gave faith to the mother, and the life to the son, and who has since made him such a blessing to the world. It was the mother's faith, claiming the blessing "even now", that did it. I tell you this remarkable incident that many others may be stirred up to the same immediate and importunate desire for the salvation of their children and relatives. There are some things we must always pray for with submission as to whether

it is the will of God to bestow them upon us: but for the salvation of men and women we may ask without fear. God delights to save and to bless; and when the faith is given to us to expect an immediate answer to such a prayer, thrice happy we are. Seek such faith even now, I beseech you, "even now."

II. But, in the second place, I want to speak very earnestly to any here who are concerned about their own souls. Jesus came to save you "even now." CAN WE BELIEVE THIS FOR OURSELVES? Can you expect the Lord, even while you hear these words, to speak to you the word of power, and bring you forth from your sleep of sin?

For some of you, *the time is late, very late; yet it is not too late*. You are getting into years, my friend. I want you to believe that even now Christ can save you. I often notice the number of old people who come to the Tabernacle. I am glad to see the aged saints; but amongst so many elderly people, no doubt, there are some unsaved sinners, whose grey hairs are not a crown of glory, but a fool's cap. But, however old you are, though you are sixty, seventy, eighty or even ninety years of age, yet "even now" Christ can give you life. Blessed be God for that! But it is not altogether the years that trouble you; it is your sins. As I have already said, if you have gone to the very extremity of sin, you may believe that, after all those years of wandering, the arms of free grace are still open to receive you "even now." There is an old proverb, "It is never too late to mend." It is ever too late for us to mend ourselves, but it is never too late for Christ to mend us. Christ can make us new, and it is never too late for him to do it. If you come to him, and trust him, he will receive you "even now."

By the longsuffering of God, *there is a time left to you*, in which you may turn to him. What a thousand mercies it is that "even now" is a time of mercy to you: it might have been the moment of your everlasting doom! You have been in accidents; you have been within an inch of the grave many times; you have been ill, seriously ill; you have been well-nigh given up for dead; and here you are yet alive, but still an enemy to God! Plucked by his hand from the fire and flood, and, mayhap, from battle; delivered from fever and cholera, and still ungrateful, still rebelling, still spending the life that grace has lent you in resisting the love of God! Long years ago you should have believed in Christ, but the text is "even now." Do not begin to say, "I believe that God could have saved me years ago;" there is no faith in that. Do not meet my earnest plea, by saying, "I believe that God can save me under such-and-such conditions." Believe that he can save you now, up in the top gallery there, just as you are. You came in here careless and thoughtless; yet, even now, he can save you. Away yonder, quite a man of the world, free and easy, destitute of all religious inclinations though you may be, he can save you even now. O God, strike many a man down, as thou did Saul of Tarsus, and change their hearts by thine own supreme love, as thou canst do it, even now, on the very spot where they sit or stand.

But though God waits to be gracious to you, though you have yet time to repent, remember, *it is but a time, therefore seize it*. Your opportunity will not last for ever. I believe that even now God can save; but if you reject Christ, there will come a time when salvation will be impossible. On earth, as long as a man desires to be saved, he may be saved: while there is life there is hope. I believe that, if a man's breath were going from his body, if he could then look to Christ, he would live. But—

"There are no acts of pardon passed
In the cold grave, to which we haste;
But darkness, death, and long despair,

Reign in eternal silence there."

Do not venture on that last leap without Christ; but even now, ere the clock strikes another time, fly to Jesus. Trust him "even now."

It is a time of hope. Even now, there is still every opportunity and every preparation for the sinner's salvation. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Shall I give you some reasons for believing that "even now" is a time of hope? There are many good arguments which may be brought forward, in order to banish the thought of despair.

First, *the gospel is still preached.* The old-fashioned gospel is not dead yet. There are a great many who would like to muzzle the mouths of God's ministers; but they never will. The old gospel will live when they are dead; and, because it is still preached to you, you may believe and live. What is the old gospel? It is that, seeing you are helpless to save yourself, or bring yourself back to God, Christ came to restore you; that he took those sins of yours, which were enough to sink you to hell, and bore them on the cross, that he might bring you to heaven. If you will but trust him, even now, he will deliver you from the curse of the law; for it is written, "He that believeth on him is not condemned." If you will trust him, even now, he will give you a life of blessedness, which will never end; for again it is written, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Because that gospel is preached, there is hope for you. When there is no hope, there will be no presentation of the gospel. God must, by an edict, suspend the preaching of the gospel ere he can suspend the fulfillment of the gospel promise to every soul that believeth. Since there is a gospel, take it; take it now, even now. God help you to do so!

In the second place, I know there is hope now, "even now"; *for the Christ still lives.* He rose from the dead, no more to die, and he is as strong as ever. "I am he that liveth and was dead." He saith, "an behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen." These words were spoken to the Apostle John, and when he saw him, he said that "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow;" but when the spouse saw him, she said, "His locks are busy, and black as a raven." Yet both saw truly. John's vision of the white hair was to show that Christ is the ancient of days; but the view of the spouse was to show his everlasting youth, his unceasing strength and power to save. If there is any difference in him, Christ is to-day more mighty to save than he was when Martha saw him. He had not then completed the work of salvation, but he has perfectly accomplished it now; and therefore there is hope for everyone who trusts in him. My Lord has gone up yonder where a prayer will find him, with the keys of death and hell jingling at his girdle, and with the omnipotence of God in his right hand. If you believe on him, by his "eternal power and Godhead" he will save you, and save you even now, on the spot, before you leave this house.

Moreover, I know that this is a time of hope, in the next place, because *the precious blood still has power.* All salvation is through the blood of the Lamb. Still—

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;"
and still, "even now,"—
"Sinners, plunged beneath the flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."

The endless efficacy of the atoning sacrifice is the reason why you may come and believe in Jesus, "even now." If that blood had diminished in its force, I should not dare to speak as I do; but I can, "even now," say with confidence,—

"Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood

Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more."

How many have already entered into glory by the blood of the Lamb! When a man comes to die, nothing else will do for him but this: our own works are a poor staff for us when we pass through the river. All those who are now in the land of light have but one confidence, and but one song: they stand upon the merit of Jesus Christ, and they praise the Lamb who was slain, by whose blood they have been cleansed and sanctified. There is no other way of salvation but that. "Even now: that blood has virtue to take away your sin. Christ is a sufficient Saviour, because his death has unexhausted power. Believe that he can save you "even now."

Again, I would remind you that "even now" is a time of hope to you because *the Spirit still can renew*. He is yet at work, regenerating and sanctifying. He came down at Pentecost to dwell with his people, and has never gone back again. He is still in the church. Sometimes we feel his mighty power more than at other times, but he is always at work. Oh, you that do not know anything about the power of the Holy Ghost, let me tell you that this is the most wonderful phenomenon that can ever be observed! Those of us, who have seen and known his mighty energy, can bear testimony to it. In my retirement, at Menton, during the last few weeks, if you had seen me, you would have found me sitting every morning, at half-past nine o'clock, at my little table, with my Bible, just reading a chapter, and offering prayer, my family prayer with the little group of forty to fifty friends, who gathered for that morning act of worship. There they met, and the Spirit of God was manifestly moving among them, converting, cheering, comforting. It was because of no effort of mine; it was simply the Word, attended by the Spirit of God, binding us together, and binding us all to Christ. And here, in this house, for seven-and-thirty years, have I in all simply preached this old-fashioned gospel. I have just kept to that one theme; content to know nothing else amongst men; and where are they that preached new gospels? They have been like the mist upon the mountain's brow. They came, and they have gone. And so it will always be with those who preach anything but the Word of God; for nothing will abide but the mount itself, the everlasting truth of the gospel to which the Holy Ghost bears witness. That same Holy Ghost is able to give you a new heart "even now", to make you a new creature in Christ Jesus at this moment. Believest thou this?

Once more. I know that "even now" Christ can save you, and I pray you to believe it, for *the Father is still waiting to receive returning prodigals*. Still, as of old, the door is open, and the best robe hangs in the hall, ready to be put upon the shoulders of the son who comes back from the far country, even though he returns reeking with the odour of the swine-trough. How longingly the Father looks along the road, to see whether at length some of you are turning homeward! Ah! did you but know the joy that awaits those who come, and the feast which would load the welcoming table, you would "even now" say, "I will arise and go to my Father." You should have returned long ago; but blessed be his love, which "even now" waits to clasp you to his heart!

Last of all, *faith is but the work of a moment*. Believe and live. Thou hast nothing to do; thou needest no preparations: come as thou art, without a single plea, but that he bids thee to come. Come now, "even now." If Christ were far away, the time that is left to some of you might be too short to reach him; if there were many things which first of all you had to do, your life might close before they were half done; if faith had to grow strong before it received salvation, you might be in the place of eternal despair before your faith had time to be more than a mere mustard seed. But Christ is not far away; he is in our midst, he is by your side. You have nothing to do before you

trust him, he has done it all; and, however weak your faith, if it but comes in contact with Christ, it will convey you to instant blessing. "Even now" you may be saved for ever; for—

"The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at one he receives,
Redemption in full, through his blood."

Surely all these are sufficient reasons why "even now" is a time of hope to you; may it also be a time of blessing! It shall be so if thou wilt but at this instant cast thyself on Christ. He says to thee that, if thou wilt but believe, thou shalt see the glory of God. Martha saw that glory. Thou shalt see it too if thou hast like precious faith.

I long that God would give me some souls to-night, on this first occasion when I have met an evening congregation since my return from the sunny South. I desire earnestly that he would set the bells of heaven ringing because sinners have returned, and heirs of glory have been born into the family of grace. I stirred you up to pray this morning. Pray mightily that this word to-night, simple but pointed, may be blessed to many.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 11.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—95 (Part II.), 607, 612.

Words to Rest On

A Sermon

(No. 2250)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, April 3rd, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, September 18th, 1890.

"And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah."—2 Chron. 32:8.

It is very beautiful reading the story of Hezekiah, to see how the people always went with him. God had prepared the nation for a change, and when the hour came the man came with it. Under his father Ahaz, the people had been idolaters, and had forsaken God; but, when Hezekiah became king, he had a zeal for the worship of Jehovah, and on the very threshold of his reign, he began what proved to be a glorious reformation in the land. He seems to have been a man who was attractive to the people, and they took up his line of things at once with enthusiasm. Whether he proposed to break down the idols, to cleanse the temple, or to bring tithes into the house of God, they made no objection; but, on the contrary, they followed his word with much vigor and earnestness. It is a grand thing when God sends a man who can guide others aright; especially when, in times of apostasy and spiritual declension, a leader is given who becomes a guide back to the old paths. We should feel exceedingly grateful whenever, in any place, God raises up a judge to deliver Israel, and when the people serve God all the days of that judge.

When our text comes in, the people of Judah were in great straits. The Assyrians, who were both cruel and barbarous in their treatment of others, had invaded the land, and had captured all the country, with the exception of Jerusalem. The city of the Great King was yet untrodden by the armies of the alien; but it looked as if it could not hold out very long, and Hezekiah encouraged his men of war by exciting their faith in their God. "Be strong and courageous," he said to them; "be not afraid or dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him." With a ring of triumph in his tone, he told them that with Sennacherib was only an army of flesh; and though it was a powerful one, yet with them was the omnipotence of God, and therefore there was more with them than with the Assyrians. The past glory of his reign, and the evident depth of his own faith, added weight to his words, and the people believed his testimony. In such a time of great difficulty, when people are apt to mutiny, to find fault with their leaders, and to break up into cliques and parties, they still held to their king, and comforted themselves with the assurance he had given them of help in God. They were not distressed because of invasion, nor did they despair of their cause. They were, of course, conscious of their great danger; but they had found peace, even in their extremity, by quoting to themselves, and to one another, the emboldened language of their king. "The people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah the king of Judah."

It is not always a good thing to rest upon man's words. It may often be a very evil thing; and because some error has been introduced by "such a dear, good man", it has had the deadlier hold upon masses of men. There have been thousands who have found their way to hell resting upon the words of some priest or pretended teacher who taught other than the truth. An yet, with this

grain of caution, we cannot but commend these people, who, when they had a God-sent leader, had both the common-sense and the uncommon confidence to banish their fears at his bidding, seeing that his trust was in the name of the Lord. The people were not perfect, nor was their king; but we commend them, in that they did wisely when they "rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah the king of Judah."

I. Our first consideration shall be, **THE KIND OF MAN WHOSE WORDS ARE LIKELY TO BE RESTED ON.** There are some in whose words you never have much confidence, because they are flippant in their utterance. They do not appear to be sincere, and those who hear them, make nothing of what they say, for they are evidently making nothing of it themselves. You cannot rest in the words of a man who contradicts himself, nor rely much upon one who is of one opinion to-day, who will be of another opinion to-morrow, and who before the third day is over, will be seized with some new notion. There are men whom we all know in whose word nobody is tempted to put any kind of trust whatever. But, thanks be to God, there are in the Christian church still some in whose words men do trust, men who are as transparent as the clearest crystal, and as reliable as the best steel. These are the kind of men I want to describe; and this man who won the confidence of the people of Jerusalem shall serve us as a type thereof, and enable us to discover the kind of man whose words are likely to be rested on.

To begin with, he must be *a great man*. So it was in the case of "Hezekiah king of Judah." If the people cannot trust their king in matters of war, in whom can they trust? But if they see him to be a good sovereign, walking in the fear of God, and doing his utmost for them, how shall they do otherwise than trust their king? Yet in this matter we must take care, for they who trust in the great may find themselves greatly deceived. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." That man is not truly great who leads us away from the greatest of all, even the Lord who ruleth over all. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." There is a kind of greatness that is only a cover for littleness. Sometimes a great title has great selfishness, even great sensuality, lying just underneath it. But Hezekiah was not a little great man; he was truly a king. He was born a monarch; a kingly man. He was a man of royal mind and noble deed; hence the people did not ill, when, having respect to his greatness, they "rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah the king of Judah."

Moreover, the man who will be trusted will be found to be *a good man*. If he be not really so, he will, at least, be thought to be so. Men will put great trust in the words of one whose life agrees with his teaching. If they can detect something inconsistent in his character, the man's power is ended; but if a man is evidently carried away with the one idea of being and doing good, and consumed with the purpose of glorifying God, then his utterances have power. I know a man who is not an orator; he speaks but very plainly; and yet, if I had my choice I would sooner hear him than almost any man I ever heard, because, when he speaks, I remember the wondrous life of faith in God, which accompanies his words. I will not say who he is, but almost everybody will guess. It is not what he says, but the man who says it, that makes the impression. It is the life behind the words, the holy confidence in God every day exhibited, the calm restful walk with God which everybody can see in his very face, which, to a thoughtful man, makes his feeblest accent more powerful than the most furious declamation of a mere rhetorician. As Dr. Bonar says,—

"Thou must be true thyself,
If thou the truth wouldst teach.
Thy soul must overflow, if thou

Another's soul wouldst reach:
 It needs the overflow of heart
 To give the lips full speech."

The man in whose words we are likely to find rest must be a good man. Hezekiah, from all we read of him, was evidently such a man. When greatness and goodness are blended, as in his case, there is sure to be a wide influence exerted. When there is eminence of ability as well as eminence of character found in a man, it often follows that what is described in this verse is true, the people rest themselves upon his words, even as they did upon Hezekiah's.

Again, a man whose words are to be rested upon, must be a *courageous man*. Hezekiah had this qualification. He had waited upon God in prayer, and knew God would deliver him, so that bidden farewell to fear; he was calm, and therefore bold. When he spoke to the captains of the soldiers, there was no trepidation in his voice or in his manner. He spoke like one who was—

"Calm 'amid the bewildering cry,
 Confident of victory."

Courage in one man breeds courage in another, and once coward has the contagion of cowardice about him; many will turn tail when one runs. But, if a man stands like a rock, unmoved, he will soon have a body of others behind him who will have borrowed courage from his example. Paul in the storm is an example of this. I suppose he has a little insignificant-looking Jew, yet when the sailors and the soldiers were alarmed at the tempest, he calmly and quietly told them not to be afraid, and they borrowed courage from his faith. He told them that no harm would come to them; that though the ship would be lost, their lives have been given to him in answer to his prayer; and since they had fasted long, he bade them to eat, and they did eat. All his orders were carried out as fully as if he had been the centurion in command of the soldiers, or the captain in charge of the ship. Because he was bold he made them brave; he commanded them, because he could command himself. Oh, my brothers and sisters, may you have the courage of your convictions! May you be brave enough to do right, and to speak right, and to stand up for the gospel, whoever rails at it! If you do, you have only to bide your time; and you will be master over meaner men who cannot be trusted. He that will but "hold the fort" when others are giving up their castles, shall by-and-by, God helping him, behold a race of valiant men, who, like himself, shall believe in their Master's coming, and will not quit the field until he appears. God grant to many here to be bold in the way of holiness, in their own circle, in their own families! They must be assured that there will be found some who will rest upon their words, because they see their courage.

Further, a man who is to have his words much rested in, must also be a *hearty man*; indeed, he must be an enthusiast. Of such a spirit was Hezekiah, for we read in the last verse of the previous chapter, "and in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart." This is the kind of man whom people will follow. Let them but see that the whole of the man leads them, and not only a bit of him, and they will quickly learn to rely on his word. Put all your heart into what you do, or else put none of it. There are some people who seem as if they have no heart, or at least their heart is only a kind of valve for the expulsion of blood, and not over vigorous in that direction, I fear. Any other kind of heart you cannot discover. Nobody will follow mere head. There must be a heart displayed by the man who would have a hearty following. If you want to lead others aright, lead them by showing that you yourself love the way. Be intense; be emphatic; throw your whole being into it. Be hearty when you are working, when you are praying, when you are singing. In all that

you do for God, and for your fellow-Christians, let your heart be manifest; and then it is highly probable that it may happen to you, as it did to Hezekiah, that many will rest upon your words.

In the case of such a man, God will add his sanction by granting success: he will be *a prosperous man*. I did not finish the last verse of the previous chapter just now. It reads: "He did it with all his heart, *and prospered*." He prospered because he did everything with all his heart. God set his seal to that which he did so heartily. A man may be devout and holy, and yet not be outwardly prospered. Such a man may do useful work for the Lord; but the man whom God chooses for a leader, he will also qualify and bless. He will put his mark upon him; and when people see that man is enabled by God to go from strength to strength, that his enterprises do not end in disaster, but that by the grace of God he leads his followers on from victory to victory, they are sure to rest themselves upon his word.

Let me add, that he who could help others must be *a man who has respect for God's Word*. We may safely rest ourselves upon a man's words when, like Hezekiah, his words are full of God, and when, evidently, he has nothing to say but what God has first said to him. Such a man becomes the medium by which God speaks to your soul. "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles." Even had this been spoken by another, it was a divine truth, and any man might have rested upon it. If any of us must needs be very original, if we must think out our own theology, and go on speculating from day to day, our people will be very foolish if they ever rest themselves upon our fickle, vapid words. But if the minister of Christ is as God's mouth, if he be dependent upon the Spirit of God for teaching; then God will speak through him, and the people will hear. If his one aim be, not to be original, but to repeat God's thought as far as he knows them, and to speak the truth revealed as far as he can get a grip of it, such a man will often come to know that the people are resting themselves upon his words; for his words will be not so much his, but God's words through him. May our prayer then be—

"Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
 In living echoes of thy tone;
 As thou hast sought, so let me seek
 Thy erring children, lost and lone."

Here a word of caution is necessary. Since men are permitted to say words upon which other people rest, let us be careful how we speak. There may be some here, who have attained, by years of holy living and deep experience, to a position of great influence—one of you in a Bible-class, another in a village station, several of you, perhaps, in your pulpits. Brothers and sisters, what a very responsible position we occupy when young people and others are resting upon your words! I will not say whether they are altogether right or wrong in doing so; but I know this is their habit; therefore, what manner of people ought we to be, how choicely we should use language, how determines we ought to be to let all our teachings be Scriptural, and not to mingle the precious with the vile; remembering the promise, "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth."! Do not let us even sportively say what may injure others. I have known children take in earnest what others have said in jest. It were often better that some things were not said even in sport; for such flippant utterances have either misled the children, or they have injured the influence of those who have uttered them when they have spoken another time. Since it so happens that many of those around us are of feeble mind, and need a strong mind to guide them, let those who lead be doubly careful of their conversation and conduct. Since those who know their own weakness lean perhaps too much upon their teachers, let their teachers cry to God that they may be helped to teach

nothing but what is right. May you and I never lead another even one inch astray! May none of us ever be in communion with that which is not true! May we stand right out from all connection with that which we feel to be contrary to the mind of God! Let us try to live in such a way that, if another were to take us for an example, he might copy us through and through and do himself no harm. I set before you a very high standard, and one which no man will reach except under divine instruction; but since the necessary teaching is freely given to all who seek it, I would urge you to be quick scholars in the school of grace. I fear very few of us have ever reached this excellent standard, but that is no reason why we should not study our lesson with redoubled energy. Remember that Hezekiah must speak aright when the people of Jerusalem rest themselves upon his words. O Hezekiah, be not silent when thou oughtest to speak; speak not when thou oughtest to be silent; and never speak except when the Lord shall open thy lips, that thy mouth may show forth his praise! Since thou hast this responsibility that the people rest upon thy words, be sure to give them words solid enough, and reliable enough to rest upon. As thou hast "wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord", speak also true and right and good words to the people: and then it shall be well both with them and with thee.

II. In the second place, let us turn the other way, and look at THE KIND OF PEOPLE WHO REST ON SUCH A MAN'S WORDS. I am not going to praise all these people, nor am I going to blame them. I wish to use discrimination, and judge each case upon its merits. Sometimes it is the best possible thing for a man to rest himself on the words of another; but often such a course is a very foolish one.

Children do so with their parents, and if they have gracious and godly parents. They do well to rest themselves on their father's or on their mother's word. When I was a boy, I never doubted what my father believed. And when I was under the influence of my grandfather who taught the Word of God, I was such a little simpleton, that I never set up my judgment against his. I find that very small boys are not now so foolish; I wish they were wise enough to be as foolish as I was! When I grew up, I never suspected a doctrine because my father believed it. No, my leaning went the other way; and if my godly father found peace and comfort in a word, I thought that what was good for him was good for his son. I was foolish enough to lean upon the words of my elders in this way, and somehow, though others often think that such a course is folly, I am glad that it was so. I thank God, too, that my sons were as foolish as their father; and that what their father believed had an attraction for them. I hope that they judged for themselves, as I also tried to do, when I came to riper years; but, at the first, it was the words of my parents that led me to Christ. What I knew of the elements of the gospel I received largely, without a question, from them, and I do not think it was an ill bequest. Now, dear parents, mind that your children are able to believe in you. I like children to have fathers and mothers whom they can trust. A young friend has written me a letter, asking me to preach a sermon on, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger." Well, will you kindly consider that I have preached it? I fear I could not make a long sermon of it; but it is necessary to tell some of you parents that I suspect you are not quite so considerate as you ought to be. I do not know the man for whom the word is intended, but I wish he would take the sermon as if I had preached it to him. Now, fathers and mothers, your children do rest themselves upon your words, if you are fathers and mothers worth having. Be careful, then, of what you say. I like that boy who said, "I know that it is true, for mother said it. Whatever mother says is true, and it is true if it is not true, of mother said it." It is a blessed thing when boys and girls can feel such confidence in their parents that they are sure that their word is beyond all question. It is so much easier for them

to have faith in God in the days to come, if first they have been able to have faith in their father and mother. Faith of any kind is so tender a plant, that it should be carefully nourished wherever it is found; and as children often, and rightly too, rest themselves upon the words of their parents, it behoves the parents to give them words whereon they may rest safely.

Illiterate people, who cannot read, belong to another class, who must needs rest themselves upon the words of others. They are but grown-up children, if they are persons of no education, though I am glad to think the number of those who cannot even read their Bible for themselves is constantly decreasing. Still, there are many persons who are so taken up with daily toil that they have no opportunity of searching for themselves. Although God has given many of them gracious judgments, so that they seem to know truth from error by a kind of inward instinct, yet, for the most part, much of the teaching that they receive must come to them as the utterance of some man in whose life they believe, and whom they believe to be under a divine influence which makes him speak continually with an endeavour for their good. Whether this is right or not, it is so; and every man who is placed in a position where many such hang upon his words, must therefore learn to speak only as God speaks to him, lest he himself should sin, and lest the hundreds who accept what he says as being true, would also be led astray.

This is also the case with regard to *unconverted persons who have no spiritual discernment*, and who can have none, in their first hearing of the gospel. Very largely, men believe in Christ not only through the Scriptures, but through the testimony of those who already know the Lord. This was implied by our Saviour's words, in that wondrous intercession with his Father. Christ said concerning his disciples, "Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." It is part of the economy of grace that the testimony of the saints shall be used of the Spirit to lead people to Christ. We bear witness to forgiveness which we have received; we bear witness to a change of heart which we have experienced; we bear witness to the power of prayer; and like the men of Sychar, the people who hear us, first believe our word, and that leads them to Christ. After they have met with him, they may say, with much truth, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Still, it will always be true that, at the beginning, it was because of our saying that they believed. It is a large part of our ministry to bear witness to the truth recorded in the Book of God; and oftentimes the witness himself is believed, and then what he says is believed because of the faith the hearer has in him. Although some are unworthy of such credence, yet so it does happen. Christian men, you are like the Bibles of the people. They do not read the Book, but they read you; and if they see Christ in you truly represented, they will, perchance. Come to the knowledge of him. But, if you caricature him, dreadful evil will come of it. I beseech you, be very careful. If the preacher, when he is addressing a mass of people who never read the Word of God, contorts and distorts the truth, what wonder is it if the people miss the salvation of Christ altogether, seeing that they rest upon his word? If he only gives half of the truth, or only one side of it; if he paints one doctrine out of proportion to another; if he misses the love and tenderness of Christ; and even if he omits the justice and stern truthfulness of God, he may so misrepresent God and Christ, and so misinterpret the whole system of grace to the people, that when they rest upon his words they will be resting upon a broken reed, and fall to their eternal destruction.

Persons who naturally run in a groove form another class who rest upon the words of men. There are some people of considerable capacity who, nevertheless, partly from a want of elasticity of mind, and partly from excess of common-sense, are very apt to keep to beaten tracks. They are

not altogether to be censured, for some of them are the salt of the earth; but they are a trifle monotonous in their method of life. Still, with some this is very natural. They are like the tramcars that only get off line by accident. Well, I think that, if I were a tramcar, I should like to run on the trams after I got used to it. If they lead in the right direction, we might do much worse than travel by tram. There are, however, a number of people who always will live like that. Having attended at such a place of worship, and having been brought up in the midst of a certain set of godly people, they scarcely deviate one jot from the teaching that they have received. Almost by necessity of their nature they rest on what they hear.

There is one class more I should like to mention, not because I am fond of them, but for the opposite reason; I mean *those who profess always to do their own thinking*, who will not have any creed, and who say that they will not follow anybody. If you will trace them home, they are, in nine cases out of ten, the veriest slaves that ever lived. They are the bond-servants of some heretic or other, who has put it into their heads that, in following him, they become free men. Why, there are thousands of people that laugh at us for believing in the old doctrine of the fall of man, who, nevertheless, rest themselves implicitly upon the words of some infidel philosopher, or else they follow some favourite heretic in broadcloth upon whom they rest their confidence through thick and thin. They speak much of their deep thought, but they never think; they make up for want of brains by talking the jargon supposed to be spoken by highly intellectual people, though, in most cases, it requires a very vivid imagination to make the supposition. These, who thus take for granted the heterodox words of their favorite leaders, though they do not acknowledge them, incur great guilt, and their leaders are doing grievous mischief in uttering the words upon which their followers stay themselves.

Before I leave this point, I would urge you earnestly to be careful both as to the man you hear, and the words of his on which you rest. I beseech any of you who are attendants here, who are resting yourselves upon my words, to cease that habit. If I tell you anything that is not consistent with God's Word, away with my word, and away with me, too. If you hear from em anything which Christ would not have taught, I shall grieve to the last degree if you believe it. But if you fling it away, and ascribe it to the infirmity and fallibility of the preacher, it will be better for you. Or if there are some of you here who are resting yourselves upon any other man's words, I exhort you to know thoroughly the man and his communications, and do not, even when you know him, take his words without an appeal "to the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Bring all men's words to the test of God's words/ "Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they are of God." Blindly follow no man. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you" from this blessed Book, "let them be accursed." When a man has a message from God, listen to him earnestly, with an open mind ready to be taught; but never think of making him the master of your spirit. "The people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah the king;" and they did well in doing so; for he was a man worthy of their trust. But had he been under another kind of king, or a man of a different character and temperament, they might have ruined themselves by relying upon the words which he spoke to them. Again, therefore, I utter the caution, be careful both as to the man you hear, and the words of his on which you rest.

III. And now I close with my third head, by asking you to consider **THE KIND OF WORDS THAT YOU MAY REST ON**. We come to speak now, not of the kind of men who speak restful

words, nor of the kind of men who find rest in such words when they are spoken; but of the kind of words in which you and I may rest.

You may safely rest in *words which urge you to faith in God*. Are you exhorted to-night to lay your burden of sin down at Jesus' feet? Obey such a word as that without questioning. You may well rest on words which bid you to believe in Christ, and you may, without fear, believe in him who has all grace and wisdom and power to save and to bless you. Through the hearing of such words, may you soon be able to say—

"I rest my soul on Jesus,
This weary soul of mine;
His right hand me embraces,
I on his breast recline.
I love the name of Jesus,
Immanuel, Christ, the Lord;
Like fragrance on the breezes,
His name abroad is poured."

Are you, who are believers, encouraged to roll your care on your great Father, according to that word, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you"? You will do no wrong in obeying to the full every admonition to believe your God, and to believe his Christ. If our preaching tends to create faith, and foster it, it goes the right way; but, whatever clever things may be said, if the tendency is to undermine faith, and if the words you hear increase that tendency, they are mischievous, eternally mischievous, to the souls of men.

You may always rest, in the next place, on *words which are the words of God himself*. If God has said it, it is sure. If those men could rest themselves upon the words of Hezekiah the king, how is it that some of you, who are God's people, cannot rest yourselves upon the words of God our King? You believe his promises, you say, but still you are very restless. You have some of that terrible fever of unbelief on you. Beloved, try to practise the art of resting yourself upon the Word of God. God has promised me such and such a thing. I believe it, therefore I have got it. "No," you say, "the word is not fulfilled yet." Ah, but I have got it notwithstanding! If a friend gives me a cheque for five pounds, though I have never seen his money, I have the five pounds. I do not want to see his money, for I have his five-pound cheque in my pocket; I have his guarantee for the amount; and though I have not received the coin, I believe that I have the five pounds, and so I have. And if thou believest that thou hast the blessing for which thou hast asked, go thy way, and rejoice that thou hast it, for it is thine in the promise, and God's promise is as valuable as God's fulfillment. Rest yourselves, then beloved, in the words of God. Are you afraid of being too peaceful? Are you afraid of being too happy? Are you afraid of living too blessed a life? Are any of you afraid of having too much heaven here below? Well, do not give way to such idle fears. The more thou can rest, the more will God be pleased with thee. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people:" saith your God; "speak ye comfortably to comfortably to Jerusalem;" and if he bids us comfort you, you may be sure that he wants you to be comforted. Be comforted, therefore. Rest yourselves in his word. I have had to praise with 'bated breath those who rested on Hezekiah's word; I have thrown in little bits of necessary caution and interjection of doubt; but, if you desire to rest on God's Word, I need not caution you against trusting the Lord too much. Though you believe God up to the hilt, though you believe God desperately, though you believe God to the utmost, though you believe him infinitely, he will never fail you. Your confidence in him can never exceed that which he deserves.

He will warrant it all. "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed;" and again it is written, "Ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." You can never be wrong in resting upon the words of God himself. Even in your greatest weakness you may look to him, and say—

"I am trusting thee for power,
Thine can never fail,
Words which thou thyself shalt give me
Must prevail."

You may always believe, also, *in words which are sealed by the Lord Jesus*. If the mark of his blood is upon any word, thou needest never doubt it. If he has died, how canst thou perish? If he has bidden thee come, how can he cast thee out? If thou dost rest upon his finished work, how canst thou be condemned? Believe, I pray thee, and rest thee on the blood-sprinkled words of this wondrous Book.

"The clouds may go and come,
And storms may sweep the sky;
The blood-sealed friendship changes not,
Thy cross is ever nigh.
"I change; he changes not,
The Christ can never die;
His word, not mine, the resting-place,
His truth, not mine, the tie."

Believe also, most firmly, and rest yourself most fully on *words which have been blessed to other men*. If other have been saved by a word, that word will suit thee. If God's promise proved true to my father, it will be true to me. There is no private interpretation of God's "great and precious promises." They are not hedged about with a ring-fence. They are as much mine as they were Abraham's or Jacob's—as much mine as they were Peter's or Paul's; and I will have them, too, by faith, and have what those promises include. Beloved, rest yourselves upon the words of God, upon which others have rested, and you shall find them to be as true in your experiences as in the experience of those who have gone before.

Last of all, you may surely rest upon *words which breathe a sense of rest into the soul*. I love all the words of God; but there are some that have an aroma of rest around them. Were you ever in such trouble that, when you read the chapter beginning with those sweet words, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me," you read it in vain? I think I never did. With the tears in my heart as well as in my eyes, I have read that blessed verse, again and again, and I have been comforted. That eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is a wonderful light when you are in the dark; when I read those glorious doctrines, I find golden stepping stones through the Slough of Despond. And, as for the Psalms, why the man who wrote most of them seemed to be "not one, but all mankind's epitome." He has lived out all our lives, yours, and mine, and millions besides; his psalms breathe peace around us; and, as we accept the truths they reveal, we are enabled to rest upon them.

To all of us the time will come when we shall want rest. Dear young people, however long you may live, unless the Lord descend from heaven in glory, the time will come when you will die. You will want a pillow then; and, oh, may it be said of all of us then, "The people rested themselves upon the words of Jesus"! These promises are the best pillows for dying heads. There is no one who will suit you now, and suit you then. "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Go, brother, anywhere on earth, and even up to heaven with that in thy hand: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Or will this other word suit you better, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness"? But I need not go on giving these words to you; you know them well. If you are not familiar with them, I should advise you to get a little book called *Clarke's Precious Promises*, where you will find them all arranged. General Gordon, who was killed at Khartoum, used to carry a copy in his pocket wherever he went, and he and many others have found it to be a great help to them. Get hold of the promises of God, and when you feel downcast, when the wind is in the east, when the liver does not work, or when you have a real heart-ache, when the dear child is dead, when the beloved wife is sick, or when there is trouble in the house from any cause, then get you the words of the Lord; and may it always be said of you: "The people rested themselves on the words of King Jesus, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords"!

Oh, that the Holy Spirit might lead some poor soul to rest on these precious words of God even now for the first time; and unto the Lord shall be praise for ever and ever! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Chronicles 32.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—23 (Vers. II.), 759, 614.

Our Compassionate High Priest

A Sermon

(No. 2251)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, April 10th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, April 3rd, 1890.

"Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity."—Hebrews 5:2

The high priest looked Godward, and therefore he had need to be holy; for he had to deal with things pertaining to God. But at the same time he looked manward; it was for men that he was ordained, that, through him, they might deal with God; and therefore he had need to be tender. It was necessary that he should be one who could have sympathy with men; else, even if he could succeed Godward, he would fail to be a link between God and man, from want of tenderness and sympathy with those whom he sought to bring nigh to Jehovah.

Hence, the high priest was taken from among men that he might be their fellow, and have a fellow-feeling with them. No angel entered into the holy place; no angel wore the white garments; no angel put on the ephod and the breastplate with the precious stones. It was a man ordained of God, who for his brothers pleaded in the presence of the Sκεkinah. Many of us, I trust, have a desire within our hearts to come to God; but we need a High Priest. Inasmuch as it is his right, he counts it not robbery to be equal with God; but he communes with the Father as one that was by him, as one brought up with him, who was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. But we ought also to be very grateful that we can come into touch with our High Priest on his human side, and rejoice that he is truly man. For thus saith the Lord, "I have laid help upon One that is mighty: I have exalted One chosen out of the people;" he is anointed, it is true, with the oil of gladness above his fellows, but still he and they are one, "for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren."

Those who came to the high priest of old, were not often of the rough sort. Those who wished to have fellowship with God through the high priest in the tabernacle, or in the temple, were generally the timid ones of the people. Remember how she who came when Eli was high priest was "a woman of sorrowful spirit"; and the high priest had to deal with many such. The sons and daughters of affliction were those who mostly sought the divine oracle, and desired to have communion with God; hence the high priest needed not only to be a man, but a man of tender and gentle spirit. It was necessary that he should be one with whom those with broken hearts, and those who were groaning under a sense of sin, would like to speak. They would dread an austere man, and would, probably, in many cases, have kept away from him altogether. Now, the mercy for us is, that our great High Priest is willing to receive the sinful and the suffering, the tried and the tempted; he delights in those that are as bruised reeds and smoking flax; for thus he is able to display the sacred qualifications. He "can have compassion." It is his nature to sympathize with the aching heart; but he cannot be compassionate to those who have no suffering, and no need. The heart of compassion

seeks misery, looks for sorrow, and is drawn towards despondency; for there it can exercise its gracious mission to the full.

Often, when we are trying to do good to others, we get more good ourselves. When I was here one day this week, seeing friends who came to join the church there came among the rest a very diffident tender-hearted woman, who said many sweet things to me about her Lord, though she did not think that they were any good, I know. She was afraid that I should not have patience with her and her poor talk; but she said one thing which I specially remember: "I have to-day put four things together, from which I had derived a great deal of comfort," she told me. "And what are they, my sister?" I asked. "Well," she said, "they are those four classes—the unthankful and the evil, the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way,' Jesus 'is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil', and he 'can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way,' and I think that I can get in through those four descriptions. Though I am great sinner, I believe that he will be kind to me, and have compassion upon me." I stored that up; for I thought that one of these days I might want it myself; I tell it to you, for if you do not want it now, you may need it one of these days; you may yet have to think that you have been unthankful and evil, ignorant and out of the way, and it will give you comfort to remember that our Lord Jesus is kind to the unthankful and to the evil, and that he "can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way."

On this latter subject, I would speak at this time, wishing to comfort some who are of a sorrowful spirit, and others who may yet have need of such consolation as this topic gives.

Notice in our text, first, *the sort of sinners with whom our High Priest is concerned*, namely, "the ignorant and them that are out of the way"; secondly, *the sort of High Priest with whom sinners have to deal*—One "who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way"; and thirdly, *the sort of infirmities in men that may be sanctified to great uses*. "For that he himself also is compassed with infirmity," is said of an earthly high priest; this it was that made him fit to be a high priest; and there are certain infirmities that we might almost glory in, for they enable us to be like priests unto God, and make us helpful to his sorrowing and suffering children.

I. First, then, let us carefully observe THE SORT OF SINNERS FOR WHOM OUR HIGH PRIEST IS CONCERNED. While it is true that he is willing to receive all sorts of sinners, there are many who never come to him, nor submit to his authority. With those who proudly and rashly stand before God on their own merit, he has nothing to do; but with others of a different character he is greatly concerned.

The people who claim Christ's aim are generally *those who have a very low opinion of themselves*. Out of all the tribes of Israel, those that came to the high priest, to ask him to present their sacrifice to God for them, and to speak a word from God to them, were God-fearing people. No doubt hypocrites, occasionally, did come, and some of a proud spirit who trusted in their own offerings; but I should think that, all the year round, the high priest saw some of the humblest and best people in all Israel. Men and women, in sore trouble, would come to him; and these chastened spirits would be choice spirits. Men and women who were conscious of sin, and longing for pardon, would come to the high priest; men and women who had not sinned after the similitude of a public transgression, who nevertheless felt evil darkening their conscience within, would draw near to him; men and women who had lost the light of God's countenance, and who came longing to have it back again, because they could not live without it, would approach the courts of God's house. All these would be welcome visitors at the high priest's door, and would receive his sympathy and compassion. Such are the people whom Christ our great High Priest now delights to bless. The proud and

self-satisfied cannot know his love; but the poor and distressed may ever find in him comfort and joy, because of his nature, and by means of his intercession.

As with the high priest of Israel in the olden time, amongst those who come to our High Priest, *are many whose fear and distress arise from ignorance*. Oh, dear friends, if all the ignorant were to come, we should all come; for we are all ignorant; but there are some who fancy that it is otherwise with them. They imagine they know all things, and, professing themselves to be wise, they become fools. They know not their need of the great High Priest. Their folly is proved by their light esteem of him. But among those who come to our great High Priest in heaven, there are none but those who are ignorant.

In the first place, there is *a universal ignorance*. Notwithstanding all that great men may say about what they evolve from their own consciousness, I think that the only thing that a man can evolve from his own consciousness is folly and sin; for there is nothing else there. If he goes on evolving, he will evolve greater folly and greater sin, that is all. But when the Lord deals with men, he makes them feel that they know very little. What do we know of sin? The larger proportion of our sins are probably unknown to us. We do them, and scarcely observe that we have committed them. And who knows the evil that lies in any one sin? We is he that can weigh his iniquities in scales, or his errors in balances? Upon that one dread subject of sin, we are all life babes; we have not begun to learn more than the alphabet of that awful knowledge. Sinful we are, but it is part of the effect of sin that we do not know the extent of our sinfulness, and we should not know it at all, if it were not for the teachings of the Holy Spirit.

Again, what do we know of ourselves? Does any man truly know himself? "The proper study of mankind is man," says Pope. I am not sure of that; but I am certain that the proper study of mankind is Christ; for in him we not only can learn about man, but much more besides. But how little we know of ourselves, of our natural weakness, of our evil tendencies, of our proneness in this direction, or in that! "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

What do we know of God the unsearchable? Is he past finding out? Who can sufficiently tell of his nature, or of his wondrous attributes? Who can speak adequately of his greatness, or of his glory? Who can number up his years, or declare the whole of his lovingkindness? "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" On this great subject as well as on the other topics I have mentioned, there is a universal ignorance. As compared with the light of God, we are in the dim twilight. He that seeth best only seeth men as trees walking.

But, in addition to the ignorance that is universal, there is also a *comparative ignorance* on the part of some; and because of this, the compassion of Christ flows forth to them. Those who are ignorant in this way, are the kind of sinners whom he has come to help as a High Priest. He puts them in a class by themselves.

There are, first, the recent converts—young people whose years are few, and who probably think that they know more than they do; but who, if they are wise, will recognize that, even by reason of the fewness of their years, their senses have not been fully exercised to discern between good and evil. You must not ask them questions about the deep things of God. They have to be satisfied with those blessed parts of Scripture where a lamb may wade; they must not meddle with those parts where leviathan has to swim. Many truths are either above them or below them, much experience is too deep for them. In the presence of many of God's ways, they are compelled to say, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." The Lord Jesus Christ

can take little boys and girls to his bosom; and he does so, while they are as yet ignorant of many things. He loves them; he teaches them; he has compassion on them; and he says of them, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God." Christ receives them in spite of their lack of knowledge, and therefore we must treat such very tenderly. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones;" for our great High Priest has compassion upon their ignorance, and he instructs them. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children," when they trust in him who sympathizes with them, and who cares for them.

Others there are who are ignorant because of their little opportunity of getting instruction. Are there not many who are so placed that they have little chance of ever learning to read? We are thankful that there will be few left of that sort by-and-by. But there are others who, if they could read, have scarcely sufficient time allowed them to read their Bibles, and who, when they have read them, are very like the Ethiopian eunuch, in that they do not comprehend what they have read. If the question were addressed to them, "Understandst thou what thou readest?" they could truly say, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" There are many, all over our land, who are situated in places where they cannot often hear the gospel, and when they do hear it, it is so mixed up and confused, that it is small wonder they cannot make head or tail of it. Constantly do we meet with persons of that kind, whose ignorance is excusable; for they have had no teaching. They have not had opportunities of reading and searching, as most of us have had; upon these our great High Priest has compassion, and often with their slight knowledge they show more of the fruits of the Spirit than some of us produce even with our more abundant light.

Further than that, there are many that are of a very feeble mind. You can only with difficulty get a thought into their brain, and if you try to get another idea on the top of it, the second one seems to knock the first one out. They never learn much, and they are so constructed that they never will. In our pilgrim band we have a number who are like Mr. Feeblemind; we may try all that we can with him, but we shall never make a hero of him. Others are like Mr. Ready-to-halt, with his crutches; he did dance once, you will remember, when Giant Despair's head was cut off; but still he had to go on his crutches even then, and he never gave them up till he crossed the river; then he left them to anybody who wanted such things, and, I fear me, there are many who want them to-day. We have those in our company who never will be able to give a systematic statement of the doctrines of grace, though they are full of grace. They could never explain how they were saved; but they *are* saved. I daresay the snail could never explain how he got into the ark, but he did get in; and these feeble ones are in Christ, though they cannot fully explain how they came to that blessed position. Some of these good people are not very apt to receive knowledge: they are not "learnable", if I may coin a word to express my meaning We cannot make them learn. They are willing to be taught, they are teachable; but they are not "learnable." Ah, well, our blessed High Priest can have compassion on the ignorant, and the feeble-minded!

Beside the universal ignorance of which we have spoken, and this comparative ignorance, there is a *sinful ignorance*. We have some who are ignorant, and no excuse is to be made for them; their ignorance is to be condemned; and if these words reach any who are thus guilty, I would beseech them to pray God to pardon their guilt, and cease to sin in this way any longer. I mean those who are ignorant for want of attention. They are so full of business, and have such a great many other things to think of, that they do not value the means of grace. They say that they cannot attend, but we know that where there is a will there is a way. Perhaps they go once on a Sunday and never

more all the week. Now, if I had to eat one meal a week, and only one, I should want it to be a very good one; but I think that I should hardly be in a good condition for the next one the week following. It is a grand thing to get a little bit by the way, by coming on a Thursday night, or a morsel or two on a Monday, at the prayer-meeting. This stays the heart, and keeps the soul in good order.

Some will never be much above the ignorant, because they have not the ambition to learn. They do not set themselves to study the things of God. They do not sufficiently prize the revelation of God. I pray that they may be stirred up to do so. Though they have been guilty of neglectfulness and forgetfulness, they are not to be deprived of the sweetness of this text. Our Lord can have compassion on the ignorant, and on such as are out of the way. Here stands the great company to which his compassion goes out, and its name is written, "*The ignorant.*" I think that we had better all get into this class; indeed, I am sure that we had better join it, and thus obtain our Lord's compassion. I have seen, at a railway-station, gentlemen with first-class tickets walking up and down the platform unable to find a first-class carriage, and if the train was going on they have jumped in the third-class, so as to get to the journey's end. If there is a man here who does not think that he ought to be put down quite among the ignorant, jump in, brother, because you will get to your journey's end in this compartment, and there is no carriage, just now, for any wise person. There is nothing provided in the train that starts from this text, except that which is provided for the ignorant. The Lord hath us personally to rejoice that he can have compassion on the ignorant!

Now comes another description of the sort of sinners for whom our High Priest is concerned. There are *many whose fears arise from being out of the way*. The Lord "can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way." I remember that, when I felt myself to be a very great sinner, and verily thought I was more of a inner than anybody else, these words were very, very much blessed to me. I read them, "and on them that are out of the way"; and I knew that I was an out-of-the-way sinner. I was then, and I am afraid that I am now, somewhat like a lot out of the catalogue, an odd person who must go by himself. Very well; our High Priest can have compassion on those that are odd, on those that are out-of-the-way, on those who do not seem to be in the common run of people, and do not go with the multitude, but who must be dealt with individually, and by themselves. He can have compassion upon such.

But now let us look at the more exact meaning of the text.

To be out of the way is, in the case of all men, *their natural state*. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." That is where we are all by nature, and our own way is out of *the* way. Therefore, Christ can have compassion upon all of us who come to him; for he has learnt to deal with those who are out of the way, and such, literally, are we all.

In addition to that, men have gone out of the way by *their own personal folly*. We had enough original sin; but we have added to that another kind of originality in evil.

"Like sheep we went astray,
And broke the fold of God
Each wandering in a different way;
But all the downward road."

But there are some who wander most foolishly. You wonder why they sin in the particular way that they do. There seems to be no reason for it, no motive for it, no special temptation in that direction, and yet, they will do it. They wander out of the way by themselves. Have you done so, dear friend? The Lord can have compassion on those that are out of the way.

Some are out of the way because of *their seduction from the way by others*. False teachers have taught them, and they have taken up with the error brought before them by a stronger mind than their own. In some cases persons of evil life have had a fascination over them. It is wonderful how, in the cases of young men and young women, they frequently seem to be not themselves, but the evil embodiment of another. They are ruled and governed by the will of somebody else, and not by their own. Thus they are led out of the way. They are like sheep that "have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." Ah, poor friend, it is ill that you should have been the victim of another's temptation! Do not blame your tempter; blame yourself; but, at the same time, remember that Christ has compassion upon those who have been led out of the way. As by the will of another you were beguiled from the true path, so by the love of Another shall you be won back again, even as it has been with many of us.

Many are out of the way because of *their backsliding after grace has come to them*. Our text comprehends backsliders who were once in the way. To such we may say, "Ye did run well, who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth?" Something has been an occasion of stumbling to such; and now, though sitting in the house of God, they know they are not what they once were, nor what they ought now to be, nor what they must be, nor what I hope they will be, even before I shall finish my discourse. "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you." Why will ye wander from the only source of good? "Take with you words and turn to the Lord." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The Lord calls you in infinite tenderness; for he can have compassion upon backsliders, and stop them from becoming apostates, bringing them back unto himself, according to his divine purpose.

Others are out of the way because of *their consciousness of special sin*. Is there here anyone conscious of some great sin in years gone by? Is there a crimson spot upon your hand, which you have tried to wash out, but cannot; some act of your life which you would fain undo, and remove? There it is, still there, always there. Does it fret you by night, and weary you by day, to think of the gross iniquity of yours? Ah, it has put you out of the way! Perhaps you did not grasp all the consequences of what you were doing when you did it. Be comforted by this gracious text. Hear your High Priest pray, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He pleads your ignorance. You "did it ignorantly in unbelief"; and while this does not excuse you, it puts you into the list of those who are both ignorant and out of the way. Come to this compassionate High Priest, and trust your case in his dear hands; they were pieced because of your sin. Trust your iniquity with him; his heart was opened and set abroad because of your transgression. Come, trust in him. He died because of your sin. "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Thus I have very feebly set forth the sort of sinners for whom Christ is High Priest; those who are ignorant, and those who are out of the way. This message is for almost everybody here, except my friend over there who knows everything, and never did anything wrong. He does not want any Christ, and I will not bother him with one. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick," saith the Lord Jesus; and he further adds this word, which shuts out you who never did any harm, "I come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." To be so very learned, and so very good in your own estimation is no recommendation to Christ, but the reverse. He comes to men who need compassion, and those he teaches to profit, and leads in the way everlasting.

II. Having seen the sort of sinners with whom our High Priest is concerned, let us in the second place, look at THE SORT OF HIGH PRIEST WITH WHOM SINNERS HAVE TO DEAL.

Now, if I go back to the high priest under the law, the type would be a fine fatherly man, whose very face invited confidence. I should think that all the people were glad when the high priest was very tender and compassionate. Possibly that had occasionally a high priest who was very high and very mighty; one who was very glad when the day's service was over. If sinners wanted to see him, he was not visible; and when he did talk to them, he was not very gentle. Sometimes he may have said to them, "Now you are stupid, you talk nonsense;" and when any of them were very sad, he said, "You ought to know better than to indulge this foolish nervousness of yours." I think that they were not sorry when that high priest was taken from them. But the pattern high priest was a fatherly-looking man, with love in his eyes, a smile on his face, one who had often sorrowed himself, one to whom all the people could go naturally. There are such men still alive. They are like a harbour for ships. Sometime sit brings a very heavy burden upon them, but they are happy men to have such a burden to carry. I think that some of those high priests must have seen a great deal of sin, and a great deal of mercy and divine love. When the poor people went up to the temple, one would say, "I must go in and see the high priest. I have such a burden and he will be able to help me." Another would say, "No, I shall not go in; I do not need to take up his time myself. Did not you hear him speak? What, what he said was just the very thing that I wanted. God gave him the very word that my distress required, and so I can go in peace." But here and there one would say, "Ah! I must tell him. It does me good to unburden my heart." Now that is the kind of high priest that we should all have wished for had we been living in those days; but our Lord Jesus is something incomparably better than that.

He is One who can bear with ignorance, forgetfulness, and provocation. How do I know it? Because he bore so wonderfully with the ignorance of people when he was here. It was with a very tender accent that he said to one of his disciples, "Have I been so long time with you, and hast thou not known me, Philip?" He had told them many, many times the same thing over again, and yet he was not above repeating it, he had such compassion on them. Sometimes, he could not say what he would have liked to say, and yet he bore with the poor men who did not know the burden he had on his heart: he only said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." And when, after he had taught them, they still forgot, he did not chide them. I never find that he turned one of them away because of their stupidity; he did not even cast off Thomas for his unbelief. He let them still linger about his person, despite their false notions and their forgetfulness. They must often have grieved him through their ignorance, and through getting out of the way, especially when they got into the way of each desiring to be the greatest. But notwithstanding all, our Lord was never like Moses. Of him it is written that the people of Israel "provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips."; but never an impatient word came from those lips into which grace was so abundantly poured. There was never such a meek, and gentle, and quiet spirit as our divine Lord and Master possessed. I need not dwell on that, for you all know what compassion he had upon the ignorant sons of men.

Again, *he is One who can feel for grief, because he has felt the same.* When I have explained compassion as implying meekness of disposition, I have not given you the full meaning of the expression. Not only has our Lord compassion on the ignorant by being gentle towards them, but he sympathizes with them by having a fellow-feeling with them. They got out of the way, and into the thorns; they wandered, and fell into a maze; they were lost in the dark mountains, but he was

"a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." "In all their afflictions he was afflicted." Because of that fellow-feeling he is always very tender and pitiful; and if he finds any of his children sorrowing, he has abundant compassion upon them.

Moreover, *He is One who lays himself out tenderly to help such as come to him.* He did so when he was here in body, and he is the same now; all his life was given in tenderness. You never find Christ throwing bread and meat to the hungry crowd as we throw bones to the dogs. He has made them sit down on the green grass, and then he blessed the food, and gave it to his disciples, and they distributed it in a quiet, orderly way. And the Lord Jesus Christ has a very loving way now of helping his people. So tenderly does he do it, that the doing of it is almost as great a wonder as the thing that is done. He abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence, and we may each one say, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Oh, he is a wonderful Saviour! There is none like him for sympathizing with us, and dealing tenderly with us.

Another thing I have to say of him that never can be said of anybody else is, that *he is One who never repelled a single person.* Not even the most ignorant, the most out of the way, was ever turned back from him. It was always true: "This man receiveth sinners." And for ever this word is settled in heaven, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

I have not time to go into this matter fully, but all who have read the life of Christ know what a gentle and tender High Priest he was towards men.

"Now, though he reigns exalted high,
His love is still as great.
Well he remembers Calvary
Nor let his saints forget."

His heart is on earth, though he has ascended into the heavens. If anyone here groans after him, he will hear that groan; and if the wish does not come to a vocal sound at all, but if your heart only aches after him, he will feel that ache of your heart, and know what it means; and if you do not know how to pray, the very desire to pray he will interpret. He can have compassion on the ignorant. And if you do not know what you want, but only know that it is something that you must have or die, he will give it to you; for he will interpret your wordless desires, and what you cannot read yourself, he will read for you. But, oh, you must have him; you must have him, you cannot get to God without him! I pray that you will feel such confidence in his tenderness that you may come and take him as your own High Priest; if you do, he will be yours at the moment of acceptance. He will never refuse the seeker. He will not hide himself from his own flesh. He will never be distant and strange to any penitent sinner. If thou desirest him, it is because he desirest thee; and if thou hast a spark of wish for him, he has a furnace of desire for thee. Come, and welcome. He can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way. God bless these words! I pray that he may do so, to very many.

III. Now, I want to speak to those of you who are the people of God. I can imagine that some of you here are troubled, perhaps ill, and that you cannot get on as you would like in the world. You seem compassed with infirmities. I want to remind you that there may be a blessing even in your weakness; and that this may be the more clearly seen we will look, in the third place, at the SORT OF INFIRMITY WHICH MAY BE SANCTIFIED AND MADE USEFUL.

The high priest of old was compassed with infirmities, and this was part of his qualification. "Yes," says one, "but he was compassed with sinful infirmities; but our Lord Jesus had no sin." That is quite true, but please remember that this does not make Christ less tender, but more so.

Anything that is sinful hardens; and inasmuch as he was without sin, he was without the hardening influence that sin would bring to bear upon a man. He was all the more tender when compassed with infirmities, because sin was excluded from the list. We will not, then, reckon sin in any form as an infirmity likely to be turned to a great use, even though the grace of God abounds over the sin; but, beloved friends, let me try and speak to some of you who wish to do good, and set forth some of the things which were sore to bear at the times, and yet have been rich in blessing since.

First think of *our struggles in finding mercy*. Years ago you had a hard time of it when you were seeking the Saviour. I had, and I have always been very glad of it ever since. It was a long while before I could perceive the eternal light, and cast myself on Christ. I thank God that it was so because I have had to deal with hundreds—I might say thousands—in a similar case; and if I had found Christ, as many dear friends do, very readily and very easily, I could not have guided them; but now I can sit down by the side of them and say, "What! Have you got into the dark? I have been in the dark, too. You are down in the lowest dungeon, are you? Well, I was in the lowest dungeon of all. I can show you the way to where the jug of water stands, and the bit of brown bread. I know the way, for I have been there." If you have not had a certain experience, you cannot so well help others who have; but if you were compassed with infirmity in your first coming to Christ, you may use that in helping others to come to him.

Again, *our grievous temptations* may be infirmities which shall be largely used in our service. "What a blessing it would be to live without temptations!" says one. I do not believe it would be a blessing at all. I think that, being without temptation is more of a temptation than having a temptation. There is no devil that is equal to no devil, for when there seems to be none, we get so very quiet and so very easy, and think that everything is going on well, when it is not. Be glad if you have been tempted. Remember that temptation is one of the best books in the minister's library. To be tried, to be afflicted, to be downcast, to be tested—all this helps you to deal with others. You cannot be unto others a helper unless you have been compassed with infirmities. Therefore accept the temptations which trouble you so much, as a part of your salvation to make you useful to others.

Our sickness may turn out to be in the same category. Of course we would like to be always well. I think that health is the greatest blessing that God ever sends us, except sickness, which is far better. I would give anything to be perfectly healthy; but if I had to go over my time again, I could not get on without those sick beds and those bitter pains, and those weary, sleepless nights. Oh, the blessedness that comes to us through smarting, if we are ministers and helpers of others, and teachers of the people! I do not say that too much of it is to be despised, but the Lord knows how much is too much, and he will never afflict us beyond that which he will enable us to bear. But just a touch of sickness now and then may help you mightily. I have heard some brethren preach the gospel, but it had been as hard as a Brazil nut; little children could never get at the kernel. These brethren had never had any trouble or affliction; and if you have never had any, you may try to be very tender, but it will be like an elephant picking up a pin; you may try to be patient and sympathetic, but you will not be able to manage it. Glory in your infirmities, then, and in your sicknesses, for they shall be made useful in you for the comfort of God's sick people.

Our trials, too, may thus be sanctified. He that has had no troubles, and no trials, what mistakes he makes! He is like the French lady in the time of famine, who said that she had no patience with the poor people starving because of the price of bread. You can always buy a penny bun for a penny, she said; and therefore she thought there need not be any poverty at all. She was one of the rich

ones of the earth. I do not suppose that she had ever had a penny bun in her life, or a penny either. Ah, dear friends! You must, if you are ready to help others, be yourself compassed with infirmity.

Our depressions may also tend to our fruitfulness. A heart bowed down with despair is a dreadful thing. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" But if you have never had such an experience, my dear brother, you will not be worth a pin as a preacher. You cannot help others who are depressed unless you have been down in the depths yourself. You cannot lift others out of despondency and depression, unless you yourself have sometimes need to be lifted out of such experiences. You must be compassed with this infirmity, too, at times, in order to have compassion on those in a similar case.

Herein I think that every one of us should try to make use of all his weaknesses. *Our whole nature as feeble men* may be turned to the noblest use if it calls forth our compassion towards others. Thanks God that you are not a man of iron. We has the Iron Duke once, who did famous things, but in a different fight from ours. An iron preacher would need to have iron hearers; and then, I am afraid, that there would come a crash before long. No, no; we must have our weaknesses and infirmity consecrated to God, and laid at his feet. Let us go, in all our weakness and infirmity, and try to help others who are as ignorant and as out of the way as we once were; and, God blessing us, when we are weak, we shall be strong. When we are less than nothing, the all-sufficiency of God will be all the more manifested. Here I must stop, for our time has gone. May the Lord bless the word, both to the sinner and to the saint, for his name's sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews 4:15-16; 5.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—326, 367, 376.

The Unknown Giver and the Misused Gifts

A Sermon

(No. 2252)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, April 17th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, September 25th, 1890.

"For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax."—Hosea 2:8-9.

In reading any of the records concerning the people of Israel and the people of Judah, one stands amazed at two things, and scarcely knows which to wonder at most. The first thing which causes astonishment is the great sin of the people; and the next thing, which is even more marvellous, is the great patience of God. I scarcely know which of the two things causes me greater surprise, that men should be so guilty, or that God should be so gracious. On every page of Israel's history, the kindness and forbearance of Jehovah are manifested towards the people whom he had betrothed unto himself. Even in the midst of their backsliding and idolatry, he did not forget the covenant which he had made with their fathers. Yet, in spite of all this goodness, the people sinned times without number, and grieved his Spirit again and again; instead of being led to repentance, they sinned yet more and more. Their iniquity, and the forbearance of God, stand like two mountain summits of the history of the chosen yet wayward people.

Let us just transfer these thoughts to ourselves, and see if we can, with any justice, cast a stone at the people who, in spite of such love, went so far astray. Alas, we are condemned by the comparison! We are nothing better than they were. Our case is, perhaps, fuller of contradictions and inconsistencies, if that is possible. Is it not wonderful, first of all, that we should have been so guilty, that we should have persevered in sin so many years, that even after we have known God we should have been so unfaithful to him, so unfaithful to our own convictions, and to our own conscience? Is it not this awful fact amazing? But that God should love us still, that he should follow us with warning and invitation, that his Holy Spirit should strive with us, and continue to strive until he wins the day, and that despite our shortcomings and our transgressions, he should have remained faithful to us, even to this very hour, is more amazing still. O my soul, sink low in deep humiliation because of thy sinfulness! But, rise higher and yet higher in adoration of the unutterable love, the boundless mercy of God to thee in spite of thine iniquity. Beloved brethren, if it were possible for us to only know adequately these two things, man's sin and God's love, we should have learned more than the greatest scientists of this world ever knew, and we should have attained to more true wisdom than all earth's philosophers ever possessed. There be some that, in their search for knowledge, have almost seemed to walk the heavens in order to tread the stars, and to dive into the depths to arrange the rocks and all their ancient life; but there are two things that none of the wise amongst men have ever been able to compass—two things which unaided reason has ever failed to grasp, and ever will—sin and love; sin for its thunder, and love for its music: sin

for its hell and love for its heaven. But we, who have been taught by the grace of God, do know something of sin: may we know increasingly what an evil it is! I trust we also know something of divine love; may we be filled with it, even to overflowing!

But, coming now close to our text, I am going to make four observances upon it.

The first will be one that seems self-evident, yet is often forgotten, namely, that *God is the Giver of every good gift*. "I gave her corn, and wine and oil." In the second place, I will dwell upon the sad fact that *many seem not to know this*. "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil." My third observation will be, that *this ignorance leads to perversion of God's gifts*: the gifts of God were profaned by being "prepared for Baal." In the last place, the solemn truth will demand our attention, that *this ill use of God's gifts causes God to withdraw them*. "Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and I will recover my wool and my flax." We lose what we are determined to put to improper use. So, you see that my discourse promises to be a very practical one.

I. The first thought in the text which claims our attention will be, that GOD IS THE GIVER OF EVERY GOOD GIFT. "I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." Whether we know it, or not, it is true that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Do not, then, exult over thy brother if thou art more richly endowed with God's gifts than he is: "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" All things that we possess have been bestowed upon us; for it is as certain that we brought nothing into the world, and that we shall take nothing out of the world. We receive everything from the great Distributor, who openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Though used with reference to a higher gift than any of those mentioned in the text, the words of John the Baptist are true concerning all God's gifts, "a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven."

But someone may say, "Corn and wine are here mentioned first of all; surely these are *the fruit of tillage*. Men sow, and reap. Men plant, and gather grapes. How, then, can these things be the gift of God?" Why, the moment we think seriously of this matter, we perceive that no husbandman can command a harvest! No vine-dresser can be sure of fruit, unless he that rules the heavens, and sendeth the dews, the rains, the snow, and the frosts, shall take care both of the budding vine and of the ripening clusters. All that springs from the earth comes by a miracle of God's benevolence. If God withheld his hand, you might plough your land, but you would wait in vain for the harvest; and unfruitful season would not return to you even so much as the seed which you had sown. When famines come upon the nations, because of blighted harvests, then men ought to understand that the corn, and the wine, and the oil are God's gifts; but, alas, many are very slow to learn even that elementary lesson!

Perhaps others say, "Our share of these things comes to us as *the earnings of labour*. Of course, in some form or other that must be true. Ever since man fell, that word of God to Adam, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," has been the rule of life for his sons. If men do not till the soil, but dwell in cities, they must still work; but in less pleasant ways than the farmer knows. They may have to toil in murky workshops, where they would be glad to catch a breath of fresh breezes that come over the fields. I know we get our bread by our work; but then, who finds us work? Who gives us strength to do it? Let God but withdraw from us his gracious power, and our hands would hang feebly at our side. You know how true this is. When you have been laid aside upon the bed

of sickness, then have you understood that, unless God gave health, the breadwinner could not go forth to his service, and there would be nothing on the table for the wife and children. It is God that gives us our bread, however hard we work in order to earn it. Still have we need to present the petition that our Lord taught his disciples, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Besides this, the text also mentions *the gain of commerce*. "I multiplied her silver and her gold." Here, also, God's hand is plainly seen. I admit, of course, that men gain their silver and their gold by trading; but will the ship come home again in safety unless God watches over it? Will the men that go into the bowels of the earth, to dig for minerals, come up alive unless still the providence of God preserves them? Is not the benediction of heaven needed in every enterprise to which men can put their hand? "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh in vain." The success of business is based upon a thousand conditions, and surrounded by many risks, as every merchant knows. How easily God can lay his finger upon my human scheme, and bring to nought all our plans! They used to call those who engaged in commerce "merchant venturers", and they were rightly named. There is many a "peradventure" about business-life in these days of cruel competition, even in our home-trade; and it is even more at a venture that a man goes to a far-off land for a gain. God must give him success, if he is to get it. In our bills of lading we even now insert a clause, by which the shipowner disclaims responsibility in certain contingencies, amongst which is mentions "the act of God"; and when men despatch a vessel, they often pray, and they always ought to pray, "God speed this ship," for God-speed is needed if it is to reach its destination safely.

But some come in by their own corn, and their own wine, and their silver, and their gold, by *the legacies of their friends*. In such a case, you may easily trace the gifts of God. If you parents have left you sufficient for your maintenance, who gave you those parents? Who placed them in a position to be so generous to you? Who arranged the place and manner of your birth but the great Lord of providence? If you are living in specially favourable circumstances, and are able to obtain food, and the other necessaries of life, with a good share of its luxuries, which others can only gain by long labour, if at all, ascribe to it, I beseech you, to the bountiful providence of the Most High. If you do not give all the glory to the Giver of these gifts, surely you are forgetting your God.

And yet, perhaps, another says, "I have not laboured with my hands, but I am a man of resources. What I possess is *the result of thought*. I have carefully elaborated an invention, and in a few months I have been able to get for myself what others cannot get with a whole life of toil. Surely I may trace my prosperity to my capacious mind." And if you do so, you will be very foolish, unless you also adore the God who gave you your mind. By whose power is it that you have had the wit to gain wealth so speedily? I beseech you be humble in the presence of God, or you may in a few days lose your reason, for it has often happened that men who have had more wit than others have been among the first to lose it. "Great wit to madness is allied." In many a case it has proved to be so. Remember Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, builder of cities, inventor of great things, and yet "he did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws," because he was proud, and exalted himself against God, neither gave glory for his greatness to the Most High.

We therefore settle it in our hearts as true, once for all, that God is the Giver of the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and the silver, and the gold, and whatever temporal blessings we enjoy. If honestly gained, we trace them to his hand; and we would thank him now and always for every good gift that we have received from him.

I need not make a list of spiritual blessings, nor need I remind you that they all come from God. You know how dependent you are upon him for them. By nature you are dead. What spiritual life can you get for yourselves without God? Can the dead make themselves to live? When you have been made alive, you are pardoned; can you pardon yourselves? Whence can forgiveness come but from God? You have more than pardon if you are a child of God, you are possessed of righteousness; how shall you ever have it but as God arrays you in the righteousness of Christ? Joy and peace are our portion, but both come by believing; they are the gift of God. Holiness, too, and everything else that prepares us for heaven, and helps us to reach that blessed place, is the gift of God freely bestowed upon unworthy men. We were unworthy when he began to bless us, and we are unworthy still; yet the hand that at first bestowed the gift upon us, continues to enrich us every day in all bountifulness. Shall we not praise him, lifting high our grateful song?

"Come thou fount of every blessing,

Tune my heart to sing thy grace,

Streams of mercy, never ceasing,

Call for songs of loudest praise."

We will not withhold our thanks for such abounding goodness.

"Oh, to grace how great a debtor

Daily I'm constrained to be!

Let that grace, now, like a fetter,

Bind my wandering heart to thee."

So much for the first point.

II. Now, secondly, and we come closer to our text, **MANY SEEM NOT TO KNOW THIS.** "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." She did not know, and in this lack of knowledge she stands not alone. There are great numbers in the world who do not know this elementary truth, that all good gifts, of any kind whatsoever, come from the hand of God. Why is this?

With some it arises from *natural ignorance*. Myriads of men know not God as yet; and they are to be pitied, if they have not even heard of him. I fear that in London there are many who have never received even the plainest instruction with regard to God and his Christ. It ought not to be so, seeing that so many in earlier years have passed through our Sunday-schools into which a child may go and come out again, and know but little that will abide with him. It is a pity that this should be the case; but facts go to show that I state no more than the plain truth. There are many whom we may meet in the street who could give us no intelligent account of what they owe to God. They scarcely know who he is. They use his name as a part of their profanity, and that is all. Brethren, I charge you, by the living God, that as far as your ability goes, you do not suffer a single person in London to be ignorant of God, and what men owe to him. With all your might, instruct those with whom you come in contact concerning the great Creator, Preserver, and Judge of men, and show them how all our blessings are to be traced to his generous hand. Thus shall be laid a foundation whereon may rest a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are, however, many more who, from *thoughtless ignorance*, do not know that God gave them their providential mercies. Oh, what a thing it is that the bulk of the people by whom we are surrounded should have a thought for everybody but God! Some persons are strictly honest to their fellow-men, but they never think that they owe God anything. Everybody is treated fitly by them except their Creator. They will be ungrateful to nobody except their very best Friend; and all for

want of thought. Is it not ten thousand pities that so many miss heaven from heedlessness, and that so many go down to hell for want of thinking how they may escape from it? "The wicked shall be turned into hell," says the Psalmist, "and all the nations that forget God." What did these do who thus perish? Did they blaspheme? No; they only forgot God. Did they oppose his purposes? No, it is not said so; but they *forgot* God. That is all. He that forgets his king becomes a traitor. The soldier that forgets his captain becomes a deserter. The child that forgets his mother, becomes a prodigal. But the man that forgets his God is the worst of all; his sheer thoughtlessness leads him to the abyss of woe.

Some lose sight of God because of their wrong thoughts. They look upon everything that happens as luck. "I was a lucky fellow," says one. "Wonderfully fortunate I have always been," says another; "I have always had good luck." So God is pushed from his throne, and men pay their tribute to an imaginary something, which is really nothing, but which they call "luck." If luck has actually done anything for you, then by all means worship luck, and pay homage to it; but it is not so. Luck, fortune, and chance are the devil's trinity. If things have gone well with you, it has been so because it has pleased the Most High to favour you. I pray that you may not be unmindful of the heavenly blessing, but thank your God, and bless his name.

"Well," says one, "I do not attribute my success to luck. I say I owe it to myself." So you turn from your God, and worship yourself, do you? The Egyptians have been counted the most degraded people of this world in their worship. They worshipped onions, till Juvenal says, "O blessed people, who grow their gods in their own back gardens!" But I do not think they were quite so degraded as the man that worships himself. If I could bring my soul to worship an onion, I could never degrade myself low enough to worship myself. A man who makes himself his own god is mad. When you begin to adore yourself as a self-made man, you have surely come to the very abyss of absurdity and idolatry. "Know ye that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." Let us not then be guilty of the folly of forgetting him to whom we owe our all. "O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." Still, alas, it is true that some, through their thoughtlessness or their corrupt thought about God, know not that he gave them their corn and wine and oil.

There are others who forget God from *assumed ignorance*; they know better, but they profess that they are too intelligent to believe in God. Do you often hear the proud boastings of such men? Oh! It is folly of the most profound kind for any man to think he is too intelligent, or too clever, to believe in God, or to trace anything to him. "These things happen according to the laws of nature," they say. "The arrangements of nature are fixed and invariable." Thus "nature" becomes nothing more than a false god, which they worship. They have elevated a certain something which they call "nature" into the place of God, and they suppose that God is somehow tied by his own laws, and can never do any other than that which he has been accustomed to do; by such reasoning natural law is lifted up, and made higher than the omnipotent God himself. Go you that worship nature, and worship her if you will. I have not generally found much worship in it. I had a neighbor, who said to me, "I do not go and shut myself up in the stifling atmosphere on a Sunday; I stop at home, and worship the god of nature." I said to him, "he is made of wood, is he not?" "What do you mean?" he said in some surprise. "I think," I answered, "that I have heard you at worship, and you seem to me to adore your god by knocking him down." "Ah!" said he; "have you heard me playing skittles on Sunday?" "Yes," I said; "you are a pretty fellow to tell me that you stop at home, and worship the god of nature. Your worship is all a lie." When you hear men talk about this god of nature, it

often means that they only want an opportunity of having more drink, or of amusing themselves, or of otherwise wasting the hours of God's holy day. As for us, I trust that we shall not assume an ignorance which is not ours. We know that God gave us all we have, and unto him shall be the praise.

A great many have no real lack of knowledge at all, if you search their minds. Theirs is a *practical ignorance*. They know not that God gave them these things, in the sense that they do not confess that it is so. They never speak about him as the one who provideth for all their needs; they never praise him for his bounty. They may, perhaps, jerk out a "Thank God," just as a matter of common speech; but there is no thankfulness in their heart. Practically, they live from year to year as if there were no God, and spend their time and their substance as if they were under no obligation whatever to the great Lord of providence. Practically it may be said of them, "They know not that I gave them their corn and their wine and their oil."

A lower depth is reached by those who do not recognise God because of their *wilful ignorance*; who, because of their deeds of darkness, hate the light, and refuse to acknowledge the gifts of God. Our Father in heaven "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust." But the unjust do not receive the refreshing showers as from his hand, nor do those who are evil acknowledge that it is God's sun that shines upon their head. They hate God, and are wilfully ignorant, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."

Now, it does seem to be a very grievous thing that men should be indebted to God for everything, and should never praise him; that they should every morning be awakened by the light that he gives, and every evening be helped to sleep by the shades of darkness with which he mercifully closes the day, and curtains the night; and yet that they should never adore his name. Am I not speaking to some here who, through a tolerably long life, have never thought of their God, or whose thoughts concerning him have been but fitful and feeble? I would like to hold you to your seat for a moment, my friend, while I ask you whether you do not feel ashamed that you have never considered the claims of the Most High, or have never thought that he could have any claims, but supposed that you had just to live to think of yourself and your friends, and perhaps of your fellow-men, but never of your God? His goodness has been practically denied by you. You have lived as if there were no God, or as if he were too far off to operate upon your life. You live as if you had received ought to have secured for him your service. Yet what have you done? Does a man keep a cow without expecting its milk? Would he keep a horse without putting it to work? Would he own a dog if it did not fawn upon him, and come at his call? Yet God has kept you all these years, and he has had nothing from you but sheer forgetfulness, or, possibly, something worse than that. What do you say to this? I press the matter upon you, and ask you carefully to review it before your own conscience, and before the Lord, to whom you must one day give account. Seeing that you have received so much from him, you should, at the very least, acknowledge that he is the Giver of all your good things. May God the Holy Spirit make you confess that you have not dealt well with your God, and strive with you until, by his almighty grace, you shall be constrained to change your evil course, and acknowledge the goodness and mercy you have received from him throughout your whole life!

III. In the third place, when men thus fail to recognize and acknowledge God's goodness, **THIS IGNORANCE OFTEN LEADS TO THE PERVERSION OF GOD'S GIFTS**. See how God puts it with reference to the people of Israel, "I multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for

Baal." What a depth of infamy it would be to receive the bounty of one king, and to pay homage therewith before the throne of his rival! This is what Israel did, and alas! Too many imitate them to-day. The people burned incense to the false god of the heathen on every hill. "She decked herself with her ear-rings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord." This was a great iniquity. The very gold which God gave them they fashioned into ornaments for their idol, and poured out the wine that came as a gift from heaven, as an offering at Baal's shrine. There was a certain Indian potentate, who deposed his father from the throne, and then desired that father to send him his jewels, that he might wear them at his own coronation. These people desired God's gifts, in order that they might present them to Baal; and, alas! In this impiety they have many followers. How many there are who are using against God all that he has given them! They have prepared it for Baal.

We do this whenever the gifts of God are used *to augment pride*. This is a temptation that besets all. We have all a tendency to swell and grow great simply because God has given us more than other people; whereas that but makes us the greater debtors. I have heard that, in the days of imprisonment for debt, there were people in prison who used to be quite proud because they owed ten thousand pounds, and who looked down with scorn upon a poor fellow who had come in there only owing a hundred pounds, or perhaps, only a five-pound note. The more they were in debt, the more they thought of themselves. Now, is not that the case with every proud man? Because you have greater ability, or greater wealth, than another, you owe so much the more to God; and yet you are foolish enough to make that, which ought to be a reason for being humble, a reason for being proud. God surely feels that his gifts are being misused when we handle them so as to make ourselves haughty and important. In doing this we forget him who gave us all, even as Hosea in another place saith concerning the people, "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore they have forgotten me."

Moreover, the gifts of God are perverted when we use them *to justify sin*, setting our necks stiffly in the way of evil, because, though we have wandered from God, the corn and the oil are still continued to us. "There are my rewards that my lovers have given me," said this nation that went after Baal; therefore she thought that her worship of Baal was worthy to be continued. How horrible a thing it is for a man to boast in his sin, because God does not swiftly follow it with judgment, and to continue therein because God does not at once withdraw his common mercies! Those whose hearts are set in them to do evil, because the sentence against the evil work is not executed speedily, shall have sore distress in the day when, at last, the righteous God arises to judgment.

Again, God's gifts are ill-used when because of the very abundance of them, we begin *to excuse excesses*. The drunkard and the glutton pervert what was meant to be a good gift into an occasion of sin and riot. God gives us all good things richly to enjoy; but when, instead of enjoying them, men abuse them, and ruin themselves, body and soul, by misusing the gifts of heaven, it would be small cause for wonder if God was roused to remove the gifts put to such base use. And since so many of those around us do abuse God's gifts in this manner, it behoves us, who desire to glorify God, to use all things with great temperance, and wholly to abstain from some things, lest we should cause our brother to stumble.

Equally bad is it when a man uses the gifts of God's providence so as *to foster selfishness*. His silver and gold are multiplied; he hoards it up and makes a god of it. The poor are at his gate. There let them keep; why should he trouble about them? The church of God needs his aid. Let it need it.

It shall have nothing from him. "Soul," says such a man, "thou must lay up much goods for many years." And, when he has effected his purpose, then he talks to his own soul again, poor creature that it is, and says, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry." He has made a god of his goods, and thus he has perverted God's gifts, and used them to God's dishonour. He has given them to Baal.

It grieves one's heart to see gifts of God used *to oppose God*. What would you have thought of David, when Jonathan gave him his sword and bow, if he had not taken the sword, and cut off Jonathan's head, or if he had fitted an arrow to the string, and shot Jonathan to the heart? It would have been ingratitude. But men fight against God with God's own gifts. A woman endowed with beauty, the rare gift of God, uses it to ensnare others to sin. God gives us garments, and there are some who use their very garments for nothing else but pride, and who go through the world with no motive but display. A man has a musical voice given to him, but he sings what God cannot be pleased to hear, and what no man or woman ought to listen to. Another has great intellect, and he gives himself up to pulling the Bible to pieces, and, as far as he can, to destroy much good. Another has a voice that is clear and loud, and skill in using it, and you hear him stand up and lead others to war against their Maker, and to sin with a high hand against the King of heaven. Oh, the pity is that there should be so much of good in the world, all heaped up to rot—that so many gifts of God should be used by men against him! When those in high authority oppress the righteous, they use their authority against God; and when men in high standing are seen at police courts advocating that which is injurious to morals, they not only degrade themselves, but they make us think that the "nobility" with which they are said to be endowed must be a myth. God keep us all, dear friends, from ever using the gifts of our Maker against our Maker; and we are certainly acting against him when we go contrary to anything that is honest, lovely, and of good repute; and when, in any way, we sanction that which will do our fellow-creatures wrong, and will be injurious to the interests of true righteousness, and the advancement of the kingdom of Christ!

My text is sadly true with reference to many; "She did not know that I gave her corn and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal." They prepared for God's enemies what God himself had given to them, and what he meant to be used only for his own glory.

IV. And now my fourth observation is this: THIS PERVERSION OFTEN MOVES GOD TO WITHDRAW HIS MISUSED GIFTS. "Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax."

God has given to many of you a great many mercies. Remember that, if you become proud of them, if because you have become fat, like Jeshurun, you begin to kick, he can take his gifts away. If you forsake God, who made you, and lightly esteem the Rock of your salvation, he will forsake you, and withdraw his bounty.

He can withdraw his gifts *easily*. "Riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." You have seen the crows on the ploughed field, have you not? There they are, blackening the ground. But clap you hands, and they are gone. So have we often seen it with a man's wealth. There has been a little change in the money market, some little turn in commerce, and all his money has taken to itself wings, and flown away. Is it health and strength that you have, or great wit? Ah, sir, a puff of wind may take away life; a little gas may be fatal to health! We know not what dependent creatures we are. God can easily take away the blessings which he gives, therefore let us remember him in the use of them. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God."

Moreover, God can take away his gifts *unexpectedly*. In the text, he says, "I will take away my corn in the time thereof," that is, in harvest, "and my wine in the season thereof," that is, just at the time of vintage. When it seems as if the harvest and vintage were secure, God would send a sudden blight upon both, and they would perish. God can take things away when they almost touch the tips of our fingers, and he can easily deprive us of misused blessings at the very moment when we think we are most sure of them. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip;" and there is many an occasion of final disappointment when we think we have succeeded. We are only secure as we trust in the Giver of all good.

God can take away these things *rightfully*. What would you do yourself if you had one whom you fed who was always kidding against you? Would you feed a dog that was always barking at you, and trying to fly at you, and do you mischief? Is it not right that God should take away providential benefits from men when they misuse them, and pervert them to his dishonour? It is of his grace that these things are ours at all; he has but to withdraw that grace, and to deal with us as we deserve, and lo! We are impoverished at once.

If God does take these things away, I would pray that he may take them from you *mercifully*. I was riding one day with a young gentleman, who was leading a very reckless life indeed, but whose father was a very gracious man. I found that the son had taken to horse-racing, and I said, "That is right; go on as fast as you can. Till you have lost every penny you have, you will scarcely be willing to turn to God. Young fellows like you do not often come home, except round by the swine-trough. When you get down to that, then, I trust, you will cry to God for mercy, and say, 'I will arise, and go to my father.'" He was very astonished at my advice; but I think it was the right thing to say under the circumstances.

How often have I seen something of this sort take place! The Lord has taken away from a man wealth, or he has taken away health, or else the man has fallen into dishonour; the Lord takes away the corn in the time thereof, and the wine in the season thereof, and then it happens, as we have it in the verse before the text, the afflicted one says, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now." So long as you come to Christ, I do not mind if you come round by "Weeping-Cross." Even if you come with a broken leg, with the loss of an eye, or with consumption making a prey of you, it will be well; if only your souls be saved, and you come home to your great Father, we will be glad. But why do you want to be whipped to Christ? Why not come willingly? Why do you need to have these truths burnt into you as with a hot iron? Why not learn them easily. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle." Be not hard-mouthed with God, for he will master you, if he once take you by the hand. If he means to bless you, he will conquer you, though he may have to use rough measures with you. By-and-by, when he has broken you in, he will deal with you in all the infinite tenderness of his compassion; and you will acknowledge that even his roughness was all the result of his love to you.

Now, I close by saying that the Lord may take these things away from us *justly*. He sometimes withdraws his bounty without intending mercy. The sufferings of guilty men here are like the first days of a horrible tempest that will continue for ever and ever. If they will not turn to him when he calls in mercy, but continue to reject his love, then will he begin to speak in thunder, and the first storm of his righteous wrath shall only be the beginning of an endless hurricane.

"Ye sinners, seek his grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;

Fly to the shelter of his cross,
And find salvation there."

I have tried to speak very earnestly; but if I have failed to speak as tenderly as I would, may the great Master forgive! Oh, that you would acknowledge your indebtedness to God! Oh, that you would cast away your idols! "As though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God."

God grant that you may be led by the blessed Spirit to yield yourself to him who has given you so much cause to trust him, and to his name shall be eternal honour! Amen, and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hosea 2.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—709, 524, 596.

The Perseverance Of Faith

A Sermon

(No. 2253)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, April 24th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, October 30th, 1890.

"Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."—Matthew 15:28.

I HAVE frequently spoken to you concerning the faith of this Canaanitish woman, of the way in which Christ tried it, and of the manner in which, at length, he honoured it, and granted all that the suppliant sought. The story is so full of meaning, that one might turn it this way, and that way, and the other way, and always see jewels in it. But I am not going to use it with only one aim, namely, to encourage those who have faith enough to seek Jesus, but have not yet, to their joy and peace, been quite able to find him.

This woman had come to her last word. I do not see what more she could have said. When Christ had likened her to a dog, she had consented to it, and said, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." She had come to her last word, and now Christ gives her his best word. It is his way, sometimes, to make us wait till we are completely exhausted, and can say and do no more; then he comes in with the fulness of his divine power, and gives to us what we have importunately sought at his hands. Our extremity is his opportunity.

I. The first remark which I shall make, and enlarge upon, is that FAITH ALONE CAN KEEP A SOUL SEEKING AFTER CHRIST UNDER DISCOURAGEMENT. Other causes may send us a certain distance along the road, but only faith will bring us to the goal of assured rest.

That which made this woman seek the Saviour was, first of all, parental love. She loved her daughter. She longed to have the devil cast out of her, that her daughter might not be so grievously vexed. That started her going, and carried her some way towards the blessing; but she would have stopped short of the boon she desired if she had relied upon natural love alone.

Her earnestness also to a large extent urged her forward. When she desired healing for her daughter, she meant what she said. When she cried, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou Son of David!" it was with a shrill and piteous voice. She could not bear to be refused. Nobody ever came to Christ who pleaded more from the heart than did this poor Canaanite. She was not an idle repeater of forms of prayer. Her prayer leaped, red-hot, from her soul—"Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David!" But her earnestness alone would not have upheld her under the ordeal through which she was called to pass. It would have given way if she had not had the believing conviction that Christ could heal her daughter, and that he would do so.

Her humility also helped her greatly. Had she been a proud woman, she would have stood upon her dignity when she was called a dog; but humility came to her help, and she did not resent even the harsh word the Lord used, but still pleaded for her poor child. Now, parental love and earnestness

and humility are good things, but they are not enough to enable a soul to cling to Christ, and never let him go. Something more is needed.

This Canaanite woman was a very sensible woman, wise and prudent. She knew how to turn the hard words of Christ into arguments in her own favour. She would not be put back. If he had not answered her, she would have pleaded with him again. When he did answer her, and say that it was not meet to give the children's bread to dogs, she found even in that dry bone some little marrow on which to feed her heart. But wise as she was, and prudent as she was, she would not have held out to the end, and obtained the blessing she desired for her daughter, if it had not been for her faith.

We may be quite sure that the one thing specially noteworthy in this woman's case was her faith, first, because *we have Christ's word for it*. He said unto her, "O woman, great is thy faith!" He did not say, "Great is thy love to thy child;" nor, "Great is thy earnestness;" nor, "Great is thy importunity;" but he put his finger on the power that had urged her forward, and he said, "O woman, great is thy faith!" And not in this case alone did Christ trace the blessing to faith, but in nearly every instance where a suppliant obtained favour from him, faith was the medium of securing the mercy. Faith is mightier than all other available forces.

Besides this, *we know that faith supports the other graces*. If other graces can help a soul to plead with Christ, they all owe their power to faith. If it had not been for the faith which she had to support it, parental love would not have helped this woman much. If it had not been for faith, she would not have been earnest and importunate. Faith hangs on to Christ in the dark, it holds to a silent Christ, it holds to a refusing Christ, it holds to a rebuking Christ, and it will not let him go. Faith is the great holdfast that hooks a soul on to the Saviour.

Faith is thus powerful because of its effects. *Faith enlightens, enlivens and strengthens*. It is written of some of old that "They looked unto him, and were lightened." Faith shed a light upon many things, and lets us see that even if Christ has a frown on his face, he has love in his heart. Faith looks right into the heart of Christ, and helps us to perceive that he cannot mean anything but mercy to a seeking soul. Faith also enlivens, and when the heart begins to faint, faith brings its smelling bottle, and revives it. David said, "I had fainted, unless I had believed." Believing is the cure for fainting, and you must do one of two things, either believe or faint. Faith is thus a great help to one who is seeking Christ, because it both enlightens and enlivens the soul. Faith also strengthens. It makes the lame take the prey. Beloved, it is because faith thus enlightens and enlivens and strengthens, that it is the grace most useful to a soul that is seeking to lay hold upon Christ, and yet cannot get a comfortable look at his blessed face.

Moreover, *faith lays hold on Christ*. It is like the Greek Antisthenes, who went to a philosopher to learn; but he was a dull scholar, and the philosopher bade him go away. The next time the class met, Antisthenes returned, and the philosopher thereupon sent for a man with a club to drive the stupid scholar away; but he was overcome by his scholar; for Antisthenes said, "There is no club that was ever made that is heavy enough to drive me away from you. Here I mean to stay, and learn whatever you can teach me." Oh, may we have a faith like that, a faith that will say to Christ, "I will not go away from thee. I can but perish if I stay with thee, and if I go from thee, I must perish; therefore I will abide with thee evermore, and learn all thou wilt teach me"! Faith is like the Greek in the days of Xerxes, who seized the boat with his right hand. When they chopped off the right hand, he seized it with the left hand; when they cut off the left hand, he laid hold of the boat with his teeth, and did not let go until they severed his head from his body. Soul, if thou canst lay hold

of Christ with thy right hand, or with thy left hand, it will be well with thee. Cling to Christ, and say to him with that holy boldness that is the result of faith, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Faith, then, holds on to Christ.

Further, I would say that *faith does this best without help*. How often we try to assist faith! We want faith to have some works, some prayers, something or other of our own to help it. It is as if somebody were to try and help me to walk by giving me a big chair to carry. I should not walk so well with the burden, as without it. Have you ever heard this parable concerning faith? She had to cross a stream, and the current was strong, and there came one to her who said, "' faith, I will help thee! Come with me up the river till we can find a place where we can ford it." Faith said, "No; I was bidden to cross the river here." So another came, and said, "I will build a bridge for you, that you may go over the river with ease;" and he laid hold of a few stones, but not much ever came of it. Yet another said, "I will go and find a boat." But there were no boats about; therefore they asked faith to wait till they build a boat for her. What did she do? She took off her vestments, and plunged into the water. "Thanks God," said she, "I can swim;" and so she swam across, and reached the other side without boat, without bridge, and without ford. That is what I should like to see every sinner here do—begin to swim. Do not wait for help. Cast yourself into the stream of everlasting love. Believe in Christ Jesus, and have no more confidence in the flesh, with its bridges and boats. Commit thyself to the stream of eternal grace, and swim across. Faith can enable you to do it. Nothing else can. Take that lesson home to yourselves, you who are seeking to Saviour at this time.

The only thing that will help you to follow after Christ till you find him, is faith. All your groaning will not help you. All your doubting and your trembling will be of no avail; your feeling that you are too vile to be saved, and that faith would be presumption in such a sinner as you are, will not aid you. But believe that Christ can save you, and trust to his power and love, and he will save you. Come to him as the woman of Canaan came, with her importunate cry, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David," and he will have mercy on you even as he had upon her. Believe, believe, believe! Thou wilt never come into light by doubting and fearing. The way to liberty lies through this one door of faith. Therefore believe and live.

Thus much upon our first remark, that faith alone can keep a soul seeking after Christ under discouragement.

II. Secondly, FAITH IS EXCEEDINGLY DELIGHTFUL TO CHRIST. What he said to this woman began with an exclamation, as if he were struck with something in her that delighted him. He said, "O woman, great is thy faith!" Notice that he spoke of her faith, and of that alone. He knew about her love; he knew about her earnestness; he knew about her humility; but he said nothing at all about them; his one word of commendation was for her faith. "O woman, great is thy faith!" That is what my Lord is looking for now. He comes round and looks at you, who are sitting in these pews, to see whether you have faith in him. There are several thoughts suggested by this, that should encourage you who are seeking Christ.

He can spy out the beginnings of faith. "If thou hast faith as a grain of mustard seed," he will see it, and he will accept it. If thou hast only now begun to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and to trust him, though thy faith be feeble as a babe that cannot stand, but can only cling to its mother's breast, Jesus will see the beginnings of it. He is the "Author" as well as "the Finisher of our faith." Be thou comforted, then, concerning that tiny trust thou hast in him.

Still, *he is greatly pleased when he sees great faith.* When a great sinner says, "I believe that he is a Saviour great enough to save me;" it brings joy to the heart of Christ. When an old sinner

says, "I believe that his precious blood can take away the sin of seventy or eighty years;" the Lord's heart is gladdened. Christ loves a great faith. He deserves great faith, and when he gets it, he is highly pleased. "O woman," said he, "great is thy faith!"

He is so delighted with faith, that *he passes by other things for it*. If that woman's ears had been hung with rings, and her neck had been decked with pearls, and her hands had been covered with diamonds, he would not have cared about her ornaments and her beauty. He sees something that he prizes more than any of these things; therefore he says to her, "O woman, great is thy faith!" He is charmed with that choice decoration of her heart. By that treasure "The king is held in his galleries." Christ may say of faith, "Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thy eyes." When we can but look straight to Christ, and trust in him, he is charmed and carried away by our faith.

Why does Christ think so much of faith?

One reason is, because *faith glorifies him*. He thinks much of it, because it thinks so much of him. Faith believes him, faith trusts him, faith lives upon him. He is "the chiefest among ten thousand" and the "altogether lovely" to faith. Therefore, because faith highly esteems Christ, Christ highly esteems faith.

Next, he loves faith because it is *God's appointed way* in which we are to receive blessing. God might have appointed ordinances as the vehicle of grace; but, instead thereof, he has made faith to be the medium of salvation. If thou believest, thou shalt be saved. He that be faith lays hold on Christ, has laid hold on eternal life. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." To the awakened sinner our word is still, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Since God has put faith into so eminent a place, our Lord Jesus Christ loves to see it; he takes delight in that which pleases his Father.

Another reason why he loves it is, because *faith is the signal which permits the train of mercy to come to us*. Whenever unbelief holds up its arms, the train of almighty grace stands still. Of a certain place it is said, "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Their doubt blocked the way. But when faith lowers the signal, the great Driver of heaven's express says, "That road is clear," and he delights to see it, and drives right ahead. Oh, if thou canst but let that signal go down, showing that the line is clear of all obstructions, Christ will surely come to thee! He is glad to come wherever he can bring a blessing, and he rejoices when faith reveals to him a clear road.

Besides, *faith has open arms for embracing Christ*. When he comes to our door, and finds it locked, he stands there till his bitter lament is "my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." But when he comes and the door is open, the poor sinner is so taken up with his beauty that he never thinks of shutting him out. "Oh," says the seeking soul, "if the Lord would but come in!" And as surely as Christ finds thus door open, he comes in, and dwells there; and makes that heart and that house happy with his divine presence. Christ loves faith because faith gives him a hearty welcome; faith receives him; faith embraces him.

Oh, I would to God you would think of this and exercise faith in the Lord Jesus! May you see that nothing delights Christ like a sinner believing in him, that nothing gives him more joy than to have a saint resting completely upon him without doubt or fear!

Thus have we considered two points; first, that the only way to keep a soul seeking Christ under discouragement is by faith; and, secondly, that nothing pleases Christ like believing on his name.

III. The third point is that FAITH WILL, BEFORE LONG, GET A KIND ANSWER FROM THE LORD JESUS. This poor woman at the first, received no reply to her petition, "Have mercy

on me, O Lord, thou Son of David!" Then, when Christ did speak to her, he gave her what seemed to be a rough answer. But, after a while, these notes of heavenly music sounded in her ear, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt!"

Now, someone here probably says, "I have been praying ever so long, and I have received no cheering reply." Well, if thou believest in Jesus, thou shalt have a good reply before long. If thou canst but hold on to Christ, determined to plead with him till he answers thee, he will answer thee kindly ere long. But keep on believing that he can and will give thee what thou needest, and thou shalt not be disappointed. "Oh," says one, "you do not know who I am! I am an outcast." So was the woman. She was a Canaanitish woman, yet she obtained a blessing from Christ; and thou shalt get one, too, if thou dost follow her in her faith. "Oh, but I do not think that I am fit!" Did Christ ever say to you that you were a dog? He did as good as tell this woman that; yet she held on to him by faith, and prevailed. "Oh, but I have prayed in vain for such a long time!: So did she. She prayed, and for a while, she received no answer. "Oh, but I feel worse after I have prayed!" So did she; for instead of getting a comfortable answer, she heard Christ say, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." You cannot be in a worse plight than she was. "But the devil troubles me," you add. The devil also troubled her. She pleaded about her daughter, who was possessed with a devil; and she kept on pleading and believing. She meant to have Christ. I exhort you to come to the same holy determination. Oh, that Almighty grace might help you so to do; for in so doing you will surely get an answer of peace! You will get a comfortable answer before very long, probably much earlier than you have reckoned upon.

Remember that *Christ delays in order to increase your faith*. Your faith will grow by exercise: therefore he tests it that you may use it, and that thus it may become stronger.

Christ delays in order to increase the blessing itself. While we wait, the blessing becomes bigger, and our hands become stronger to hold it when it does come. You may be sure that our blessed Lord will give you a comfortable answer; for you do not know that he has been sustaining you while you have been pleading, and as yet have received no answer? Did you ever notice, when Joseph's brethren went down into Egypt, that he made himself strange to them, and spoke to them roughly, and put them in prison? But in spite of that, there was one thing he did: when they went back to Jacob, he filled their sacks for them. He would not smile upon them, but he would not starve them; and at last, it is said, "Joseph could not refrain himself," and he "made himself known unto his brethren. He was obliged to show his love at last; but even before he did that, he always filled their sacks for them. Christ will deal with you in like manner; while you are waiting, he will not let you die. Oh, in what wonderful ways did the Lord support me when, through weary years, I was seeking his face! I could not say that I had any comfort that I dared to call my own, and yet there flowed into my soul, somehow, a secret power that enabled me still to hope, and still to hold on; for that I now desire to bless his name, and I tell it for the encouragement of any who may be in soul-trouble as I was. Keep on seeking his grace, dear friend. Believe still; for he must give you a comfortable answer one of these days.

Consider well that *it is contrary to his nature to refuse to bless*. He is brimful of love; and if he does put a sinner back for a while, it is only because it is right and kind and wise to do so. But his heart yearns over every seeking sinner. He wants you more than you want him. He longs after you. He desires to bless you. He must do so; it is his nature to do so.

He must give you a comfortable reply before long, again, *for it is contrary to his glory to refuse*. If he allowed a seeking sinner to die, where would his troubles be? Has he not said, "Him that

cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"? Our friend, Dr. Barnardo, announces that in his refuges no homeless boy will ever be rejected: that no destitute child shall ever be turned away. Suppose somebody could prove—which, of course they cannot do—that scores of destitute children were turned away, all confidence in him would be destroyed. And if it could be proved that Christ ever cast out a single soul that came to him, it would take away his honor and glory. We could never believe him any more. Perish the thought of such a thing!

It is contrary to his word to refuse any seeker, and Christ will keep his word. "Come unto me," saith he, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If Christ will not give you rest when you come to him, what is his promise worth? My friend, Dr. Pierson, sent me, the other day, an imitation of an American banknote, which they call a "greenback" over there, and on one side of it were these words, "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." A splendid note that! It had our friends name on the back, "Arthur T. Pierson"; and he said to me, when he sent it, "If the Lord does not pay you, I will, for I have endorsed the note." I shall never have to look my brother Pierson up, and tell him that the note he endorsed is of no value. There it stands, and stands forever/ God will keep his word. I know it; and I want you poor sinners to know it too. He cannot run back from his own promise. His word is his bond. To every honest man it is so; but to the thrice-holy God his oath and his promise bind him eternally.

Let me add that, if Christ does not give a comfortable answer to you who believingly seek him, *it is contrary to his custom*. Here are many of us who have known our Lord now for forty years, and we can say that his custom is to hear our prayers, and according to our faith, so is it unto us. Come along, thou blackest sinner out of hell! Come, and wash in the fountain filled with blood, and thou shalt be cleansed, as surely as ever Christ died! Come along, thou lowest, meanest, most self-abhorred, most self-condemned of humankind! Come thou, and look to him, and trust in him; and if thou dost not find peace at once, yet be sure that thou shalt have it before long. "The morning cometh." It is not for long that Christ's mercy can be restrained. He must break forth, like Joseph, weeping over his brethren. He must manifest himself to you in love, and tenderness, and kindness. I will be bound for him any day that it shall be so.

IV. Lastly, we come to a very glorious thought. FAITH GETTING CHRIST'S WORD HATH ALL THINGS. Listen to the text again: "Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto you even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Christ's word was *a comforting word*. How the look on this woman's face must have been altered when Christ talked to her so! When he answered her never a word, she doubtless had a long and sorrowful face, and probably the big tears stood in her eyes; but not he began to talk in another strain, how happy she felt! The woman was no more sad. So it is even to-day. One word from Christ can comfort you, even if they talk about putting you into an asylum because you are so melancholy. One word from my Master shall be the balm of Gilead to your wounds. He will bind up your broken heart. He will comfort you and speak peace to you, as he did to her. It was a comforting word.

It was also *a commending word*, "O woman, great is thy faith!" She had never been praised like that before. I have no doubt that her husband had praised her. What good husband is there who does not praise his wife, even as it is written of the virtuous woman, "Her husband also, and he praiseth her"? but his praise had never been so sweet as this word from the Lord Jesus. I have no doubt that her daughter had called her all the sweet names she could think of; for she loved her child, and it was only natural to believe that her child loved her. But now, when Christ looks her in the face, and says, "O woman, great"—"ah!" she may have thought; "he is going to say, 'Great

is thy sin,' or else, 'Great is thy noise.' " What astonishment must have been hers when he said, "Great is thy faith"! He gave her a gold medal for her faith, ay, something even better than that, she was put into the class called "Highly commended." "O woman, great is thy faith!" It was a commending word; and she needed it.

Next, it was *a commanding word*. Notice that, well. Listen to it: "Be it unto thee." He speaks like a king. And if the Lord now speaks his gracious word with power, as I pray that he may, he will say, "Minister, comfort that woman, who puts her trust in me." He will say, "Ordinances, comfort those weary ones. Bread and wine, be sweet to the taste of those poor troubled ones." He will say, "Prayer-meetings, be a joy to those poor tried ones." It is a commanding voice with which the Lord of hosts speaks, when he says, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."

In addition to being a commanding word, it was *a creating word*. Why, it was the very word that God himself used when he made the light! He said, "*Be* light." He said to the earth, "Be," and it was. He said to the heavens, "Be," and they were. The word is a fiat. In the Latin it is precisely that, a *fiat*. So here, that same mighty voice says, "Be it unto thee. Be it unto thee." O God, send forth a fiat at this moment to some poor weary heart! Create light; create joy; create peace. He can create all of these in your heart now. Oh, that he might do it by the power of his almighty grace! The faith of this poor Canaanite thus obtained for its reward a creative fiat from the lips of Christ.

Further, it was *a complying word*. You can see all these adjectives begin with the same letter: it was a comforting word, a commending word, a commanding word, a creating word and a complying word. "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt—just as you please, whatever you wish for, and in the way you wish to have it." Christ capitulates to a conquering faith. Nothing ever conquered him yet but faith. His love is stronger than death. Death could not conquer Christ, nor could all the powers of hell. But here he surrenders at discretion to a soul that can vanquish him by believing. "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Do you want more joy? Do you want full salvation? Do you want perfect rest? Behold, he says to each of you who can and do believe in him, "Be it unto you even as thou wilt."

Thus, lastly, this word became *a completing word*; "her daughter was made whole from that very hour." From that very hour she was well again. Christ finished that work speedily. He was not long about it. It does not take so long to save a soul as it does for a lightening flash to become visible. You pass from death to life in an instant. When lost, ruined, condemned, the man casts himself at Christ's feet, immediately he is saved. It is not the work of hours or weeks, or years, when you trust to the finished work of Christ. All that required time, Christ has accomplished. All that now has to be done, can be done in a moment. When a man is thirsty, it does not take him long to drink when the water is there. Remember the invitation with which the Scriptures must conclude, "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The water of life is there, take it. When a man is hungry, it does not take him long to eat when the bread is on the table. God can now give you, who came to this Tabernacle afar off from him, grace which shall enable you to be made nigh at once. He can bring you immediately out of the blackness of sin, and make you on the instant whiter than snow."

Believe my Lord and Master. Oh, why do you not believe him? Artful doubts and reasonings cease! I would now take the hammer and the nails, and fasten my unbelief and fear to Christ's cross. Hang there, ye thieves, and die! You destroy men's souls, ye doubts and reasonings! Come here,

simple faith, thou who hast no wisdom! A mere child thou art, but; O simple faith, thou hast the key of the kingdom! Come, and welcome, into my heart. Will all of you not also believe, and trust in Christ, even now? If you do, you shall be saved.. "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." God bless you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew 15:21-39.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—560, 599, 550.

MATTHEW 15:21—39.

Jesus had been in conflict with the Scribes and Pharisees. He never liked such discussions, and though he was always victorious in every controversy, it grieved his spirit.

Verse 21. Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

He was glad to get away, and made a journey over the hills to get at as great a distance as possible from these cavillers.

22. And behold, a woman of Canaan came.

A Syro-Phoenician woman, one of the old, condensed race living in Tyre and Sidon.

22. A woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David.

You remember the son of David, that is Solomon, was well known in Phoenicia; for the men of Tyre and Sidon cut down the cedars for Solomon, and Hiram helped him in the building of the temple. There had always been a remembrance of this lingering among the Sidonians; so this woman called the Saviour the Son of David.

22. Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

"Have mercy on me." The mother identifies herself with her child. When we pray for our children, that is the right way to pray. Intercessory prayer never prevails until we bear the object of our prayer upon our heart, and ask for the blessing we desire for them as a favor to ourselves.

23. But he answered her not a word.

Answers to prayers may be delayed; but delays are not always denials. Christ's silence must have been a great trial to the poor woman; but our Lord knew with whom he was dealing.

23. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

Ah, these disciples made a grand mistake! She did not cry after them; she cried after him; but so they understood it: therefore they said, "Get rid of her; she disturbs us; when we are in the street, we can hear her cry. Send her away; for she crieth after us." Ah! Poor disciples, she was not so foolish as to cry after you; she was crying after your Master. If any here have come only to hear the preacher, they have made a great mistake; but if you have come for a word from the Master, I pray that you may be gratified.

24. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Christ did what he was sent to do; he was the Messiah, the sent One. He would not go beyond his mission, so he says, "I am sent." He was sent as a Preacher and a Teacher, not to the Gentiles, but to Israel. He had a larger commission in reserve, and was yet to be a Saviour to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; but for the present he was to be a Shepherd to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

25. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me.

A very short prayer; but how much there was in it!

26, 27. *But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*

It is the faculty of faith to see in the dark. This woman spied out light in what seemed to be a very dark saying. Did Christ call her a dog? Well, dogs have their privileges when they lie under the table. Even if their master does not throw them a crumb, yet they may take that which falls from his hand. If Jesus would but allow any mercy to drop, as it were, accidentally, this woman would be content.

28, 29. *Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. And Jesus departed from thence.*

When he had done his business, he was off. Our Lord was a great itinerant; he was always on the move/ He had come all the way to the parts of Tyre and Sidon to help one woman; and when that one woman had been attended to, he goes back again immediately to his old post by the sea of Galilee.

29, 30. *And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them.*

In the prayer-meeting, held by the deacons and elders this morning, before I came in here, one of our friends observed in prayer that there might be many lame, blind, and maimed in the congregation, and he prayed that they might be brought to Jesus. Let us, by faith, bring them to him, and lay them at his feet. Oh, that this word, "He healed them," might be true again to-day!

31. *Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be made whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.*

Oh, for glory to God! There is no glory to god which equals that which comes from blind eyes which have been made to see; and from dumb lips which have been made to speak. The glories of nature and providence are eclipsed by the glories of grace. May we see such things to-day!

32. *Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.*

Ah, dear friends, they were willing to put up with inconvenience to hear the gospel in those days! Three days of sermon-hearing! People want sermons wonderfully short now, and the sermons must be marvellously interesting, too, or else the people grow dreadfully tired. If dinner-time came around, the dinner-bell, at any time, in these days, would drown all the attraction of the pulpit. But here were people that attended Christ's ministry for three days, and they had nothing to eat. He had compassion upon them, and said to his disciples, "I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way."

33, 34. *And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye?*

That is the point. It is idle to enquire about how much you want. "How many loaves have ye?"

34, 35. *And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.*

It was a token of Christ's presence and power that they were willing to sit down on the ground. Think of thousands of people taking their places in an orderly way to feed upon seven cakes and a few little fishes! Without any demur, the crowd arranged itself into banquet order at the command of Jesus.

36, 37 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

They were large baskets, too; not like the small food-baskets mentioned when the five thousand were fed. The word used here is the same word that is employed to describe the basket in which Saul was let down by the wall of Damascus.

38. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

Now, if the women and children bore the same proportion to the men as they generally do in our congregation, there must have been a very large crowd indeed. Why is the number of the women and children not mentioned? Was it because there were so many? Or was it because their appetites being smaller than the appetites of men, the men are put down as the great eaters, and the women and children, as it were, thrown into the count? What a mercy it is that the Lord adds to the church daily a vast number of men, women, and children! The Lord sends us many more, until we cannot count them!

39. And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

He had taught the people, and fed them; so now he goes elsewhere to carry similar blessings to others also.

* The sermons available for future use are those preached on Lord's-day and Thursday evenings. These were usually shorter than the morning discourses. The publishers will issue, with the Sermon, the Exposition that preceeded it as often as they are able to do so. They believe that readers will value all of these utterances of the beloved preacher who is now with the Lord. They have heard of many sermon-readers who regularly turn to the portions of Scripture expounded by Mr. Spurgeon, and even read the hymns sung at the Tabernacle. Such friends will now have a very full report of the services held there during the late Pastor's ministry.

The Two Guards, Praying and Watching

A Sermon

(No. 2254)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, May 1st, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, July 24th, 1890.

"Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them."—Nehemiah 4:9.

Nehemiah, and the Jews with him, were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Sanballat and others were angry with them, and tried to stop the work. They determined to pounce upon the people on a sudden, and slay them, and so to put an end to what they were doing. Our text tells us what Nehemiah and his companions did in this emergency: "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them."

These people had not only to build the wall of Jerusalem, but to watch against their enemies at the same time. Their case is ours. We have to work for Christ. I hope that all of us who love him are trying to do what we can to build up his kingdom; but we need also to watch against deadly foes. If they can destroy us, of course they will also destroy our work. They will do both, if they can. The powers of evil are mad against the people of God. If they can in any way injure or annoy us, you may rest assured that they will do so. They will leave no stone unturned, if it can serve their purpose. No arrows will be left in the quivers of hell while there are godly men and women at whom they can be aimed. Satan and his allies aim at our hearts every poisoned dart they have.

Nehemiah had been warned of the attack that was to be made upon the city. The Jews who lived near these Samaritans had heard their talk of what they meant to do, and they came and told Nehemiah of the plotting of the adversaries. We also have been warned. As our Lord said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat," so has he, in his word, told us that there is a great and terrible evil power which is seeking our destruction. If Satan can do it, he will not only sift us as wheat, but he will cast us into the fire that we may be destroyed. Brethren, "we are not ignorant of his devices." You are not left in a fool's paradise, to dream of security from trial, and to fancy that you are past temptation.

It is well for these people, also, that, being in danger, and being aware of the malice of their enemies, they had a noble leader to incite them to the right course to be pursued. Nehemiah was well qualified for his work. He gave the Jews very shrewd, sensible, and yet spiritual advice, and this was a great help to them in their hour of need. Beloved, we have a better Leader than Nehemiah; we have our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and we have his Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and shall abide with us. I beg you to listen to his wise and good advice. I think that he will give it to you through our explanation of the text. He will say to you what Nehemiah, in effect, said to these people, "Watch and pray." Although the adversaries of the Jews conspired together, and came to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder the work of rebuilding the wall, Nehemiah says, "Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them."

In the text, I see *two guards*; first, *prayer*: "We made our prayer unto our God." The second guard is *watchfulness*: "We set a watch." When I have spoken on these two subjects, I shall take as my third topic, *the two guards together*. "We prayed, and we set a watch." We must have them both, if we would defeat the enemy.

I. First, then, dear friends, think of THE FIRST GUARD: "We made our prayers unto our God."

Speaking of this prayer, I would hold it up as a pattern for our prayers in a like condition. It was *a prayer that meant business*. Sometimes when we pray, I am afraid that we are not transacting business at the throne of grace; but Nehemiah was as practical in his prayer as he was in the setting of the watch. Some brethren get up in our prayer-meetings, and say some very good things; but what they really ask for, I am sure I do not know. I have heard prayers of which I have said, when they were over, "Well, if God answers that prayer, I have not the least idea of what he will give us." It was a very beautiful prayer, and there was a great deal of explanation of doctrine and experience in it; but I do not think that God wants to have doctrine or experience explained to him. The fault about the prayer was, that there was not anything asked for in it. I like, when brethren are praying, that they should be as business-like as a good carpenter at his work. It is of no use to have a hammer with an ivory handle, unless you aim it at the nail you mean to drive in up to the head; and if that is your object, an ordinary hammer will do as well as a fine one, perhaps better. Now, the prayers of Nehemiah and the Jews were petitions for divine protection. They knew what they wanted, and they asked for it definitely. Oh, for more definiteness in prayer! I am afraid that our prayers are often clouds, and we get mists for answers. Nehemiah's prayer meant business. I wish we could always pray in this way. When I pray, I like to go to God just as I go to a banker when I have a cheque to be cashed. I walk in, put the cheque down on the counter, the clerk give me my money, I take it up, and go about my business. I do not know that I ever stopped in a bank five minutes to talk with the clerks; when I have received up my change, I go away and attend to other matters. That is how I like to pray; but there is a way of praying that seems like lounging near the mercy-seat, as though one had no particular reason for being found there. Let it not be so with you, brethren. Plead the promise, believe it, receive the blessing God is ready to give, and go about your business. The prayer of Nehemiah and his companions meant business.

In the next place, it was *a prayer that overcame difficulties*. The text begins with a long word, "nevertheless." If we pull it to pieces, we get three words, never the less; when certain things happen, we will pray never the less; on the contrary, we will cry to our God all the more. Sanballat sneered; but we prayed never the less, but all the more because of his sneers. Tobiah uttered a cutting jest; but we prayed never the less, but all the more because of his mocking taunt. If men make a jest of your religion, pray none the less. If they even become cruel and violent to you, pray none the less; never the less, not a word less, not a syllable less, not a desire less, and not any faith less. What are your difficulties, dear friend, in coming to the mercy seat? What hindrance lies in your way? Let nothing obstruct your approach to the throne of grace. Turn all stumbling-stones into stepping-stones; and come, with holy boldness, and say, notwithstanding all opposition, "never the less, we made our prayer unto our God." Nehemiah's prayer meant business, and overcame difficulties.

Notice, next, that it was *a prayer that came before anything else*. It does not say that Nehemiah set a watch, and then prayed; but "nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch." Prayer must always be the fore horse of the team. Do whatever else is wise, but not until thou hast prayed. Send for the physician if thou art sick; but first pray. Take the medicine if thou hast a belief that it will do thee good; but first pray. Go and talk to the man who has slandered you, if you think

you ought to do so; but first pray. "Well, I am going to do so and so," says one, "and I shall pray for a blessing on it afterwards." Do not begin it until you have prayed. Begin, continue, and end everything with prayer; but especially begin with prayer. Some people would never begin what they are going to do, if they prayed about it first, for they could not ask God's blessing upon it. Is there anybody here who is going out of this Tabernacle to a place where he should not go? Will he pray first? He knows that he cannot ask a blessing on it; and therefore he ought not to go there. Go nowhere where you cannot go after prayer. This would often be a good guide in your choice of where you should go. Nehemiah first prayed, and then set a watch.

Once more, it was *a prayer that was continued*. If I read the passage aright, "we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night," it means that, as long as they watched, they prayed. They did not pray their prayer, and then leave off, and go away, as naughty boys do when they give runaway knocks at a door. Having begun to pray, they continued praying. So long as there were any enemies about, the prayer and the watching were never parted. They continued still to cry to him who keepeth Israel as long as they set the watchman of the night to warn them of the foe.

When shall we leave off praying, brothers and sisters? Well, they say that we shall do so when we get to heaven. I am not clear about that. I do not believe in the intercession of saints for us; but I remember that it is written in the book of Revelation, that the souls under the altar cried, "How long, O Lord?" Those souls were waiting for the resurrection, waiting for the coming of Christ, waiting for the triumph of his kingdom; and I cannot conceive of their waiting there without often crying, "O Lord, how long? Remember thy Son, glorify his name, accomplish the number of thine elect." But certainly, as long as we are here, we must pray. One lady. Who professed that she had long been perfect, said that her mind was in such complete conformity with the mind of God, that she need not pray any longer. Poor creature! What did she know about the matter? She needed to begin at the first letter of the alphabet of salvation; and pray, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" When people imagine they need not to pray, the Lord have mercy upon them!

"Long as they live let Christians pray,
For only while they pray they live."

The prayer which Nehemiah offered was, next, *a prayer that was home-made*. There may be some of you who like prayers made for you; and it may be that, if all the congregation are to join in the supplication, and every voice is to speak, the prayer must be prepared even as the hymn is; but ready-made prayers always seem to me very much like ready-made clothes, they are meant to fit everybody, and it is very seldom that they fit anybody. For real business at the mercy-seat, give me a home-made prayer, a prayer that comes out of the deeps of my heart, not because I invented it, but because God the Holy Spirit put it there, and gave it such a living force that I could not help letting it come out. Though your words are broken, and your sentences are disconnected; if your desires are earnest, if they are like coals of juniper, burning with a vehement flame, God will not mind how they find expression. If you have no words, perhaps you will pray better without them. There are prayers that break the backs of words; they are too heavy for any human language to carry.

This prayer, then, whatever it may have been as to its words, was one the pleaders made: "We made our prayers unto our God."

It is very important to notice, that it was *a prayer that went to the home of prayer*: "We made our prayer unto our God." You have heard of the man who prayed at Boston, "the hub of the

universe", and the report in the paper the next morning was, that "The Rev. Dr. So-and-so prayed the finest prayer that was ever addressed to a Boston audience." I am afraid that there are some prayers of that sort, that are prayed to the congregation. That is not the kind of prayer that God loves. Forget that there is anybody present, forget that a human ear is listening to your accents; and let it be said of your prayer, "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God."

It is a very commonplace remark to make, that prayer must go to God if it to be of any avail; but it is very necessary to make it. When prayer does not go to God, what is the good of it? When you come out of your closet, and feel that you have only gone through a form, how much are you benefited? Make your prayers unto your God. Speak in his ear, knowing that he is there; and come away knowing that he has replied to you, that he has lifted up the light of his countenance upon you. That is the kind of prayer we need for our protection against our enemies both day and night.

Only once more upon this first point. I gather from the words before me that it was *a prayer saturated with faith*. "We made our prayer unto—God"? No, "unto our God." They had taken Jehovah to be their God, and they prayed to him as their God. They had a full assurance that, though he was the God of the whole earth, yet he was specially their God; and so they made their prayer unto the God who had given himself to them, and to whom they belonged by covenant relationship. "We made our prayers unto *our God*." Those two little words carry a vast weight of meaning. The door of prayer seems to turn on those two golden hinges,—"*our God*." If you and I are to be delivered from the evil that is in the world, if we are to be kept building the church of God, we must have for our first guard, mighty, believing prayer, such as Nehemiah and his Jewish friends presented unto the Lord.

II. I have now to speak to you about THE SECOND GUARD: "We set a watch against them day and night, because of them."

This setting of the watch was *a work appointed*. "We set a watch." Nehemiah did not say, "Now, some of you fellows, go and watch," leaving the post of watchmen open to any who chose to take it; but they "set a watch." A certain number of men had to go on duty at a certain point, at a certain hour, and remain for a certain length of time, and be on guard against the adversary. "We set a watch." Brethren, if we are to watch over ourselves, and we must do so, we must do it with a definite purpose. We must not say, "I must try to be watchful." No, no; you must be watchful; and your watchfulness must be as distinct and definite an act as your prayer. "We set a watch." Some of you have seen the guards changed in the barracks; there is a special time for each company to mount guard. When you go to bed at night, pray the Lord to guard you during the darkness. In the morning, set a watch when you go to your business. Set a watch when you go to the dinner-table; set a watch when you return home. Oh, how soon we may be betrayed into evil unless we set a watch!

It was *a work carefully done*; for Nehemiah says, "We set a watch against them day and night, because of them." Those three last words would be better rendered, "over against them"; that is, wherever there was an enemy, there he set a watch/ They are likely to come up this way. Very well, set a watch there. Perhaps they may shift about, and come up this way. Very well, set a watch there. Possibly they may come climbing over the wall in front here. "Well, set a watch there. "We set a watch over against them." One brother has a very hot temper. Brother, set a watch there. Another is very morose at home, critical, picking holes in other people's coats. Brother, set a watch there. One friend has a tendency to pride, another to unbelief. Set a watch wherever the foe is likely to come. "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch over against them."

It was *a work continued*; Nehemiah says, "we set a watch against them day and night." What! Is there to be someone sitting up all night? Of course there is. If Sanballat had told them when he meant to attack them, they might have gone to sleep at other times; but as he did not give them that information, they had to set a watch "day and night." The devil will not give you notice when he is going to tempt you; he likes to take men by surprise; therefore, set a watch day and night.

It was *a work quickened by knowledge*. they knew that Sanballat would come if he could, so they set a watch. The more you know of the plague of your own heart, the more you will set a watch against it. The more you know of the temptations that are in the world through lust, the more you should set a watch. The older you are, the more you should watch. "Oh!" says an aged friend, "you should not say that; it is the young people who go wrong." Is it? In the Old Testament or in the New, have you an instance of a young believer who went astray? The Bible tells us of many old men who were tripped up by Satan when they were not watching; so you have need to set a watch even when your hair turns grey, for you will not be out of gunshot of the devil until you have passed through the gate of pearl into the golden streets of the New Jerusalem.

You and I, dear friends, have need to set a watch against the enemies of our holy faith. Some people ask me, "Why do you talk so much about the 'Down-grade'? Let men believe what they like. Go on with your work for God, and pray to him to set them right." I believe in praying and setting a watch. We have to guard with jealous care "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." When you find, as you do find now, professing Christians and professing Christian ministers denying every article of the faith, or putting another meaning upon all the words than they must have been understood to bear, and preaching lies in the name of the Most High, it is time that somebody set a watch against them. A night-watchman's place is not an easy berth; but I am willing to take that post for my blessed Master's sake. Those professed servants of Christ who enter into an unholy alliance with men who deny the faith will have to answer for it at the last great day. As for us, brethren, when our Lord comes, let him find us watching as well as praying.

But, dear friends, to come home to ourselves, we must set a watch against our own personal adversaries. I hope that, in one sense, you have no personal enemies; that you own nobody a grudge; but that you live in peace and love towards all mankind. But there are Christian people here, who will go to homes where everybody in the house is against them. Many a godly woman goes from the sanctuary to a drunken husband; many children, converted to God, see anything but what they like to see in their homes. What are they to do in such circumstances? Set a watch. Dear woman, how do know but that you shall be the means of saving your unconverted husband? If so, you must set a watch; do not give him a bit of your mind; you will not convert him that way. And you, dear children, who have come to Christ, and joined the church, mind that you are dutiful and obedient, for otherwise you will destroy all hope of bringing your parents to the Saviour. Set a watch. "Oh!" say you, "if I do a little wrong, they magnify it." I know they do; therefore, set a watch; be more careful. Set a watch over your temper, set a watch over your tongue, set a watch over your actions. Be patient, be gentle, be loving. May the Spirit of God work all this in you!

But there is another set of enemies much more dreadful than these adversaries that are without us, the foes within, the evil tendencies of our corrupt nature, against which we must always set a watch. Perhaps you say, "How can I do this?" Well, first, know what they are. People who are beginning the Christian life should seek to know where their weak points are. I should not wonder, dear friend, if your weak point lies where you think that you are strong. Where you think, "Oh, I shall never go wrong there!"—that is the very place where you are likely to fall. Set a watch wherever

any weakness has appeared; and if you have, in the past of your Christian life, grieved the Holy Spirit by anything wrong, set a double watch there. Where you have tripped once, you may trip again; for you are the same man. Set a watch, also, dear friend, whenever you feel quite secure. Whenever you feel certain that you cannot be tempted in a particular direction, that proves that you are already as proud as Lucifer. Set a watch, set a watch, set a watch. Avoid every occasion of sin. If any course of conduct would lead you into sin, do not go in that direction. I heard a man say, as an excuse for drinking, "You see, if ever I take a glass of beer, I seem to lose myself, and I must have two or three more." Well, then, if that is the case with you, do not take a glass of beer. "But," says one, "if I get into company, I forget myself." Then, do not go into company. Better go to heaven as a hermit, than go to hell with a multitude. Pluck out your right eye, and cut off your right hand, sooner than that these should cause you to fall into sin. Do not go where you are likely to be tempted. "Well," says one, "but my business calls me into the midst of temptation." I grant you that your business may compel you to go where there are ungodly men; for how could some live at all, if they had not to come into contact with the ungodly?—they would have to go out of the world. Well, then, if that is your case, put on the whole armour of God, and do not go without being prepared to fight the good fight of faith. Set a watch, set a watch, set a watch.

Watch against the beginnings of sin. Remember, Satan never begins where he leaves off; he begins with a little sin, and he goes on to a greater one. When he first tempts men, he does not aim at all he hopes to accomplish; but he tries to draw them aside by little and little, and he works up by degrees to the greater sin he wants them to commit. I do not believe that, at the present time, a Christian man can be too precise. We serve a very precise God: "the Lord thy God is a jealous God." Keep out of many things in which professing Christians now indulge themselves. The question is, whether they are Christians at all. If we must not judge them, at any rate, let us judge for ourselves, and settle it, once for all, that we dare not go where they go; indeed, we have no wish to do so.

Watch for what God has to say to you. In your reading of the Bible, if the Holy Spirit applies a text of Scripture to you with special force, regard it as a hint from your heavenly Father that there is a lesson in it for you. I am often surprised at the way in which the morning text will often instruct me through the whole day. Persons who come to hear the Word of God preached, often find that, within two or three days, there is a reason why the preacher delivered that particular sermon, and a reason why they were led to hear it.

Whenever you see a professing Christian going astray from the way of holiness, do not talk about it, and so increase the mischief. "It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest." Instead of speaking of another's fall, set a watch for yourself, and say, "That is when he slipped, that is where I may stumble if the grace of God does not keep me." Remember our Saviour's words to the three disciples with him in Gethsemane, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

III. I finish by putting THE TWO GUARDS TOGETHER. "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them."

Dear friends, neither of these two guards is sufficient alone. *Prayer alone* will not avail. To pray and not to watch, is presumption. You pretend to trust in God, and yet you are throwing yourself into danger, as the devil would have had Christ do, when he tempted him to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. If you pray to be kept, then be watchful.

Prayer without watchfulness is hypocrisy. A man prays to be kept from sin, and then goes into temptation; his prayer is evidently a mere piece of mockery; for he does not carry it out in his practice.

Sometimes, however, ignorance may lead to prayer without watching. There are other things which ought not to be omitted. Let me tell you a simple story/ There was a little school-girl who did not know often her lessons, and there was another girl, who sat near her, who always said her lessons correctly. Her companions said to her, "Jane, how is it that you always know your lessons?" Jane replied, "I pray to God to help me, and so I know them." The next day, the other little girl stood up, but she did not know her lesson; and afterward she said to her friend, "I prayed to God about my lesson, but I did not know it any better than I did yesterday." Jane said, "But did you try to learn the lesson?" "No," she said; "I prayed about it, and I thought that was sufficient." Of course she did not know her lesson without learning it. In the same manner, you must watch as well as pray. There must be the daily guard put upon tongue, and thought, and hand; or else prayer will be in vain.

I have known some people run great risks, and yet say that they have prayed to the Lord to preserve them. I have heard, dozens of times, these words, "I made it a matter of prayer," and I have been ready to grow angry with the man who has uttered them. He has done a wrong thing, and he has excused himself because he says that he made it a matter of prayer. A young man married an ungodly young woman, and yet he said that he made it a matter of prayer! A Christian woman married an ungodly man, and when someone blamed her for disobeying the Word of God, she said that she made it a matter of prayer! If you had really sought divine guidance, you would not have dared to do what the Scriptures expressly forbid to a child of God. Prayer without watching is not sufficient to preserve us from evil.

On the other hand, dear friends, *watching without praying* is equally futile. To say, "I will keep myself right," and never pray to God to keep you, is self-confidence, which must lead to evil. If you try to watch, and do not pray, you will go to sleep, and there will be an end to your watching. It is only by praying and watching that you will be able to keep on your guard. Besides, watching grows wearisome without prayer, and we soon give it up, unless we have a sweet interlude of prayer to give us rest, and to help us to continue watching.

I will not keep you longer when I have said this, *put the two together*, "Watch and pray," or, as my text has it, "Pray and watch." One will help the other. Prayer will call out the watchman, prayer will incite him to keep his eyes open, prayer will be the food to sustain him during the night, prayer will be the fire to warn him. On the other hand, watching will help prayer, for watching proves prayer to be true. Watching excites prayer, for every enemy we see will move us to pray more earnestly. Moreover, watching *is* prayer. If there be true watching, the watching itself is prayer. The two blend the one into the other. Beloved friends, I send you away with my text ringing in your ears, "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night."

But I have not been speaking to all who are here. Some of you do not pray, some of you cannot set a watch. The message for you is, "Ye must be born again." You cannot attempt Christian duties till first you have the Christian life; and the only way to get the Christian life is to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to the fountain which he has filled with his precious blood; wash there, and be clean; and then, quickened by his Spirit, set a watch. I am looking to see some people brought to Christ at this service, for although I have been preaching to God's people, if they will watch for you, and pray for you, there will come a blessing to you through their watching and praying. The Lord grant that it may come to many of you! "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him when he is near." May many seek and find the Lord to-night; and may many call upon

him in truth! "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved." God grant that it may be so to everybody here, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Nehemiah 4.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—994, 999, 668

NEHEMIAH 4:1-23.

Verse 1. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.

It was needful to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, which had been lying in ruins. They went on pretty briskly, for everyone had a mind to work. There never was a good work yet but what there were some to oppose it, and there never will be till the Lord comes. Sanballat heard what the Jews were doing, and he was very angry. "He was wroth, and took great indignation." He was all on fire with anger that God's work was being continued.

2. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews?

The enemies of God's people generally take to sneering. It is a very easy way of showing opposition.

2. Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?

No doubt these questions were thought to be very witty and very sarcastic. The enemies of Christ are generally good hands at this kind of thing. Well, if it amuses them, I do not know that it need hurt us much; for, after all, it is their way of paying homage to God's power.

3. Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him.

Such a man as Sanballat never lacks friends. If there is a bad man anywhere, there is sure to be another close at hand. The devil does not make a fire with one stick. When he has set the first one alight, he can generally find a faggot to put near it. Tobiah the Ammonite, who was tarred with the same brush as Sanballat the Horonite, was by him.

3. and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

Tobiah, you see, was another great wit. If possible, he excelled his leader in sarcasm. Are any of you the objects of ridicule for Christ's sake? Bear it without being much distressed by it. It will break no bones, after all. If your Lord endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, you may very well bear it without being distressed.

4, 5. Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity; and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

This was righteous indignation; but Nehemiah is not a perfect model for us. He was not only stern, but he mingled with his severity a measure of bitterness in his prayer that we must not imitate. Sometimes, when we have seen men plotting against God, seeking to ruin the souls of others, and trying to stop us in our endeavour to build up the church of God, we have felt such language as this trembling on our lips. It were better, however, for us to bow the knee, in humble imitation of our Lord upon the cross, and cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

6. So built we the wall.

You half expected to read, "So we stopped building the wall, and answered Sanballat and Tobiah." Not a bit of it. They kept to their work and let these two men scoff as they pleased.

6. *And all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.*

They built the wall as high as they meant it to be ultimately; but they carried it all round, and joined it well together. If we cannot do all we would like to do, let us do what we can; and let us endeavour, as far as possible, to finish off the part that we do, waiting for better times to carry the walls higher.

7. *But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth.*

They were "wroth" before; now they were "very wroth." If a work has no opposition from Satan, we may be half afraid it is good for nothing. If you cannot make the devil roar, you have not done him much harm; but the more he roars, the more cause is there for the angels singing the praises of God before the throne.

8. *And conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.*

It is wonderful how unanimous bad men can be. It has always struck me as a very startling thing, that you have never heard of any division among the devils in hell. There are no sects among the devils; they seem to work together with an awful unanimity of purpose in their wicked design. In this one thing they seem to excel the family of God. Oh, that we were as hearty and united in the service of God as wicked men are in the service of Satan!

9, 10. *Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. And Judah said,—*

Judah, you know, was the lion tribe. Christ is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." But Judah, instead of being lion-hearted, made a noise more like a mouse than a lion, for Judah said,—

10. *The strength of the bearers of burden is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.*

Poor Judah! He ought to have been bolder and braver; but he was not. It is the same to-day; some who seem to be pillars, prove very weak in the hour of trial, and by their cowardice discourage the rest.

11. *And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.*

While some were discouraging the people within the city, their enemies, without the walls, were plotting to take them by surprise, and slay them.

12. *And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.*

These Jews ought to have been helping to build the wall; but they did not come to the help of the Lord's people. Still, they were sufficiently friendly to tell Nehemiah of the plot that was being hatched by his enemies. God knows how, when his enemies are sinking a mine, to undermine them. If secrecy is necessary to the success of evil, somebody speaks out, and tells the story, so that the plot is discovered.

13. *Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.*

When Nehemiah knew the danger to which the people were exposed, he took measures to guard against it. I like the common-sense of Nehemiah. He kept families together. "I set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows." Beloved friends, I have no greater

joy than such as I had last Tuesday, when I received five children of one family, all brought to Christ. May the Lord make our families to be the guards of the church!

14. *And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not afraid of them.*

Fear may waken us, but it must never be allowed to weaken us. We should put on the armour, and take the sword and spear and bow when there is cause for fear; we should never dream of running away.

14, 15. *Remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.*

There was no fighting after all. As soon as the enemy knew that their plot was found out, they did not make any assault. One commentator says:—"Some men, if they had been delivered from danger, would have returned every one to the ale-house; but these men returned every one to his work." They went back to their building, and continued still in the service of the city.

16, 17. *And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bore burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.*

The sword and the trowel both guarded the city and builded the wall.

18. *For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.*

What the trumpet was for, we are told directly.

19, 20. *And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what places, therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.*

That is a grand sentence. The moment you hear the trumpet, you are to leave your place on the wall, and come to the point where the enemy is attacking us. But Nehemiah does not say, "You shall fight for us," he puts it much better, "Our God shall fight for us." So he will still.

21. *So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.*

They made long days. Christian people do not want merely eight hours a day for Christ. We can sometimes do eighteen hours' work for him in a day; and we wish that we could do twenty-four.

22,23. *Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let everyone with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes.*

Nehemiah was a good leader. He did not say, "Go," he said, "Come"; and he bore the brunt of the service. Like Alexander, who went with the Macedonians into the rough places, and did the hard work, so did Nehemiah. He and those with him did not put off their clothes, even for sleeping.

23. *Saving that every one put them off for washing.*

Which was necessary; for cleanliness is next to godliness. The Lord sends us more Nehemiahs, and plenty of people to work with them, who can endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and who will also be good builders of the church of God!

God Justified, Though Man Believes Not

A Sermon

(No. 2255)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, May 8th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, August 31st, 1890.

"For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, and every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."—Romans 3:3,4.

The seed of Israel had great privileges even before the coming of Christ. God had promised by covenant that they should have those privileges; and they did enjoy them. They had a revelation and a light divine, while all the world beside sat in heathen darkness. Yet so many Jews did not believe, that, as a whole, the nation missed the promised blessing. A great multitude of them only saw the outward symbols, and never understood their spiritual meaning. They lived and died without the blessing promised to their fathers. Did this make the covenant of God to be void? Did this make the faithfulness of God to be a matter of question? "No, no," says Paul, "if some did not believe, and so did not gain the blessing, this was their own fault; but the covenant of God stood fast, and did not change because men were untrue." He remained just as true as ever; and he will be able to justify all that he has said, and all that he has done, and he will do so even to the end. When the great drama of human history shall have been played out, the net result will be that the ways of God shall be vindicated notwithstanding all the unbelief of men.

I am going to talk of our text, at this time, first, as giving to us *a sorrowful reminder*: "For what if some did not believe?" It is sad to be reminded that there always have been some who did not believe. Next, here is *a horrible inference*, which some have drawn from this grievous fact, that is, because some did not believe, it has been hinted that their unbelief would make the faith of God or the faithfulness of God without effect; to which, in the third place, the apostle gives *an indignant reply*: "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justifies in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."

I. Well now, first, we have here A SORROWFUL REMINDER. There always have been some who have not believed.

When God devised the great plan of salvation by grace; when he gave his own Son to die as the Substitute for guilty men; when he proclaimed that whosoever believed in Jesus Christ should have everlasting life; you would have thought that everybody would have been glad to hear such good news, and that they would all have hastened to believe it. Christ is so suitable to the sinner. Why does not the sinner accept him? The way of salvation is so simple, so suitable to guilty men, it is altogether so glorious, so grand, that if we did not know the depravity of the human heart, we should expect that every sinner would at once believe the gospel, and receive its boons. But, alas, some have not believed!

Now, *this is stated very mildly*. The apostle says, "For what if some did not believe?" He might have said, "What if many did not believe?" But he is talking to his Hebrew friends, and he wishes to woo them; so he states the case as gently as he can. Remember, dear friends, the carcasses of all but two who came out of Egypt fell in the wilderness through unbelief. Only Joshua and Caleb entered the promised land; but the apostle does not wish to unduly press his argument, or speak so as to aggravate his hearers; and he therefore puts it, "For what if some did not believe?" Even in his own day, he might have said, "The bulk of the Jewish nation has rejected Christ. Wherever I go, they seek my life. They would stone me to death, if they could, because I preach a dying Saviour's love;" but he does not put it so; he only mentions that some did not believe. Yet this is a very appalling thing, even when stated this mildly. If all here, except one person, were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it was announced that that one unbeliever would be pointed out to the congregation, I am sure we would all feel in a very solemn condition. But, dear friends, there are many more than one here who have not believed on the Son of God, and who, therefore, are not saved. If the unconverted were not so numerous, there is all the greater need for our tears and our compassion.

The terms of Paul's question suggest *a very sweet mitigation of the sorrow*. "What if some did not believe?" Then it is implied that some *did* believe. Glory be to God, there is a numerous "some" who have believed that Jesus is the Christ; and believing in him, have found life through his name! These have entered into a new life, and now bear a new character, "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Beloved, we do thank God that the preaching of the gospel has not been in vain. Up yonder, more numerous than the stars are they that walk in white robes which they have washed in the blood of the Lamb; and down here, despite our mourning, there is a glorious company, who still follow the Lamb, who is to them, their only hope.

Looking at the other side of the case, it is true that, *at times, the "some" who did not believe meant the majority*. It must be admitted that, sometimes, unbelievers have preponderated even among the hearers of the precious Word. Read the story of Israel through, in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, and you will be saddened to find how again and again they did not believe. The history of Israel, from the moment they became a nation, is a very painful one. It is full of the mercy of God; but it is also full of treachery of the human heart. In the days of the judges, the people served God while a good judge ruled over them; but as soon as he was dead, they went astray after false gods. I almost think that the Christian church is in the period of the judges now. When the Lord raises up, here one and there another, to preach his Word faithfully, the people seem to take heed to it; but when the faithful preachers are gone, many of their hearers turn aside again. Blessed be to God, we expect the coming of the King soon; and when the King comes, and the period of the judges shall have ended, then we shall enter upon a time of rest and peace. It may be that, even among hearers of the gospel, those who do not believe preponderate over those who do believe. My text sounds like a solemn knell, and there is something terribly awful about it, like the deep rumbling of underground thunder.

Now, dear friends, this unbelief has usually been the case throughout all ages *among the great ones of the earth*. In our Saviour's day, they said, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?" The gospel has usually had a free course among the poor and among those who some call "the lower orders", though why they are said to be lower than others, I do not know, unless it is because the heavier and more valuable things generally sink to the bottom. The church of God owes

very little to kings and princes and nobles. She owes far more to fishermen and peasants. Jesus said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight: I suspect that, until the King himself shall come, we shall still find that the common people will gladly hear the gospel; and that, while Christ the Lord will choose for his own some from all ranks and conditions of men, it will still be true that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."

I think we may also say, with deep solemnity that *some who have not believed have belonged to the religious and to the teaching class*. In the days of our Lord and his apostles, the scribes and Pharisees were the greatest haters of the doctrine of Christ. Those whom you might have supposed, being most familiar with the Scriptures, the scribes, would soonest have recognized the Messiah, were the men who would not acknowledge him. So it was with the priests, even the chief priests, the men who had to do with the sacrifices and with the temple. They rejected Christ, although they were the religious leaders of the people. Do you suppose it is very different now? Alas, my friends, we may be preachers, and yet not preach the gospel of Christ; we may be members of the church, and yet not savingly know the gospel; we may go in and out of the house of God, and seem to take part in its holy service, and yet, all the while, we may be strangers and foreigners in the presence of the Most High. Believers are not always those whom you would suppose to be believers. The Lord often brings to himself, as in the case of the centurion, of whom we read this morning, far-off ones, rough soldiers, who were not thought likely to feel the power of such gentle teaching as the doctrine of the cross; and they bow before the Saviour. But alas! Alas! Among those who appear to be the children of the kingdom, brought up in the worship of God, there are some, yea, many, who have not believed on Christ; and, saddest of all, even among those who are the teachers of others in the things of God, there are some that have not savingly believed.

Now, dear friends, if we take the whole range of *the nations favoured with the gospel*, we shall have to say, and say it, as it were, in capital letters, "SOME DO NOT BELIEVE," and that "some" is a very large number. The question of the apostle is, "What if some did not believe?" Well, if I had to ask and answer that question, at this time, I would say, "What if some do not believe?" Then they are lost. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." There still remains, to those who hear the gospel, the opportunity to believe; and, believing in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." There still remains, to those who hear the gospel, the opportunity to believe; and, believing, they shall find life through the sacred name. Let us pray for them. If some do not believe, let us, who do believe, make them the constant subject of our prayers; and then let us tell them what is it to be believed, and bear our witness to the saving power of the gospel. When we have done that, let us scrupulously take care that our life and conduct are consistent with the doctrine that we teach, so that, if some do not believe, they may be won to Christ by the example of those who believe in him. Oh, that every Christian here would seek to bring another person to Christ! I pray you, beloved, if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, be not barren nor unfruitful. If you know the great secret, tell it to others. Tell it out; tell it out; we all want stirring up to this blessed work; I am sure we do. I heard of a Christian who always spoke about Christ to, at least, one person every day. I commend the example for your imitation. How many of us could say that we do that? I know there are some here who do ten times as much as that. It has grown to be a habit with them to speak of Christ to every one they meet; but it is not the habit even of all who believe. It takes some Christians a long time to begin

to say anything for their Lord. Let us try and labour hard, that, if some people do not believe, we may bring them to the Saviour, that God may have praise from them also.

II. But now I advance a step further, and dwell upon A HORRIBLE INFERENCE drawn from the fact that some did not believe. The inference was, that their unbelief had made the faith of God, or the faithfulness of God, altogether without effect. I will translate what Paul said without dwelling on his words.

Some will say, "If So-and-so, and So-and-so do not believe the gospel, then *religion is a failure.*" We have read of a great many things being failures nowadays. A little time ago, it was a question whether marriage was not a failure. I suppose that, by-and-by, eating our dinners will be a failure, breathing will be a failure, everything will be a failure. But now the gospel is said to be a failure. Why? Because certain gentlemen of professed culture and supposed knowledge do not believe it. Well, dear friends, there have been other things that have not been believed in by very important individuals, and yet they have turned out to be true. I am not quite old enough to remember all that was said about the introduction of the steam-engine, though I remember right well going to see a steam-engine and a railway-train as great wonders when I was a boy. Before the trains actually ran, all the old coachmen, and all the farmers that had horses to sell, would not believe for a moment that an engine could be made to go on the rails, and to drag carriages behind it; and in parliament they had to say that they thought they could produce an engine that could go at the speed of eight miles an hour. They dare not say more, because it would have been incredible if they did. According to the wise men of the time, everything was to go to the bad, and the engines would blow up, the first time they started with a train. But they did not blow up, and everybody now smiles at what those learned gentlemen (for some of them were men of standing and learning) ventured then to say. Look at the gentlemen who now tell us that the gospel is a failure. They are the successors of those who have risen up, one after the other; whose principal object has been to refute all that went before them. They call themselves philosophers; and, as I have often said, the history of philosophy is a history of fools, a history of human folly. Man has gone from one form of philosophy to another, and every time that he has altered his philosophy, he has only made a slight variation in the same things. Philosophy is like a kaleidoscope. The philosopher turns it round, and exclaims that he has a new view of things. So he has; but all that he sees is a few bits of glass, which alter their form at every turn of the toy. If any of you shall live fifty years, you will see that the philosophy of today will be a football of contempt for the philosophy of that period. They will speak, amidst roars of laughter, of evolution; and the day will come, when there will not be a child but will look upon it as being the most foolish notion that ever crossed the human mind. I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet; but I know what has befallen many of the grand discoveries of the great philosophers of the past; and I expect that the same thing will happen again. I have to say, with Paul, "What if some did not believe?" It is no new thing; for there have always been some who have rejected the revelation of God. What then? You and I had better go on believing, and testing for ourselves, and proving the faithfulness of God, and living upon Christ our Lord, even though we see another set of doubters, and another, and yet another *ad infinitum*. The gospel is no failure, as many of us know.

Is the gospel to be disbelieved because some people will not receive it? I trow not, dear friends. As I have already said, many other things have been believed, although some people have not believed them; and the believers have had the best of it, and so they always will. Has the gospel changed your character? Has the gospel renewed you in the spirit of your mind? Does the gospel

cheer and comfort you in the day of sorrow? Does it help you to live, and will it help you to die? Then do not give it up, even though some do not believe it.

Again, dear friends, *has God failed to keep his promise to Israel* because some Israelites did not believe? That is the point that Paul aims at, and the answer is, "No." He did bring Israel into the promised land, though all but two that came out of Egypt died in the wilderness. He did give that promised land to Israel, albeit that, through their unbelief, God smote them, and they were destroyed; yet a nation came up again from their ashes, and God kept his covenant with his ancient people; and to-day he is keeping it. The "chosen seed of Israel's race" is "a remnant, weak and small"; but the day is coming when they shall be gathered in, and we shall then rejoice; for then shall be the fullness of the Gentiles, also, When Israel has come to her own Lord and King. God has not cast away his people, whom he did foreknow; nor has he broken his covenant made with Abraham, nor will he while the world standeth, even though many believe not on him.

Will God fail to keep his promise to anyone who believes on him? Because some do not believe, will God's promise therefore fail to be kept to those who do believe? I invite you to come and try. When two of John's disciples enquired of Jesus where he dwelt, he said to them, "Come and see." If any person here will try Christ, as I tried him, when yet a youth, as miserable as I could be, and ready to die with despair, if they shall feel in believing such joy as I felt, if they shall experience such a change of character as passed over me when I believed in Christ, they would not tolerate a doubt. What they have known, and felt, and tasted, and handled of the good Word of God, will prove to them that, if some believe not, yet God abideth faithful, he will never deny himself. One said that she believed the Bible because she was acquainted with the Author of it, which is an excellent reason for believing it. You will believe the gospel if you are so acquainted with the Saviour who brings that gospel to us. Personal dealings with God in Christ, personal trust in the living Saviour, will put you out of reach of this strange inference that God will be unfaithful because some do not believe in him.

I am going a step further. *Will God be unfaithful to his Son* if some do not believe? I have heard sometimes, a fear expressed that Christ will lose those for whom he dies. I thank God that I have no fear about that. "He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." I never come to you, and, *in forma pauperis*, ask you to accept Christ, begging and praying you to take Christ, because otherwise he will be a loser by you. It is you who must beg of him. He giveth grace as a king bestows his favours; nay more, he lovingly condescends to entreat you to come to him. Suppose that you wickedly say, "We will not have Christ to reign over us." If you think that you will rob him of honour, and bring disgrace upon him by your rejection, you make a great mistake. If you will not have him, others will. If you who are so wise will not have Christ, there are plenty, whom you reckon to be fools, who will take him to be their "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." If you who are so gay and frivolous will not have my Lord, you will die in your sins; but there are others who will have him. Do not think that you can by any possibility rob him of his glory. "For what if some did not believe?" This word shall yet become true. "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." If myriads reject him, there will be myriads who will receive him, and in all things he shall have the preeminence; and he will return to his Father not defeated, but more than a conqueror over all his foes.

To put the question in another shape, "For what if some did not believe?" *Will God alter his revealed truth?* If some do not believe, will God change the gospel to suit them? Will he seek to

please their depraved taste? Ought we to change our preaching because of "the spirit of the age"? Never; unless it be to fight "the spirit of the age" more desperately than ever. We ask for no terms between Christ and his enemies except these, unconditional surrender to him. He will bate not jot or tittle of his claims; but he will still come to you, and say, "Submit yourselves; bow down, and own me King and Lord, and take me to be your Saviour. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and besides me there is none else." If you wait till there is a revised version of the gospel, you will be lost. If you wait till there is a gospel brought out that will not cost you so much of giving up sin, or so much of bowing your proud necks, you will wait until you find yourself in hell. Come, I pray you, come even now, and believe the gospel. It cannot be altered to your taste; therefore alter yourself so as to meet its requirements.

Now suppose that these men, who will not believe, should all concert together to proclaim new views in order to upset the gospel. You see, up to the present time, they never have agreed. One wing of Satan's army of doubters always destroys the other. Just now the great scientists say to the modern-thought gentlemen, and say to them very properly, "If there is no serpent, and no Eve, and no Adam, and no flood, and no Noah, and no Abraham. As you tell us now that all this is a myth, then your whole old Book is a lie." I am very much obliged to those who talk thus to the disciples of the higher criticism. They thought that they were going to have all the scientists on their side, to join them in attacking the ancient orthodoxies. There is a split in the enemy's camp; Amalek is fighting Edom, and Edom is contending against Moab.

But suppose they were all to agree. Well, what would happen then? I thought I saw a vision once, when I was by the seaside. To my closed eyes, there seemed to come down to the beach at Brighton a huge black horse, which went into the water, and began to drink; and I thought I heard a voice that said, "It will drink the sea dry." My great horse grew, and grew, till it was such a huge creature that I could scarcely measure it; and still it drank, and drank, and drank. All the while the sea did not appear to alter in the least, the water was still there as deep as ever. By-and-by the animal burst, and its remains were washed up on the beach, and there it lay dead, killed by its own folly. That will be the end of this big black horse of infidelity that boasts that it is going to drink up this everlasting gospel.

I remember that Christmas Evans put this truth rather roughly on one occasion. He said, "There was a dog on the hearthrug, and there was a kettle of boiling water on the fire. As the kettle kept puffing out steam and hot water, the dog sat up and growled. The more the kettle kept on puffing, the more the dog growled; and at last he seized the kettle by the throat, and of course the boiling water killed him." Thus will unbelievers do with the gospel. They growl at it to-day; but if they ever join together, and really make an attack upon it, the gospel will be a savour of death unto death to those who oppose it, as it is a savour of life to those who receive it.

Thus I have mentioned this horrible inference.

III. Now I close by speaking very briefly upon AN INDIGNANT REPLY to this horrible inference.

In reply to this question, "Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" Paul give *a solemn negative*: "God forbid." All the opponents of the gospel cannot move it by a hair's breath; they cannot injure a single stone of this divine building. It remains ever the same. Let them do what they may, they cannot alter it.

Then Paul utters *a vehement protestation*: "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar." Can you picture this great host? Here they come, all the men who ever lived, unnumbered millions!

They come marching up; and we stand like the inspecting general at a review, and see them all go by; and as every man passes, he shouts, "The gospel is not true. Christ did not die. There is no salvation for believers in him." The apostle Paul, standing as it were at the saluting-point, and seeing the whole race of mankind go by, says, "God is true, and every one of you is a liar." "Let God be true, but every man a liar." You know the way that we have of counting beads, and if the majority goes in a particular direction, we almost go that way. If you count the heads, and there is a general consensus of opinion, you are apt to say, "It must be so, for everybody says so." But what everybody says is not therefore true. "Let God be true, but every man a liar." It is a strange, strong expression; but it is non too strong. If God says one thing, and every man in the world says another, God is true, and all men are false. God speaks the truth, and cannot lie. God cannot change; his word, like himself, is immutable. We are to believe God's truth if nobody else believes it. The general consensus of opinion is nothing to a Christian. He believes God's word, and he thinks more of that than of the universal opinion of men.

Paul next uses a *Scriptural argument*. Whenever he gets thoroughly redhot, and wants an overwhelming argument, he always goes to the divine treasury of revelation. He quotes what David had said in the fifty-first Psalm, "That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."

God will be justified in everything that he has said. You may take every line of the Word of God, and rest assured that God will be justified in having directed the sacred penman to write that line.

God shall also be justified when he judges, and when he condemns men. When he pronounces his final sentence upon the ungodly, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:" he shall be justified even in that dreadful hour.

A very startling expression is used here: "That thou mightest overcome when thou art judged." Think of this enormous evil; here are men actually trying to snatch the balance and the rod from the hand of God; and presuming to judge his judgments, and to sit as if they were the god of God. Suppose that they could be daring enough to do even that, the verdict would be in God's favour. It would be proved that he had neither said anything untrue, nor done anything unjust. We are confident that, although some do not believe God, he will be justified before men and angels, and we shall have nothing to do but to admire and adore him world without end.

Now, I could say much more; but I will not except just this, I want those who are the Lord's people to be very brave about the things of God. There has been too much of yielding, and apologizing, and compromising. I cannot bear it; it grieves me to see one truth after another surrendered to the enemy. A brother writes to me, saying, "You do not put so much mirth into your preaching as you used to do. When the captain at sea whistles, then all the sailors feel more cheerful." My friend adds, "Whistle a bit." I will do so. This is my way of whistling to cheer my shipmates. I believe in the everlasting God, and in his unchanging truth; and I am persuaded that the gospel will win the day, however long and stern the conflict rages. Therefore, my brethren, be not ashamed of the gospel, nor of Christ your Lord, who died that he might save you eternally. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." Even if it did come to this, that every other man in the world were against the truth of God, stand you to his word, and say, "Let God be true, but every man a liar."

The other word that I have to say is a message to the unsaved. If you are opposed to God, I beseech you give up your opposition at once. The battle cannot end well for you unless you yield

yourself to God. He is your Maker and Preserver; every argument we can use ought to convince you that you should be on his side. I pray you remember that, for you to contend with God, is for the gnat to contend with the fire, or the wax, to fight with the flame. You must be destroyed if you come into collision with him. Then yield to him at once. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." What is it to kiss the Son? Why, to accept the Lord Christ as your King and Saviour. To ask him to be your peace and your salvation. Ask him now, before that clock ceases striking. I pray that some may at this moment say, "I will have Christ, and I will be Christ's." The Lord grant it! This great transaction done now, it shall be done forever; and you and I will meet on the other side of Jordan, in the land of the blessed, and eternally praise him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God. The Lord be with you, for Jesu's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 3.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—166, 675, 674.

ROMANS 3.

Verse 1. What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?

If, after all, both Jew and Gentiles were under sin, what advantage had the Jew by the covenant under which he lived? Or what was the benefit to him of the circumcision which was his distinctive mark?

2. Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

The Jews were God's chronicle-keepers. They had to guard the holy Books, "the oracles of God." They had also to preserve the knowledge of the truth by those divers rites and ceremonies by which God was pleased to reveal himself of old time.

3. For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

Did he not, after all, bless the Jews though among them were unbelievers? Could it be that their unbelief would turn God from his purpose to bless the chosen people? Would their want of faith affect God's faithfulness?

4. God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, that thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou are judged.

However faithless men might be, God was still true and faithful. Paul quotes the Septuagint, which thus renders David's words.

5. But if our unrighteousness comment the righteousness of God, what shall we say?

If it so turns out, that even man's sin makes the holiness of God the more illustrious, what shall we say?

5. Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)

Paul spoke as a mere carnal man might be supposed to speak. If ever we are obliged, for the sake of argument, to ask a question which is almost blasphemous, let us do it very guardedly, and say something to show that we really do not adopt the language as our own, just as Paul says, "I speak as a man." If the very sin of man is made to turn to the glory of God, is God unjust in punishing that sin?

6. God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?

God will judge the world; and he does judge the world even now. There are judgments against nations already executed, and recorded on the page of history. If God were unjust, how could he judge the world?

7. *For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?*

If God has even turned the opposition of evil men to the establishment of his truth, as he has often done; why, then, are men punished for it? These are deep, dark questions, which come out of the proud heart of man, and Paul ventures to answer them.

8. *And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? Whose damnation is just.*

We never said, we never even thought, that we might do evil that good should come; nay, if all the good in the world could come of a single evil action, we have no right to do it. We must never do evil with the hope of advancing God's cause. If God chooses to turn evil into good, as he often does, that is no reason why we should do evil; and it is no justification of sin. The murder of Christ at Calvary has brought the greatest possible benefit to us; yet it was a high crime against God, the greatest of all crimes, when man turned deicides, and slew the Son of God.

9, 10. *What then? Are we better than they? No, in no vain: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are under sin; as it is written.*

Paul had already proved in the Epistle that both Jews and Gentiles were guilty before God. Now he quotes a set of texts from Israel's own holy Books, to show the universal depravity of men. Notice how he rings the changes on the words "all" and "none."

10-12. *There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

This is the character of all unregenerate men. It is a true description of the whole race of mankind, whether Jews or Gentiles. In their natural state, "there is non righteous . . . there is none that seeketh after God . . . there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

13. *Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:*

Paul does not use flattering words, as those preachers do who prate about the dignity of human nature. Man was a noble creature when he was made in the image of God; but sin blotted out all his dignity.

14-19. *Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law:*

The Jews are comprehended here, for they are specially "under the law." The whole chosen seed of Israel, highly privileged as they were, are described in these terrible words that we have been reading, which Paul quoted from their own sacred Books.

19. *That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

That is the true condition of the whole world, "guilty before God." This is the right attitude for the whole human race, to stand with its finger on its lip, having nothing to say as to why it should not be condemned.

20. *Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

All the law does, is to show us how sinful we are. Paul has been quoting from the sacred Scriptures; and truly, they shed a lurid light upon the condition of human nature. The light can

show us our sin; but it cannot take it away. The law of the Lord is like a looking-glass. Now, a looking-glass is a capital thing for finding out where the spots are on your face; but you cannot wash in a looking-glass, you cannot get rid of the spots by looking in the glass. The law is intended to show a man how much he needs cleansing; but the law cannot cleanse him. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." The law proves that we are condemned, but it does not bring us our pardon.

21, 22. *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon them that believe:*

We have no righteousness of our own; but God gives us a righteousness through faith in Christ; and he gives that to everyone who believes.

22, 23. *For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

There are degrees of guilt; but all men have sinned. There is no difference in that respect, whatever gradations there may be in sinners.

24. *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*

Dear hearers, are you all justified, that is, made just, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus? You are certainly all guilty in the sight of God; have you all been made righteous by faith in the redemption accomplished on the cross by Christ Jesus our Lord? I beg you to consider this question most seriously; and if you must truthfully answer, "No," may God make you tremble, and drive you to your knees in penitence to cry to him for pardon!

25. *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*

God holds back the axe which, were it not for his forbearance, would cut down the barren tree. He still forbears, and he is ready to pardon and blot out all the past if you will but believe in his dear Son.

26, 27. *To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.*

Where is it? It is to be found in a great many people. It is common enough; but where ought it to be? Where does it get a footing? It is shut out! There is no room for boasting in the heart that receives Christ. If a man were saved by works, he would have whereof to glory; boasting would not be shut out. But as salvation is all of grace, through faith in Christ, boasting is barred out in the dark, and faith gratefully ascribes all praise to God.

27-31. *It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles, also: seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.*

Whether Jews or Gentiles, there was no salvation for them by the works of the law; the only way in which the circumcised or the uncircumcised could be justified was by faith. This principle does not make void God's law; on the contrary, it establishes it, and sets it on the only right and solid foundation. The gospel of the grace of God is the best vindication of his law.

Daniel's Band

A Sermon

(No. 2256)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, May 15th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, August 3rd, 1890.

"O Daniel, a man greatly beloved."—Daniel 10:11.

It did not do Daniel any harm to know that he was greatly beloved of God; or else he would not have received that information from heaven. Some people are always afraid that, if Christian people obtain full assurance, and receive a sweet sense of divine love, they will grow proud, and be carried away with conceit. Do not you have any such fear for other people, and especially do not be afraid of it for yourselves. I know of no greater blessing that can happen to any man and woman here, than to be assured by the Spirit of God that they are greatly beloved of the Lord. Such knowledge might do some of us, who are Christians, the greatest conceivable good. Daniel was not injured by knowing that he was greatly beloved. It has often been said that Daniel is the John of the Old Testament, and John is the Daniel of the New Testament. Those two men, Daniel and John, were choice saints. They rose to the greatest height of spiritual obedience, and then to the greatest height of spiritual enjoyment.

The knowledge that they were greatly beloved of God, instead of doing us harm, will be a means of blessings in many ways. If you know, my dear brother, of a surety, that you are a man greatly beloved of God, you will become very humble. You will say, "How could God ever love me?"

"What was there in me to merit esteem,

Or give the Creator delight?"

I think a sense of God's love is even more humbling than a sense of our own sin. When the two are blended, they sink the soul very low, not in depression of spirit, but in its estimate of itself.

A sense of God's love will also excite in you great gratitude. "Oh!" you will say, "how can I repay the Lord for such an amazing favour?" You will be conscious that you never can repay him; but you will begin working out all sorts of schemes and plans to try to show how much you value the love of God. You will bring out your alabaster-box from its hiding-place; you will willingly enough break it, and pour the precious ointment upon the dear head of him who has loved you so greatly. I am sure that a certainty of having the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, is one of the greatest promoters of holy gratitude; and holy gratitude is the mother of obedience. When we feel how much we owe, then we seek to know the will of God, and take a delight in doing it. Whatsoever he saith unto us, we are glad to do, as a proof that we really are grateful for "love so amazing, so divine."

This will also consecrate us. I believe that, to know certainly that you are greatly beloved of God, will make you feel that you cannot live as others do. You cannot trifle with sin. He who lives in the heart of the king must be faithful to him. If called to stand in God's immediate presence as a courtier and a favourite, you must take care how you behave yourself, and you will do so. "Ye

are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" In proportion as we are sure of his love, our love to him will burn like coals of juniper, which have a most vehement heat; and everything contrary to the will of God will be consumed in that blessed flame.

A sense of divine love will also strengthen us. What is there that a man cannot do when he is in love even with one of his own race; but when he gets to be in love with God, and knows of a certainty that he is greatly beloved of God, he would cut his way through a lane of devils, he would face an army of angels, and defeat them all; for love is a conquering grace. When faith is side by side with love, it—

"Laughs at impossibilities,
And says, 'It shall be done;'"

and love goes and does it; for there is nothing which the love of God will not enable us to do.

Moreover, this assurance of God's love will make us very courageous. If thou art a man greatly beloved, and thou knowest it, thou wilt be a brave man. Let me never come into collision with the sword of that man whom God greatly loves; he will cut me in halves. The love of God makes a hero of the man on whom it is fixed. He is in the thick of the fray; he defies sin, and death, and hell. He will burn for Christ; he would be ready to burn a thousand times over when once he was assured that he was the object of the peculiar love of God, and like Daniel, could be addressed as "a man greatly beloved."

This will make a man glad. If we are greatly beloved of God, how can we be miserable and discontent? Oh, no! If you are a man greatly beloved, you will trip with light feet over the hills of sorrow. You will be glad in the Lord, even when you have much to depress and discourage you. You will begin the music of heaven even here, for a sense of God's love in the soul sets all the bells of the heart ringing. He is the gladdest man who has the greatest assurance that he is "a man greatly beloved."

I have said all this as a preface, to show you that you need not be afraid of knowing that God loves you. Some seem to think that a state of doubt is a state of discretion. It is a state of folly. Full assurance of the faithfulness and truthfulness of God is nothing but common-sense spiritualized. To believe a lie, is folly; but to believe the truth is wisdom. If thou art a believer in Christ, though the very least and weakest of believers, thou art a man greatly beloved. Believe it, and be not afraid to rejoice in it. It will have no influence over thee but that which is sanctifying and health-giving.

Well, now, to help us think of Christ's great love to us, I am going to talk a little, first, about *the case of Daniel*, the man greatly beloved; secondly, about *the case of every believer*, for every believer is a man greatly beloved; and thirdly, about *the case of some special saints*, believers who are the elect out of the elect, the choicest of the choice ones of the Most High. Of these it may truly be said that they are men greatly beloved.

I. First, then, let us consider THE CASE OF DANIEL, who was "a man greatly beloved."

Because Daniel was greatly beloved of God, *he was early tried, and enabled to stand*. While he was yet a youth, he was carried into Babylon, and there he refused to eat the king's meat, or to drink the king's wine. He put it to the test whether, if he fed on common pulse, he would not be healthier and better than if he defiled himself with the king's meat. Now, religion does not stand in meat and drink; but let me say, a good deal of irreligion does, and it may become a very important point with some as to what they eat and what they drink. Daniel was early tested, and because he was a man greatly beloved of God, he stood the test. He would not yield even in a small point to

that which was evil. Young man, if God greatly loves you, he will give you an early decision, and very likely he will put you to an early test. If you are greatly loved, you will stand firm, even about so small a thing as what you eat and drink, or something that looks less important than that. You will say, "I cannot sin against God. I must stand fast, even in the smallest matter, in keeping the law of the Lord my God." If thou art enabled to do that, thou art a man greatly beloved.

Afterwards, Daniel *was greatly envied, but found faultless*. He was surrounded by envious enemies, who could not bear that he should be promoted over them, though he deserved all the honour he received. So they met together, and consulted how they would pull him down. They were obliged to make this confession, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." O dear friends, you are greatly beloved is, when your enemies meet to devise some scheme for your overthrow, they cannot say anything against you except what they base upon your religion. If, when they sift you through and through, their eager, evil eyes cannot detect a fault; and they are obliged to fall back upon abusing you for your godliness, calling it hypocrisy, or some other ugly name, you are a man greatly beloved.

Further, Daniel *was delivered from great peril*. He was cast into the lions' den because he was a man greatly beloved of God. I think I see some shrink back, and I hear them say, "We do not want to go into the lions' den." They are poor creatures, but Daniel was worth putting in the lions' den; there was enough of him to be put there. Some men would be out of place among lions; cats would be more suitable companions for them; indeed. They are such insignificant beings that they would be more at home among mice. Lion's dens would not be at all in their line. They would imitate Solomon's slothful man, and say, "There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." There is not enough manhood in them to bring them into close quarters with the king of beasts. Even among our hearers there are many poor feeble creatures. A clever man preaches false doctrine, and they say, "Very good. Was it not well put?" Oh, yes! it is all alike good to some of you, who cannot discern between the true and the false; but Daniel could distinguish between good and evil, and therefore he was thrust into the lion's den. It was, however, a den out of which he was delivered. The lions could not eat him, God loved him too well. The Lord preserved Daniel, and he will preserve you, dear friend, if you belong to "Daniel's band." It is one thing to *sing*:—

"Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone;"

but it is quite another thing to *be* a Daniel, and dare to stand alone, when you are at the mouth of the lions den. If you are like Daniel, you will have no cause for fear even then. If your trial should be like going into a den of lions, if you are a man greatly beloved of God, you will come out again. No lion shall destroy you; you are perfectly safe. The love of God is like a wall of fire round about you.

Once more, Daniel was a man greatly beloved, and therefore *he had revelations from God*. Do not open your eyes with wonder and say, "I wish that I had all the revelations that Daniel had." Listen to what he says: "I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me;" and again: "As for me Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me; but I kept the matter in my heart." The revelations he received actually made him ill: "I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it." He whom God loves will see things that will astound him; he will see that which will almost kill him; he will that which will make him faint and sick well nigh unto death. When one said, "You cannot see God and live,"

another answered, "Then let me see him if I die." So those who are greatly beloved say, "Let me see visions of God whatever it may cost me. Let me have communion with him even though it should break my heart, and crush me in the dust. Though it should fill me with sorrow, and make me unfit for my daily business, yet manifest thyself to me, my Lord, as thou dost unto the world!" Even men greatly beloved, when they deal closely with God, have to find out that they are but dust and ashes in his sight. They have to fall down before the presence of his glorious majesty, as the beloved John did when he fell at Christ's feet as dead.

I will make only one more remark upon Daniel's case, and that is this, *he stood in his lot*. Because he was a man greatly beloved, he had this promise with which to close his marvellous book. "Go thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." He was a man greatly beloved, but he does not understand all that God has revealed; and he is to go his way, and rest quite satisfied that, whether he understood it or not, it would work him no harm; for when the end came, he would have his place and his portion, and he would be with his Lord for ever. The next time you get studying some prophecy of Scripture, which you cannot make out, do not be troubled; but hear the voice of God saying, "Go thy way. Wait awhile. It will all be plain by-and-by. God is with thee. There remains a rest for thee, a crown that no head but thine can wear, a harp that no fingers but thine can play upon, and thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

Thus I have briefly describe the case of Daniel.

II. In the second place, I am going to speak of THE CASE OF EVERY BELIEVER, who is also greatly beloved of God. I must be very brief, because of the communion service which is to follow.

Every believer has been *called out from others*. My brother, look at the hole in the pit whence thou wast digged. Like Abraham, thou hast been called out from thy family, and from thy father's house. Possibly, you have not a godly relative. Many here are the only ones of their kith and kin that ever knew the Lord, so far as they know of, or can remember. Behold in this the sovereign, electing love of God. Art thou not a man greatly beloved? Even if thou hast come of a godly stock, yet thou hast seen others who seemed to be nearest to the kingdom, and yet have been cast out from it. Admire the grace of God, which has called thee, and thy father, and thy grandfather, and thy brother, and thy wife, and maybe children too. Oh, be grateful, and bless the name of the Lord! But "who maketh thee to differ from another?" Who but God, the Giver of all grace, has made thee to differ from the ungodly around thee? Therefore, adore him for his matchless mercy, his distinguishing grace.

Remember, too, that if thou hast been called out from a sinful world, and transformed into a child of God, this is the token that thou hast been *chosen from the beginning*. God loved thee long before he began to deal with thee in the way of grace. Ere thou wast born, Christ died for thee; and ere this world was made. God loved thee with an everlasting love.

"Before the day-star knew its place,
Or planets ran their round,"

thy name was in his Book; and thine image was on the heart of Christ, whose delights were with the sons of men. Remember his word by the prophet Jeremiah, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Feed on that precious truth, inwardly digest it, let it enter into thy very soul. He hath loved me with an everlasting love; then, surely, I may claim the title of "a man greatly beloved."

Remember, too, that in the fulness of time, thou wast *redeemed with the precious blood of Christ*. Thy God took upon himself thy nature, and on the cross he bore thy sins in his own body on the tree. The chastisement of thy peace was upon him, and with his stripes thou art healed. The bloodmark in on thee now; thou art one for whom he died in that special way which secures effectual salvation to thee. He loved his church, and gave himself for it; and this is the song of that church on heaven, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on earth." If thou hast been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, verily, I say unto thee, thou art "a man greatly beloved."

Thou hast been also *pardoned, and put among the Lord's children*. Remember thy sin for a moment. Darest thou remember it? Hast thou remembered it? Then forget it, for God hast blotted it out. He has cast all thy sins behind his back. The depths have covered them; there is no one of them left. They sank like lead in the mighty waves of oblivion; and they shall never arise to condemn thee. Thou art forgiven. Perhaps thou wast a drunkard, a swearer, disobedient to parents, or unchaste; but whatever thy sin, the blood of Jesus has cleansed thee, and thou art whiter than the snow; and he has covered thee with the robe of his perfect righteousness, and thou art "accepted in the Beloved." Art thou not a man greatly beloved? I remember one who came creeping to the Saviour's feet, it was myself, black as night, condemned in my own conscience, and expecting to be driven to the place where hope could never come. I came to Christ wearing the weeds of mourning; but, in a moment, when I looked to Jesus, he put on me the garments of salvation. He took away my sin, and place a fair crown upon my head, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. Blessed be his name! If there is a man in the world who can sing,—

"Oh, 'twas love, 'twas wondrous love,
The love of God to me!
It brought my Saviour from above,
To die on Calvary;"

I am that man; and you can sing it, too, dear friend, cannot you? I mean you have been forgiven your trespasses for Christ's sake. I feel sure that your heart is speaking now, even if your tongue is silent, and it says, "Indeed, as a pardoned man, I am greatly beloved."

Since the Lord forgave your sin, you have been a praying man, and God has *heard your prayers*. From the horns of the unicorns has he delivered you; out of the depths of the sea have you cried, and he has rescued you, like Jonah. With the psalmist, you can say, "Verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer." Are you not greatly beloved? As our dear friend, Dr. Taylor, said in prayer this morning, we have a mercy-seat to which we can always go. Not only have we gone to it in the past, but we may go to it whenever we need. We have the *entree*' of the King's palace at will. Are we not men greatly beloved?

Beside that, remember that the Lord has *upheld you* until now. In your pilgrim path, how many times your feet have almost gone! How often you have been tempted, ah! Worse than that, how often you have yielded to temptation; yet here you are, your character not ruined, your soul not lost, your face towards Jerusalem, and the enemy's foot is not on your neck yet; and it never will be, glory be to the name of the Lord! When I think of all our experience in the way in which the Lord hath led us, I can truly say of all his people that they are men and women greatly beloved.

Now to-night you are invited to *feast with Christ and his church*; not to come and be dogs under the table, but to sit with him at the royal banquet, with his banner of love waving over you. You

are invited to be his companions here, his comrades at his feet. Oh, what a festival is this sacred supper! Haman thought himself honoured when he was invited to his king's banquet; but what shall we say who are bidden to come to this high festival?

"What food luxurious loads the board,
When at the table sits the Lord!
The wine how rich, the bread how sweet,
When Jesus deigns the guests to meet!"

Only one thing more will I say under this head; but the story is so marvellous, that we may be forever telling it, and yet it will never be all told. The love of Christ to some of us has been so wonderful, that when we once begin the theme, we seem to forget all about time, and wish there were no fleeting hours to bid us end our story! Eternity itself will not be too long for telling out "the old, old story, of Jesus and his love."

But, what I was going to say is this, *we shall be with him soon*. Some of us sit here heavy at heart; and there are wrinkles on the brow, and there is a weariness in the frame which makes the wheels of life drag heavy. Beloved, it is but the twinkling of an eye, so brief is life, and we shall be with him where he is, and shall behold his glory. Do you ever try to realize the greatness of that love that will take you to be with Christ, to dwell with him, and to share his glory for ever? Can you not put the incorruptible crown on your head, to-night in fancy; nay, in faith? Can you, even now, begin to wave the palm of victory, and strike the harp of everlasting praise? Do you feel as if you could, even now, join the sacred songsters above, and sing the heavenly hymn, the hallelujah chorus of the ages yet to be? As surely as we are in Christ to-night, we shall be with Christ by-and-by. Oh, men greatly beloved, to have such a future as this before you, ought to make your heaven begun below!

III. Time fails me, so I must speak of THE CASE OF SPECIAL SAINTS, those who are in a peculiar sense men greatly beloved.

There are some men who are, as I said at the beginning of my discourse, elect out of the elect. Remember, that Christ had seventy choice men, his disciples; but then he had twelve choicer men, his apostles; and he had three of these, who were with him when the others were not; and out of these three he had one John, "that disciple whom Jesus loved." His love is so sweet, that, while I would be grateful to be even outside the seventy, so long as I might be among the five hundred brethren who saw him after he rose from the dead, yet I would then have the ambition to get in among the seventy; and not for the honour of it, but for the love it would bring, I would like to be out of the eleven; and for the same reason I would fain to be one of the three, and I would, above measure, be thankful if I might be that one whom Jesus loved. Have you not the same holy aspiration?

Well, now, let me tell you that, if you would be among the choicer spirits, greatly beloved of God, you must be *men of spotless character*. Christ loves great sinners; and even saints that fall, and stain their garments, he will not cast away; but you will never enjoy the fulness of Christ's love unless you keep your garments unspotted from the world. You cannot find a fault in Daniel; and if you want to live on earth so as to be in heaven while you are here, and to drink the wine of Christ's love to the bottom of the chalice, even the spiced wine of his pomegranate, you must watch every step, and observe every word; for our Lord is very jealous, and half a word of evil will grieve him. If you would walk in the light as he is in the light, and have constant fellowship with God, I beseech you, be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect, and follow after unsullied

holiness. The pure in heart shall see God. Oh, that you might everyone have this purity! It is those who have not defiled their garments who shall walk with Christ in white.

The next point is, that men who are greatly beloved are *men of decision*. When Daniel had the lions' den in prospect, because of his faithfulness to his God, "he went into the house; and his window being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." There was no compromising in Daniel's case. If you want to be greatly beloved, do not attempt any compromise with sin. Have nothing to do with policy, and craft, and holding with the true and the false at the same time. If God is to use you in his service, you must be like the tribe of Levi, separate from your brethren, and you must ever be ready to stand up bravely for God and for his eternal truth at any cost. It is my earnest desire that we may have in this church many men and women of this kind, who will be, as Mr. Moody puts it, out and out for Christ.

Next, if you would be men greatly beloved of God, beyond all the rest of his people, on whom special shinings of his face shall come, you must be *much in communion with him*. Daniel fasted and prayed, and communed with God with cries and tears; and God came and revealed himself to him. He was greatly beloved, for he lived near to God. He was no far-off follower of his Lord. He dwelt in the full blaze of the Sun of Righteousness.

If a man is to be greatly beloved of God, he must *live above the world*, as Daniel did. Daniel became a prince, a governor, a man of substance and position; but when Belshazzar promised to clothe him with scarlet, and to put a gold chain about his neck, if he could read and interpret the writings on the wall, he said to the king, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another." Daniel did not want them. When he became great in the land, he walked with God as he had done when he was poor. It is a dangerous thing for some people to be made much of in this world; their hands soon get turned, and they begin to think too much of themselves. He who thinks that he is somebody is nobody; and he whose head swims because of his elevation, will soon have it broken because of his tumbling down from his lofty position. Daniel was a man greatly beloved, and God showed him his great love by setting him in high places, and keeping him there in safety.

Once more, men who are greatly beloved by the Lord *live wholly for God and for God's people*. You see nothing of selfishness about Daniel. He neither seeks to be great nor to be rich. He loves his own people, Israel; he pleads with God for the seed of Abraham. He is patriotic. He loves Jehovah, and he pleads with him for God's own people. Now, if you want to be greatly beloved, give yourself up to the service of God and his church.

"Ye that are men, now serve him,
Against unnumbered foes;
Your courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose."

No man need wish to be born in a time more suitable for heavenly chivalry than this. To stand alone for God in such an evil age as this, is a great honour. I pray that you may be able to avail yourselves of your privileges. How few care to swim against the current! A strong stream is running in opposition to the truth of God. Many say that the Bible is not half inspired. Many are turning away from Christ, refusing to acknowledge his deity, and some blasphemously speak of his precious blood as a thing of the shambles. O sirs! If somebody does not stand out to-day for the cause of God and truth, what is to become of the nominal church and of a guilty world? If you are loyal to Christ, show it now. If you love him, and his infallible Word, prove it now. Then shall you hear

him say to you also, "O man greatly beloved, go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." God grant it for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 John iv. 9-21.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—810, 808, 735.

1 JOHN 4:9-21

Verse 9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

There is love in our creation; there is love in providence; but most of all there is love in the gift of Christ for our redemption. The apostle here seems to say, "Now that I have found the great secret of God's love to us; here is the clearest evidence of divine love that ever was or ever can be manifested toward the sons of men."

10. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

In us there was no love; there was a hatred of God and goodness. The enmity was not on God's side toward us; but on our side toward him. "He loved us and sent his son." The gift of Christ; the needful propitiation for our sins, was all of love on God's part. Justice demanded the propitiation, but love applied it. God could not be just if he pardoned sin without atonement; but the greatness of the love is seen in the fact that it moved the Father to give his Son to an ignominious death, that he might pardon sinners and yet be just.

11. *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*

Here we have a fact and an argument. We ought to love. We ought to love after God's fashion; not because men loved us. Nor because they deserve anything at our hands. We are too apt to look at the worthiness of those whom we help; but our God is gracious to the unthankful and to the evil. He makes his sun to rise and rain to fall for the unjust as well as for the righteous, therefore we ought to love the unlovely and the unloving. But just as God has a special love for his own people, we who believe in him ought to have a peculiar affection for all who are his.

12. *No man hath seen God at any time.*

We do not need to see him to love him. Love knows how good he is, though she hath not beheld him. Blessed are they who have not seen God, yet who love him with heart, and mind, and strength.

12. *If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

He is not far to seek. If you love one another, God is in you; he dwells in you, he is your nearest and dearest Friend, the Author of all other love. The grace of love comes from the God of love.

13. *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.*

And his Spirit is the spirit of love. Wherever it comes, it makes man love his fellow-man and seek his good; and if you have that love in your heart, it came from God, and you dwell in God.

14. *And we have seen.*

Yes, there is something that we have seen. John writes for himself and his fellow-apostles, and he says, "No man hath seen God at any time," but—

14. *We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.*

John saw him live, and saw him die, and saw him when he had risen from the dead, and saw him as he ascended. So he speaks to the matter of eyesight, and bears testimony that, though we have not seen God, we have, in the person of the representative apostles, seen the Son of God who lived and laboured and died for us.

15. *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he is God.*

Let Christ be God to you, and you are saved. If, in every deed, and of a truth. You take him to be the Son of God, and consequently rest your eternal hopes on him, God dwells in you, and you dwell in God.

16. *And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.*

How far is this true of all of you? How many here can join with the beloved apostle, and say, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us"? We know it; we have felt it; we are under its power/ We know it still, it remains a matter of faith to us; we believe it. We have a double hold of it. "We know," we are not agnostics. "We believe," we are not unbelievers.

16. *God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*

This is not mere benevolence; there are many benevolent people who still do not dwell in love. They wish well to their fellow-men; but not to all. They are full of indignation at certain men for the wrong that they have done them. John's words teach us that there is a way of living in which you are in accord with God, and with all mankind; you have passed out of the region of enmity into the realm of love. When you have come there, by the grace of God, then God dwells in you, and you dwell in him.

17. *Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have a boldness in the day of judgment:*

That is a wonderful expression, "boldness in the day of judgment." According to some, the saints will not be in the day of judgment. Then, what is the use of "boldness in the day of judgment"? As I read my Bible, we shall all be there, and we shall all give an account unto God. I shall be glad to be there, to be judged for the deeds done in my body; not that I hope to be saved by them, but because I shall have a perfect answer to all accusations on account of my sin. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." If I am a believer in Christ,—

"Bold shall I stand in that grand day,
For who aught to my charge shall I lay?
While through thy blood absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame."

17. *Because as he is, so are we in this world.*

Happy Christian men, who can say that? If you live among men as Christ lived among men, if you are a saviour to them in your measure, if you love them, if you try to exhibit the lovely traits of character that were in Christ, happy are you.

18. *There is no fear in love;*

When a man loves with a perfect love, he escapes from bondage.

18. *But perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*

There is a loving, holy fear, which is never cast out. Filial fear grows as love grows. That sacred dread, that solemn awe of God, we must ever cultivate; but we are not afraid of him. Dear heart, God is your best Friend, your choicest love.

"Yea, mine own God is he,"

you can say; and you have no fear of him now. You long to approach him. Though he is a consuming fire, you know that he will only consume what you want to have consumed; and will purify you, and make your gold to shine more brightly because the consumable alloy is gone from it. He will not consume you, but only that which would work for your hurt if it were left within

you. Refining fire, go through my heart! Consume as thou wilt! I long to have sin consumed, that I may be like my God. Say you not so, my brethren?

19. *We love him, because he first loved us.*

The reason for our love is found in free grace. God first loved us, and now we must love him; we cannot help it. It sometimes seems too much for a poor sinner to talk about loving God. If an emmet or a snail were to say that it loved a queen, you would think it strange, that it should look so high for an object of affection; but there is no distance between an insect and a man compared with the distance between man and God. Yet love doth fling a flying bridge from our manhood up to his Godhead. "We love him, because he first loved us." If he could come down to us, we can go up to him. If his love could come down to such unworthy creatures as we are, then our poor love can find wings with which to mount up to him.

20. *If a man say, I love God.*

Not, "if a man love God," but if a man say, "I love God." It is a blessed thing to be able to say, "I love God," when God himself can bear witness to the truth of our statement; but the apostle says, *If a man say, I love God,—*

20. *And hateth his brother, he is a liar:*

It is very rude of you, John, to call people liars. But it is not John's rough nature that uses such strong language; it is his gentle nature. When a loving disposition turns its face against evil, it turns against it with great vehemence of holy indignation. You can never judge a man's character by his books. Curiously enough, Mr. Romaine. Of St. Anne's Church, Blackfriars, wrote the most loving books that could be; yet he was a man of very strong temper indeed. Mr. Toplady wrote some of the sharpest things that were ever said about Arminians; but he was the most loving and gentle young man that ever breathed. St. John, full of love and tenderness, hits terribly hard when he comes across a lie. He was so fond of love, that he cannot have it played with, or mocked or mimicked. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."

20, 21. *For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

This is that "new commandment" which our Lord gave to his apostles, and through them to his whole church. "That ye love one another as I have loved you." John was, in a special sense, "that disciple whom Jesus loved." It was meet, therefore, that he should be the apostle to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to bring "this commandment" to the remembrance of any who had forgotten it. "This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." God help us so to do, of his great grace! Amen.

Inexcusable Irreverence And Ingratitude

A Sermon

(No. 2257)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, May 22nd, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, July 13th, 1890.

"They are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful."—Romans 1:20-21.

This first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is a dreadful portion of the Word of God. I should hardly like to read it all through aloud; it is not intended to be so used. Read it at home, and be startled at the awful vices of the Gentile world. Unmentionable crimes were the common pleasures of those wicked ages; but the chapter is also a striking picture of heathenism at the present time. After a missionary had gone into a certain part of Hindostan, and had given away New Testaments, a Hindoo waited upon him, and asked him this question: "Did you not write that first chapter in the Epistle to the Romans after you came here?" "No," replied the missionary, "I did not write it at all; it has been there nearly two thousand years." The Hindoo said, "Well, if it has not been written since you came here, all I can say is, that it might have been so written, for it is a fearfully true description of the sin of India." It is also much more true, even of London, than some of us would like to know. Even here are committed those vices, the very mention of which would make the cheek of modesty to crimson. However, I am not going to talk about Hindoos; they are a long way off. I am not going to speak about the ancient Romans; they lived a couple of thousand years ago. I am going to speak about ourselves, and about some persons here whom my text admirably fits. I fear that I am speaking to some who are "without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful."

I. The first charge against those who are mentioned in my text is, WANT OF REVERENCE. "They knew God," but "they glorified him not as God." They knew that there was a God; they never denied his existence; but they had no reverence for his name, they did not render him the homage to which he is entitled, they did not glorify him as God.

Of many this is still true in this form, *they never think of God*. they go from year to year without any practical thought of God. Not only is he not in their words, but he is not in their thoughts. As the Psalmist puts it, "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not at all in his thoughts." The marginal reading is very expressive: "All his thoughts are, There is no God." Whether there is a God, or not, makes no practical difference to the wicked; they have so little esteem for him that, perhaps, if we could prove that there were no God, they would feel easier in their conscience. There must be something very wrong with you when you would rather that there were no God. "Well," says one, "I do not care much whether there is a God or not; I am an agnostic." "Oh!" I said, "that is a Greek word, is it not? And the equivalent Latin word is 'Ignoramus'." Somehow, he did not like the Latin nearly as much as the Greek. Oh, dear friends, I could not bear to be an "ignoramus" or an "agnostic" about God! I must have a God; I cannot do

without him. He is to me as necessary as food to my body, and air to my lungs. The sad thing is, that many, who believe that there is a God, yet glorify him not as God, for they do not even give him a thought. I appeal to some here, whether that is not true. You go from the beginning of the week to the end of it without reflecting upon God at all. You could do as well without God as with him. Is not that the case? And must there not be something very terrible in the condition of your heart when, as a creature, you can do without a thought of your Creator, when he that has nourished you, and brought you up, is nothing to you, one of whom you never think?

These people, further, *have no right conceptions of God*. The true conception of God is that he is all in all. If God is anything, we ought to make him everything; you cannot put God in the second place. He is Almighty, All-wise, All-gracious, knowing everything, being in every place, constantly present, the emanations of his power found in every part of the universe. God is infinitely glorious; and unless we treat him as such, we have not treated him as he ought to be treated. If there be a king, and he is set to open the door or do menial work, he is not honoured as a king should be. Shall the great God be made a lackey for our lusts? Shall we put God aside, and say to him, "When I have a more convenient season, I will send for thee: when I have more money, I will attend to religion," or, "When I can be religious, and not lose anything by it, then I will seek thee"? Dost thou treat God so? Oh, beware, this is high treason against the King of kings! Wrong ideas of God, grovelling thoughts of God, come under the censure of the text, "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God."

Again, dear friends, there are some who think of God a little, but *they never offer him any humble, spiritual worship*. Do not imagine that God can be worshipped by anything which is merely mechanical or external, but which is from the heart. A strange god must that god be who is pleased with what some men call worship. I have been into many a Romish church, and seen upon the altar paper flowers that would have been a disgrace to a tap-room; and I have said, "Is God pleased with this kind of thing?" Then I have been into a better building, and I have seen crucifixes and altars adorned like a fine lapidary's shop; and I have said to myself, "They might adorn a bride; but God cares not for jewels." Is your conception of God that he desires your gold and your silver, and your brass and your fine linen, and all these adornments? Thou thinkest that he is such an one as thyself. Surely, thou hast poor conceptions of God. When the organ peals out its melodious tones, but the heart is not in the singing, dost thou think that God has ears like a man, that can be tickled with sweet sounds? Why hast thou brought him down to thy level? He is spiritual; the music that delights him is the love of a true heart, the prayer of an anxious spirit. He has better music than all your organs and drums can ever bring to him. If he wanted music, he would have not asked thee, for winds and wave make melodies transcendently superior to all your chief musicians can compose. Does he want candles when his torch makes the mountains to be great altars, smoking with the incense of praise to the God of creation? Oh, brethren, I fear that it has been true of many who externally appeared to be devout, "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God"! Weep over your sin: now have you glorified him as God. Fall on your face, and be nothing before the Most High: now you have glorified him as God. Accept his righteousness; adore his bleeding Son; trust in his infinite compassion. Now you have glorified him as God, for "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." How far, my dear hearers, have you complied with that requisition?

Further, the people mentioned in my text did not glorify God, *for they did not obediently serve him*. My dear hearer, have *you* served God? Have you looked upon yourself as a servant of God?

When you awoke in the morning, did you say, "What does God expect me to do to-day?" When you have summed up the day, have you applied this test, "How far have I endeavoured to serve God to-day?" There are many who are the servants of themselves; and there is no master more tyrannical than unsanctified self. Many are toiling, like slaves at the galleys, for wealth, for honour, for respectability, for something for themselves. But, remember, if the Lord be God, and he made us, we are bound to serve him. How is it that God has kept you alive these forty years, perhaps twice forty, and you have never glorified him as God, by rendering him any service whatsoever? This is a very solemn enquiry. I should like everyone whom it concerns to take it home to his own conscience.

There is another charge to be brought against those who glorified not God, although they knew him; that is, *they did not trust him*. The place for man is under the shadow of God's wings. If he made me, I ought to seek him in the hour of trouble. In the time of my need, I should apply to his bounty. If I feel unhappy, I should look to him for comfort. My dear hearers, are there not some of you who never did trust God yet? You run to your neighbours as soon as ever you are in difficulties. You trust your old uncle; but you never trust your God. Oh, what a wretched business is this, if God, who is all truth and all love, does not have the confidence of his own creatures! Remember how the Lord spake by the mouth of Jeremiah: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see good when it cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought; neither shall cease from yielding fruit." The people mentioned in the text knew God, but they did not trust him.

In addition to this, *they did not seek to commune with him*. Are there not some here who never tried to speak to God? It never occurred to you, did it? And God has not spoken to you; at least, you have not known whose voice it was when he did speak. It is a very sad business when a boy, who has been at home with his father and mother for years, has never spoken to them. He came down in the morning, and ate his breakfast; he came in, and devoured his dinner; he took his supper with them by night; but never spoke to them. Would you have a boy of that kind living with you? You would be obliged to say, "John, you must go; it pains me to send you away, but I cannot bear to have you sitting here in silence. If I speak to you, you never answer me." Some of you cannot remember the time when you spoke to God, or God spoke to you: it is so very long ago, if it ever did occur in your past experience. There is a man somewhere here who did speak to God the other day. He called upon God with a foul and blasphemous oath. When he was telling a lie, he called upon God to witness it. Ah! Yes, you have broken the silence; but it would have been better not to have spoken, than to have uttered those vile blasphemies against the Most High. Your horrible words have entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth; and, as the Lord liveth, you will have more to answer for them to the great judge of all men, unless you seek his face, and find forgiveness through his Son. Our Saviour said that, for every *idle* word that men shall speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment; how much more shall they be required to answer for every evil, false, slanderous, blasphemous word they have spoken!

But are there not many persons who have uttered an oath, and are scrupulously careful about speaking the truth, who have never had any spiritual converse with God? Wretched creatures indeed

are you, even though you are healthy and prosperous, you have missed the highest good, the best blessing that man can know.

There are some who, although they know God, *they do not want to be reconciled to him*. there is a way of perfect reconciliation between God and man. Whosoever believeth in Christ Jesus is at once forgiven; he is adopted into the family of God; he drinks the wine of the love of God; he is saved with an everlasting salvation. There are many who know this in their minds; but it never excites any desire for it in their hearts. No, whether reconciled or unreconciled, does not trouble them. Knowest thou, O man, that the English of it is, "I defy God; I neither want his love, nor fear his hate; I will lift my face before his thunderbolts and dare him to do his worst."? Oh, fatal defiance of the blessed God! May the Spirit of God work upon thy conscience now, to make thee see the evil of this condition, and turn from it! While I speak, I feel deeply troubled to have to say what I do; but I am only speaking of what many a conscience here must confess to be true. You live, some of you, knowing God, but not glorifying him as God.

II. Now I take from my text the second accusation, which is certainly quite as sad as the other. Those who are mentioned by Paul are accused of WANT OF GRATITUDE. It is said of them that "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful."

I cannot say anything much worse of a man than that he is not thankful to those who have been his benefactors; and when you say that he is not thankful to God, you have said about the worst thing you can say of him. Now look not merely at the people who lived in Paul's day, but at those who are living now. I will soon prove ingratitude on the part of many. There are many counts in the indictment we have to bring against them in God's High Court of Justice.

First, *God's law is despised*. You young men and women, who are beginning life, if you are intelligent and wise, say, "We wish that we knew what we ought to do for our own preservation and happiness; and we should also like to know what to avoid lest we should do ourselves harm." Well, now. The book of the law of the ten commands is simply the sanitary regulation of the moral world, telling us what would damage us, and what would benefit us. We ought to be very thankful to have such plain directions. "Thou shalt." "Thou shalt not." But see. God has taken the trouble to give us this map of the way, and to direct us in the right road; yet some have despised the heavenly guide. They have gone directly in the teeth of the law; in fact, it looks as if the very existence of the law has been a provocation for them to break it. Is not this a piece of dreadful ingratitude? Whenever God says, "Thou shalt not," it is because it would be mischievous to us to do it. Sometimes, in London, when the ice in the parks is not strong enough to bear, they put up boards on which is the word "Dangerous." Who but a fool would go where that danger-signal is? The ten commands indicate what is dangerous: nay, what is fatal. Keep clear of all that is forbidden.

Next, *God's day is dishonoured* by those who are not thankful to him. God has, in great mercy, given us a day, on day in seven, wherein to rest, and to think of holy things. There were seven days that God had in the week. He said, "Take six, and use them in your business." No, we must have the seventh as well. It is as if one, upon the road, saw a poor man in distress, and having but seven shillings, the generous person gave the poor man six; but when the wretch had scrambled to his feet, he followed his benefactor to knock him down, and steal the seventh shilling from him. How many do this! The Sabbath is their day for sport, for amusement, for anything but the service of God. They rob God of his day, though it be but one in seven. This is base unthankfulness. May not many here confess that they have been guilty of it? If so, let no more Sabbaths be wasted; but let their sacred hours, and all the week between, be spent in diligent search after God; and then, when

you have found him, the Lord's-day will be the brightest gem of all the seven, and you will sing with Dr. Watts,—

"Welcome, sweet day of rest,
That saw the Lord arise;
Welcome to this reviving breast,
And these rejoicing eyes!"

Moreover, *God's Book is neglected* by these ungrateful beings. He has given us a Book; here is a copy of it. Was there ever such a Book, so full of wisdom, and so full of love? Let a man look at it on bended knee; for he may find heaven between those pages. But, when God has taken the trouble to make this wonderful Book, there are many who do not take the trouble to read it. Ah, me, what ingratitude! A father's love-letter to his son, and his son leaves it unread! Here is a Book, the like of which is not beneath the cope of heaven, and God has exercised even his omniscience to make it a perfect Book, for all ranks and conditions of men, in all periods of the world's history; and yet, such is man's ingratitude, that he turns away from it.

But there is something much worse; *God's Son is refused* by the unthankful. God had but one Son, and such a Son; one with himself, infinite, holy, his delight! He took him from his bosom, and sent him to this earth. The Son took our nature, and became a servant, and then died the death of a felon, the death of the cross, and all to save us, all for the guilty, all for men who were his enemies. I feel guilty myself while I am talking about it, that I do not burst into tears. This must be one of the mysteries that the angels cannot comprehend, that after Christ had died, there were found sinners who would not be saved by him. They refused to be washed in the fountain filled with blood; they rejected eternal life, even though it streamed from the five great founts of his wounded body. They chose hell rather than salvation by his blood. They were so in love with their dire enemy, sin, that they would not be reconciled to God, even by the death of his Son. Oh, ingratitude, thou hast reached thy utmost limit now, for thou hast trodden under foot the Son of God, and hast counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hast done despite unto the Spirit of Grace! Is it not terrible?

I might stop here; but, for the sake of pricking the conscience of some, I want to say, dear friends, that there are some persons so ungrateful, that *God's deliverances are forgotten*. Some years ago, I spoke with a soldier who rode in the fatal charge at Balaclava; and when he told me so, I took him by the hand; I could not help it, though he was a stranger to me. The tears were in my eyes, and I said, "Sir, I hope that you are God's man after such a deliverance as that." Almost all the saddles emptied, shot and shell flying to the right and left, death mowing down the whole brigade; yet he escaped. But I did not find that he had given his heart to Christ. Over there is a man who has been in a half-a-dozen shipwrecks; and if he does not mind, he will be shipwrecked to all eternity! One here has had yellow fever. Ah sir, there is a worse fever than that on you now! I cannot speak of all the cases here of strange deliverances; but I do not doubt that I address some who have been between the jaws of death. They have looked over the edge of that dread precipice, beneath which is the fathomless abyss. You vowed that, if God would spare your life, you would never be what you were before; and in truth you are not, for you are worse than ever. You are sinning now against light, and in shameful ingratitude. God have mercy upon you!

How often, dear friends, is there ingratitude on the part of unconverted men in the matter of *God's providences ignored!* Why, look at some of you! You never missed a meal in your lives. When you went to the table, there was always something on it. You never had to lose a night's rest for

want of a bed. Some of you, from your childhood, have had all that heart could wish. If God has treated you so, while many are crushed with poverty, should he not have some gratitude from you? You had a good mother; you had a tender father; you have gone from one form of relationship to another with increasing comfort. You are spared, and your mother is spared; your wife and children are spared. Indeed, God has made your path very smooth. Some of you are getting on in business, while other men are failing; some of you have every comfort at home, while others have been widowed, and their children have fallen, one after the other. Will you never be grateful? Hard, hard heart, wilt thou never break? Will any mercy bend thee? I do appeal to some here, whose path has been so full of mercies, that they ought to think of God, and turn to him with sincere repentance and faith.

But one says, "I have had good luck." What can be worse than that? Here is unthankfulness to God indeed, when you ascribe his good gifts to "good luck." "Well, you know, but I have been a very hard-working man." I know you have, but who gave you this strength for your work? "I have a good supply of brains while others do not." Did you make your own brains? Do you not feel that any man who talks about his own wisdom, and his own wit, writes "FOOL" across his forehead in capital letters? We owe everything to God; shall we not give God nothing? Shall we have no gratitude to him from whom all our blessings have come? God forgive us if it has been so, and give us grace to alter our past course at once!

Once more, there is another piece of ingratitude of which many are guilty, *God's Spirit is resisted by them*. The Spirit of God comes to them, and gently touches them. Perhaps he has done so to-night while you have been sitting here. You have said, "Do not talk quite so plainly to us. Give us a little comfort, a little breathing space; and do not be quite so hard on us." I hope that it was the Spirit of God rather than the preacher who was dealing with you. At any rate, he has done so a good many times; and you have tried to drive from your heart your best Friend. You have been so ungenerous to him that, when he came to lead you to Christ, you summoned all your strength, and the devil came to help you, and up till now you have resisted the Spirit of God with some degree of success. The Lord have mercy upon you! But how true is my text still, even of many who are found in the house of prayer, "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful"!

III. Now I finish with my third point, which is, that THIS IRREVERENCE AND INGRATITUDE WERE AGAINST KNOWLEDGE. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful."

Will you kindly notice, that, according to my text, *knowledge is of no use if it does not lead to holy practice*? "They knew God." It was no good to them to know God, for "they glorified him not as God." So my theological friend over there, who knows so much that he can split hairs over doctrines, it does not matter what you think, or what you know, unless it leads you to glorify God, and to be thankful. Nay, your knowledge may be a millstone about your neck to sink you down in woe eternal, unless your knowledge is turned to holy practice.

Indeed, *knowledge will increase the responsibility of those who are irreverent and ungrateful*. Paul says, "They are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." Whatever excuse might be made for those who never heard of God, there was none for these people. My dear hearers, you also are "without excuse." Many of you have had godly parents, you have attended a gospel ministry, your Sunday-school teachers and Christian friends have taught you the way of salvation; you are not ignorant. If you do not glorify God, if you are not thankful to him, it will be more tolerable for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah at the

day of judgment than for you, for they never had the privileges that you have despised. Remember how the Saviour upbraided the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the might works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." I hardly know which is the greater wonder, that the poor people who saw Christ's mighty works did not repent, or that those who would have repented if they had seen those works were not permitted to see them.

I wish, dear friends, that you could go out of this state of not glorifying God, and not being thankful. Surely, you only want to have the case stated, and the Spirit of God to speak to your conscience, to cause you to say, "I cannot bear to be in such a dreadful condition without regard to God any longer." May God enable you to repent to-night! Change your mind. That is the meaning of the word "repent." Change your mind, and say, "We will glorify God. There is a Great First Cause. There is a Creator. There must be an omnipotent, all-wise Being. We will worship him. We will say in our hearts, "This God shall be our God, and we will trust him, if he will but accept us."

Then remember the years that are past. They involve a great debt, and you cannot pay it; for, if you go one serving God without a flaw to the end of your life, there is the old debt still due; there are the years that are gone, and "God requireth the years that are past." Well, now, hear what he has done. He has given his dear Son to "bear our sins in his own body on the tree"; and if you will trust Christ, then know of a surety that Christ has put away your sin, and you are forgiven. "Look,"—that is his word—"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." When the brazen serpent was lifted up, all that those who were bidden had to do was to look at the serpent of brass; and everyone that looked, lived. If any man of that crowd had looked at Moses, that would have healed him. If he had looked at the fiery serpents, and tried to pull them off, that would not have healed him. But he looked to the brazen serpent, and, as his eyes caught the gleam of the brass, the deadly serpent's bites were healed, and the man lived. Look to Jesus. Look now. May God the Holy Spirit lead you to do so!

"I do not feel fit," says one. That is looking to yourself. "I do not feel my need enough." Says another. That is trusting to your sense of need. Away with everything that is in you, or about you, and just trust Christ, and you shall immediately be saved. Whoever, in this great congregation will but look to Jesus shall be saved upon the spot. However great your iniquities, however stony your heart, however despairing your mind, look, look, look, look. And then, when you look to Christ, your ingratitude will be forgiven, and it will die. You will love him who has loved you, and you shall be saved, and saved forever.

When we received eighty-two into the church last Lord's-day evening, I could not help breathing an earnest prayer that this might be the beginning of a revival. May it come to-night, and may many in these two galleries, and down below, be carried away by that blessed tide of mighty grace that shall sweep them off their feet, and land them safe on the Rock of ages!

Will you, dear friends, pray for this? I shall feel that even my poor, weak instrumentality will be quite sufficient for the greatest work if I have your prayers at my back. Will you to-night at the family altar, or at your own bedsides, make it a special subject of prayer that men, who knew God, but glorified him not as God, and were not thankful, may to-night turn to God? If I could get at some of you who are living without Christ, I should like to do what the Roman ambassadors used to do. When they come to a king who was at war with the empire, they said to him, "Will you have peace with Rome, or not?" If he said that he must have time to think it over, the ambassador, with

his rod, drew a ring around the man, and said, "You must decide before you cross that line, for, if you do not say 'Peace' before you step out of it, Rome will crush you with her armies." There are no doors to the pews, else I would say, "Shut those doors, and do not let the people out until God decides them." Lord, shut them in! Lord, arrest them: hold them fast, and let them not go till each one of them has said, "I believe; help thou mine unbelief." May God bless you all, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Romans 1:1-25.

Verse 1. *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.*

Paul had not seen the Romans when he wrote this epistle. They were strangers to him, and therefore he begins by asserting his apostleship. "called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God." That expression should be true of every Christian minister. We are not apostles; but we are "separated unto the gospel of God." I do not think that we are called to have anything to do with party politics, or social problems, or any such questions; we are set apart for this purpose. "separated unto the gospel of God." There are plenty of people who can attend to those things better than we can/ If we mind our own business, or rather, if we mind our Master's business, we who are ministers will have quite enough to do. "Separated unto the gospel of God." There are some brethren who in preaching are as timid as mice; but on a political platform they can roar like lions. Had not they better take to what they like best, and give up the work at which they are not at home? For my part, I believe that I am like Paul when he says that he was "separated unto the gospel of God." I am set apart unto the gospel, cut off from everything else that I may preach the glorious gospel of the blessed God to the perishing sons of men.

2. *(Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures.)*

Notice, brethren, how reverent the apostles were to Holy Scripture. They had no doubt about its inspiration. They quoted the old Testament, and delighted to make it a kind of basis for the New Testament: "which he had promised afore by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures."

3, 4. *Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:*

What a glorious Lord we serve! He is God's Son: "Jesus Christ our Lord." In his human nature, he is a Man of royal race: "of the seed of David." He was a man, therefore he died: but he rose again, for he was more than man: "declared to be the Son of God with power."

5, 6. *By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all notions, for his name: among whom are you also the called of Jesus Christ:*

That is a sweet name for every truly converted man. "called of Jesus Christ." He has called you personally, he has called you effectually, he has called you out of the world, he has called you into fellowship with himself: "the called of Jesus Christ." The revised version has it: "call to be Jesus Christ's." those who are called by Christ, are called to be his.

7, 8. *To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.*

What contrasts we have in the seventh verse! "In Rome, beloved of God." "In Rome called to be saints." God has beloved ones in the darkest parts of the earth. There is all the more reason for them to be saints because they are surrounded by sinners. They must have had true faith, or they

could not have confessed Christ between the jaws of a lion, for they lived in Rome, with Nero hunting after Christians, as if they had been wild beasts, and yet they were not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

9. *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;*

This man, Paul, did a great deal by prayer. I remember a minister, who is now with the Lord, who was thanked by his people for his wonderful sermons; but he said to them, "You never thanked me for my prayers, yet they were the best part of my service for you." When men of God are mighty in prayer, we owe much to them.

10. *Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.*

Paul wanted to go to Rome; but I do not suppose that he ever thought that he would go there at the expense of the government, with an imperial guard to take care of him all the way. We pray, and God gives us the answer to our petitions; but often in a way of which we should never have dreamed. Paul goes to Rome as a prisoner for Christ's sake. Now suppose Paul had gone to Rome in any other capacity, he could not have seen Caesar, he could not have obtained admission into Caesar's house. The prison of the Palatine was just under the vast palace of the Caesars; and everybody in the house could come into the guard-room. And have a talk with Paul if they were minded so to do. I suppose that, whatever I might be willing to pay, I could not have preached in the palace of the Queen, even in this nominally Christian country; but Paul was installed as a royal chaplain over Caesar's household in the guard-room of the Palatine prison. How wonderfully God works to accomplish his divine purposes!

11, 12. *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith of you and me.*

Paul wanted his faith to establish theirs, and their faith to establish his. Christians grow rich by and exchange of spiritual commodities; and I am afraid some Christians are very poor because they do not engage in the spiritual bartering with one another. You know how it was in the old time, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." Shall I tell you how it is now? They that fear not the Lord speak often one against another. That is a very sad difference. Oh, for more Christian communion; for when we blend our "mutual faith," we are "comforted together"; each believer grows stronger as he cheers his brother in the Lord!

13. *Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.*

Ah! Paul, you could not go when you wished. Caesar must convoy you. Your Master would have you go to Rome under the protection of the eagles of your empire. God has servants everywhere: he can make Satan himself provide the body-guard for his faithful apostle's journey.

14. *I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.*

Paul felt a debt to everybody. The God who saved him, had saved him that he might preach the gospel in every place he could reach. Brethren, if you have received much from God, you are so much the debtor to men; and you are debtors not only to the respectable, but to the disreputable, debtors not only to those who come to a place of worship, but to the dwellers in the slums, "to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; to the wise and to the unwise."

15. *So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ:*

Many other people were ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It was too simple; it had not enough of mystery about it; it had not enough of worldly wisdom about it. Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," and then gives his reason for not being ashamed of it,—

16, 17. *For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*

The gospel tells us about this living by faith, this believing, this receiving righteousness through believing, and not through working. This is the sweet story of the cross, of which Paul was not ashamed.

18. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;*

Those last words may be read, "Who *hold down* the truth in unrighteousness." They will not let the truth work upon their hearts; they will not allow it to operate in their minds; but they try to make it an excuse for their sin. Is there anybody here who is holding down the truth to prevent its entering his heart? I fear that there are some such persons, who have come here for years, and the truth has pricked them, troubled them, made them lie awake at night; but they are holding it down, like one who grasps a wild animal by the ears, and holds it down for fear it should bite him. Oh, sirs, when you are afraid of the truth, you may well be afraid of hell! When you and the truth quarrel, you had better end your fighting soon, for you will have the worst of it if you do not yield: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness."

19, 20. *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

Men who never heard the gospel can see God in his works if they open their eyes. There is written upon the face of nature enough to condemn men if they do not turn to God. There is a gospel of the sea, and of the heavens, of the stars, and of the sun; and if men will not read it, they are guilty, for they are wilfully ignorant of what they might know, and ought to know.

21, 22. *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*

The way to be a fool is to pretend to be wise. A shortcut to wisdom is the confession of folly. The near way to folly is the profession of wisdom.

23, 24. *And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lust of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:*

It is very easy to make a beast of yourself when you have made a beast to be your god, as the Egyptians did, when they worshipped the god that they had made in the form of an ox, or a crocodile, or a cat.

25. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

There are many preachers who have "changed the truth of God into a lie"; and by their exaltation of man, they have "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever." God save all of us from such idolatry as that! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—545, 527, 606.

Where Is the Lord?

A Sermon

(No. 2258)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, May 29th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, September 4th, 1890.

"Then he remembered the days of old Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name."—Isaiah 63:11-14.

I told you, in the reading, that Israel had a golden age, a time of great familiarity with God, when Jehovah was very near to his people in their sufferings, and was afflicted in their affliction, when he helped them in everything they did, and the angel of his presence saved them. But after all that the Lord had done for them, there came a cold periods. The people went astray from the one living and true God. They fell into the ritualism of the golden calf. They must have something visible, something that they could see and worship. Even after they were brought into the promised land, and the Lord had wrought great wonders for them, they turned aside to false gods, till they worshipped strange deities, that were no gods; and provoked Jehovah to jealousy. "They rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." Not that he ceased to love his chosen, but he must be just, and he could not patronize sin, so he sent their enemies against them, and they were sorely smitten, and brought very low. Then it was that they began to remember the days of old, and to sigh for him whom they had treated so ill, and they said one to another, "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord cause him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people to make thyself a glorious name."

I have but a short time, as the communion service is to follow, and therefore I must leave much unsaid that I think your own imaginations will make up to you at home.

But I shall ask you to notice, first, that the text contains *a sacred, loving remembrance*. It dwells very much upon what God did in the old times, when he was familiar with his people, and they walked in the light of his countenance. After that, I shall call your attention to *an object clearly shining* in the text. We get it twice over. In the twelfth verse, we read, "To make himself an everlasting name." In the fourteenth verse, "To make thyself a glorious name." When I have spoken

of those two things, I shall dwell more at length upon *an anxious enquiry*, which is put here twice: "Where is he?" In the eleventh verse you get this repeated question, "Where is he? Where is he?"

I. So then, to begin with, we go back to God's dealings with his people, and with us, and we have A SACRED, LOVING REMEMBRANCE. The people remembered what God did to them. What was it?

As it is here described, he first of all *gave them leaders*. "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock?" Moses and Aaron, and a band of godly men who were with them, were the leaders of the people, through the sea and through the wilderness. Brethren, we are apt to think too little of our leaders. First of all we think too much of them, and afterwards we think too little of them. We seem to swing like a pendulum between these two extremes. Man is reckoned as if he were everything to some, and God becomes nothing to such; but, without unduly exalting man, we can truly say that it really is a great blessing to the church when God raises up men who are qualified to lead his people. Israel did not go out of Egypt as a mob; they were led out by their armies. They did not plunge into the Red Sea as an undisciplined crowd; but Moses stood up there with his uplifted rod, and led them on that memorable day. We may as well sigh for the glorious days of old, when God gave his people mighty preachers of his Word. There have been epochs in history that were prolific of great leaders of the Christian church. No sooner did Luther give his clarion call, than God seemed to have a bird in every bush; and Calvin, and Farel, and Melancthon, and Zwingle, and so many besides that I will not attempt to make out the list, joined with him in his brave protest against the harlot-church of Rome. "The Lord gave the Word: and great was the company of those that published it." The church remembers those happy days, with earnest longing for their return. They were giants in those days; mighty men of renown, well fitted by the Lord to lead his people.

We are next told that God *put his spirit within these shepherds*. They would have been nothing without it. Where is he that put his Holy Spirit within them? A man with God's Holy Spirit within him, can anybody estimate his worth? God says that he will make a man more precious than the gold of Ophir; but, to a man filled with his Spirit, mines of rubies or of diamonds cannot be set in comparison. When the eleven apostles went forth, on the day of Pentecost, endowed by the Spirit of God, there were forces in the world whose very tramp might make it quiver beneath their feet. God send us once more many of his servants, within whom he has put his Spirit in an eminent and conspicuous manner, and then we shall see bright days indeed! The command to such still is, "Tarry until ye be endued with power from on high."

Then there was, in the next place, as a happy memory for the church, *a great manifestation of the divine power*. "That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name." "The right hand of Moses," by itself, was no more than your right hand or mine; but when God's glorious arm worked by the right hand of Moses, the sea divided, and made a way for the hosts of Israel to pass over. As the Psalmist sings, "He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as a heap." The right hand of Moses could not have wrought that miracle; but the glorious arm of the Lord did. What we want to-day, brethren, is a manifestation of divine power. Some of us are praying for it day and night. We have expected it. We do expect it. We are longing for it with a hunger and a thirst insatiable. Oh, when will Jehovah pluck his right hand out of his bosom? When will he make bare his arm, as one that goeth to his work with might and main? Pray, O ye servants of God,

for leaders filled with the Spirit, and with the power of God working with them, that multitudes may be converted unto Christ, and the sea of sin be dried up in the advance of his kingdom!

Then, there came to God's people *a very marvellous deliverance*: "That led them through the deep, as a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble." Understand by the word "wilderness" here, an expansive grassy plain; a place of wild grass and herbs, for so it means. And as a horse is led where it is that and level, and he does not stumble, so were the hosts of Israel led through the Red Sea. The bottom of the sea may be stony or gravelly, or it may be full of mire and mud. Probably, there will be huge rocks standing up in the middle of the stream. There may be a sudden fall from one stratum of rock to the other; and to come up from the sea on the further bank would be hard work for struggling people carrying burdens, as these Israelites did; for they went out of Egypt harnessed and laden, bearing their kneading-troughs in their clothes upon their shoulders. But God made that rough sea bottom to be as easy travelling for them as when a horse is led across a flowery meadow. Beloved, God has done so with his church in all time. Her seas of difficulty have had no difficulty about them. He has come in all the glory of his power, and smoothed the way for the ransomed to pass over. Has it not been so with you, my brethren?

And, as a blessed ending to their trials, God *brought them into a place of rest*: "As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord causeth him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people." In the desert they rested a good deal; but in Canaan they rested altogether. As the cattle come down from the mountains, where they have been picking up their food, when the plains are fat with grass, and they feed to their full, and lie down and rest, so did God deal with his people, bringing them from all the mountains of their trouble into a sweet valley, a land that flowed with milk and honey, where they might rest. This is a memorial, a sketch of the past.

I read it, first, literally as a sketch of Israel's history. I read it, next, as a sketch of the church's history. There have been times with the church as at Pentecost, and the Reformation, when, though she had wandered, God returned to her, and made bare his arm, and raised up shepherds, and put his Spirit upon them, and then led his people straight ahead through every difficulty, and gave them rest. You are most of you acquainted with the history of the period before Luther's day. It did not seem likely then that the gospel would be preached everywhere throughout Northern Europe; but it was so, and God singularly preserved the first Reformers' lives when they were very precious. Zwingle died in battle; but he should not have been fighting, and he might have died a natural death. But Calvin, and Luther, and the rest of them, for the most part, remained until their work was done, and they quietly passed away; and the churches, despite long persecution, had comparative rest. It was so here, and it was so across the border in our sister church of Scotland. She cannot forget the covenanting blood, and the putting to death of those who were for the Crown Rights of King Jesus; but, at last, she had her time of rest. Time would not fail me to tell you the long list of shepherds that God gave to his covenanting church, the mighty men who, being dead, yet speak to us by their works, and who, while they lived, made the church of God in Scotland to be glorious with the presence of her Lord.

Well now, the same thing has happened also to us as individuals. We have had our cloudy and dark day, but God has appeared for our help. Some of you could tell how God led you through the deep as through a prairie. You went a way that you never knew, a new way, an untrodden path, as though it were the bottom of a sea but newly dry; but the Lord led you as a groom leads a horse, so that you did not stumble, and before long you came up out of the depths unharmed. With Moses and the children of Israel, you sang the praises of him who had triumphed gloriously; and then you

began to learn another song, not so martial, but very sweet: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters." In conflicts for the God of Israel, and his everlasting truth, some of us have been counted as the mire of the streets; but therein we do rejoice, and will rejoice; for Jehovah liveth, and he will bring up his people again from Bashan. He will bring them up from the depths of the sea, and there shall be rest again in the midst of Israel, if men are but faithful to God, and faithful to his truth.

Thus much upon the sacred memory of the past.

II. But now, in the second place, I want you to notice, AN OBJECT CLEARLY SHINING, like the morning star. I see, through the text, God's great motive in working these wonders for his people. *It was God who did it all*; my text is full of God. He brought them up out of the sea. He put his Holy Spirit within them. He led them with his glorious arm. He led them through the deep. He caused them to rest. He did it all. When the history of the church is written, there will be nothing on the page but God. I know that her sin is recorded; but he hath blotted that out; and at the end, there will remain nothing but what God has done. When your life and mine shall ring out as a psalm amid the harps of glory, it will be only, "Unto him that loved us and laved us, be glory and dominion for ever and ever." "*Non nobis, Domine.*" "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." So will sing all of us who are the Lord's redeemed, when we have come up out of the great tribulation, and have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

But then, why had God done all this? Did he do it because of his people's merits, or numbers, or capacities? He tells them, many a time, "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel." God finds in himself the motive for blessing men who have no merits. If God looked for any motive in us, he would find none. He would see in us many reasons why he should condemn us; but only in himself could he discover the motive for his matchless mercy.

God works his great wonders of grace with the high motive of *making known to his creatures his own glory*, manifesting what he is and who he is, that they may worship him. He tells us in the text that he "led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name." So he has done, for to this day the highest note of praise to God that we know of, is the one that tells of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, and when this world is burnt up, the song will go up to God in heaven will be the song of Moses, the servant of God, and of the Lamb. Still, if we want a figure and a foretaste of the ultimate victories of God over all his people's enemies, we have to go back to the Red Sea, and look at Miriam's twinkling feet, and hear her fingers making the timbrel sound as she cries, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." He did it to make himself an ever-enduring name, and he has succeeded in that object.

Isaiah adds that the Lord led his people, and brought them into their rest, to make himself "a glorious name." God is glorious in the history of Israel. God is glorious in the history of his church. God is glorious in the history of every believer. The life of a true believer is a glorious life. For himself he claims no honour, but by his holy life he brings great glory to God. There is more glory to God in every poor man and woman saved by grace, and in the one unknown obscure person, washed in the Redeemer's blood, than in all the songs of cherubim and seraphim, who know nothing of free grace and dying love. So you see, beloved, the motive of God in all that he did; and I dwell upon it, though briefly, yet with much emphasis, because this is a motive that can never alter. What if the church of to-day be reduced to a very low condition, and the truth seems to be ebbing out

from her shores, while a long stretch of the dreary mud of modern invention lies reeking in the nostrils of God; yet he that wrought such wonders, to make himself a name, still has the same object in view. He will be glorious. He will have men know that he is God, and beside him there is none else. Thus saith the Lord God, "All flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." "The earth shall be full of knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." O brethren, he is a jealous God still; and when the precious blood of Christ is insulted, God hears it, and forgets it not. When the inspiration of the blessed Book is denied, the Holy Ghost hears it and is grieved, and he will yet bestir himself to defend his truth. When we hear the truth that we love, the dearest and most sacred revelations from our God, treated with a triviality that is nothing less than profane, if we are indignant, so is he, and shall not God avenge his own elect. Which cry day and night unto him? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily, though he bear long with his adversaries. God's motive is his own glory. He will stand to that, and he will vindicate it yet; and we need to have no doubt, nor even the shadow of a fear, about the ultimate result of a collision between God and the adversaries of his truth. Shall not the moth, that dashes at the candle, die in that flame? How shall the creatures of a day stand out against our God, who is a consuming fire? Here, then, is the hope of the people of God, the constant persistent, invariable motive of God to make himself glorious in the eyes of men.

III. My third point is, AN ANXIOUS ENQUIRY, which I find twice over in my text. Believing in what God has done, and believing that his motive still remains the same, we begin to cry, "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?"

This question suggests that *there is some faith left*. "Where is he?" He is somewhere. Then, he lives. Beloved, the Lord God omnipotent still liveth and reigneth. Many usurpers have tried to turn him from his throne; but he still sits upon it, and reigns amongst his ancients gloriously. He was, and is, and is to come, the Almighty; "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

He is; but where is he? The question implies that *some were beginning to seek him*. Where is he? Those were brave days when he was here on the moors, or on the hills of Scotland, or at the stakes of Smithfield, or the prisons of Lambeth Palace. Those were glorious days when Christ was here, and his people knew it, and rejoiced in him. Then the virgin daughter of Zion shook her head at the harlot of Rome, and laughed her to scorn; for she lay in the bosom of her King, and rejoiced in his love. O beloved, do we begin to long after him again? I hope that we do. I trust the cry of many loyal hearts is, "Come back, king Jesus! When thou art away, all things languish. Adown the streets of Mansoul ride again, O Prince Emmanuel! Then shall the city ring with holy song, and every house shall be bedecked with everything that is beautiful and fair. Only come back!" If the King may but have his own again, I shall be content to sing old Simeon's song, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word!" The church longs for the King's coming. Where is he? Where is he?

It shows now, dear friends, that she has *begun to mourn over his absence*. I like the reduplicated word. "Where is he? Where is he?" Not, "Where is Moses? Where are the leaders? The fathers, where are they?" Let them keep where they are. But where is he that made the fathers? Where is he that sent us Moses and Aaron? Where is he that divided the waters, and led his people safely? Where is he? Oh, it is a question that I put to all your hearts! Oh, if he were here! One hour of his glorious arm; just a day of his almighty working; and what should we not see? We will not ask for

tongues of fire, or mighty rushing winds. Let him be here as he may; but if he only be here, the battle is turned at the gate, and the day of his redeemed is come. We sigh for his appearing.

Where is he, then? As the text asks. Well, *he is hidden because of our sins*. The church has been tampering with his truth. She has given into the hands of critics the Word of God, to cut it with a penknife, to rend away this and tear out that. She has been dallying with the world. She has tried to gain money for her objects by the basest of means. She has played the harlot in what she has done; for there are no amusements too vile or too silly for her. Even her pastors have filled a theatre of late, to sit there and mark with their applause the labours of the play-actors! To this pass have we come at last, to which we never came before—no, not in Rome's darkest hour; and if you, who profess to be God's servants, do not love Christ enough to be indignant about it, the Lord have mercy upon you! The time has surely come when there should go up one great cry unto the Lord Jehovah that he would make bare his arm again; for well may we say, "Where is he? Where is he?"

For your comfort, the next verse to my text tells you where he is. *He is in heaven*. They cannot expel him from his throne. "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." By every possible contrivance, in these modern days, they have tried to drive Christ out of his own church. A Christless, bloodless gospel defiles many a pulpit, and Christ is thus angered; but he is in heaven still. At the right hand of God he sits; and let this be our continual prayer to him, "Look down from heaven, O Lord! Cast an eye upon thy failing, faltering, fickle church. Look down from heaven."

"Where is he?" Well, *he is himself making an enquiry*; for, as some read the whole passage, it is God himself speaking. He remembered the days of old, Moses and his people; and when he his himself, and would not work in wrath, yet he said to himself, "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock?" When God himself, who is always a stranger here,—for are we not strangers with him and sojourners, as all our fathers were?—When God himself begins to ask where he is, and to regret those happier days, something will come of it. "Ye that make mention of the Lord—ye that are the Lord's remembrances—keep not silence, and give him no rest,—take no rest, and give him no rest,—till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." "That little cloud", said one of old, when Julian the apostate threatened to extirpate Christianity, "That little church will soon be gone." All that I see to-day of darkness, is but a wave of smoke. Behold, the Lord God himself shall chase it away with a strong west wind. He doth but blow with his wind, and the clouds disappear; and what stands before us to-day shall be as nothing.

I thought, as I came here to-night, that the man who drives the tram car gave me a lesson on how I should look upon all future time. He starts, say at Clapham, with his car. If he could have a view of all that was on the road between Clapham and the Elephant and Castle, the carts, the waggons, and other traffic that are exactly where he wants to go, and he were to add all those obstacles together, he might be foolish enough to say, "I shall not complete my course to-night;" but, you see, he starts, and if anything is on the rails, it moves off; and if, perhaps, some sluggish, heavily-laden coal waggon is slow to move, he puts his whistle to his mouth, and gives a shrill blast or two, and lo, it is gone! So when the church, serving her God, begins to look far ahead through prophecy, which she never did understand, and never will, she will think she will never reach her journey's end. But she will; for God has laid the line. We are on the rails, and the rails do not come to an end till the journey's end is reached; and as we go along, we shall find that everything in our way will move before us; and if it does not, we will pray a bit. We will blow our whistles, and the devil himself will have to move, though all his black horses shall be dragging along the brewer's

dray, or what else belongs to him. He will have to get off our track, assuredly as God lives; for if Jehovah sends us on his errands, we cannot fail. The old Romans picture Jove as hurling thunderbolts. Sometimes God makes his servants thunderbolts, and when he hurls them, they will go crashing through everything until they reach their mark. Wherefore; be not for a moment discouraged; but trust you in God, and be glad without a shadow of fear.

If any here have never trusted in God, never made him their Friend, or been reconciled to him by the death of his Son, I pray them to think of their present condition. Opposed to God! You are standing in the way of an express train. You are urged to get out of the way. You will not! You are going to throw that train off the rails, you say. Poor fool, I could put mine arms about your neck, and forcibly drag you from the iron way; for assuredly, if you remain there, nothing can come of it but your everlasting destruction. Wherefore, flee, flee, I pray you, from the wrath to come. The train of divine judgment comes thundering along the iron road even now. It shakes the earth. Awake! Rise! Flee! God help you to do so! Behold, the Saviour stands with open arms to be your shelter. Fly to him, and trust in him, and live for ever! Amen.

Isaiah 63-64

Chapter 63. Verses 1-6. *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them into my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.*

It is a dark and terrible time; no one at God's side, his people discouraged, Edom triumphant. Then comes the one great Hero of the gospel, the Christ of God; and by his own unaided strength he wins for his people a glorious victory. He is as terrible to his foes as he is precious to his friends. He stands before us as the one hope of his ancient church. There is a picture Isaiah was inspired to paint. Now the prophet goes on to say:—

7. I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord,

Are you, dear friends, mentioning the lovingkindnesses of the Lord; or are you silent about them? Learn a lesson from the prophet Isaiah. Talk about what God has done for you, and for his people in all time: "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord." Let this be the resolve of every one of us who has tasted that the Lord is gracious.

"Awake, my soul, in joyful lays,
And sing thy great Redeemer's praise:
He justly claims a song from me,
His lovingkindness, oh, how free!
"He saw me ruin'd in the fall,
Yet loved me, notwithstanding all;
He saved me from my lost estate,
His lovingkindness, oh, how great!"

7. *And the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses.*

This is a verse full of sweets; but I must not dwell upon it. My object at this time is to read much, and to say little by way of comments; so I cannot stay to pick out the sweetnesses here. There are very many. This passage is a piece of a honeycomb. Read it when you get home; pray over it, suck the honey out of it, and praise the Lord for it.

8. *For he said,*

In the old time, when God called his people out of Egypt, he said this.

8. *Surely they are my people, children that will not lie:*

Or, children that will not act deceitfully; or, will not deal falsely.

8. *So he was their Saviour.*

He thought well of them. He treated them as though they were trustworthy. He took them into his confidence. He said, "Surely they will not deceive me." This is speaking after the manner of men, of course; for God knows us, and is never deceived in us. We may deceive others; we may even deceive ourselves; but we can never deceive him.

9. *In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.*

Happy Israel! These were her golden days, when she was faithful to God, and God communed very closely with her. Then God was very near to his people, so near that he is represented as carrying them in his arms. He could be seen in a bush; he could be seen in a cloud; he could be seen working with a rod; he was so familiar with his people.

10. *But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.*

This was a great change in dispensation, though there was no change in the heart of God. He deals roughly with his people when they rebel against him. They would not be improved by tenderness, so now they must be scourged by his rod, and come under his displeasure. When men turn from God, he is "turned to be their enemy."

11. *Then he remembered the days of old,*

His people were never out of his mind, even when they wandered away from him. He remembered the love of their espousals, when they went after him into the wilderness. He remembered the days of old, the happier days, when his people walked closely with him. They also remembered these days. It is strange that they should ever have forgotten them.

11-14. *Moses, and his people, saying. Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.*

Now comes a prayer suggested by their condition of sorrow and desertion.

15. *Look down from heaven,*

Thou art still there, though we have wandered. Look down upon us from heaven, O, Lord!

15, 16. *And behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? Are they restrained?*

Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not; thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.

That last sentence may be read, "Thy name is, our Redeemer, from everlasting." This is a sweet plea with God: "We have offended thee; but we are still thy children. We have wandered from thee; but we are still thine own, bought with a price. Thy name of 'Redeemer' is not a temporary one; it is from everlasting to everlasting, therefore look on thy poor children again. Leave us not to perish."

17, 18. *O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. The people of thy holiness.*

Or, "Thy holy people."

18, 19. *Have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were no called by thy name.*

"Thou didst give us the land by an everlasting covenant; but we have had it only a little while. Lo, the enemy has come in, and driven thine Israel away from her heritage! Can it be so, always, O Lord?" Happy times seem very short when they are over; and when they are succeeded by dark trials, we say, "The people of thy holiness, thy holy people have possessed it but a little while. Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are now become (for this is the true rendering of the passage) like those over whom thou hast never borne rule, those who were never called by thy name." That is a sad condition for the church of God to be in; and I am afraid that it is getting into that condition now, sinking to a level with the world, leaving its high calling, quitting the path of the separated people, and becoming just like those whom God never knew, and who were never called by his name. It is a pitiful case; and here comes a prayer like the bursting out of a volcano, as though the hearts of gracious men could hold in the agonising cry no longer:—

Chapter lxiv. Verses 1,2. *Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth,*

Or, much better, "as when the brushwood burneth"; for if God does but come to his people, they are ready to catch the flame, like the dry heather which is soon ablaze; and his enemies also shall be like brushwood before the fire.

2, 3. *The fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou comest down, the mountain flowed down at thy presence.*

O Lord, come again! Thou didst come in the past; repeat thy former acts, and let us see what thou canst do for the avenging of thy people.

4. *For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.*

God is ready to help. He has everything in preparation before our needs begin. He has laid in supplies for all our wants. Before our prayers are presented, he has prepared his answers to them; blessed be his name! You remember how Paul uses this passage, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." The spiritual man is a privileged man.

5. *Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways:*

God does not wait for us to return to him. He meets us. He comes to us the moment that we turn our feet towards his throne. While we are, like the prodigal, a great way off, he sees us, and has compassion upon us, and runs to meet us.

5. *Behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.*

In thy faithfulness, in thy love, in thyself, in thy ways of mercy there is continuance. This is our safety. What are we? Here is the answer:—

6. *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

It is not a flattering picture that the prophet draws. Even our righteousnesses are like filthy rags, fit only for the fire; what must our righteousnesses be like? We, ourselves, are like the sere leaves on the trees; and just as the wind carries away the faded leaves of autumn, so our sins, like a mighty blast, carry us away.

7. *And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee:*

That is a wonderful description of prayer. When a man rouses himself from sinful lethargy, and stirs himself up to take hold of God in prayer, he will become an Israel, a prince prevailing with God.

7, 8. *For thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, thou art our father;*

Adoption does not come to an end because of sin. Regeneration or sonship does not die out; it cannot die out. I am my father's son, and so I always shall be; and if I am my heavenly Father's son, I shall never cease to be so. "Now, O Lord, thou art our Father!" This truth must not be perverted into an argument for sinning; it ought rather to keep us from sinning, lest we should grieve such wondrous love.

8-12. *We are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wrath very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. The holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?*

The prophet touches the minor key, and weeps and wails for the sorrows of his people; but he does not neglect to pray. In the next chapter God breaks out, and says, "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not." How much more quickly is he found of them who do seek him! Verily, God does hear prayer; and he will hear prayer; let us not cease to pray to him as we look round on the sad state of the professing church at this time, and with Isaiah let us cry, "Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?"

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—107 (Song I), 953, 954

The Simplicity and Sublimity of Salvation

A Sermon

(No. 2259)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, June 5th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, March 6th, 1890.

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."—John 1:11-13.

EVERYTHING here is simple; everything is sublime. Here is that simple gospel, by which the most ignorant may be saved. Here are profundities, in which the best-instructed may find themselves beyond their depth. Here are those everlasting hills of divine truth which man cannot climb; yet here is that plain path in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, need nor err, nor lose his way. I always feel that I have no time to spare for critical and captious persons. If they will not believe, neither shall they be established. They must take the consequences of their unbelief. But I can spare all day and all night for an anxious enquirer, for one who is blinded by the very blaze of the heavenly light that shines upon him, and who seems to lose his way by reason of the very plainness of the road that lies before him. In this most simple text are some of the deep things of God, and there are souls here that are puzzled by what are simplicities to some of us; and my one aim shall be, so to handle this text as to help and encourage and cheer some who would fain touch the hem of the Master's garment, but cannot for the press of many difficulties and grave questions which rise before their minds.

Let us go to the text at once, and notice, first, *a matter which is very simple*: "As many as received him . . . even to them that believe on his name"; secondly, *a matter which is very delightful*: "to them gave he power to become the sons of God"; and thirdly, *a matter which is very mysterious*: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

I. Here is, first, A MATTER WHICH IS VERY SIMPLE; receiving Christ, and believing on his name. Oh, that many here may be able to say, "Yes, I understand that simple matter. That is the way in which I found eternal life"!

The simple matter of which John here speaks is receiving Christ, or, in other words, believing on his name.

Receiving Christ is *a distinctive act*. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." The very people you would have thought would have eagerly welcomed Christ did not do so; but here and there a man stood apart from the rest, or a woman came out from her surroundings, and each of these said, "I receive Christ as the Messiah." You will never go to heaven in a crowd. The crowd goes down the broad road to destruction; but the way which leadeth to life eternal is a narrow way; "and few there be that find it." They that go to heaven must come out one by one, and say to him that sits at the wicket-gate, "Set my name down, sir, as a pilgrim to the celestial city." They

who would enter into life must fight as well as run, for it is an uphill fight all the way, and few there be that fight it out to the end, and win the crown of the victors.

Those who received Christ were different from those who did not receive him; they were as different as white is from black, or light from darkness. They took a distinctive step, separated themselves from others, and came out and received him whom others would not receive. Have you taken such a step, dear friend? Can you say, "Yes, let others do as they will, as for me, Christ is all my salvation, and all my desire; and at all hazards I am quite content to be counted singular, and to stand alone; I have lifted my hand to heaven, and I cannot draw back. Whatever others may do, I say, 'Christ for me'?"

As it was a distinctive act, so it was a *personal one*: "To as many as received him." They had to receive Christ each one by his own act and deed. "Even to them that believe on his name." Believing is the distinct act of a person. I cannot believe for you any more than you can believe for me; that is clearly impossible. There can be no such thing as sponsorship in receiving Christ, or in faith. If you are an unbeliever, your father and mother may be the most eminent saints, but their faith does not overlap and cover your unbelief. You must believe for yourself. I have had to even remind some that the Holy Ghost himself cannot believe for them. He works faith in you; but you have to believe. The faith must be your own distinct mental act. Faith is the gift of God; but God does not believe for us; how could he? It is for you distinctly to believe. Come, dear hearer, have you been trying to put up with a national faith? A national faith is a mere sham. Or have you tried to think that you possess the family faith? "Oh, we are all Christians, you know!" Yes, we are all hypocrites; that is what that comes to. Unless each one is a Christian for himself, he is a Christian only in name, and that is to be a hypocrite. Oh, that we might have the certainty that we have each one laid our sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God! God grant that, if we have never done so before, we may do so this very moment!

Mark, next, that, as it was a distinctive and personal act, so *it related to a Person*. I find that the text runs thus, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." That religion which leaves out the person of Christ, has left out the essential point. Thou art not saved by believing a doctrine, though it is well for thee to believe it if it be true. Thou art not saved by practising an ordinance, though thou shouldst practise it if thou art one of those to whom it belongs. Thou art not saved by any belief except this, believing on Christ's name, and receiving him. "I take in a body of divinity," says one. Do you? There is no body of divinity that I know of but Christ, the son of God in human flesh, living, bleeding, dying, risen, ascended, soon to come; thou must lean on him; for the promise is only to as many as receive him.

This reception of Christ *consisted in faith in him*: "As many as received him . . . even to them that believe on his name." He was a stranger, and they took him in. He was food, and they took him in, and fed on him. He was living water, and they received him, drank him up, took him into themselves. He was light, and they received the light. He was life, and they received the life, and they lived by what they received. As the empty cup receives from the flowing fountain, so do we receive Christ into our emptiness. We, being poor, and naked, and miserable, come to him, and we receive riches, and clothing, and happiness in him. Salvation comes by receiving Christ. I know what you have been trying to do; you have been trying to give Christ something. Let me caution you against a very common expression. I hear converts continually told to give their hearts to Jesus. It is quite correct, and I hope they will do so; but your first concern must be, not what you give to

Jesus, but what Jesus gives to you. You must take him from himself as a gift to you, then will you truly give your heart to him. The first act, and, indeed, the underlying act all the way along, is to receive, to imbibe, to take in Christ, and that is called believing on his name. Note that "name." It is not believing a fanciful christ; for there are many christs nowadays, as many christs as there are books, nearly; for every writer seems to make a christ of his own; but the christ that men make up will not save you. The only Christ who can save you is the Christ of God, that Christ who, in the synagogue at Nazareth, found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

You are to believe on *the Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures*. You are to take him as you find him here; not as Renan, not as Strauss, or anybody else, pictures of him; but as you find him here. As God reveals him, you are to believe on his name: "the Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace"; Emmanuel, God with us; Jesus, saving from sin; Christ anointed of the Father. You are to believe on his name, not on the Christ of Rome, nor the Christ of Canterbury, but the Christ of Jerusalem, the Christ of the eternal glory; no christ of a dreamy prophecy, with which some are defaming the true prophetic spirit of the Word, no christ of idealism, no man-made christ; but the eternal God, incarnate in human flesh, as he is here pictured by Psalmist, Prophet, Evangelist, Apostle, very God of very God, yet truly man, in your stead suffering, bearing the sin of men in his own body on the tree. It is believing in this Christ that will effectually save your soul. To believe is to trust. Prove that you believe in Christ by risking everything upon him.

"Upon a life I did not live,
Upon a death I did not die,
I risk my whole eternity."

On him who lived for me, and died for me, and rose again for me, and has gone into heaven for me; on him I throw the whole weight of past, present, and future, and every interest that belongs to my soul, for time and for eternity.

This is a very simple matter, and I have noticed a great many sneers at this simple faith, and a great many depreciatory remarks concerning it; but, let me tell you, there is nothing like it under heaven. Possessing this faith will prove you to be a son of God; nothing short of it ever will. "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God;" and he has given that power to nobody else. This will prove you to be absolved, forgiven. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus;" but if thou hast no faith in Christ Jesus, the wrath of God abideth on thee. Because thou hast not believed on the Son of God, thou art condemned already. One grain of this faith is worth more than a diamond the size of the world; yea, though thou shouldst thread such jewels together, as many as the stars of heaven for number, they would be worth nothing compared with the smallest atom of faith in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

But whence comes this wonderful power of faith? Not from the faith, but from him on whom it leans. What power Christ has! The power of his manhood suffering, the power of his Godhead bowing on the cross, the power of the God-man, the Mediator, surrendering himself as the greatest sacrifice for sin; why, he who toucheth this, hath touched the springs of omnipotence! He who comes, by faith, into contact with Christ, has come into contact with boundless love, and power, and mercy, and grace. I marvel not at anything that faith brings when it deals with Christ. Thou

hast a little key, a little rusty key, and thou sayest, "By use of this key I can get all the gold that I want." Yes, but where is the box to which you go for the gold? When you show me, and I see that it is a great chamber filled full of gold and silver, I can understand how your little key can enrich you when it opens the door into such a treasury. If faith be the key which unlocks the fulness of God, "for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell," then I can understand why faith brings such boundless blessings to him who hath it. Salvation is a very simple business. God help us to look at it simply and practically, and to receive Christ, and believe on his name!

II. Now, secondly, here is A MATTER WHICH IS VERY DELIGHTFUL: "To them gave he power to become sons of God." If I had a week to preach from this text, I think that I should be able to get through the first head; but at this time I can only throw out just a few hints. Look at the great and delightful blessing which comes to us by our faith in Christ. We give Christ our faith, and he gives us power to become sons of God, the authority, liberty, privilege, right,—something more than mere strength or force—to be sons of God.

When we believe in Jesus, he indicates to us *the Great Father's willingness to let us be his sons*. We who were prodigals, far away from him, perceive that, when we receive Christ, the Father, who gave us Christ, is willing to take us to be his sons. He would not have yielded up his Only-begotten if he had not willed to take us into his family.

When we believe in Jesus, *he bestows on us the status of sons*. We were slaves before; now we are sons. We were strangers, aliens, enemies; and every word that means an evil thing might have been applied to us; but when we laid hold on Christ, we were adopted by some great citizen, and publicly acknowledged in the forum as being henceforth that man's son, was regarded as such, so, as soon as we believe in Jesus, we get the status of sons. "Beloved, now we are the sons of God."

Then Christ does something more for us. *He gives us grace to feel our sonship*. As we sang just now,—

"My faith shall 'Abba, Father,' cry,
And thou the kindred own."

God owns us as his children, and we own him as our Father; and henceforth, "Our Father, which art in heaven," is no meaningless expression, but it comes welling up from the depths of our heart.

Having given us grace to feel sonship, *Christ gives us the nature of our Father*. He gives us "power to become the sons of God." We get more and more like God in righteousness and true holiness. By his divine Spirit, shed abroad in our hearts, we become more and more the children of our Father who is in heaven, who doeth good to the undeserving and the unthankful, and whose heart overflows with love even to those who love not him.

When this nature of sons shall be fully developed, *Christ will bestow his glory upon us*. We shall be in heaven, not in the rear rank, as servants, but nearest to the eternal throne. Unto angels he has never said, "Ye are my sons"; but he has called us sons, poor creatures of the dust, who believe in Jesus; and we shall have all the honour, and joy, and privilege, and delight that belong to the princes of the blood royal of heaven, members of the imperial house of God, in that day when the King shall manifest himself in his own palace.

Some of us could draw parallels, about being made sons, from our own lives. You were once a very tiny child; but you were a son then as much as you are now. So is it with you who have only just begun to believe in Christ; he has given you authority and right to become sons of God. Very early in our life, our father went down to the registrar's office, and wrote our name in the roll as his sons. We do not recollect that, it was so long ago; but he did it, and he also wrote our name in

the family Bible, even as our Father in heaven has enrolled our names in the Lamb's Book of Life. You recollect that, as a child, you did not go into the kitchen, to dine with the servants; but you took your seat at the table. It was a very little chair in which you first sat at the table; but as you grew bigger, you always went to the table, because you were a son. The servants in the house were much bigger than you, and they could do a great many things that you could not do, and your father paid them wages. He never paid you any; they were not his sons; but you were. If they had put on your clothes, they would not have been his sons. You had privileges that they had not. I remember that, in the parish where my home was, on a certain day in the year, the church-bell rang, and everybody went to receive a penny roll. Every child had one, and I recollect having mine. I claimed it as a privilege, because I was my father's son. I think there were six of us, who all had a roll; every child in the parish had one. So there are a number of privileges that come to us very early in our Christian life, and we mean to have them, first, because our Lord Jesus Christ has given us the right to have them; and, next, because, if we do not take what he bought for us, it will be robbing him, and wasting his substance. As he has paid for it all, and has given us the right to have it, let us take it.

You were put to school because you were a son. You did not like it; I daresay that you would rather have stopped at home at play. And you had a touch of the rod, sometimes, because you were a son. That was one of your privileges: "for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" One day you were in the street with other boys, doing wrong, and your father came along, and punished you. He did not touch your companions, for they were not his sons. You smile at those little things, and you did not at the time count your punishments as privileges; but they were. When the chastening of the Lord comes, call it a privilege, for that is what it is. There is no greater mercy that I know of on earth than good health except it be sickness; and that has often been a greater mercy to me than health.

It is a good thing to be without a trouble; but it is a better thing to have a trouble, and know how to get grace enough to bear it. I am not so much afraid of the devil when he roars, as I am when he pretends to go to sleep. I think that, oftentimes, a roaring devil keeps us awake; and the troubles of this life stir us up to go to God in prayer, and that which looks to us ill turns to our good. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

III. Now I come to my last point, that is, A MATTER WHICH IS MYSTERIOUS. We are not only given the status of children, and the privilege of being called sons, but this mysterious matter is one of heavenly birth: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

This new birth is *absolutely needful*. If we are ever to be numbered amongst God's children, we must be born again, born from above. We were born in sin, born children of wrath, even as others; to be God's children, it is absolutely necessary that we should be born again.

The change wrought thereby is *wonderfully radical*. It is not a mere outside washing, nor any touching up and repairing. It is a total renovation. Born again? I cannot express to you all that the change means, it is so deep, so thorough, so complete.

It is also *intensely mysterious*. What must it be to be born again? "I cannot understand it." Says one. Nicodemus was a teacher in Israel, and he did not understand it. Does anybody understand it? Does anybody understand his first birth? What know we of it? And this second birth; some of us have passed through it, and know that we have, and remember well the pangs of that birth, yet we

cannot describe the movements of the Spirit of God, by which we were formed anew, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus, according to that word from him who sits on the throne, "Behold, I make all things new!" It is a great mystery.

Certainly it is *entirely superhuman*. We cannot contribute to it. Man cannot make himself to be born again. His first birth is not of himself, and his second birth is not one jot more so. It is a work of the Holy Ghost, a work of God. It is a new creation; it is a quickening; it is a miracle from beginning to end.

Here is the point to which I call your special attention, it is *assuredly ours*. Many of us here have been born again. We know that we have, and herein lies the evidence of it, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." If thou believest on Christ's name, thou art born of God. If thou hast received Christ into thy soul, thou hast obtained that birth that comes not of blood, nor of the will of parents, nor of the will of man, but of God. Thou hast passed from death unto life.

Let no man sit down here, and cover his face, and say, "There is no hope for me. I cannot understand about this new birth." If thou wilt take Christ, to have and to hold, henceforth and for ever, as thy sole trust and confidence, thou hast received that which no line of ancestors could ever give thee; for it is "not of blood." Thou dost possess that which no will of the father and mother could ever give thee; for it is "not of the will of the flesh." Thou hast that which thine own will could not bring thee; for it is "not of the will of man." Thou hast that which only the Giver of life can bestow; for it is "of God." Thou art born again; for thou hast received Christ, and believed on his name. I do not urge you to look within, to try and see whether this new birth is there. Instead of looking within thyself, look thou to him who hangs on yonder cross, dying the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. Fix thou thine eyes on him, and believe in him; and when thou seest in thyself much that is evil, look away to him; and when doubts prevail, look to him; and when thy conscience tells thee of thy past sins, look to him.

I have to go through this story almost every day of the year, and sometimes half a dozen times in a day. If there is a desponding soul anywhere within twenty miles, it will find me out, no matter whether I am at home, or at Mentone, or in any other part of the world. It will come from any distance, broken down, despairing, half insane sometimes; and I have no medicine to prescribe except "Christ, Christ, Christ; Jesus Christ and him crucified. Look away from yourselves, and trust in him." I go over and over and over with this, and never get one jot further. Because I find that this medicine cures all soul sicknesses, while human quackery cures none. Christ alone is the one remedy for sin-sick souls. Receive him; believe on his name. We keep hammering at this. I can sympathize with Luther when he said, "I have preached justification by faith so often, and I feel sometimes that you are so slow to receive it, that I could almost take the Bible, and bang it about your heads." I am afraid that the truth would not have entered their hearts if he had done so. This is what we aim at, to get this one thought into a man, "Thou art lost, and therefore such an one as Christ came to save."

One said to me just lately, "Oh, sir, I am the biggest sinner that ever lived!" I replied, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "But I have not any strength." "While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died." "Oh! But," he said, "I have been utterly ungodly." "Christ died for the ungodly." "But I am lost." "Yes," I said, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "The Son of man has come to

save that which was lost." I said to this man, "You have the brush in your hand, and at every stroke it looks as if you were quoting Scripture. You seem to be making yourself out to be the very man that Christ came to save. If you were to make yourself out to be good and excellent, I should give you this word—Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He did not die for the good, but for the bad. He gave himself for our sins; he never gave himself for our righteousness. He is a Saviour. He has not come yet as a Rewarder of the righteous; that will be in his Second Advent. Now he comes as the great Forgiver of the guilty, and the only Saviour of the lost. Wilt thou come to him in that way?" "Oh! But," my friend said, "I have nothing to bring to Christ." "No," I said, "I know that you have not; but Christ has everything." "Sir," he said, "you do not know me, else you would not talk to me like this;" and I said, "No, and you do not know yourself, and you are worse than you think you are, though you think that you are bad enough in all conscience; but be you as bad as you may, Jesus Christ came on purpose to uplift from the dunghill those whom he sets among princes by his free, rich, sovereign grace."

Oh, come and believe in him, poor sinner! I feel that, if I had all your souls, I would believe in Christ for their salvation; I would trust him to save a million souls if I had them, for he is mighty to save. There can be no limit to his power to forgive. There can be no limit to the merit of his precious blood. There can be no boundary to the efficacy of his plea before the throne. Only trust him, and you must be saved. May his gracious Spirit lead you to do so now, for Christ's sake! Amen.

John 1:1-34.

May the Holy Spirit, who inspired these words, inspire us through them as we read them!

Verse 1. *In the beginning was the Word.*

The divine Logos, whom we know as the Christ of God. "In the beginning was the Word." The first words of this gospel remind us of the first words of the Old Testament: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Even then "the Word" was; he existed before all time, even from everlasting.

1. *And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

I know not how the Deity of Christ can be more plainly declared than in his eternal duration. He is from the beginning. In his glory he was "with God." In his nature he "was God."

2. *The same was in the beginning with God.*

As we have been singing—

"Ere sin was born, or Satan fell;"

ere there was a creation that could fall, "the same was in the beginning with God."

3. *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

He that hung upon the cross was the Maker of all worlds. He that came as an infant, for our sake, was the Infinite. How low he stooped! How high he must have been that he could stoop so low!

4. *In his was life;*

Essentially, Eternally.

4, 5. *And the light was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

It never has done so; it never will. You may sometimes call the darkness, the ignorance of men, or the sin of men. If you like, you may call it the wisdom of men, and the righteousness of men, for that is only another form of the same darkness. "The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."

6. *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

How very different is the style of this verse from the one that precedes it! How grand, how sublime, are the Evangelist's words when he speaks of Jesus! How truly human he becomes, how he dips his pen in ordinary ink, when he writes: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." Yet that was a noble testimony to the herald of Christ. John the Baptist was "a man sent from God."

7. *The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.*

Dear friends, if you and I know our real destiny, and are the servants of God, we are sent that men might, through us, believe in Jesus. John was a special witness; but we ought all to be witnesses to complete the chain of testimony. Every Christian man should reckon that he is sent from God to bear witness to the great Light, that, through him, men might believe.

8, 9. *He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

There was no light from John except what he reflected from his Lord. All the light comes from Jesus. Every man who comes into the world with any light borrows his light from Christ. There is no other light; there can be no other. He is the "Light of the World."

10. *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.*

This is a sad verse. He was a stranger in his own house. He was unknown amidst his own handiwork. Men whom he had made, made nothing of him. "The world knew him not;" did not recognize him.

11. *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

That favoured circle, the Jewish nation, where revelation had been given, even there, there was no place for him. He must be despised and rejected even by his own nation.

12, 13. *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

To receive Christ, a man must be born of God. It is the simplest thing in all the world, one would think, to open the door of the heart, and let him in; but no man lets Christ into his heart till first God has made him to be born again, born from above.

14. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

They who saw Christ on earth were highly privileged; but it is a spiritual sight of him alone that is to be desired, and we can have that even now. How full of grace, how full of truth, he is to all those who are privileged to behold him!

15, 16. *John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*

I wish that we could all say that. Even out of this company, many can say it; and linking our hands with those who have gone before us, and those who are still with us in the faith, we say unitedly, "Of his fulness have all we received," and we hope to receive from it again to-night, for it is still his fulness. There is never a trace of declining in him. It was fulness when the first sinner came to him; and it is fulness still; it will be fulness to the very end. "And grace for grace." We get grace to reach out to another grace, each grace becoming a stepping-stone to something higher. I

do not believe in our rising on the "stepping-stones of our dead selves." They are poor stones; they all lead downwards. The stepping-stones of the living Christ lead upwards; grace for grace, grace upon grace, till grace is crowned with glory.

17. *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

We know that the law came by Moses. The law has often burdened us, crushed us, convinced us, condemned us. Let us be equally clear that grace and truth come by this divine channel, "Jesus Christ."

18. *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

We do not want to see God apart from Christ. I am perfectly satisfied to see the Eternal Light through his own chosen medium, Christ Jesus. Apart from that medium, the light might blind my eyes. "No man hath seen God at any time." Who can look on the sun? What mind can look on God? But Christ does not hide the Father; he manifests him. "The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

19-23. *And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No. Then said thy unto him, Who art thou? That we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice*

Not "I am the Word," but "I am the voice." Christ is the essential Word; we are but the voice to make that word sound across the desert of human life.

23. *Of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.*

You see, even as a voice, John was not original. That straining after originality, of which we see so much to-day, finds no warrant among the true servants of God. Even though John is only a voice, yet he is a voice that quotes the Scriptures: "Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." The more of Scripture we can voice, the better. Our words, what are they? They are but air. His Word, what is it? It is "grace and truth." May we continually be lending a voice to the great Words of God that have gone before!

24-27. *And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.*

Ah! Dear friends, although it was a lowly expression that John used, you and I often feel that we want something that goes lower even than that. What are we worthy to do for Christ? Yet there are times when, if there is a shoe-latchet to be unloosed, we are too proud to stoop to do it. When there is something to be done that will bring no honour to us, we are too high and mighty to do it. O child of God, if you have ever been in that condition, be greatly ashamed of yourself! John was first in his day, the morning-star of the Light of the gospel, yet even he felt that he was not worthy to do the least thing for Christ. Where shall you and I put ourselves? Paul said that he was "less than the least of all the saints." He ran away with a title that might have been very appropriate for us. Well, we must let him have it, I suppose; and we must try to find another like it; or if we cannot find suitable words, God help us to have the humble feeling, which is better still!

28, 29. *These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

John preached a sacrificial Saviour, a sin-bearing Saviour, a sin-atonement Saviour. You and I have nothing else to preach. Let each of us say—

"Tis all my business here below

To cry, Behold the Lamb!"

30, 31. *This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not:*

Although John knew the Saviour personally, he did not know him officially. He had a token given to him by God, by which he was to know the Messiah; and he did not officially know him till he had that token fulfilled.

31-33. *But that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bore record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.*

John would not know of his own judgment. No doubt he was morally certain that Jesus was the Christ. He had been brought up with him; he knew his mother, he had heard of his wondrous birth; John and Jesus must have been often together; but he was not to use his own judgment in this case, but to wait for the sign from heaven; and until he witnessed it, he did not say a word about it. When he saw the Holy Ghost descend upon him, then he knew that it was even he.

34. *And I saw, and bore record that this is the Son of God.*

Hear ye, then, the witness of John. The Christ, who came from Nazareth to be baptized of him in Jordan, he on whom the Holy Ghost descended like a dove, "this is the Son of God." This is the sin-bearing Lamb. Oh, that you and I might fulfil John's expectation, for he spoke that we might believe. He, being dead, yet speaketh. May we believe his witness, and be assured that "this is the Son of God"!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—249, 549, 728.

Christ's Hospital

A Sermon

(No. 2260)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, June 12th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, March 9th, 1890.

"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."—Psalm 147:3.

Often as we have read this Psalm, we can never fail to be struck with the connection in which this verse stands, especially its connection with the verse that follows. Read the two together: "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names." What condescension and grandeur! What pity and omnipotence! He who leads out yonder ponderous orbs in almost immeasurable orbits, nevertheless, is the Surgeon of men's souls, and stoops over broken hearts, and with his own tender fingers closes up the gaping wound, and binds it with the liniment of love. Think of it; and if I should not speak as well as I could desire upon the wonderful theme of his condescension, yet help me by your own thoughts to do reverence to the Maker of the stars, who is, at the same time, the Physician for broken hearts and wounded spirits.

I am equally interested in the connection of my text with the verse that goes before it: "The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel." The church of God is never so well built up as when it is built up with men of broken hearts. I have prayed to God in secret many a time, of late, that he would be pleased to gather out from among us a people who have a deep experience, who should know the guilt of sin, who should be broken and ground to powder under a sense of their own inability and unworthiness; for I am persuaded that, without a deep experience of sin, there is seldom much belief in the doctrine of grace, and not much enthusiasm in praising the Saviour's name. The church needs to be built up with men who have been pulled down. Unless we know in our hearts our need of a Saviour, we shall never be worth much in preaching him. That preacher who has never been converted, what can he say about it? And he who has never been in the dungeon, who has never been in the abyss, who has never felt as if he were cast out from the sight of God, how can he comfort many who are outcasts, and who are bound with the fetters of despair? May the Lord break many hearts, and then bind them up, that with them he may build up the church, and inhabit it!

But now, leaving the connection, I come to the text itself, and I desire to speak of it so that everyone here who is troubled may derive comfort from it, God the Holy Ghost speaking through it. Consider, first, *the patients and their sickness*: "He healed the broken in heart." Then, consider, *the Physician and his medicine*, and for a while turn your eyes to him who does this healing work. Then, I shall want you to consider, *the testimonial to the great Physician* which we have in this verse: "He healed the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Lastly, and most practically, we will consider, *what we ought to do* towards him who healeth the broken in heart.

I. First, then, consider THE PATIENTS AND THEIR SICKNESS. They are broken in heart. I have heard of many who have died of a broken heart; but there are some who live with a broken heart, and who live all the better for having had their hearts broken; they live another and higher life than they lived before that blessed stroke broke their hearts in pieces.

There are many sorts of broken hearts, and Christ is good at healing them all. I am not going to lower and narrow the application of my text. The patients of the great Physician are *those whose hearts are broken through sorrow*. Hearts are broken through disappointment. Hearts are broken through bereavement. Hearts are broken in ten thousand ways, for this is a heart-breaking world; and Christ is good at healing all manner of heart-breaks. I would encourage every person here, even though his heart-break may not be of a spiritual kind, to make an application to him who healed the broken in heart. The text does not say, "the spiritually broken in heart", therefore I will not insert an adverb where there is none in the passage. Come hither, ye that are burdened, all ye that labour and are heavy laden; come hither, all ye that sorrow, be your sorrow what it may; come hither, all ye whose hearts are broken, be the heart-break what it may, for he healeth the broken in heart.

Still, there is a special brokenness of heart to which Christ gives the very earliest and tenderest attention. He heals *those whose hearts are broken for sin*. Christ heals the heart that is broken because of its sin; so that it grieves, laments, regrets, and bemoans itself, saying, "Woe is me that I have done this exceeding great evil, and brought ruin upon myself! Woe is me that I have dishonoured God, that I have cast myself away from his presence, that I have made myself liable to his everlasting wrath, and that even now his wrath abideth upon me!" If there is a man here whose heart is broken about his past life, he is the man to whom my text refers. Are you heart-broken because you have wasted forty, fifty, sixty years? Are you heart-broken at the remembrance that you have cursed the God who has blessed you, that you have denied the existence of him without whom you never would have been in existence yourself, that you have lived to train your family without godliness, without any respect to the Most High God at all? Has the Lord brought this home to you? Has he made you feel what a hideous thing it is to be blind to Christ, to refuse his love, to reject his blood, to live an enemy to your best Friend? Have you felt this? O my friend, I cannot reach across the gallery to give you my hand; but will you think that I am doing it, for I wish to do it? If there is a heart here broken on account of sin, I thank God for it, and praise the Lord that there is such a text as this: "He healeth the broken in heart"

Christ also heals *hearts that are broken from sin*. When you and sin have quarrelled, never let the quarrel be made up again. You and sin were friends at one time; but now you hate sin, and you would be wholly rid of it if you could. You wish never to sin. You are anxious to be clear of the most darling sin that you ever indulged in, and you desire to be made as pure as God is pure. Your heart is broken away from its old moorings. That which you once loved you now hate. That which you once hated you now at least desire to love. It is well. I am glad that you are here, for to you is the text sent, "He healeth the broken in heart."

If there is a broken-hearted person anywhere about, many people despise him. "Oh," they say, "he is melancholy, he is mad, he is out of his mind through religion!" Yes, men despise the broken in heart, but such, O God, thou wilt not despise! The Lord looks after such, and heals them.

Those who do not despise them, at any rate avoid them. I know some few friends who have long been of a broken heart; and when I feel rather dull, I must confess that I do not always go their way, for they are apt to make me feel more depressed. Yet would I not get out of their way if I felt

that I could help them. Still, it is the nature of men to seek the cheerful and the happy, and to avoid the broken-hearted. God does not do so; he heals the broken in heart. He goes where they are, and he reveals himself to them as the Comforter and the Healer.

In a great many cases people despair of the broken-hearted ones. "It is no use," says one, "I have tried to comfort her, but I cannot do it." "I have wasted a great many words," says another, "on such and such a friend, and I cannot help him. I despair of his ever getting out of the dark." Not so is it with God; he healeth the broken in heart. He despairs of none. He shows the greatness of his power, and the wonders of his wisdom, by fetching men and women out of the lowest dungeon, wherein despair has shut them.

As for the broken-hearted ones themselves, they do not think that they ever can be converted. Some of them are sure that they never can; they wish that they were dead, though I do not see what they would gain by that. Others of them wish that they had never been born, though that is a useless wish now. Some are ready to rush after any new thing to try to find a little comfort; while others, getting worse and worse, are sitting down in sullen despair. I wish that I knew who these were; I should like to come round, and just say to them, "Come, brother; there must be no doubting and no despair to-night, for my text is gloriously complete, and is meant for you. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Notice that fifth verse, "Great is our Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite." Consequently, he can heal the broken in heart. God is glorious at a dead lift. When a soul cannot stir, or help itself, God delights to come in with his omnipotence, and lift the great load, and set the burdened one free.

It takes great wisdom to comfort a broken heart. If any of you have ever tried it, I am sure you have not found it an easy task. I have given much of my life to this work; and I always come away from a desponding one with a consciousness of my own inability to comfort the heart-broken and cast-down. Only God can do it. Blessed be his name that he has arranged that one Person of the Sacred Trinity should undertake this office of Comforter; for no man could ever perform its duties. We might as well hope to be the Saviour as to be the Comforter of the heart-broken. Efficiently and completely to save or to comfort must be a work divine. That is why the Holy Divine Spirit, healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds with infinite power and unfailing skill.

II. Now, secondly, we are going to consider THE PHYSICIAN AND HIS MEDICINE: "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Who is this that healeth the broken in heart?

I answer that *Jesus was anointed of God* for this work. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted." Was the Holy Spirit given to Christ in vain? That cannot be. He was given for a purpose which must be answered, and that purpose is the healing of the broken-hearted. By the very anointing of Christ by the Holy Spirit, you may be sure that our Physician will heal the broken in heart.

Further, Jesus was *sent of God* on purpose to do his work; "He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted." If Christ does not heal the broken-hearted, he will not fulfill the mission for which he came from heaven. If the broken-hearted are not cheered by his glorious life and the blessings that flow out of his death, then he will have come to earth for nothing. This is the very errand on which the Lord of glory left the bosom of the Father to be veiled in human clay, that he might heal the broken in heart; and he will do it.

Our Lord was also *educated* for this work. He was not only anointed and sent; but he was trained for it. "How?" say you. Why, he had a broken heart himself; and there is no education for the office of comforter like being place where you yourself have need of comfort, so that you may be able to comfort others with the comfort wherewith you yourself have been comforted of God. Is your heart broken? Christ's heart was broken. He said, "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness." He went as low as you have ever been, and deeper than you can ever go. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" was his bitter cry. If that be your agonized utterance, he can interpret it by his own suffering. He can measure your grief by his grief. Broken hearts, there is no healing for you except through him who had a broken heart himself. Ye disconsolate, come to him! He can make your heart happy and joyous, by the very fact of his own sorrow, and the brokenness of his own heart. "In all our afflictions he was afflicted." He was tempted in all points like as we are", "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." For a broken heart, there is no physician like him.

Once more, I can strongly recommend my Lord Jesus Christ as the Healer of broken hearts, because he is so *experienced* in the work. Some people are afraid that the doctor will try experiments upon them; but our Physician will only do for us what he has done many times before. It is no matter of experiment with him; it is a matter of experience. If you knock to-night at my great Doctor's door, you will, perhaps say to him, "Here is the strangest patient, my Lord, that ever came to thee." He will smile as he looks at you, and he will think, "I have saved hundreds like you." Here comes one who says, "That first man's case was nothing compared with mine; I am about the worst sinner who ever lived." And the Lord Jesus Christ will say, "Yes, I saved the worst man that ever lived long ago, and I keep on saving such as he. I delight to do it." But here comes one who has a curious odd way of broken-heartedness. He is an out-of-the-way fretter. Yes, but my Lord is able to "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way." He can lay hold of this out-of-the-way one; for he has always been saving out-of-the-way sinners. My Lord has been healing broken hearts well nigh nineteen hundred years. Can you find a brass-plate anywhere in London telling of a physician of that age? He has been at the work longer than that; for it is not far off six thousand years since he went into this business, and he has been healing the broken in heart ever since that time.

I will tell you one thing about him that I have on good authority, that is, he never lost a case yet. There never was one who came to him with a broken heart, but he healed him. He never said to one, "You are too bad for me to heal;" but he did say, "Him that cometh to me, I will in now wise cast out." My dear hearer, he will not cast you out. You say, "You do not know me, Mr. Spurgeon." No, I do not; and you have come here to-night, and you hardly know why you are here; only you are very low and very sad. The Lord Jesus Christ loves such as you are, you poor, desponding, doubting, desolate, disconsolate one. Daughters of sorrow, sons of grief, look ye here! Jesus Christ has gone on healing broken hearts for thousands of years, and he is well up in the business. He understands it by experience, as well as by education. He is "mighty to save." Consider him; consider him; and the Lord grant you grace to come and trust him even now!

Thus I have talked to you about the Physician for broken hearts; shall I tell you what his chief medicine is? It is his own flesh and blood. There is no cure like it. When a sinner is bleeding with sin, Jesus pours his own blood into the wound; and when that wound is slow in healing, he binds his own sacrifice about it. Healing for broken hearts comes by the atonement, atonement by substitution, Christ suffering in our stead. He suffered for every one who believeth in him, and he

that believeth in him is not condemned, and never can be condemned, for the condemnation due to him was laid upon Christ. He is clear before the bar of justice as well as before the throne of mercy. I remember when the Lord put that precious ointment upon my wounded spirit. Nothing ever healed me until I understood that he died in my place and stead, died that I might not die; and now, to-day, my heart would bleed itself to death were it not that I believe that he "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." "With his stripes we are healed," and with no medicine but this atoning sacrifice. A wonderful heal-all is this, when the Holy Ghost applies it with his own divine power, and lets life and love come streaming into the heart that was ready to bleed to death.

III. My time flies too quickly; so, thirdly, I want you to consider THE TESTIMONIAL TO THE GREAT PHYSICIAN which is emblazoned in my text. It is God the Holy Ghost who, by the mouth of his servant David, bears testimony to this congregation to-night that the Lord Jesus heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds. If I said it, you need no more believe it than I need believe it if you said it. One man's word is as good as another's if we be truthful men; but this statement is found in an inspired Psalm. I believe it; I dare not doubt it, for I have proven its truth.

I understand my text to mean this: *he does it effectually*. As I said last Thursday night, if there is a person cast down or desponding within twenty miles, he is pretty sure to find me out. I laugh sometimes, and say, "Birds of a feather flock together;" but they come to talk to me about their despondency, and sometimes they leave me half desponding in the attempt to get them out of their sadness. I have had some very sad cases just lately, and I am afraid that, when they went out of my room, they could not say of me, "He healeth the broken in heart." I am sure that they could say, "He tried his best. He brought out all the choicest arguments he could think of to comfort me." And they have felt very grateful. They have come back sometimes to thank God that they have been a little bit encouraged; but some of them are frequent visitors; and I have been trying to cheer them up by the month together. But, when my Master undertakes the work, "He *healeth* the broken in heart," he not only tries to do it, he does it. He touches the secret sources of the sorrow, and takes the spring of the grief away. We try our bests; but we cannot do it. You know it is very hard to deal with the heart. The human heart needs more than human skill to cure it. When a person dies, and the doctors do not know the complaint of which he died, they say, "It was heart disease." They did not understand his malady; that is what that means. There is only one Physician who can heal the heart; but, glory be to his blessed name, "He healeth the broken in heart," he does it effectually.

As I read my text, I understand it to mean, *he does it constantly*. "He healeth the broken in heart." Not merely, "He did heal them years ago"; but he is doing it now. "He *healeth* the broken in heart, and *bindeth up* their wounds." What, at this minute? Ten minutes to eight? Yes, he is doing this work now. "He healeth the broken in heart," and when the service is over, and the congregation is gone, what will Jesus be doing then? Oh, he will still be healing the broken in heart! Suppose this year 1890 should run out, and the Lord does not come to judgment, what will he be doing then? He will still be healing the broken in heart. He has not used up his ointments. He has not exhausted his patience. He has not in the least degree diminished his power. He still healeth. "Oh dear!" said one, "If I had come to Christ a year ago, it would have been well with me." If you come to Christ to-night, it will be well with you, for "he healeth the broken in heart." I do not know who was the inventor of that idea of "sinning away the day of grace." If you are willing to have Christ, you may have him. If you are as old as Methuselah—and I do not suppose that you are older than he was—if you want Christ, you may have him. As long as you are out of hell, Christ is able to save you. He is going on with his old work. Because you are just past fifty, you say the die is cast; because you

are past eighty, you say, "I am too old to be saved now." Nonsense! He *healeth*, he *healeth*, he is still doing it, "he healeth the broken in heart."

I go further than that, and say that *he does it invariably*. I have shown you that he does it effectually and constantly; but he does it invariably. There never was a broken heart brought to him that he did not heal. Do not some broken-hearted patients go out at the back door, as my Master's failures? No, not one. There never was one yet that he could not heal. Doctors are obliged, sometimes, in our hospitals to give up some persons, and say that they will never recover. Certain symptoms have proved that they are incurable. But, despairing one, in the divine hospital, of which Christ is the Physician, there never was a patient of his who was turned out as incurable. He is able to save to the uttermost. Do you know how far that is—"to the uttermost"? There is no going beyond "the uttermost", because the uttermost goes beyond everything else, to make it the uttermost. "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Where are you, friend "Uttermost"? Are you here to-night? "Ah!" you say, "I wonder that I am not in hell." Well, so do I; but you are not, and you never will be, if you cast yourself on Christ. Rest in the full atonement that he has made; for he healeth always, without any failure, "he healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

As I read these words, it seems to me that *he glories in doing it*. He said to the Psalmist, by the Holy Spirit, "Write a Psalm in which you shall begin with Hallelujah, and finish with Hallelujah, and set in the middle of the Psalm this as one of the things for which I delight to be praised, that I heal the broken in heart." None of the gods of the heathen were ever praised for this. Did you ever read a song to Jupiter, or to Mercury, or to Venus, or to any of them, in which they were praised for binding up the broken in heart? Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is the only God who makes it his boast that he binds up the broken in heart. Come, you big, black sinner; come, you desperado; come, you that have gone beyond all measurement in sin; you can glorify God more than anybody else by believing that he can save even you! He can save you, and put you among the children. He delights to save those that seemed farthest from him.

IV. This is my last point: consider WHAT WE OUGHT TO DO.

If there is such a Physician as this, and we have broken hearts, it goes without saying that, first of all, *we ought to resort to him*. When people are told that they have an incurable disease, a malady that will soon bring them to their grave, they are much distressed; but if, somewhere or other, they hear that the disease may be cured after all, they say, "Where? Where?" Well, perhaps it is thousands of miles away; but they are willing to go if they can. Or the medicine may be very unpleasant or very expensive; but if they find that they can be cured, they say, "I will have it." If anyone came to their door, and said, "Here it is, it will heal you; and you can have it for nothing, and as much as you ever want of it;" there would be no difficulty in getting rid of any quantity of the medicine, so long as we found people sick. Now, if you have a broken heart to-night, you will be glad to have Christ. I had a broken heart once, and I went to him and he healed it in a moment, and made me sing for joy! Young men and women, I was about fifteen or sixteen when he healed me. I wish that you would go to him now, while you are yet young. The age of his patients does not matter. Are you younger than fifteen? Boys and girls may have broken hearts; and old men and old women may have broken hearts; but they may come to Jesus and be healed. Let them come to him to-night, and seek to be healed.

When you are about to go to Christ, possibly you ask, "How shall I go to him?" Go by prayer. One said to me, the other day, "I wish that you would write me a prayer, sir." I said, "No, I cannot do that, go and tell the Lord what you want." He replied, "Sometimes I feel such a great want that I do not know what it is I do want, and I try to pray, but I cannot. I wish that somebody would tell me what to say." "Why!" I said, "the Lord has told you what to say. This is what he has said: 'Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.' " Go to Christ in prayer with such words as those, or any others that you can get. If you cannot get any words, tears are just as good, and rather better; and groans and sighs and secret desires will be acceptable with God.

But add faith to them. *Trust the Physician.* You know that no ointment will heal you if you do not put it on the wound. Oftentimes when there is a wound, you want something with which to strap the ointment on. Faith straps on the heavenly heal-all. Go to the Lord with your broken heart, and believe that he can heal you. Believe that he alone can heal you; trust him to do it. Fall at his feet, and say, "If I perish, I will perish here. I believe that the Son of God can save me, and I will be saved by him; but I will never look anywhere else for salvation. 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!'" If you have come as far as that, you are very near the light; the great Physician will heal your broken heart before very long. Trust him to do it now.

When you have trusted in him, and your heart is healed, and you are happy, *tell others about him.* I do not like my Lord to have any tongue-tied children. I do not mean that I would want you all to preach. When a whole church takes to preaching, it is as if the whole body were a mouth, and that would be a vacuum. I want you to tell others, in some way or other, what the Lord has done for you; and be earnest in endeavouring to bring others to the great Physician. You all recollect, therefore I need not tell you again, the story that we had about the doctor at one of our hospitals, a year or two ago. He healed a dog's broken leg, and the grateful animal brought other dogs to have their broken legs healed. That was a good dog; some of you are not half as good as that dog. You believe that Christ is blessing you, yet you never try to bring others to him to be saved. That must not be the case any longer. We must excel that dog in our love for our species; and it must be our intense desire that, if Christ has healed us, he should heal our wife, our child, our friend, our neighbour; and we should never rest till others are brought to him. Then, when others are brought to Christ, or even if they will not be brought to him, be sure to *praise him.* If your broken heart has been healed, and you are saved, and your sins forgiven, praise him. We do not sing half enough. I do not mean in our congregations; but when we are at home. We pray every day. Do we sing every day? I think that we should. Matthew Henry used to say, about family prayer, "They that pray do well; they that read and pray do better; they that read and pray and sing do best of all." I think that Matthew Henry was right. "Well, I have no voice," says one. Have you not? Then you never grumble at your wife; you never find fault with your food; you are not one of those who make the household unhappy by your evil speeches. "Oh, I do not mean that!" No, I thought you did not mean that. Well, praise the Lord with the same voice that you have used for complaining. "But I could not lend a tune," says one. Nobody said you were to do so. You can at least sing as I do. My singing is of a very peculiar character. I find that I cannot confine myself to one tune; in the course of a verse I use half-a-dozen tunes; but the Lord, to whom I sing, never finds any fault with me. He never blames me, because I do not keep this tune or that. I cannot help it. My voice runs away with me, and my heart too; but I keep on humming something or other by way of praising God's name. I would like you to do the same. I used to know an old Methodist; and the first thing in the morning,

when he got up, he began singing a bit of a Methodist hymn; and if I met the old man during the day, he was always singing. I have seen him in his little workshop, with his lapstone on his knee, and he was always singing, and beating with his hammer. When I said to him once, "Why do you always sing, dear brother?" he replied, "Because I always have something to sing about." That is a good reason for singing. If our broken hearts have been healed, we have something to sing about in time and throughout eternity. Let us begin to do so to the praise of the glory of his grace, who "healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." God bless all the broken hearts that are in this congregation to-night, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Psalm 147

This is one of the Hallelujah Psalms; it begins and ends with "Praise ye the LORD." May our hearts be in tune, that we may praise the Lord while we read these words of praise!

Verse 1. *Praise ye the LORD:*

It is not enough for the Psalmist to do it himself. He wants help in it, so he says, "Praise ye the LORD." Wake up, my brethren; bestir yourselves, my sisters; come, all of you, and unite in this holy exercise! "Praise ye the LORD."

1. *For it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.*

When a thing is good, pleasant, and comely, you have certainly three excellent reasons for attending to it. It is not everything that is good; but here you have a happy combination of goodness, pleasantness, and comeliness. It will do you good to praise God. God counts it good, and you will find it a pleasant exercise. That which is the occupation of heaven must be happy employment. "It is good to sing praises unto our God," "it is pleasant," and certainly nothing is more "comely" and beautiful, and more in accordance with the right order of things, than for creatures to praise their Creator, and the children of God to praise their Father in heaven.

2. *The LORD doth build up Jerusalem:*

Praise his name for that. You love his church; be glad that he builds it up. Praise him who quarries every stone, and puts it upon the one foundation that is laid, even Jesus.

2. *He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.*

Praise him for that. If you were once an outcast, and he has gathered you, give him your special personal song of thanksgiving.

3. *He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.*

Praise him for that, ye who have had broken hearts! If he has healed you, surely you should give him great praise.

4. *He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.*

He who heals broken hearts counts the stars, and calls them by their names, as men call their servants, and send them on their way. Praise his name. Can you look up at the starry sky at night without praising him who made the stars, and leads out their host?

5. *Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.*

Praise him, then; praise his greatness, his almightiness, his infinite wisdom. Can you do otherwise? Oh, may God reveal himself so much to your heart that you shall be constrained to pay him willing adoration!

6. *The LORD lifteth up the meek:*

What a lifting up it is for them, out of the very dust where they have been trodden down by the proud and the powerful! The Lord lifts them up. Praise him for that.

6. *He casteth the wicked down to the ground.*

Thus he puts an end to their tyranny, and delivers those who were ground beneath their cruel power. Praise ye his name for this also. Excuse me that I continue to say to you, "Praise ye the Lord," for, often as I say it, you will not praise him too much; and we need to have our hearts stirred up to this duty of praising God, which is so much neglected. After all, it is the praise of God that is the ultimatum of our religion. Prayer does but sow; praise is the harvest. Praying is the end of preaching, and praising is the end of praying. May we bring to God much of the very essence of true religion, and that will be the inward praise of the heart!

7. *Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God:*

"Unto our God." How that possessive pronoun puts a world of endearment into the majestic word "God"! "This God is our God." Come, my hearer, can you call God your God? Is he indeed yours? If so, "Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God."

8. *Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.*

They did not talk about the "law of nature" in those days. They ascribed everything to God; let us do the same. It is a poor science that pushes God farther away from us, instead of bringing him nearer to us. HE covers the heaven with clouds, HE prepares the rain for earth, HE makes the grass to grow upon the mountains.

9. *He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.*

Our God cares for the birds and the beasts. He is as great in little things as in great things. Praise ye his name. The gods of the heathen could not have these things said of them; but our God takes pleasure in providing for the beasts of field and the birds of the air. The commissariat of the universe is in his hand: "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing."

10, 11. *He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.—*

Kings of the olden times rejoiced in the thews and sinews of their soldiers and their horses; but God has no delight in mere physical strength. He takes pleasure in spiritual things, even in the weakness which makes us fear him, even that weakness which has not grown into the strength of faith, and yet hopes in his mercy. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."

12. *Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion.*

Let whole cities join together to praise God. Shall we live to see the day when all London shall praise him? Shall we, ever, as we go down these streets, with their multitudes of inhabitants, see the people standing in the doorways, and asking, "What must we do to be saved?" Shall we ever see every house with anxious enquirers in it, saying, "Tell us, tell us, how can we be reconciled to God?" Pray that it may be so. In Cromwell's day, if you went down Cheapside at a certain hour of the morning, you would find every blind drawn down; for the inmates were all at family prayer. There is no street like that in London now. In those glorious Puritan times, there was domestic worship everywhere, and the people seemed brought to Christ's feet. Alas, it was but an appearance in many cases; and they soon turned back to their own devices! Imitating the Psalmist, let us say, "Praise the Lord, O London; praise thy God, O England!"

13. *For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee.*

As a nation, we have been greatly prospered, defended, and supplied; and the church of God has been made to stand fast against her enemies, and her children have been blessed.

14, 15. *He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly.*

Oriental monarchs were very earnest to have good post arrangements. They sent their decrees upon swift dromedaries. They can never be compared with the swiftness of the purpose of God's decree. "His word runneth very swiftly." Oh, that the day would come when, over all the earth, God's writ should run, and God's written Word should come to be revered, believed, and obeyed!

16. *He giveth snow like wool:*

Men say, "*it*" snows; but what "*it*" is it that snows? The Psalmist rightly says of the Lord, "HE giveth snow." They say that according to the condition of the atmosphere, snow is produced; but the believer says, "He giveth snow like wool." It is not only like wool for whiteness; but it is like it for the warmth which it gives.

16. *He scattereth the hoar frost like ashes.*

The simile is not to be easily explained; but it will often have suggested itself to you who, in the early morning, have seen the hoar frost scattered abroad.

17. *He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?*

None can stand before his heat; but when he withdraws the fire, and takes away the heat, the cold is equally destructive. It burns up as fast as fire would. "Who can stand before his cold?" If God be gone, if the Spirit of God be taken away from his church, or from any of you, who can stand before his cold? The deprivation is as terrible as if it were a positive infliction. "Who can stand before his cold?"

18. *He sendeth out his word, and melteth them; he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow.*

The frozen waters were hard as iron; the south wind toucheth them, and they flow again. What can God not do? The great God of nature is our God. Let us praise him. Oh, may our hearts be in a right key to-night to make music before him!

19. *He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes unto Israel.*

This is something greater than all his wonders in nature. The God of nature is the God of revelation. He hath not hidden his truth away from men. He hath come out of the eternal secrecies, and he hath showed his word, especially his Incarnate Word, unto his people. Let his name be praised.

20. *He hath not dealt so with any nation:*

Or, with any other nation. He revealed his statutes and his judgments to Israel; and since their day, the spiritual Israel has been privileged in like manner: "He hath not dealt so with any nation."

20. *And as for his judgments, they have not known them.*

Even to-day there are large tracts of country where God is not known. If we know him, let us praise him.

20. *Praise ye the LORD.*

Hallelujah! The Psalm ends upon its key-note: "Praise ye the LORD." So may all our lives end! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—386, 537, 587.

One Worker Preparing for Another

A Sermon

(No. 2261)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, June 19th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, August 14th, 1890.

"Now behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight: for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto."—1 Chron. 22:14.

The building of the temple is an admirable type of the building of the Church of God. I am afraid that there are some present with us at this time who have never helped to build the spiritual temple for Christ. They are not, themselves, living stones. They are no part of God's spiritual house; and they have never helped to bring their cedar, or iron, or gold to the great Builder of the Church. In fact, there may be some here who have rather helped to pull it down, some who have delighted to throw away the stones, and who have tried to hide from the divine Builder the precious material which he intends to use in the sacred edifice. Judge your own hearts; and if you cannot say that you are a living stone, if you have not helped to build up the Church of Christ, may you repent of your sin, and may the grace of God convert you! But if you are workers for the Lord, if your hearts are right with God, I think that I shall be able to say some things that will encourage you to work on, even if you should not for a time see any immediate results from your work.

There were many who helped to build the temple: David gathering the materials; Solomon, the master mason, by whose name the temple would afterwards be called; the princes helping him in the great work; strangers, foreigners, and aliens, who dwelt throughout Israel and Judah; these all took their share, and even the Tyrians and Zidonians had a part in the work. Now, we have here many ministers of God and students, Davids and Solomons; but I pray that many, who are strangers as yet, may be enlisted in this holy service by our great Lord and King, and that some, who are farthest off from Christ, Tyrians and Zidonians, who have gone far away from God, may be enabled, by divine grace, to contribute their share to this glorious work of building a house for the living God, a house not made of gold, and silver, and stone, and timber, but a spiritual house for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

I. In considering our text, let us notice, first, that DAVID HAD ZEALOUSLY DONE HIS PART, although he might not build the temple. There are many servants of God whose names are little known, who, nevertheless, are doing a work that is essential to the building up of the Church of God. I have known many such, who have never lived to realize any great success; their names have never been written upon any great temples that have been built; but, nevertheless, they have worthily done their part, even as David did.

You see, then, first, that *David had gathered the materials*. Many a man collects people together, and yet he has not the fashioning of them. He is the founder of a Christian congregation; but he does not live to see many conversions. He gets together the raw materials upon which another shall

work. He ploughs and he sows; but it wants another man to come and water the seed, and perhaps another to gather the harvest. Still, the sower did his work, and deserves to be remembered for what he did. David did his part of the work, in getting together the materials for the temple.

Besides which, *he fashioned some of the materials*. He had the stone cut from the quarry, and many of them shaped to take their places, by-and-by, in silence in the temple, when it should be reared without sound of hammer or axe. So there are teachers and preachers who help to form the characters of their scholars and hearers, by working away upon their minds and hearts. They will never build up a great church; but still they are knocking the rough edges off the stones. They are preparing and fashioning them; and by-and-by the builder will come and make good use of them.

David had prepared the way for Solomon's temple. It was by his fighting that the time of peace came, in which the temple could be erected. Though he is called a man of blood, yet it is needful that the foes of Israel should be overthrown. There could be no peace till her adversaries had been crushed; and David did that. You do not hear much about the men who prepare the way for others, Somebody else comes along, and apparently does all the work; and his name is widely known and honoured; but God remembers the heralds, the pioneers, the men who prepare the way, the men who, by casting out devils, routing grievous errors, and working needful reforms, prepare the way for the triumphal progress of the gospel.

Moreover, *David found the site for the temple*. He discovered it; he purchased it; and he handed it over to Solomon. We do not always remember the men who prepare the sites for the Lord's temples. Luther is rightly remembered; but there were reformers before Luther. There were hundreds of men and women who burned for Christ, or who perished in prison, or who were put to cruel deaths for the gospel. Luther comes who the occasion has been made for him, and when a site has been cleared for him upon which to build the temple of God. But God remembers all those pre-Reformation heroes. It may be your lot, dear friend, to clear a site, and to make the occasion for others; and you may die before you see even a cornerstone of your work laid; for it will be yours when it is finished, and God will remember what you have done.

Further, *it was David who received the plans from God*. The Lord wrote upon his heart what he would have done. He told him, even to the weight of the candlesticks and lamps, everything that was to be arranged. Solomon, wise as he was, did not plan the temple. He had to borrow the designs from his father, who received them direct from God. Many a man is far-seeing; he gets the plan of the gospel into his heart, he sees a way in which great things can be done, and yet he is scarcely permitted to put his own hand to the work. Another will come by-and-by, and will carry out the plan that the first one received; but he must not forget the first man, who went into the secret place of the Most High, and learned in the place of thunder what God would have his people do.

David did one thing more; before he died, *he gave a solemn charge to others*; he charged Solomon, and the princes, and all the people, to carry out the work of building the temple. I revere the man who, in his old age, when there is weight in every syllable that he utters, concludes his life by urging others to carry on the work of Christ. It is something to gather about your last bed young men who have years of usefulness before them, and to lay upon their consciousness and their heart the duty of preaching Christ crucified, and winning the souls of men for the Lord.

So you see that David had done his part toward the building of the temple. I should like to ask every believer here, *Have you done your part?* You are a child of God; God has loved you, and chosen you; you have been redeemed with precious blood. You know better than to think of working in order to save yourself; you are saved; but have you diligently done all that you can for your Lord

and Master? It was well said, in the prayer-meeting before this service, that there are several thousand members of this church who could not preach, and there were some who did preach of whom the same thing might be said, for it was poor preaching, after all; and our brother said in prayer, "Lord, help us who cannot preach, to pray for the man who does!" Have you, dear friend, who cannot preach, made a point of praying for the pastor of the church to which you belong? It is a great sin on the part of church-members if they do not daily sustain their pastor by their prayers.

Then there is much else that you can do for Christ, in your family, in your business, and in the neighbourhood where you live. Could you go to bed to-night, and there close your eyes for the last time, feeling, "I have finished the work which God gave me to do. I have done all that I could for the winning of souls"? I am afraid that I address some who have a talent wrapped in a napkin, hidden away in the earth. My dear man, go home, and dig it up, before it gets altogether covered with rust, to bear witness against you. Take it up, and put it out to heavenly interest, that your Lord may have what he is entitled to receive. O Christian men and women, there must be very much unused energy in the Church of God! We have a great dynamo that is never used. Oh, that each one would do his own part, even as David did his!

We shall soon be gone; our day lasts not very long. "The night cometh when no man can work." Shall it be said of you, or of me, that we wasted our daylight; and then, when the evening shadows came, we were uneasy and unhappy, and though saved by divine grace, we died with sad expressions of regret for wasted opportunities? It is not very long that I sat by the bedside of one who was wealthy, I might say very wealthy. I prayed with him. I had hoped to have found him rejoicing in the Lord, for I knew that he was a child of God; but he was a child of God with a little malformation about the fingers. He could never open his hand as he ought to have done. As I sat by his side, he said, "Pray God, with all your might, that I may live three months, that I may have the opportunity of using my wealth in the cause of Christ." He did not live much more than three hours after he said that. Oh, that he had woke up a little sooner to do for the Master's church and cause what he ought to have done! Then he would not have had that regret to trouble him in his last hours. He knew the value of the precious blood, and he was resting in it; and I had great joy in knowing that all his hope and all his trust were in his Lord, and he was saved; but it was with a great deal of regret and trembling. I would spare any of you who have wealth such trouble on your dying bed.

If there is a young man here, who has the ability to preach the gospel, or to be doing something for Christ, and he is doing nothing, I am sure that it will be a pain to him one of these days. When conscience is thoroughly aroused, and his heart is getting nearer to God than it has been, he will bitterly regret that he did not avail himself of every occasion to talk of Christ, and seek to bring souls to him. I should like these practical thoughts to go round these galleries, and through this area, till some men and women shall say, "We have not done our part, as David did; but by God's grace we will do so, and he shall have all the praise."

That is my first head, then, David had zealously done his part.

II. But, secondly, there is a remarkable fact in the text, **DAVID HAD DONE HIS PART IN TROUBLE**. Read it: "Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold;" and so on. In the margin of your Bibles, you will find the words, "in my poverty." It is strange that David should talk about poverty when his gifts amounted to many millions of pounds.

David thought little of what he had prepared. He calls it poverty, I think, because it is the way of the saints to count anything that they do for God to be very little. The most generous men in the

world think the least of what they give to God's cause. David, with his millions that he gives, says, "In my poverty I have prepared for the house of the Lord." As he looked at the gold and silver, he said to himself, "What is all this to God?" And the brass and the iron, that could not be reckoned, it was so much and so costly; he thought it was all nothing to Jehovah, who fills heaven and earth, whose grandeur and glory are altogether unspeakable. If you have done the most that you can for God, you will sit down, and weep that you cannot do ten times as much. You that do little for the Lord will be like a hen with one chick; you will think a great deal of it. But if you have a great number of works, and you are doing much for Christ, you will wish that you could do a hundred times as much. Your song will be,—

"Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise!"

Oh, to be multiplied a thousand-fold, that we might, anywhere and everywhere, serve Jesus with heart, and mind, and soul, and strength! So, David here considers that what he did was very little.

Yet, *it was proof of his sincerity*. that he should be saving all this wealth, and preparing for the house of his God in the time of trouble, was a proof of great sincerity. Some Christians want to have all sunshiny weather, and the birds must sing all day and all night to please them. If they receive a rebuke or somebody seems a little cold to them, they will do no more. I have seen many, who called themselves Christians, who were like a silly child at play, who says, when something offends him, "I won't play anymore." They run away at the first rough word that they hear. But David, in the day of his trouble, when his heart was ready to break, still went on with his great work of providing for the house of God. Some who have attended this house of prayer have been absent, and when we have enquired the reason, they have said that they had become so poor that they did not like to come. Oh, dear friends, we would like to see you, however poor you are! Why, if you are in trouble, you should come all the more; for where could you go to find comfort better than to the house of God? Never, I pray you, stay away on account of poverty. David said that he had prepared for the house of his God in the time of his trouble; and that proved his sincerity. One said to me, "Ever since I have been a Christian, everything has seemed to go wrong with me." Suppose that everything should be taken away from you, should you not be grateful that you have an eternal treasure in heaven, and that these losses, which might have broken your heart if you have not known the Saviour, are now sent in heavenly discipline to you, and are working for your good? It shows that a man is right with God when he can walk with Christ in the mire and in the slough. God does not want you to wear silver slippers, and to walk on a well-mown, well-rolled grassy lawn, all the way to heaven.

David prepared for the house of the Lord in his trouble; and I have no doubt that *it was a salve to his sorrow*. To have something to do for Jesus, and to go right on with it, is one of the best ways to get over a bereavement, or any other mental depression. If you can pursue some great object, you will not feel that you are living for nothing. You will not sit down in despair; for, whatever your trouble may be, you will still have this to live for, "I want to help in building the Church of God, and I will do my part in it whatever happens to me. Come poverty or wealth, come sickness or health, come life or death, as long as there is breath in my body, I will go on with the work that God has given me to do." Do I speak to any who are in great trouble? If you are a Christian, the best advice that I can give you is this, get to work for Christ, and you will forget your trouble. If

you are not a Christian, I advise you to trust the Saviour at once, for he is the only solace of spiritual sorrow.

Again, *it was an incentive to service* when David, in his trouble, prepared for the house of the Lord. There were many things in trouble that would tend to damp his ardour, and make him feel as if he could not hold on any longer; but he said to himself, "I must go on with this work for God. His temple must be 'exceeding magnificent', and my son Solomon must build it, so I must go on gathering the materials." So he just roused himself afresh, and went on with his work with new earnestness, whenever his trouble would otherwise have depressed him.

It must also have given an elevation to David's whole life. To have a noble purpose, and to pursue that purpose with all your might, prevents your being like "dumb driven cattle", and lifts you out of the mist and fog of the valley, and sets your feet upon the hill-top, where you can commune with God. I would suggest to your younger friends that they should begin their Christian life with a high purpose, and that they should never forget that purpose; and if trouble should come, they should say, "Let it come; my face is set, like a flint, to do this work to which my Lord has called me, and I will pursue it with all my might." It may seem as if there were no spiritual help in such advice as this; but, believe me, there is. If God shall give you grace to go on with your life-work, he will thereby give you grace to overcome your life-trouble.

Ye would be like your Master, ask not to have a smooth path, and great success. Remember what a life of sorrow he lived. He was grief's close acquaintance. Yet although he saw but a small Church rising before his bodily eye, he knew that he was doing the work that God had given him to do, and he went on with it through agony and bloody sweat, through shame and spitting. He was not more in earnest when he rode in state through the streets of Jerusalem than he was when he hung on the cross of Calvary. He was resolved to do his work; and in trouble he did it, and he amassed treasure beyond all conception for the building of his Church. Riches of grace and wonders of glory he gathered together by his suffering and his death. If you would be like your Lord, you must be able to say with David, "Behold, in my trouble, I have prepared for the house of the Lord." God give his troubled ones to enter into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ in this respect!

III. I am glad that I have come to my third point, for my strength well-nigh fails me. What I have to say here is this: **DAVID'S WORK FITS ON TO THE WORK OF ANOTHER.** That should be a great joy to some of you who do not see much coming of what you are doing. Your work is going to fit on to somebody else's work.

This is *the order of God's providence* for his Church. It does not happen that he gives a whole piece of work to one man; but he seems to say to him, "You go and do so much; then I will send somebody else to do the rest." How this ought to cheer some of you up, the thought that your work may be no failure, though in itself it may seem to be so, because it fits on to the work of somebody else who is coming after you, and so it will be very far from a failure! You have sometimes seen a man take a contract to put in the foundations of a house, and to carry it up to a certain height. He has done that; he will not be the builder of that house; that will be the work of the next contractor, who carries up the walls, and puts on the roof, and so forth. Yes, but he who did the foundation-work did a great deal, and he is as much the builder of the house as the man who carries up the walls. So, if you go to a country town or village, and you preach the gospel to a few poor folk, you may never have seemed very successful; but you have been preparing the way for somebody else who is coming after you.

I am told that my venerable predecessor, Dr. Rippon, used often, in his pulpit, to pray for somebody, of whom he knew nothing, who would follow him in the ministry of the church, and greatly increase it. He seemed to have in his mind's eye some young man, who, in after years, would greatly enlarge the number of the flock, and he often prayed for him. He died, and passed away to heaven, about the time that I was born. Older members of the church have told me that they have read to answer to Dr. Rippon's prayers in the blessing that has been given to us these many years. If you keep your eyes open, you will see the same thing happen again. You will notice how one shall do his work, which shall be necessary to some larger work that somebody else will do after him. This is God's way, so that the second man, the Solomon coming after David, may do his work all the better because of what his father has done before him. Solomon had not to spend years in collecting the materials for the temple; he might not have got through the building if he had that task. His good old father had done all that for him; and all that he had to do was to spend the money that David had gathered, work up the gold, and silver, and brass, and iron, bring in the big stones, and put them in their places, and build the house for God. I daresay that Solomon often thought gratefully of his father David, and what he had done; and you and I, if God blesses us, ought always to think with thanksgiving of the Davids who went before us. If you have success in your class, my sisters, remember that there was an excellent Christian woman who had the class before you. You come, young man, into the Sunday-school, and you think that you must be somebody very great because you have had several conversions in your class. How about the brother who had given up the class through ill-health? You took his place: who knows which of you will have the honour at the last great day? I was about to say, Who cares? For we do not live for honour, we live to serve God; and if I can serve God best by digging out the cellar, and you can serve God best by throwing out that ornamental bay window, my brother, you go on with your bay window, and I will go on with my cellar, for what matters it what we do so long as the house is built, and God is glorified thereby? It is the way of God in providence to set one man to do part of a work which pieces on to that of another man.

But *this is a terrible blow at self*. Self says, "I like to begin something of my own, and I like to carry it out; I do not want any interference from other people." A friend proposed, the other day, to give you a little help in your service. You looked at him as if he had been a thief. You do not want any help; you are quite up to the mark; you are like a waggon and four horses, and a dog under the waggon as well! there is everything about you that is wanted; you need no help from anybody; you can do all things almost without the help of God! I am very sorry for you if that is your opinion. If you never get into God's service, he may say to you, "You shall never begin anything; but shall always come in as the second man;" or, "You shall never finish anything; you shall always be getting ready for somebody else." It is well to have an ambition not to build upon another man's foundation; but do not carry that idea too far. If there is a good foundation laid by another man, and you can finish the structure, be thankful that he has done his part, and rejoice that you are permitted to carry on his work. It is God's way of striking a blow at your personal pride by allowing one man's work to fit on to another's.

I believe that *it is good for the work to have a change of workers*. I am glad that David did not live any longer; for he could not have built the temple. David must die. He has had a good time of service. He has gathered all the materials for the temple. Solomon comes, with young blood and youthful vigour, and carries on the work. Sometimes, the best thing that some of us old folk can do is to go home, and go to heaven, and let some younger man come, and do our work. I know that

there are a great many lamentations about the death of Dr. So-and-So, and Mr. So-and-So; but why? Do you not think that, after all, God can find as good men as those that he has found already? He made those good men, and he is not short of power; he can make others just as good as they have been. I was present at a funeral, where I heard a prayer that rather shocked me. Some brother had said that God could raise up another minister equal to the one that was in the coffin; but prayer was offered by another man, who said that this preacher had been eyes to his blindness, feet to his lameness, and I do not know what beside; and then he said, "Thy poor unworthy dust does not think that thou ever canst or wilt raise up another man like him." So he had not an omnipotent God; but you and I have, and with an omnipotent God it is for the good of the work that David should go to his rest, and that Solomon should come in, and carry on the work.

Certainly, *this creates unity in the Church of God*. If we all had a work of our own, and were shut up to do it, we should not know one another; but now I cannot do my work without your help, my dear friends, and, in some respects, you cannot do your work without my help. We are members one of another, and one helps the other. I hope that I shall never have to do without you. God bless you for all your efficient help! In many Christian works you will have to do without me, one of these days; but that will not matter. There will be somebody who will carry on the work of the Lord; and so long as the work goes on, what matter who does it? God buries the workman, but the devil himself cannot bury the work. The work is everlasting, though the workmen die. We pass away, as star by star grows dim; but the eternal light is never-fading. God shall have the victory. His Son shall come in his glory. His Spirit shall be poured out among the people; and though it be neither this man, nor that, nor the other, God will find the man to the world's end who will carry on his cause, and give him the glory.

This leaves a place for those who come after. On thing David said to Solomon I like very much, "Thou mayest add thereto." I have quoted that sometimes when the collection has been rather small. I have said to each of our friends who were counting the money, "Thou mayest add thereto." It is not all a bad text for a collection-sermon; but it may also be used in many other ways.

Here are certain preachers of the gospel. Cannot I put my hand on some young man's shoulder, and say to him, "Thou mayest add thereto; thou hast a good voice; thou hast an active brain; begin to speak for God; there are numbers of godly men in the gospel ministry; if thou art called of God, thou mayest add thereto"? We have a good Sunday-school, though some of you have never seen it. We have a number of loving and earnest teachers; "thou mayest add thereto." Go thou, and teach likewise; or engage in some other work for which the Lord has qualified you.

I wonder whether there is an unconverted man here this evening, or unconverted woman, whom God has ordained to bless, and to whom he will speak to-night, some stranger whom he will bring in by his almighty grace, some servant of the devil who shall to-night be made a servant of Christ. My Master has a large number of servants; "thou mayest add thereto." If thou wilt yield thyself to Christ, thou mayest come, and help God's people. We want recruits; we are always wanting them. May God lead some, who have been on the side of sin and self, to come out, and say, "Set my name down amongst God's people. By the grace of God, I am going to be on Christ's side, and help to build his temple." Come along, my brother; come along, my sister; we are glad of your help. The work is not all done yet; you are not too late to fight the Lord's battles, nor to win the crown of the victors. The Lord has a large army of the soldiers of the cross; and "thou mayest add thereto." God save thee! Christ bless thee! The Spirit inspire thee! May it be so with very many, for Christ's sake! Amen.

*This sermon is intended for reading on *the first anniversary of the beloved preacher's birthday since his death*. While he was with us, he always looked for special contributions for the Stockwell Orphanage at this season. He did not seek birthday presents for himself; but he desired that all friends, who wished to show their love to him, would do so by helping to maintain his fatherless family of 500 children. We trust that no one will allow this useful institution to suffer because *his* voice can no longer plead for it; but that, through this sermon, each reader will hear him saying, "Dear friend, the Orphanage still needs thy loving and generous assistance; thou hast often helped it by thy gifts in the past, *and thou mayest add hereto*; or if thou hast not given to it, others have, *and thou mayest add thereto*."

Contributions will be gratefully received by the Treasurer, Spurgeons' orphan Home, Stockwell Orphanage, Chapman Road, London. Collecting-cards and boxes may be obtained of the Secretary. The *Annual Festival* will be held on *Wednesday afternoon and evening, June 22nd*. All friends are invited to be present.

1 CHRONICLES 21:25-30; 22.

David was commanded to go to Ornan, or Araunah, the Jebusite, to rear an altar unto the Lord in his threshingfloor. There had been a terrible plague in Jerusalem, in consequence of David's great sin in numbering the people; and they were falling in thousands by the sword of the angel of vengeance. David went up to the threshingfloor or Ornan on Mount Moriah. Ornan was willing to give it to him, but he determined to buy it. We read in the twenty-fifth verse;—

Verses 25-28. *So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof. At that time when David saw that the LORD has answered him in the threshingfloor or Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.*

There was the place for the temple, where the angel sheathed his sword. Christ Jesus, in his great atonement, is the corner-stone of the temple where divine justice sheathes its sword. There let the house of God be built. Every true Church of God is founded on the glorious doctrine of the atoning sacrifice. It was a threshingfloor, too; and God has built his Church on a threshingfloor. Depend upon it, the flail will always be going in every true Church, to fetch out the wheat from the chaff. We must have tribulation if we are in the Church of God. The threshingfloor will always be needed until we are taken up to the heavenly garner above.

29, 30. 22:1. *For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at the season in the high places of Gibeon. But David could not go before it to enquire of God; for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD. Then David said, This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel.*

Now he knew where the temple was to be built; and of a certainty he had discovered that long-predestined site of which God said, "Here will I dwell." This was the very hill whereon Abraham offered up his son Isaac; a hill, therefore, most sacred by covenant to the living God. He delighted to remember the believing obedience of his servant Abraham, and there he would have his temple built.

2. *And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God.*

Observe here a very gracious eye to us who are Gentiles. The temple was built on the threshingfloor of a Jebusite; Ornan was not of the seed of Israel, but one of the accursed Jebusites. It was his land that must be bought for the temple; and now David would employ the strangers who lived in the midst of Israel, but were not of the chosen race, to quarry the stones for the house of God. There was a place for Gentiles in the heart of God, and they had a share in the building of his temple.

3, 4. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David.

Here are the Gentiles again, the Zidonians and the men of Tyre; those that went down to the sea in ships, that had no part nor lot with Israel. There were to bring the cedar wood to David. What an opening of doors of hope there was for poor castaway Gentiles in that fact!

5. And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it.

This was beautiful and thoughtful on David's part. It might be too great a strain upon the young man to collect the materials for the temple as well as to build it; therefore David will take his part, and prepare the materials for the house of the Lord. If we cannot do one thing, let us do another; but, somehow, let us help in the building of the Church of God. The Church to-day seems but a poor thing; but it is to be "exceeding magnificent." The glory of the world is to be the Church of God; and the glory of the Church of God is the Christ of God. Let us do as much as we can to build a spiritual house for our Lord's indwelling.

5-7. So David prepared abundantly before his death. Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God:

And it was well that it was in his mind. God often takes the will for the deed. If you have a large-hearted purpose in your mind, cherish it, and do your best to carry it out: but if for some reason you should never be permitted to carry out your own ideal, it shall be equally acceptable to God, for it was in your heart.

8. But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.

In very much of that fighting David had been faultless; for he fought the battles of the people of God. Still, there are some things that men are called to do, for which they are not to be condemned; but they disqualify them for higher work. It was so in David's case; he had been a soldier, and he might help to build the temple by collecting the materials for it, but he must not build it. 9.

Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; God's Church is to be a place of rest. God's temple was built by "a man of rest."

9. And I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days.

Then the house of the Lord would be built; no stain of blood would be upon it. The only blood therein should be that of holy sacrifices, symbolical of the great Sacrifice of Christ.

10, 11. *He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever. Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee.*

May such a blessing come upon every young man here! May the Lord be with thee, my son! May the Lord prosper thee, and may he make thee a builder of his house in years to come!

12. *Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God.*

How much wisdom will be wanted by the young brethren present who hope to be builders of the house of God! When the Lord says to you, "Ask what I shall give you," ask for divine wisdom, ask to be taught of him, and ask that you may have grace to do his will in all things.

13. *Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfill the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses and concerning Israel: be strong and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed.*

It is a great thing for a Christian to keep his courage up; and especially for a builder of the Church of God to be always brave, and with a stout heart to do God's will, come what may.

14. *Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of Gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto.*

We are unable to tell exactly the amount of precious metal prepared by David; we have to take into account the value of gold and silver in his day; it was probably not so great as it is now. We know this much; it was an enormous sum which David had gathered for the building of the house of God.

15. *Moreover there are workmen with thee in abundance.*

We must have the workmen; they are more precious than the gold. They cannot be put down at any sum of silver: "there are workmen with thee in abundance."

15. *Hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work.*

God will find for his Church enough men, and the right sort of men, as long as he has a Church to be built; but he would have us pray him to send forth labourers. We forget that prayer, and hence we have to lament that there are so few faithful servants of God. Cry to the Lord about the lack of labourers; he can soon supply as many as are needed.

16. *Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number. Arise therefore, and be doing, and the LORD be with thee.*

A very nice text for stirring up idle church-members, who are well content with being spiritually fed, but who are doing nothing for the Lord: "Arise therefore, and be doing, and the LORD be with thee!"

17, 18. *David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying, Is not the LORD your God with you?*

What a good reason for working! What an admirable reason for giving! What an excellent reason for helping with the work! "Is not the LORD your God with you?"

18, *And hath he not given you rest on every side?*

If he gives you rest, you are to take no rest, but to get to his work. He is the best workman for God who enjoys perfect rest. It is always a pity to go out to preach or teach unless you have perfect

rest towards God. When your own heart is quiet, and your spirit is still, then you can work for God with good hope of success.

18. *For he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people.*

The fighting is over; now go ahead with your building.

19. *Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God;*

Do not go to build a house for God, and think that is all that is required. You want spiritual communion with God; and you will not do even the common work of sawing and planing and building aright unless you seek God, and are in fellowship with him.

19. *Arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.*

May God teach us some lessons by this reading! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—423, 681, 695 .

Christ's Curate In Decapolis

A Sermon

(No. 2262)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, June 26th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, April 27th, 1890.

"And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, God home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."—Mark v. 17-19.

That is a striking name for a man, "he that had been possessed with the devil." It would stick to him as long as he lived, and it would be a standing sermon wherever he went. He would be asked to tell the story of what he used to be, and how the change came about. What a story for any man to tell! It would not be possible for us to describe his life while he was a demoniac—the midnight scenes among the tombs, the cutting himself with stones, the howling, the frightening away of all the travellers that went near him, the binding with chains, the snapping of the manacles, the breaking of the fetters, and a great many details that he alone could enter into when he told the story among his own familiar friends. With what pathos would he tell how Jesus came that way, and how the evil spirit forced him to confront him! He would say, "That was the best thing that could have happened to me, to be brought to the Master of that desperate legion of demons, which had encamped within my nature, and made my soul to be its barracks." He would tell how, in a moment, out went the whole legion at the word of Christ.

There are some people who could tell a story very like this man's, a story of slavery to Satan, and deliverance by the power of Christ. If you can tell such a story, do not keep it to yourself. If Jesus has done great things for thee, be ever ready to speak of it, till all men shall know what Christ can do. I think that great sinners who have been saved are specially called upon to publish the good news, the gospel of the grace of God. If you have been valiant against the truth, be valiant for the truth. If you were not lukewarm when you served Satan, be not lukewarm now that you have come to serve Christ. There are some of us here who might bear the name of "the man who was born blind", or "the leper that was healed", or "the woman that was a sinner"; and I hope that we shall all be willing to take any name or any title that will glorify Christ. I do not find that this man ever persecuted Mark for libel because he wrote of him as "he that had been possessed with the devil." Oh, no! He owned that he was possessed with the devil once; and he glorified God that he had been delivered by the Lord Jesus.

I. I am going to make a few observations upon the passage I have chosen for a text; and the first observation is this, SEE HOW MEN'S DESIRES DIFFERED. We find in the seventeenth verse that, "they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts." In the eighteenth verse, "he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him." The people wanted Christ

to go away from them; the man whom he had cured wanted to go wherever he might go. To which class do you belong, my dear friend?

I hope you do not belong to the first class, the class of *the many who pray Jesus to depart from them*. Why did they want him to go?

I think it was, first, because they loved to be quiet, and to dwell at ease. It was a great calamity that had happened; the swine had run into the sea. They did not want any more such calamities, and evidently the Person who had come among them possessed extraordinary power. Had he not healed the demoniac? Well, they did not want him; they did not want anything extraordinary. They were easy-going men, who would like to go on the even tenor of their way, so they asked him to be good enough to go away. There are some people of that kind still living. They say, "We do not want a revival here; we are too respectable. We do not want any stirring preaching here; we are very comfortable. Do not break up our peace." Such men, when they think that God is at work in any place, are half inclined to go elsewhere. They want to be quiet; their motto is, "Anything for a quiet life." "Leave us alone, let us go on our old way," is the cry of these foolish people, as it was the cry of the Israelites, when they said to Moses, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians."

Possibly these people wanted the Saviour gone because they had an eye to business. That keeping of the swine was a bad business. As Jews, they had no business with it. They may have said they did not eat them themselves, they only kept them for other people to eat; and now they had lost the whole herd. I wonder what all those swine would have brought to their owners. As they began calculating how much they had lost, they resolved that the Saviour must go out of their coasts before they lost anything more. I do not wonder that, when men sell intoxicating liquors, for instance, or when they follow any trade in which they cannot make money except by injuring their fellow-men, they do not want Christ to come that way. Perhaps some of you would not like him to see you pay those poor women for making shirts. I am afraid, if Jesus Christ were to come around, and go into some people's business houses, the husband would say to his wife, "Fetch down that book where I enter the wages, and hide it away; I should not like him to see that."

Oh, dear friend, if there be any such reason why you do not Christ to come your way, I pray that the Holy Spirit may convince you that you do need him to come your way. He who has the most objection to Christ is the man who most wants Christ. Be you sure of this, if you do not desire to be converted, if you do not wish to be born again, you are the person above all others needing to be converted, and to be born again. Is it not a most unwise decision when, for the sake of swine, we are willing to part with Christ? "For what shalt it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" He will get a corner in the newspaper, saying that he died worth so many thousands of pounds; and that will not be true, for he was never worth a penny himself. Who would give a penny for him now he is dead? He will cost money to get rid of him, but he cannot not take it with him. He was not worth anything; he used his money for selfish purposes; and never used it for the glory of God. Oh, the poverty of an ungodly rich man!

I do not wonder that these people, taken up with themselves, and with the world, prayed Christ "to depart out of their coasts." May he not, even though you may not care to hear him, stop somewhere on the shore? No; when men get excited against religion, they go to great lengths in trying to drive it away from their midst. Many a poor man has lost his cottage, where he had a few prayer-meetings, because the landlord not only did not want Christ himself, but, like the dog in the manger, would not let others have him who did not want him. Are any of you in that condition?

I hope that I have some here who are of another kind, like *this poor man, who prayed him that he might be with him*. Why did he want to be with Jesus? I think he wanted to be his attendant to show his gratitude. If he might but wait on Christ, loose the latchets of his shoes, and wash his feet, or prepare his meals, he would feel himself the happiest man on earth. He would love to be doing something for the One who had cast a legion of devils out of him.

Next, he wished not only to be an attendant to show his gratitude, but a disciple that he might learn more of him. What he did know of Christ was so precious, he had personally had such an experience of his gracious power, that he wanted to be always learning something from every word of those dear lips, and every action of those blessed hands. He prayed him that he might be with him as a disciple who wished to be taught by him.

He wanted also to be with him as a comrade, for not that Christ must go, exiled from Decapolis, he seemed to feel that there was no reason why he should remain there himself. "Lord, if thou must leave there Gadarenes, let me leave the Gadarenes, too! Dost thou go, O Shepherd? Then let me go with thee. Must thou cross the sea, and get thee gone, I know not where? I will go with thee to prison and to death." He felt so linked with Christ that he prayed him that he might be with him.

I think that there was this reason, also, one of fear, at the back of his prayer. Perhaps one of that legion of devils might come back again, and if he could keep with Christ, then Christ would turn the devil out again. I should not wonder but he felt a trembling about him, as if he could not bear to be out of the sight of the great Physician, who had healed him of so grievous an ill. I would say to all here, that we are never safe except we are with Christ. If you are tempted to go where you could not have Christ with you, do not go. Did you ever hear the story of the devil running away with a young man who was at the theatre? It is said that John Newton sent after Satan, and said, "That young man is a member of my church." "Well," replied the devil, "I do not care where he is a member; I found him on my premises, and I have a right to him;" and the preacher could not give any answer to that. If you go on the devil's premises, and he takes you off, I cannot say anything against it. Go nowhere where you cannot take Christ with you. Be like this man, who longs to go wherever Christ goes.

II. Now, secondly, SEE HOW CHRIST'S DEALINGS DIFFER, and how extraordinary they are. Here is an evil prayer: "Depart out of our coasts." He grants it. Here is a pious prayer: "Lord, let me be with thee." "Howbeit Jesus suffered him not." Is that his way, to grant the prayer of his enemies, and refuse the petition of his friends? Yes, it is sometimes.

In the first case, *when they prayed him to depart, he went*. Oh, dear friends, if Christ ever comes near you, and you get a little touched in your conscience, and feel a throb of something like spiritual life, do not pray him to go away; for if he does go, if he should leave you to yourself, and never come again, your doom is sealed! Your only hope lies in his presence; and if you pray against your one hope, you are a suicide, you are guilty of murdering your own soul.

Jesus went away from these people because it was useless to stop. If they wanted him to go, what good could he do to them? If he spoke, they would not listen. If they heard his message, they would not heed it. When men's minds are set against Christ, what else is to be done but to leave them?

He could spend his time better somewhere else. If you will not have my Lord, somebody else will. If you sit there in your pride, and say, "I want not the Saviour," there is a poor soul in the gallery longing for him, and crying, "Oh, that I might find him to be my Saviour!" Christ knew

that, if the Gaderenes refused him, the people on the other side of the lake would welcome him on his return.

By going away, he even saved them from yet greater sin. If he had not gone, they might have tried to plunge him into the lake. When men begin to pray Christ to depart out of their coasts, they are bad enough for anything. There might have followed violence to his blessed person, so he took himself away from them. Is it not an awful thing that, if the gospel ministry does not save you, it is helping to damn you? We are a savour to God, always sweet; but in some men, we are a savour of death unto death, while in others we are a savour unto life. O my hearers, if you will not come to Christ, the seat you occupy is misappropriated! There might be another person sitting here, to whom the gospel might be very precious; and our opportunities of preaching it are none too many. We do not like to waste our strength on stony ground, on hard bits of rock that repel the seed. Rock, rock, rock, wilt thou never break; must we continue to sow thee, though no harvest comes from thee? God changes thee, rock; and make thee good soil, that yet the truth may grow upon thee! The evil prayer, then, was answered.

The good prayer was not answered. Why was that? The chief reason was, because the man could be useful at home. He could glorify God better by going among the Gaderenes, and among his own family, and telling what God had done for him, than he could by any attention he could pay to Christ. It is remarkable that Christ took nobody to be his body-servant, or personal attendant during his earthly ministry. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. He did not desire this man to be with him to make him comfortable; he bade him go back to his family, and make known the power of Jesus Christ, and seek to win them for God.

Perhaps, too, his prayer was not answered, lest his fear should have been thereby sanctioned. If he did fear, and I feel morally certain that he did, that the devils would return, then, of course, he longed to be with Christ. But Christ take that fear from him, and as good as says to him, "You do not need to be near me; I have so healed that you will never be sick again." A patient might say to his doctor, "I have been so very ill, and through your skill have been restored to health, I should like to be near you, so that, if there should be any recurrence of my malady, I might come to you at once." If the doctor should reply, "You may go to Switzerland, or to Australia, if you like;" it would be the best evidence that the doctor had not fears about him, and it ought to put a quietus to his doubts.

You see, then, how Christ's dealings differ with different men. Have I not known some continue in sin, and yet prosper in business, heaping up wealth, and having all that heart could wish? Have I not known others repent, and turn to God, and from that very day they have had more trouble than they ever had before, and their way has been strangely rough? Yes, I have seen them, too; and I have not envied the easy ways of the wicked, neither have I felt that there was anything very wonderful about the rough ways of the righteous; for, after all, it is not the way that is the all-important matter, it is the end of the way; and if I could travel smoothly to perdition, I would not choose to do so; and if the way to eternal life is rough, I take it with all its roughness. At the foot of the Hill Difficulty, Bunyan makes his pilgrim sing—

"The hill, though high, I covet to ascend,
the difficulty will not me offend;
For I perceive the way of life lies here."

III. My third point is this: SEE HOW GOOD A THING IT IS TO BE WITH JESUS. This man entreated of the Lord that he might be with him.

If you have been saved recently, I expect you have a longing in your heart to be with Christ always. I will tell you what shape that longing is likely to take. You were so happy, so joyful, and it was such a blessed meeting, that you said to yourself, "I am sorry it is over; I should like this meeting to have been kept on all night, and the next day, and never to end." Yes, you were of the mind of Peter, when he wanted to build the three tabernacles on the holy mount, and to stop there the rest of his days; but you cannot do it; it is no use wishing for it. You must go home to that drinking husband or that scolding wife, to that ungodly father or that unkind mother. You cannot stop in that meeting always.

Perhaps you have another idea of what it is to be with Christ. You are so happy when you can get alone, and read your Bible, and meditate, and pray, and you say, "Lord, I wish I could always be this; I should like to be always upstairs in this room, searching the Scriptures, and having communion with God." Yes, yes, yes; but you cannot do it. There are the children's socks to be mended, there are buttons to be put on the husband's shirts, and there are all sorts of odds and ends to be done, and you must not neglect any one of them. Whatever household duties come upon you, attend to them. You wish that you had not to go to the city to-morrow. Would it not be sweet to have an all-night prayer-meeting, and then to have an all-day searching the Scriptures? No doubt it would; but the Lord has not so arranged it. You have to go to business, so just put on your week-day clothes, and think yourself none the less happy because you have to show your religion in your daily life.

"Ah, well!" says one, and this I very often hear, "I think that I should always be with Christ if I could not get right out of business, and give myself up to the service of the Lord." Especially do you think that it would be so if you were a minister. Well, I have nothing to say against the ministry of the gospel. If the Lord calls you to do it, obey the call, and be thankful that he has counted you faithful, putting you into the ministry; but if you suppose that you will be nearer to Christ simply by entering the ministry, you are very much mistaken. I daresay that I had about as many of the other people's troubles brought to me this morning, after I had done the preaching, as would last most men a month. We have to bear with everybody's trouble, and everybody's doubt, and everybody's need of comfort and counsel. You will find yourself cumbered with much serving, even in the service of the Lord; and it is very easy to lose the Master in the Master's work. We want much grace lest this insidious temptation should overcome us even in our ministry. You can walk with Christ, and sell groceries. You can walk with Christ, and be a chimney-sweep. I do not hesitate to say that, by the grace of God, you can walk with Christ as well in one occupation as another, if it is a rightful one. It might be quite a mistake if you were to give up your business, under the notion that you would be more with Christ if you became a city missionary, or a Bible-woman, or a coleporteur, or a captain in the Salvation Army, or whatever other form of holy service you might desire. Keep on with your business. If you can black shoes well, do that. If you can preach sermons badly, do not do that.

"Ah!" says one, "I know how I would like to be with Christ." Yes, yes, I know; you would like to be in heaven. Oh, yes; and it is a laudable desire, to wish to be with Christ, for it is far better than being here! But, mind you, it may be a selfish desire, and it may be a sinful desire, if it be pushed too far. A holy man of God was once asked by a fellow-servant of Christ. "Brother So-and-so, do you not want to go home?" He said, "I will answer you by another question. If you had a man working for you, and on Wednesday he said, 'I wish it was Saturday,' would you keep him on?" The other thought that he would need a large stock of patience to do so. Why, do you not? You

will be glad to see the back of him before Saturday comes, for he will be no good for work. Have I a right to be wanting to go to heaven if I can do any good to you here? Is it not more of a heaven to be outside of heaven than inside, if you can be doing more for God outside than in? Long to go when the Lord wills; but if not to remain in the flesh be more for the good of the church and the world, and more for the glory of God, waive your desire, and be not vexed with your Master when, after having prayed that you may be with him; it has to be written of you as it was of this man, "Howbeit Jesus suffered him not."

Still, it is a very delightful thing to be with Jesus.

IV. But now, in the fourth place, SEE THAT THERE MAY BE SOMETHING EVEN BETTER THAN THIS. In the sense which I have mentioned, there is something better even than being with Christ.

What is better than being with Christ? Why, to be working for Christ! Jesus said to this man, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

This is *more honourable*. It is very delightful to sit at Jesus' feet; but if the most honourable post on the field of battle is the place of danger; if the most honourable thing in the State is to have royal service allotted to you; then the most honourable thing for a Christian is not to sit down, and sing, and enjoy himself, but to get up, and risk reputation, life, and everything for Jesus Christ's sake. Dear friend, aspire to serve our Lord; it is a more honourable thing even than being with him.

It is also *better for the people*. Christ is going away from the Gaderenes; they have asked him to go, and he is going; but he seems to say to this man, "I am going because they have asked me to go. My leaving them looks like a judgment upon them for their rejection of me; but yet I am not going away altogether. I am going to stop with you; I will put my Spirit upon you, and so will continue with you. They will hear you though they will not hear me." Christ, as it were, resigns the pastorate of that district; but he puts another in his place, not so good as himself, but one whom they will like better; not so powerful and useful as himself, but one better adapted to them. When Christ was gone, this man would be there, and the people would come to him to hear about those swine, and how they ran down into the sea; and if they did not come to him, he would go and tell them all about it; and so there would be a permanent curate left there to discharge the sacred ministry, now that the great Bishop had gone. I like that thought. Christ had gone to heaven, for he is wanted there, and so he has left you here, dear brother, to carry on his work.. You are not equal to him in any respect; but yet remember what he said to his disciples, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." That is why Christ does not suffer you to be with him at present. You must stop for the sake of the people among whom you live, as "he that had been possessed with the devil" had to remain for the sake of the Gaderenes, to whom he might testify concerning Christ.

His remaining, also, was *better for his family*; and do you not think that, oftentimes, a man of God is kept out of heaven for the sake of his family? You must not go yet, father; those boys still need your example and your influence. Christian mother, you must not go yet; I know that your children are grown up, and they are grieving you very much; but still, if there is any check upon them, it is their poor old mother, and you must stop till you have prayed them to God; and you will do so yet. Be of good courage/ I believe that there are many here who might be in heaven, but that God has some who he intends to bring in by them, so they must stay here a little longer. Though

infirm in body, shattered in nerve, and often racked with acute pain, perhaps with deadly disease upon you, and wishing to be gone, you must not go till your work is done.

"Howbeit Jesus suffered him not." This demoniac must go home, and tell his wife and his children what great things the Lord had done for him. Many eminent preachers have pictured the scene of his going home, so I will try to do it. You may only fancy what it would be if it were your case; and you had been shut up in an asylum, or had been almost too bad even for that. How glad your friends were to have you taken away, and then how much more glad to find you come back perfectly well! I can imagine how the man's wife would look through the window when she heard his voice. Has he come back in a mad fit? How the children will be filled with terror at the sound of their father's voice until they were assured that there was indeed a change in him! Ah, poor sinner, you have come here to-night! Perhaps you forget that your children often have to hide away under the bed when father comes home. I know that there are such persons about, and they may even find their way into the Tabernacle. The Lord have mercy upon the drunkard, and turn his cups bottom upwards, and make a new man of him! Then, when he goes home, to tell of free grace and dying love, and of the wonderful change that God has wrought in him, he will be a blessing to his family and to all about him. It may be, dear friend, that you have to stop here till you have undone some of the mischief of your early life. You have to bring to God some of those whom you tempted, and led astray, and helped to ruin.

So, you see, dear friends, there is something better even than being with Christ; that is working with Christ.

V. But, lastly, CONSIDER THAT THERE IS YET A CASE WHICH IS BEST OF ALL. We must always have three degrees of comparison. What is the best state of all? To be with Christ is good; to be sent by Christ on a holy errand, is better; but here is something that is best of all, namely; to work for him, and to be with him at the same time. I want every Christian to aspire to that position. Is it possible to sit with Mary at the Master's feet, and yet to run about like Martha, and get the dinner ready? It is; and then Martha will never be cumbered with much serving if she does that, and she will never find fault with her sister Mary. "But, sir, we cannot sit and stir at the same time." No, not as to your bodies; but you can as to you souls. You can be sitting at Jesus' feet, or leaning on his breast, and yet be fighting the Lord's battles, and doing his work.

In order to do this, *cultivate the inner as well as the outer life*. Endeavour not only to do much for Christ, but to be much with Christ, and to live wholly upon Christ. Do not, for instance, on the Sabbath-day, go to a class, and teach others three times, as some whom I know do; but come once and hear the Master's message, and get your soul fed; and when you have had a spiritual feast in the morning, give the rest of the day to holy service. Let the two things run together. To be always eating, and never working, will bring on repletion, and spiritual dyspepsia; but to be always working and never eating,—well, I am afraid that you will not bear that trial so well as the gentleman who yesterday ate his first meal after forty days fasting. Do not try to imitate him. It is not a right and wise thing to do; but very dangerous. Get spiritual food as well as do spiritual work.

Let me say to you, again, *grieve very much if there is the least cloud between you and Christ*. Do not wait until it is as thick as a November fog; be full of sorrow if it is only like a tiny, fleecy cloud. George Muller's observation was a very wise one, "Never come out of your chamber in the morning until everything is right between you and God." Keep in perpetual fellowship with Jesus; and thus you can be with him, and yet be serving him at the same time.

And mind this, *before you begin Christ's service, always seek his presence and help.* Do not enter upon any work for the Lord without having first seen the face of the King in his beauty; and in the work often recall your mind from what you are doing, to him for whom you are doing it, and by whom you are doing it; and when the work is completed, do not throw up you cap, and say, "Well done, self!" Another will say to you, by-and-by, "Well done!" if you deserve it. Do not take the words out of his mouth. Self-praise is no recommendation. Solomon said, "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips." When we have done all, we are still unprofitable servants; we have only done that which is our duty to do. So, if you are as humble as you are active, as lowly as you are energetic, you may keep with Christ, and yet go about his errands to the ends of the earth; and I reckon this to be the happiest experience that any one of us can reach this side of the gates of pearl. The Lord bless you, and bring you there, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Mark 5:1-29

1, 2. *And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gaderenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.*

Our Lord crossed the Sea of Galilee on purpose to rescue this poor man from the power of the unclean spirit that possessed him. He knew that there were many who needed him on the Galilean side of the lake, and he could foresee the storm that would threaten to sink the little ship; yet he calmly said to his disciples (see chapter iv. Verse 35), "Let us pass over unto the other side." As soon as the great Physician landed, a dreadful apparition appeared. "Our of the tombs", an uncanny place, rushed a man, howling and yelling like some wild beast; or worse still, under the influence of Satan, who had taken possession of him.

3, 4. *Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains; because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.*

See how the world deals with furiously guilty men. It tries to fetter them, or else to tame them; to keep them in check by fear of punishment, or else to subdue them to a gentleness of morality: poor work this! Christ neither binds nor tames; he changes and renews. Oh, that everywhere his aid were sought, and not so much reliance placed on the fetters of law, or the power of morals!

5. *And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.*

It must have been dreadful for travellers to pass that way at night, or to meet with this terrible madman at any hour of the day. But how terrible must have been the poor creature's own condition! We get just a glimpse of it from the words, "always in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones." See what Satan does with those who are in his power.

6. *But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,*

The devil does not like doing it; but if it will serve his purpose, he will pretend to be a worshipper of Christ. He comes here sometimes; he goes to all sorts of places of worship, and makes men turn worshippers who have no worship in their hearts; for there is no end to the depth of his cunning, and many are they that have served the devil best when they have pretended to worship Christ.

7. *And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.*

Using the lips of this poor man, Satan spoke in him and through him. He is afraid of Christ. This dog of hell knows his Master, and crouches at his feet. He beseeches the "Son of the Most High God" not to torment him before his time.

8. *For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.*

Christ never wastes words over the devil. He speaks to him very shortly and very sharply. It would be well sometimes if we could be more laconic when we are dealing with evil. It does not deserve our words as it did not observe Christ's words. Jesus said to the devil, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit."

9, 10. *And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. An he besought him much that he would not send him away out of the country.*

The devil can pray; he did so in this case. It is not because a man is fluent in prayer that we are sure of his salvation. It is not because a man prays with such fervour that his knees knock together, that we may conclude that he is a saint. It may be that he is trembling through fear of God's judgment. Satan besought Christ much.

11, 12. *Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.*

Satan would rather vex swine than do no mischief at all. He is so fond of evil that he would work it upon animals if he cannot work it upon men. What unanimity there is amongst the evil spirits! "All the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them."

13. *And forthwith Jesus gave them leave.*

The devil cannot enter even a pig with Christ's leave. So he cannot tempt you, my friend, without our Lord's permission. You may rest assured that even this great monster of evil is under Christ's control. He cannot molest you till Jesus gives him leave. There is a chain around the roaring lion, and he can only go just as far as the Lord allows him.

13, 14. *And the unclean spirit went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a deep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea. And they that fed the swine fled,*

At which we do not at all wonder. Who would not flee when they thus saw the power of Christ?

14, 15. *And told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they came to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.*

You would have thought that it would have been said, "They marvelled, and they praised Christ for this great and wonderful deed." No, "They were afraid." If you see another converted, do not be afraid; but rather have hope that you may be saved yourself. What a beautiful sight these people saw: "they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind."! That thought ought to have made them rejoice instead of being afraid. There are still people who are afraid of what will happen when they see those whom Christ has blessed spiritually as he had healed this man.

16, 17. *And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.*

If Jesus should come to you to-night, do not ask him to go away. Open wide the door of your heart, and entreat the Lord to come in, and dwell there for ever and ever. This narrative teaches us that the Lord Jesus Christ will go away if he is asked to do so; he will not remain where his room is preferred to his company.

18.20. *And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had companion with thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.*

He was told to publish what great things *the Lord* had done for him. He went and published what great things *Jesus* had done for him. Did he make any mistake? Oh, no! It is but another name for the same Person: for Jesus is the Lord; and when you speak of him as divine, and talk of him in terms fit only for God, you do but speak rightly; for so he deserveth to be praised. "And all men did marvel." So our Lord left them all wondering. Leaving this one messenger to bear testimony to him, he went his way elsewhere, to carry blessings to many others on the other side of the sea. The man appears to have gone through the wide district that bore the name Decapolis, and his testimony to the power of Christ was so convincing that, when the Saviour revisited that part of the country, he had a very different reception from that which he received on this occasion. (see chapters vii. 31-37, viii. 1-10).

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—797, 847, 806.

Christ's Plea for Ignorant Sinners

A Sermon

(No. 2263)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, July 3rd, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, October 5th, 1890.

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."—Luke 23:34.

WHAT tenderness we have here; what self-forgetfulness; what almighty love! Jesus did not say to those who crucified him, "Begone!" One such word, and they must have all fled. When they came to take him in the garden, they went backward, and fell to the ground, when he spoke but a short sentence; and now that he is on the cross, a single syllable would have made the whole company fall to the ground, or flee away in fright.

Jesus says not a word in his own defence. When he prayed to his Father, he might justly have said, "Father, note what they do to thy beloved Son. Judge them for the wrong they do to him who loves them, and who has done all he can for them." But there is no prayer against them in the words that Jesus utters. It was written of old, by the prophet Isaiah, "He made intercession for the transgressors;" and here it is fulfilled. He pleads for his murderers, "Father, forgive them."

He does not utter a single word of upbraiding. He does not say, "Why do ye this? Why pierce the hands that fed you? Why nail the feet that followed after you in mercy? Why mock the Man who loved to bless you?" No, not a word even of gentle upbraiding, much less anything like a curse. "Father, forgive them." You notice, Jesus does not say, "I forgive them," but you may read that between the lines. He says that all the more because he does not say it in words. But he had laid aside his majesty, and is fastened to the cross; and therefore he takes the humble position of a suppliant, rather than the more lofty place of one who had power to forgive. How often, when men say, "I forgive you," is there a kind of selfishness about it! At any rate, self is asserted in the very act of forgiving. Jesus take the place of a pleader, a pleader for those who were committing murder upon himself. Blessed be his name!

This word of the cross we shall use to-night, and we shall see if we cannot gather something from it for our instruction; for, though we were not there, and we did not actually put Jesus to death, yet we really caused his death, and we, too, crucified the Lord of glory; and his prayer for us was, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

I am not going to handle this text so much by way of exposition, as by way of experience. I believe there are many here, to whom these words will be very appropriate. This will be our line of thought. First, *we were in measure ignorant*; secondly, *we confess that this ignorance is no excuse*; thirdly, *we bless our Lord for pleading for us*; and fourthly, *we now rejoice in the pardon we have obtained*. May the Holy Spirit graciously help us in our meditation!

I. Looking back upon our past experience, let me say, first, that **WE WERE IN MEASURE IGNORANT**. We who have been forgiven, we who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, we once sinned, in a great measure, through ignorance. Jesus says, "They know not what they do."

Now, I shall appeal to you, brothers and sisters, when you lived under the dominion of Satan, and served yourselves and sin, was there not a measure of ignorance in it? You can truly say, as we said in the hymn we sang just now,—

"Alas! I knew not what I did."

It is true, first, that we were ignorant of *the awful meaning of sin*. We began to sin as children; we knew that it was wrong, but we did not know all that sin meant. We went on to sin as young men; peradventure we plunged into much wickedness. We knew it was wrong; but we did not see the end from the beginning. It did not appear to us as rebellion against God. We did not think that we were presumptuously defying God, setting at naught his wisdom, defying his power, deriding his love, spurning his holiness; yet we were doing that. There is an abysmal depth in sin. You cannot see the bottom of it. When we rolled sin under our tongue as a sweet morsel, we did not know all the terrible ingredients compounded in that deadly bittersweet. We were in a measure ignorant of the tremendous crime we committed when we dared to live in rebellion against God. So far, I think, you go with me.

We did not know, at that time, *God's great love to us*. I did not know that he had chosen me from before the foundation of the world; I never dreamed of that. I did not know that Christ stood for me as my Substitute, to redeem me from among men. I did not know the love of Christ, did not understand it then. You did not know that you were sinning against eternal love, against infinite compassion, against a distinguishing love such as God had fixed on you from eternity. So far, we knew not what we did.

I think, too, that we did not know all that we were doing in *our rejection of Christ, and putting him to grief*. He came to us in our youth; and impressed by a sermon we began to tremble, and to seek his face; but we were decoyed back to the world, and we refused Christ. Our mother's tears, our father's prayers, our teacher's admonitions, often moved us; but we were very stubborn, and we rejected Christ. We did not know that, in that rejection, we were virtually putting him away and crucifying him. We were denying his Godhead, or else we should have worshipped him. We were denying his love, or else we should have yielded to him. We were practically, in every act of sin, taking the hammer and the nails, and fastening Christ to the cross, but we did not know it. Perhaps, if we had known it, we should not have crucified the Lord of glory. We did know we were doing wrong; but we did not know all the wrong that we were doing.

Nor did we know fully *the meaning of our delays*. We hesitated; we were on the verge on conversion; we went back, and turned again to our old follies. We were hardened, Christless, prayerless still; and each of us said, "Oh, I am only waiting a little while till I have fulfilled my present engagements, till I am a little older, till I have seen a little more of the world!" The fact is, we were refusing Christ, and choosing the pleasures of sin instead of him; and every hour of delay was an hour of crucifying Christ, grieving his Spirit, and choosing this harlot world in the place of the lovely and ever blessed Christ. We did not know that.

I think we may add one thing more. *We did not know the meaning to our self-righteousness*. We used to think, some of us, that we had a righteousness of our own. We had been to church regularly, or we had been to the meeting-house whenever it was open. We were christened; we were confirmed; or, peradventure, we rejoiced that we never had either of those things done to us. Thus, we put our confidence in ceremonies, or the absence of ceremonies. We said our prayers; we read a chapter in the bible night and morning; we did—oh, I do not know what we did not do! But there we rested; we were righteous in our own esteem. We had not any particular sin to confess,

nor any reason to lie in the dust before the throne of God's majesty. We were about as good as we could be; and we did not know that we were even then perpetrating the highest insult upon Christ; for, if we were not sinners, why did Christ die; and, if we had a righteousness of our own which was good enough, why did Christ come here to work out a righteousness for us? We made out Christ to be a superfluity, by considering that we were good enough without resting in his atoning sacrifice. Ah, we did not think we were doing that! We thought we were pleasing God by our religiousness, by our outward performances, by our ecclesiastical correctness; but all the while we were setting up anti-Christ in the place of Christ. We were making out that Christ was not wanted; we were robbing him of his office and glory! Alas! Christ would say of us, with regard to all these things, "They know not what they do." I want you to look quietly at the time past wherein you served sin, and just see whether there was not a darkness upon your mind, a blindness in your spirit, so that you did not know what you did.

II. Well now, secondly, WE CONFESS THAT THIS IGNORANCE IS NO EXCUSE. Our Lord might urge it as a plea; but we never could. We did not know what we did, and so we were not guilty to the fullest possible extent; but we were guilty enough, therefore let us own it.

For first, remember, *the law never allows this as a plea*. In our own English law, a man is supposed to know what the law is. If he breaks it, it is no excuse to plead that he did not know it. It may be regarded by a judge as some extenuation; but the law allows nothing of the kind. God gives us the law, and we are bound to keep it. If I erred through not knowing the law, still it was a sin. Under the Mosaic law, there were sins of ignorance, and for these there were special offerings. The ignorance did not blot out the sin. That is clear in my text; for, if ignorance rendered an action no longer sinful, they why should Christ say, "Father, forgive them"? But he does; he asks for mercy for what is sin, even though the ignorance in some measure be supposed to mitigate the criminality of it.

But, dear friends, *we might have known*. If we did not know, it was because we would not know. There was the preaching of the Word; but we did not care to hear it. There was this blessed Book; but we did not care to read it. If you and I had sat down, and looked at our conduct by the light of the Holy Scripture, we might have known much more of the evil of sin, and much more of the love of Christ, and much more of the ingratitude which is possible in refusing Christ, and not coming to him.

In addition to that, *we did not think*. "Oh, but," you say, "young people never do think!" But young people should think. If there is anybody who need not think, it is the old man, whose day is nearly over. If he does think, he has but a very short time in which to improve; but the young have all their lives before them. If I were a carpenter, and had to make a box, I should not think about it after I had made the box; I should think, before I began to cut my timber, what sort of box it was to be. In every action, a man thinks before he begins, or else he is a fool. A young man ought to think more than anybody else, for now he is, as it were, making his box. He is beginning his life-plan; he should be the most thoughtful of all men. Many of us, who are now Christ's people, would have known much more about our Lord if we had given him more careful consideration in our earlier days. A man will consider about taking a wife, he will consider about making a business, he will consider about buying a horse or a cow; but he will not consider about the claims of Christ, and the claims of the Most High God; and this renders his ignorance wilful, and inexcusable.

Beside that, dear friends, although we have confessed to ignorance, *in many sins we did not know a great deal*. Come, let me quicken your memories. There were times when you knew that

such an action was wrong, when you started back from it. You looked at the gain it would bring you, and you sold your soul for that price, and deliberately did what you were well aware was wrong. Are there not some here, saved by Christ, who must confess that, at times, they did violence to their conscience? They did despite to the Spirit of God, quenched the light of heaven, drove the Spirit away from them, distinctly knowing what they were doing. Let us bow before God in the silence of our hearts, and own to all of this. We hear the Master say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Let us add our own tears as we say, "And forgive us, also, because in some things we did know; in all things we might have known; but we were ignorant for want of thought, which thought was a solemn duty which we ought to have rendered to God."

One more thing I will say on this head. When a man is ignorant, and does not know what he ought to do, what should he do? Well, he should do nothing till he does know. But here is the mischief of it, that *when we did not know, yet we chose to do the wrong thing*. If we did not know, why did we not choose the right thing? But, being in the dark, we never turned to the right; but always blundered to the left from sin to sin. Does not this show us how depraved our hearts are?: Though we are seeking to be right, when we were let alone, we go wrong of ourselves. Leave a child alone; leave a man alone; leave a tribe alone without teaching and instruction; what comes of it? Why, the same as when you leave a field alone. It never, by any chance, produces wheat or barley. Leave it alone, and there are rank weeds, and thorns, and briars, showing that the natural set of the soil is towards producing that which is worthless. O friends, confess the inmate evil of your hearts as well as the evil of your lives, in that, when you did not know, yet, having a perverse instinct, you chose the evil, and refuse the good; and, when you did not know enough of Christ, and did not think enough of him to know whether you ought to have him or not, you would not have come unto him that you might have life. You needed light; but you shut your eyes to the sun. You were thirsty; but you would not drink of the living spring; and so your ignorance, though it was there, was a criminal ignorance, which you must confess before the Lord. Oh, come ye to the cross, ye who have been there before, and have lost your burden there! Come and confess your guilt over again; and clasp that cross afresh, and look to him who bled upon it, and praise his dear name that he once prayed for you, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Now, I am going a step further. We were in a measure ignorant; but we confess that that measurable ignorance was no excuse.

III. Now, thirdly, WE BLESS OUR LORD FOR PLEADING FOR US.

So you notice when it was that Jesus pleaded? It was, *while they were crucifying him*. They had not just driven in the nails, they had lifted up the cross, and dished it down into its socket, and dislocated all his bones, so that he could say, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint." Ah, dear friends, it was then that instead of a cry or groan, this dear Son of God said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." They did not ask for forgiveness for themselves, Jesus ask for forgiveness for them. Their hands were imbrued in his blood; and it was then, even then, that he prayed for them. Let us think of the great love wherewith he loved us, even while we were yet sinners, when we rioted in sin, when we drank it down as the ox drinketh down water. Even then he prayed for us. "While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Bless his name to-night. He prayed for you when you did not pray for yourself. He prayed for you when you were crucifying him.

Then think of his plea, *he pleads his Sonship*. He says, "Father, forgive them." He was the Son of God, and he put his divine Sonship into the scale on our behalf. He seems to say, "Father, as I

am thy Son, grant me this request, and pardon these rebels. Father, forgive them." The filial rights of Christ were very great. He was the Son of the Highest. "Light of light, very God of very God", the second Person in the Divine Trinity; and he puts that Sonship here before God and says, "Father, Father, forgive them." Oh, the power of that word from the Son's lip when he is wounded, when he is in agony, when he is dying! He says, "Father, Father, grant my one request; O Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do;" and the great Father bows his awful head, in token that the petition is granted.

Then notice, that Jesus here, silently, but really *pleads his sufferings*. The attitude of Christ when he prayed this prayer is very noteworthy. His hands were stretched upon the transverse beam; his feet were fastened to the upright tree; and there he pleaded. Silently his hands and feet were pleading, and his agonized body from the very sinew and muscle pleaded with God. His sacrifice was presented complete; and so it is his cross that takes up the plea, "Father, forgive them." O blessed Christ! It is thus that we have been forgiven, for his Sonship and his cross have pleaded with God, and have prevailed on our behalf.

I love this prayer, also, because of the *indistinctness* of it. It is "Father, forgive them." He does not say, "Father, forgive the soldiers who have nailed me here." He includes them. Neither does he say, "Father, forgive sinners in ages to come who will sin against me." But he means them. Jesus does not mention them by any accusing name: "Father, forgive my enemies. Father, forgive my murderers." No, there is no word of accusation upon those dear lips. "Father, forgive them." Now into that pronoun "them" I feel that I can crawl Can you get in there? Oh, by a humble faith, appropriate the cross of Christ by trusting in it; and get into that big little word "them"! It seems like a chariot of mercy that has come down to earth into which a man may step, and it shall bear him up to heaven. "Father, forgive them."

Notice, also, what it was that Jesus asked for; to omit that, would be to leave out the very essence of his prayer. *He asked for full absolution for his enemies*: "Father, forgive them. Do not punish them; forgive them. Do not remember their sin; forgive it, blot it out; throw it into the depths of the sea. Remember it not, my Father. Mention it not against them any more for ever. Father, forgive them." Oh, blessed prayer, for the forgiveness of God is broad and deep! When man forgives, he leaves the remembrance of the wrong behind; but when God pardons, he says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." It is this that Christ asked for you and me long before we had any repentance, or any faith; and in answer to that prayer, we were brought to feel our sin, we were brought to confess it, and to believe in him; and now, glory be to his name, we can bless him for having pleaded for us, and obtained the forgiveness of all our sins.

IV. I come now to my last remark. Which is this, WE NOW REJOICE IN THE PARDON WE HAVE OBTAINED.

Have you obtained pardon? Is this your song?

"Now, oh joy! My sins are pardon'd,
Now I can, and do believe."

I have a letter, in my pocket, from a man of education and standing, who has been an agnostic; he says that he was a sarcastic agnostic, and he writes praising God, and invoking every blessing upon my head for bringing him to the Saviour's feet. He says, "I was without happiness for this life, and without hope for the next." I believe that that is a truthful description of many an unbeliever. What hope is there for the world to come apart from the cross of Christ? The best hope such a man has is that he may die the death of a dog, and there may be an end of him. What is the hope of the

Romanist, when he comes to die? I feel so sorry for many of the devout and earnest friends, for I do not know what their hope is. They do not hope to go to heaven yet, at any rate; some purgatorial pains must be endured first. Ah, this is a poor, poor faith to die on, to have such a hope as that to trouble your last thoughts. I do not know of any religion but that of Christ Jesus which tells us of sin pardoned, absolutely pardoned. Now, listen. Our teaching is not that, when you come to die, you may, perhaps, find out that it is all right, but, "Beloved, now we are the sons of God." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." He has it now, and he knows it, and he rejoices in it. So I come back to the last head of my discourse, we rejoice in the pardon Christ has obtained for us. We are pardoned. I hope that the larger portion of this audience can say, "By the grace of God, we know that the larger portion of this audience can say, "By the grace of God, we know that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb."

Pardon has come to us through Christ's plea. Our hope lies in the plea of Christ, and specially in his death. If Jesus paid my debt, and he did it if I am a believer in him, then I am out of debt. If Jesus bore the penalty of my sin, and he did it if I am a believer, then there is no penalty for me to pay, for we can say to him,—

"Complete atonement thou hast made,
 And to the utmost farthing paid
 Whate'er thy people owed:
 Nor can his wrath on me take place,
 If shelter'd in thy righteousness,
 And sprinkled with thy blood.
 "If thou hast my discharge procured,
 And freely in my room endured
 The whole of wrath divine:
 Payment God cannot twice demand,
 First of my bleeding Surety's hand,
 And then again at mine."

If Christ has borne my punishment, I shall never bear it. Oh, what joy there is in this blessed assurance! Your hope that you are pardoned lies in this, that Jesus died. Those dear wounds of his are bled for you.

We praise him for our pardon because *we do know now what we did*. Oh, brethren, I know not how much we ought to love Christ, because we sinned against him so grievously! Now we know that sin is "exceeding sinful." Now we know that sin crucified Christ. Now we know that we stabbed our heavenly Lover to his heart. We slew, with ignominious death, our best and dearest Friend and Benefactor. We know that now; and we could almost weep tears of blood to think that we ever treated him as we did. But, it is all forgiven, all gone. Oh, let us bless that dear Son of God, who has put away even such sins as ours! We feel them more now than ever before. We know they are forgiven, and our grief is because of the pain that the purchase of our forgiveness cost our Saviour. We never knew what our sins really were till we saw him in a bloody sweat. We never knew the crimson hue of our sins till we read our pardon written in crimson lines with his precious blood. Now, we see our sin, and yet we do not see it; for God has pardoned it, blotted it out, cast it behind his back for ever.

Henceforth *ignorance*, such as we have described, *shall be hateful to us*. Ignorance of Christ and eternal things shall be hateful to us. If, through ignorance, we have sinned, we will have done

with that ignorance. We will be students of his Word. We will study that masterpiece of all the sciences, the knowledge of Christ crucified. We will ask the Holy Ghost to drive far from us the ignorance that gendereth sin. God grant that we may not fall into sins of ignorance any more; but may we be able to say, "I know whom I have believed; and henceforth I will seek more knowledge, till I comprehend, with all saints, what are the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of the love of Christ, and know the love of God, which passeth knowledge"!

I put in a practical word here. If you rejoice that you are pardoned, *show your gratitude by your imitation of Christ*. There was never before such a plea as this, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Plead like that for others. Has anybody been injuring you? Are there persons who slander you? Pray to-night, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Let us always render good for evil, blessing for cursing; and when we are called to suffer through the wrong-doing of others, let us believe that they would not act as they do if it were not because of their ignorance. Let us pray for them; and make their very ignorance the plea for their forgiveness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

I want you to think of the millions of London just now. See those miles of streets, pouring out their children this evening; but look at those public-houses with the crowds streaming in and out. God down our streets by moonlight. See what I almost blush to tell. Follow men and women, too, to their homes, and be this your prayer: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." That silver bell—keep it always ringing. What did I say? That silver bell? Nay, it is the *golden* bell upon the priests garments. Wear it on your garments, ye priests of God, and let it always ring out its golden note, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." If I can set all God's saints imitating Christ with such a prayer as this, I shall not have spoken in vain.

Brethren, I see *reason for hope in the very ignorance that surrounds us*. I see hope for this poor city of ours, hope for this poor country, hope for Africa, China, and India. "They know not what they do." Here is a strong argument in their favour, for they are more ignorant than we were. They know less of the evil of sin, and less of the hope of eternal life, than we do. Send up this petition, ye people of God! Heap your prayers together with cumulative power, send up this fiery shaft of prayer, straight to the heart of God, while Jesus from his throne shall add his prevalent intercession, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

If there be any unconverted people here, and I know that there are some, we will mention them in our private devotion, as well as in the public assembly; and we will pray for them in words like these, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." May God bless you all, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Luke 23:33-46. John 19:25-30.

We have often read the story of our Saviour's sufferings; but we cannot read it too often. Let us, therefore, once again repair to "the place which is called Calvary." As we just now sang,—

"Come, let us stand beneath the cross;
So may the blood from out his side
Fall gently on us drop by drop;
Jesus, our Lord is crucified."

We will read, first, Luke's account of our Lord's crucifixion and death.

Luke 23:33. *And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one of the right hand, and the other on the left.*

They gave Jesus the place of dishonour. Reckoning him to be the worst criminal of the three, they put him between the other two. They heaped upon him the utmost scorn which they could give to a malefactor; and in so doing they unconsciously honoured him. Jesus always deserves the chief place wherever he is. In all things he must have the pre-eminence. He is King of sufferers as well as King of saints.

34. *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

How startled they must have been to hear such words from one who was about to be put to death for a supposed crime! The men that drove the nails, the men that lifted up the tree, must have been started back with amazement when they heard Jesus talk to God as his Father, and pray for them: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Did ever Roman legionary hear such words before? I should say not. They were so distinctly and diametrically opposed to the whole spirit of Rome. There is was blow for blow; only in the case of Jesus they gave blows where none had been received. The crushing cruelty of the Roman must have been startled indeed at such words as these, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

34, 35. *And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding.*

The gambling soldiers little dreamed that they were fulfilling Scriptures while they were raffling for the raiment of the illustrious Sufferer on the cross; yet so it was. In the twenty-second Psalm, which so fully sets forth our Saviour's sufferings, and which he probably repeated while he hung on the tree, David wrote, "They parted my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." "And the people stood beholding," gazing, looking on the cruel spectacle. You and I would not have done that; there is a public sentiment which has trained us to hate the sight of cruelty, especially of deadly cruelty to one of our own race; but these people thought that they did no harm when they "stood beholding." They also were thus fulfilling the Scriptures; for the seventeenth verse of the twenty-second Psalm says, "They look and stare upon me."

35. *And the rulers also with them derided him,*

Laughed at him, made him the object of course jests.

35, 36. *Saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar.*

In mockery, not giving it to him, as they did later in mercy; but in mockery, pretending to present him with weak wine, such as they drank.

37. *And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*

I fancy the scorn that they threw into their taunt: "If thou be the king of the Jews;" that was a bit of their own. "Save thyself;" that they borrowed from the rulers. Sometimes a scoffer or a mocker cannot exhibit all the bitterness that is in his heart except by using borrowed terms, as these soldiers did.

38. *And a superscription also was written over him in the letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

John tells us that Pilate wrote this title, and that the chief priests tried in vain to get him to alter it. It was written in the three current languages of the time, so that the Greek, the Roman, and the Jew might alike understand who he was who was thus put to death. Pilate did not know as much about Christ as we do, or he might have written, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS, AND OF THE GENTILES, TOO.

39. *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.*

He, too, borrows this speech from the rulers who derided Christ, only putting the words "and us" as a bit of originality. "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us."

40, 41. *But the other answering rebuked him saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.*

A fine testimony to Christ: "This man hath done nothing amiss;" nothing unbecoming, nothing out of order, nothing criminal, certainly; but nothing even "amiss." This testimony was well spoken by this dying thief.

42-46. *And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, in the thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up his ghost.*

He yielded his life. He did not die, as we have to do, because our appointed time has come, but willingly the great Sacrifice parted with his life: "He gave up the ghost." He was a willing sacrifice for guilty men.

Now let us see what John says concerning these hours of agony, these hours of triumph.

John 19:25. *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.*

Last at the cross, first at the sepulchre. No woman's lip betrayed her Lord; no woman's hand ever smote him; their eyes wept for him; they gazed upon him with pitying awe and love. God bless the Marys! When we see so many of them about the cross, we feel that we honour the very name of Mary.

26, *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!*

Sad, sad spectacle! Now was fulfilled the word of Simeon, "Yes, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Did the Saviour mean, as he gave a glance to John, "Woman, thou art losing one Son; but yonder stands another, who will be a son to thee in my absence"? "Woman, behold thy son!"

27. *Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!*

"Take her as thy mother, stand thou in my place, care for her as I have cared for her." Those who love Christ best shall have the honour of taking care of his church and of his poor. Never say of any poor relative or friend, the widow or the fatherless, "They are a great burden to me." Oh, no! Say, "They are a great honour to me; my Lord has entrusted them to my care." John thought so; let us think so. Jesus selected the disciple he loved best to take his mother under his care. He selects those whom he loves best to-day, and puts his poor people under their wing. Take them gladly, and treat them well.

27, *And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home*

You expected him to do it, did you not? He loved his Lord so well.

28, *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.*

There was a prophecy to that effect in the Psalms, and he must needs fulfil that. Think of a dying man prayerfully going through the whole of the Scriptures and carefully fulfilling all that is there written concerning him: "That the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus saith, I thirst."

29, 30. *Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar,*

For he did receive it. It was a weak kind of wine, commonly drunk by the soldiery. This is not that mixed potion which he refused, wine mingled with myrrh, which was intended to stupefy the dying in their pains: "When he had tasted thereof, he would not drink;" for he would not be stupefied. He came to suffer to the bitter end the penalty of sin; and he would not have his sorrow mitigated; but when this slight refreshment was offered to him, he received it. Having just expressed his human weakness by saying, "I thirst," he now manifests his all-sufficient strength by crying, with a loud voice as Matthew, Mark, and Luke all testify.

30. *He said, It is finished:*

What "it" was it that was finished? I will not attempt to expound it. It is the biggest "it" that ever was/ Turn it over and you will see that it will grow, and grow, and grow, and grow, till it fills the whole earth: "It is finished." 20. *And he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

He did not give up the ghost, and then bow his head, because he was dead; but he bowed his head as though in the act of worship, or as leaning it down upon his Father's bosom, and then gave up the ghost.

Thus have we had two gospel pictures of our dying Lord. May we remember them, and learn the lessons they are intended to teach!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—561, 279, 278.

Sowing in the Wind, Reaping under Clouds

A Sermon

(No. 2264)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, July 10th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, July 3rd, 1890.

"He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap."—Ecclesiastes 11:4.

SOW when the time comes, whatever wind blows. Reap when the times comes, whatever clouds are in the sky. There are, however, qualifying proverbs, which must influence our actions. We are not to discard prudence in the choice of the time for our work. "To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." It is well to sow when the weather is propitious. It is wise to "make hay while the sun shines." Cut your corn when there is the probability of getting it dry.

But Solomon here is pushing the other side of the matter. He had seen prudence turn to idleness; he had noticed some people wait for a more convenient season, which never came. He had observed sluggards making excuses, which did not hold water. So he, with a blunt word, generalizes, in order to make the truth more forcible. Not troubling about the exceptions to the rule, he states it broadly thus: "Take no notice of winds or clouds. Go one with your work whatever happens. 'He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.'"

I. The first thought that is suggested by these words is this: NATURAL DIFFICULTIES MAY BE UNDULY CONSIDERED. A man may observe the wind, and regard the clouds a great deal too much, and so neither sow nor reap.

Note here, first, that *in any work this would hinder a man*. In any labour to which we set our hand, if we take too much notice of the difficulties, we shall be hindered in it. It is very wise to know the difficulty of your calling, the sorrow which comes with it, the trial which arises out of it, the temptation connected therewith; but if you think too much of these things, there is no calling that will be carried on with any success. Poor farmers, they have a crop of hay and cannot get it in; they may fret themselves to death if they like, and never earn a penny for a seven years' fretting! We say of their calling that it is surrounded with constant trouble. They may lose everything just at the moment when they are about to gather it in. The seed may perish under the clods when it is first sown. It is subject to blight and mildew, and bird, and worm, and I know not what beside; and then, at the last, when the farmer is about to reap the harvest, it may disappear before the sickle can cut it. Take the case of the sailor. If he regards winds and clouds, will he ever be put to sea? Can you give him a promise that the wind will be favourable in any of his voyages, or that he will reach his desired haven without a tempest? He that observeth the winds and clouds, will not sail; and he that regardeth the clouds will never cross the mighty deep. If you turn from the farmer and the sailor, and come to the trader, what tradesman will do anything if he is always worrying about the competition, and about the difficulties of his trade, which is so cut up that there is no making

a living by it? I have heard this, I think, about every trade, and yet our friends keep on living, and some of them get rich, when they are supposed to be losing money every year! He that regardeth the rise and fall of prices, and is timid, and will do no trading because of the changes on the market, will not reap. If you come to the working-man, it is the same as with those I have mentioned; for there is no calling or occupation that is not surrounded with difficulties. In fact, I have formed this judgment from what friends have told me, that every trade is the worst trade out; for I have found somebody in that particular line who has proved this to a demonstration. I cannot say that I am an implicit believer in all I hear about this matter. Still, if I were, this would be the conclusion that I should come to, that he that observed the circumstances of any trade or calling, would never engage in it at all; he would never sow; and he would never reap. I suppose he would go to bed, and sleep all the four-and-twenty hours of the day; and after a while, I am afraid he would find it become impossible even to do that, and he would learn that to turn, with the sluggard, like a door on its hinges, is not unalloyed pleasure after all.

Well now, dear friends, if there be these difficulties in connection with earthly callings and trades, do you expect there will be nothing of the kind with regard to heavenly things? Do you imagine that, in sowing the good seed of the kingdom, and gathering the sheaves into the garner, you will have no difficulties and disappointments? Do you dream that, when you are bound for heaven, you are to have smooth sailing and propitious winds all the voyage? Do you think that, in your heavenly trading, you will have less trials than the merchant who has only to do with earthly business? If you do, you make a great mistake. You will not be likely to enter upon the heavenly calling, if you do nothing else but unduly consider the difficulties surrounding it.

But, next, *in the work of liberality this would stay us*. This is Solomon's theme here. "Cast thy bread upon the waters:" "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight;" and so on. He means, by my text, that if anybody occupies his mind unduly with the difficulties connected with liberality, he will do nothing in that line. "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." "How am I to know," says one, "that the person to whom I give my money is really deserving? How do I know what he will do with it? How do I know but what I may be encouraging idleness or begging? By giving to the man, I may be doing him real injury." Perhaps you are not asked to give to an individual, but to some great work. Then, if you regard the clouds, you will begin to say, "How do I know that this work will be successful, the sending of missionaries to a cultivated people like the Hindoos? Is it likely that they will be converted?" You will not sow, and you will not reap, if you talk like that; yet there are many who do speak in that fashion. There was never an enterprise started yet but somebody objected to it; and I do not believe that the best work that Christ himself ever did was beyond criticism; there were some people who were sure to find some fault with it. "But," says another, "I have heard that the management at headquarters is not all it ought to be; I think that there is too much money spent on the secretary, and that there is a great deal lost in this direction and in that." Well, dear friend, it goes without saying that if *you* managed things, they would be managed perfectly; but, you see, you cannot do everything, and therefore you must trust somebody. I can only say, with regard to societies, agencies, works, and missions of all kinds, "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." If that is what you are doing, finding out imperfections and difficulties, it will end in this, you will do nothing at all.

Going a little further, as this is true of common occupations and of liberality, so it is especially true *in the work of serving God*. Now, if I were to consider in my mind nothing but the natural

depravity of man, I should never preach again. To preach the gospel to sinners, is as foolish a thing as to bid dead men rise out of their graves. For that reason I do it, because it has pleased God, "by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." When I look upon the alienation from God, the hardness of the human heart, I see that old Adam is too strong for me; and if I regarded that one cloud of the fall, and original sin, and the natural depravity of man, I, for one, should neither sow nor reap. I am afraid that there has been a good deal of this, however. Many preachers have contemplated the ruin of man, and they have had so clear a view of it that they dare not say, "Thus saith the Lord, Ye dry bones, live." They are unable to cry, "Dear Master, speak through us, and say, 'Lazarus, come forth!'" Some seem to say, "Go and see if Lazarus has any kind of feeling of his condition in the grave. If so, I will call him out, because I believe he can come;" thus putting all the burden on Lazarus, and depending upon Lazarus for it. But we say, "Though he has been dead four days, and is already becoming corrupt, that has nothing to do with us. If our Master bids us call him out from his grave, we can call him out, and he will come; not because he can come by his own power, but because God can make him come, for the time now is when they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of God, and they that shall hear shall live.

But, dear friends, there are persons to whom we should never go to seek their salvation if we regarded the winds and the clouds, for they are peculiarly bad people. You know, from observation, that there are some persons who are much worse than others, some who are not amenable to kindness, or any other human treatment. They do not seem to be terrified by law, or affected by love. We know people who go into a horrible temper every now and then, and all the hope we had of them is blown away, like sere leaves in the autumn wind. You know such, and you "fight shy" with them. There are such boys, and there are such girls, full of mischief, and levity, or full of malice and bitterness; and you say to yourself, "I cannot do anything with them. It is of no use." Just so. You are observing the winds, and regarding the clouds. You will not be one of those to whom Isaiah says, "Blessed be ye that sow beside all waters."

Some one may say, "I would not mind the moral condition of the people, but it is their surroundings that are the trouble. What is the use of trying to save a man while he lives, as he does, in such a horrible street, in one room? What is the use of seeking to raise such and such a woman while she is surrounded, as she is, with such examples? The very atmosphere seems tainted." Just so, dear friend; while you observe the winds, and regard the clouds, you will now sow, and you will not reap. You will not attempt the work, and of course you will not complete what you do not commence.

So, you know, you can go on making all kinds of excuses for doing nothing with certain people, because you feel or think that they are not those whom God is likely to bless. I know this to be a common case, even with very serious and earnest workers for Christ. Let it not be so with you, dear friends; but be you one of those who obey the poet's words,—

"Beside all waters sow;
The highway furrows stock;
Drop it where thorns and thistles grow;
Scatter it on the rock."

Let me carry this principle, however, a little further. You may unduly consider circumstances in reference to *the business of your own eternal life*. You may, in that matter, observe the winds, and never sow; you may regard the clouds, and never reap. "I feel," says one, "as if I never can be saved. There never was such a sinner as I am. My sins are peculiarly black." Yes, and if you keep

on regarding them, and do not remember the Saviour, and his infinite power to save, you will not sow in prayer and faith. "Ah, sir; but you do not know the horrible thoughts I have, the dark forebodings that cross my mind!" I know that, dear friend; I do not know them. I know what I feel myself, and I expect that your feelings are very like my own; but, be what they may, if, instead of looking to Christ, you are always studying your own condition, your own withered hopes, your own broken resolutions, then you will still keep where you are, and you will neither sow nor reap.

Beloved Christians, you who have been believers for years, if you begin to live by your frames and feelings, you will get into the same condition. "I do not feel like praying," says one. Then is the time when you ought to pray most, for you are evidently most in need; but if you keep observing whether or not you are in the proper frame of mind for prayer, you will not pray. "I cannot grasp the promises," says another; "I should like to joy in God, and firmly believe in his Word; but I do not see anything in myself that can minister to my comfort." Suppose you do not. Are you, after all, going to build upon yourself? Are you trying to find your ground of consolation in your own heart? If so, you are on the wrong tack. Our hope is not in self, but in Christ; let us go and sow it. Our hope is in the finished work of Christ; let us go and reap it; for, if we keep on regarding the winds and the clouds, we shall neither sow nor reap. I think it is a great lesson to learn in spiritual things, to believe in Christ, and his finished salvation, quite as much as when you are down as when you are up; for Christ is not more Christ on the top of the mountain than he is in the bottom of the valley, and he is no less Christ in the storm by midnight than he is in the sunshine by day. Do not begin to measure your safety by your comfort; but measure it by the eternal Word of God, which you have believed, and which you know to be true, and on which you rest; for still here, within the little world of our bosom, "he that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." We want to get out of that idea altogether.

I have said enough to prove the truth of my first observation, namely, that natural difficulties may be unduly considered.

II. My second observation is this: **SUCH CONSIDERATION INVOLVES US IN SEVERAL SINS.**

If we keep on observing circumstances, instead of trusting God, we shall be guilty of *disobedience*. God bids me sow: I do not sow, because the wind would blow some of my seed away. God bids me reap: I do not reap, because there is a black cloud there, and before I can house the harvest, some of it may be spoiled. I may say what I like; but I am guilty of disobedience. I have not done what I was bidden to do. I have made an excuse of the weather; but I have been disobedient. Dear friends, it is yours to do what God bids you do, whether the heavens fall down or not; and, if you knew they would fall, and you could prop them up by disobedience, you have no right to do it. What may happen from our doing right, we have nothing to do with; we are to do right, and take the consequences cheerfully. Do you want obedience to be always rewarded by a spoonful of sugar? Are you such a baby that you will do nothing unless there shall be some little toy for you directly after? A man in Christ Jesus will do right, though it shall involve him in losses and crosses, slanders and rebukes; yea, even martyrdom itself. May God help you so to do! He that observeth the wind, and does not sow when he is bidden to cast his seed upon the waters, is guilty of disobedience.

Next, we are guilty also of *unbelief*, if we cannot sow because of the wind. Who manages the wind? You distrust him who is Lord of the north, and south, and east, and west. If you cannot reap because of a cloud, you doubt him who makes the clouds, to whom the clouds are the dust of his

feet. Where is your faith? Where is your faith? "Ah!" says one, "I can serve God when I am helped, when I am moved, when I can see a hope of success." That is poor service, service devoid of faith. May I not say of it, "Without faith it is impossible to please God"? Just in proportion to the quantity of faith, that there is in what we do, in that proportion will it be acceptable with God. Observing of winds and clouds is unbelief. We may call it prudence; but unbelief is its true name.

The next sin is really *rebellion*. So you will not sow unless God chooses to make the wind blow your way; and you will not reap unless God pleases to drive the clouds away? I call that revolt, rebellion. An honest subject loves the king in all weathers. The true servant serves his master, let his master do what he wills. Oh, dear friends, we are too often aiming at God's throne! We want to get up there, and manage things,—

"Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge his judgments, be the god of God."

Oh, if he would but alter my circumstances! What is this but tempting God, as they did in the wilderness, wishing him to do other than he does? It is wishing him to do wrong; for what he does is always right; but we must not so rebel, and vex his Holy Spirit, by complaining of what he does. Do you not see that this is trying to throw the blame of our shortcomings upon the Lord? "If we do not sow, do not blame us; God did not send the right wind. If we did not reap, pray not to censure us; how could we be expected to reap, while there were clouds in the skies?" What is this but a wicked endeavour to blame God for our own neglect and wrong-doing, and to make Divine Providence the pack-horse upon which we pile our sins? God save us from such rebellion as that!

Another sin of which we are guilty, when we are always looking at our circumstances, is this, *foolish fear*. Though we may think that there is no sin in it, there is great sin in foolish fear. God has commanded his people not to fear; then we should obey him. There is a cloud; why do you fear it? It will be gone directly; not a drop of rain may fall out of it. You are afraid of the wind; why fear it? It may never come. Even if it were some deadly wind that was approaching, it might shift about, and not come near you. We are often fearing what never happens. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one. Many a person has been afraid of what never would occur. It is a great pity to whip yourselves with imaginary rods. Wait till the trouble comes; else I shall have to tell you the story I have often repeated of the mother whose child would cry. She told it not to cry, but it would cry. "Well," she said, "if you will cry, I will give you something to cry for." If you get fearing about nothing, the probability is that you will get something really to fear, for God does not love his people to be fools.

There are some who fall into the sin of *penuriousness*. Observe, that Solomon was here speaking of liberality. He that observeth the clouds and the winds thinks "That is not a good object to help," and that he will do harm if he gives *here*, or if he gives *there*. It amounts to this, poor miser, you want to save your money! Oh, the ways we have of making buttons with which to secure the safety of our pockets! Some persons have a button manufactory always ready. They have always a reason for not giving to anything that is proposed to them, or to any poor person who asks their help. I pray that every child of God here may avoid that sin. "Freely ye have received, freely give." And since you are stewards of a generous Master, let it never be said that the most liberal of Lords has the stingiest of stewards.

Another sin is often called *idleness*. The man who does not sow because of the wind, is usually too lazy to sow; and the man who does not reap because of the clouds is the man who wants a little more sleep, and a little more slumber, and a little more folding of the hands to sleep. If we do not

want to serve God, it is wonderful how many reasons we can find. According to Solomon, the sluggard said there was a lion in the streets. "There is a lion in the way," said he, "a lion is in the streets." What a lie it was, for lions are as much afraid of streets as men are of deserts! Lions do not come into streets. It was idleness that said the lion was there. You were asked to preach the other night, and you could preach, but you said, no, you could not preach. However, you attended a political meeting, did you not, and talked twice as long as you would have done if you had preached? Another friend, asked to teach in Sunday-school, said, "I have no gifts of teaching." Somebody afterwards remarked of you that you had no gifts of teaching, and you felt very vexed, and asked what right had anyone to say that of you? I have heard persons run themselves down, when they have been invited to any Christian work, as being altogether disqualified; and when somebody has afterwards said, "That is true, you cannot do anything, I know," they have looked as if they would knock the speaker down. Oh, yes, yes, yes, we are always making these excuses about winds and clouds, and there is nothing in either of them. It is all meant to save our corn-seed, and to save us the trouble of sowing it.

Do you not see, I have made out a long list of sins wrapped up in this observing of winds and clouds? If you have been guilty of any of them, repent of your wrong-doing, and do not repeat it.

III. I will not keep you longer over this part of the subject. I will now make a third remark very briefly: LET US PROVE THAT WE HAVE NOT FALLEN INTO THIS EVIL. How can we prove it?

Let us prove it, firstly *by sowing in the most unlikely places*. What says Solomon? "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." Go, my brothers and sisters, and find out the most unlikely people, and begin to work for God with them. Now, try, if you can, to pick out the worst street in your neighbourhood, and visit from house to house, and if there is a man or woman more given up than another, make that person the object of your prayers and of your holy endeavours. Cast your bread upon the waters; then it will be seen that you are trusting God, not trusting the soil, nor trusting the seed.

Next, prove it *by doing good to a great many*. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight." Talk of Christ to everybody you meet with. If God has not blessed you to one, try another; and if he has blessed you with one, try two others; and if he has blessed you to two others, try four others; and always keep on enlarging your seed-plot as your harvest comes in. If you are doing much, it will be shown that you are not regarding the winds and the clouds.

Further, prove that you are not regarding winds and clouds *by wisely learning from the clouds* another lesson than the one they seem made to teach. Learn this lesson: "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth;" and say to yourself, "If God has made me full of grace, I will go and pour it out to others. I know the joy of being saved, if I have had fellowship with him, I will make a point of being more industrious than ever, because God has been unusually gracious to me. My fulness shall be helpful to others. I will empty myself for the good of others, even as the clouds pour down the rain upon the earth."

Then, beloved, prove it still *by not wanting to know how God will work*. There is a great mystery of birth, how the human soul comes to inhabit the body of the child, and how the child is fashioned. Thou knowest nothing about it, and thou canst not know. Therefore do not look about thee to see what thou canst not understand, and pry into what is concealed from thee. Go out and work; go out and preach; go out and instruct others. Go out to seek to win souls. Thus shalt thou prove, in very truth, that thou art not dependent upon surroundings and circumstances.

Again, dear friend, prove this *by consistent diligence*. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand." "Be instant in season, out of season." I had a friend, who had learned the way to put a peculiar meaning upon that passage of Scripture, "Let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth." He thought that the best way was to have money in both pockets; put one hand into each pocket, and then put both hands on the collection plate. I never objected to this interpretation of the passage. Now, the way to serve Christ is to do all you possibly can, and then as much more. "No," says you, "that cannot be." I do not know that it cannot be. I found that the best thing I ever did was a thing I could not do. What I could do well, that was my own; but what I could not do, but still did, in the name and strength of the Eternal Jehovah, was the best thing I had done. Beloved, sow in the morning, sow in the evening, sow at night, sow all day long, for you can never tell what God will bless; but by this constant sowing, you will prove to demonstration that you are not observing the winds, nor regarding the clouds.

IV. I now come to my concluding observation: LET US KEEP THIS EVIL OUT OF OUR HEARTS AS WELL AS OUT OF OUR WORK.

And, first, *let us give no heed to the winds and clouds of doctrine* that are everywhere about us now. Blow, blow, ye stormy winds; but you shall not move me. Clouds of hypotheses and inventions, come up with you, as many as you please, till you darken all the sky; but I will not fear you. Such clouds have come before, and have disappeared, and these will disappear, too. If you sit down, and think of man's inventions of error, and their novel doctrines, and how the churches have been bewitched by them, you will get into such a state of mind that you will neither sow nor reap. Just forget them. Give yourself to your holy service as if there were no winds and no clouds; and God will give you such comfort in your soul that you will rejoice before him, and be confident in his truth.

And then, next, *let us not lose hope because of doubts and temptations*. When the clouds and the winds get into your heart, when you do not feel as you used to feel, when you have not that joy and elasticity of spirit you once had, when your ardour seems a little damped, and even your faith begins to hesitate a little, go you to God all the same. Trust him still.

"And when thine eye of faith grows dim,
Still hold to Jesus, sink or swim;
Still at his footstool bow the knee,
And Israel's God thy strength shall be."

Do not go up and down like the mercury in the weather-glass; but know what you know, and believe what you believe. Hold to it, and God keep you in one mind, so that none can turn you; for, if not, if you begin to notice these things, you will neither sow nor reap.

Lastly, *let us follow the Lord's mind, and come what will*. In a word, set your face, like a flint, to serve God, by the maintenance of his truth, by your holy life, by the savour of your Christian character; and, that being done, defy earth and hell. If there were a crowd of devils between you and Christ, kick a lane through them by holy faith. They will fly before you. If you have but the courage to make an advance, they cannot stop you. You shall make a clear gangway through legions of them. Only be strong, and of good courage, and do not regard even the clouds from hell, or the blasts from the infernal pit; but go straight on in the path of right, and God being with you, you shall sow and you shall reap, unto his eternal glory.

Will some poor sinner here to-night, whether he sinks or swims, trust Christ? Come, if you feel less inclined to-night to hope, than you ever did before. Have hope even now; hope against hope;

belief against belief. Cast yourself on Christ, even though he may seem to stand with a drawn sword in his hand, to run you through; trust even an angry Christ. Though your sins have grieved him, come and trust him. Do not stop for winds to blow over, or clouds to burst. Just as thou art, without one trace of anything that is good about thee, come and trust Christ as thy Saviour, and thou art saved. God give you grace to do so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Ecclesiastes 11-12.

11:1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.*

Hoard not thy bread; for if thou dost, it will mildew, it will be of no use to thee. Cast it on the waters; scatter it abroad; give it to the unworthy men if need be. Some here have seen an allusion to the casting of seed into the Nile when it overflowed its banks. When the waters subsided, the corn would grow, and be gathered in "after many days."

2. *Give a portion to seven,*

And if that be a perfect number, give beyond it,

2. *And also to eight;*

Give to more than thou canst afford to give to. Help some who are doubtful, some who are outside of the perfect number, and give them a portion, a fair portion. Our Saviour went beyond Solomon; for he said, "Give to every man that asketh of thee."

2. *For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.*

Thou knowest not what need there may be of thy help; nor what need may come to thee, and how thou thyself mayest be helped by those whom thou helpest now.

3. *If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth;*

Thou knowest not what need there may be of thy help; nor what need may come to thee, and how thou thyself mayest be helped by those whom thou helpest now.

3. *And if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.*

The tree falls the way it is inclined; but when it has fallen, there it must be. God grant that you and I may fall the right way when the axe of death hews us down! Which way are we inclined?

4, 5. *He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.*

There are great mysteries which we can never comprehend. God alone knows how the soul comes into the body, or even how the body is fashioned. This must remain with him. We do not know how sinners are regenerated. We know not how the Spirit of God works upon the mind of man, and transforms the sinner into a saint. We do not know. There are some who know too much already. I have not half the desire to know that I have to believe and to love. Oh, that we loved God more, and trusted God more! We might then get to heaven if we knew even less than we do.

6. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

You cannot make the gospel enter into men's hearts. You cannot tell how it does enter and change them. The Spirit of God does that; but your duty is to go on telling it out. Go on spreading abroad the knowledge of Christ; in the morning, and in the evening, and all day long, scatter the good seed of the kingdom. You have nothing to do with the result of your sowing; that remains with the Lord. That which you sow in the morning may prosper, or the seed that you scatter in the evening; possibly God will bless both. You are to keep on sowing, whether you reap or not.

7, 8. *Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.*

Take Christ away, and this is a truthful estimate of human life. Put Christ into the question, and Solomon does not hit the mark at all. If we have Christ with us, whether the days are light or dark, we walk in the light, and our soul is happy and glad; but apart from Christ, the estimate of life which is given here is an exactly accurate one—a little brightness and long darkness, a flash and then midnight. God save you from living a merely natural life! May you rise to the supernatural! May you get out of the lower life of the mere animal into the higher life of the regenerated soul! If the life of God be in you, then you shall go from strength to strength like the sun that shineth unto the perfect day.

9. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

Young man, will you dare, then, to follow your passions, and the devices of your own heart, with this at thy back, "God will bring thee into judgment?" Oh no, the advice of Solomon, apparently so evil, is answered by warning at the end, which is also true,—

10. *Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.*

"Remove sorrow," or rather, anger, ambition, or anything else that would cause sorrow, "from thy heart; and put away evil from thy flesh." Let not thy fleshly nature rule thee; thou art in the period when flesh is strong towards evil, when "vanity" is the ruin of many.

12:1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.*

Now we get on solid ground. There is an irony in the advice, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." There is no irony here; there is solid, sound advice: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." May every young man take this advice, and carry it out!

1-3. *While the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,*

These arms and hands of ours shake by reason of weakness.

3. *And the strong men shall bow themselves,*

These limbs, these legs of ours, begin to bend under the weight they have to support.

3. *And the grinders cease because they are few,*

The teeth are gone.

3. *And those that look out of the windows be darkened,*

The eyesight begins to fail.

4. *And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;*

The old man sleeps very lightly; anything awakens him. He hides away from public business. The doors are shut in the streets.

5. *Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way.*

There is none of the courage of youth. Daring is gone; prudence, not to say cowardice, sits on the throne.

5. *And the almond tree shall flourish,*

The hair is white and grey, like the early peach or almond tree in the beginning of the year.

5. *And the grasshopper shall be a burden,*

A little trouble weighs the old man down. He has no energy now. The grasshopper is a burden.

5, 6. *And desire shall fail: because men to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden cord be broken.*

Before the spinal cord is broken, or the skull becomes emptied of the living inhabitants.

6. *Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.*

The circulation of the blood begins to fail, the heart grows weak, it will soon stop. The man's career is nearly over.

7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

This will happen to us all, either to return to dust or else return to God. Whether we die, and return to dust, or live until the coming of Christ, our spirit shall return to God who gave it. May the return be a joyous one for each of us!

8-11. *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads,*

They prick us onward, as the goad does the bullock, when he is trying to stop instead of ploughing in the furrow.

11. *And as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.*

The words of the wise are driven home, like nails, and clinched. There is one Shepherd who, by means of his servants' words, leads his flock where he would have them go.

12, 13. *And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the duty of man.*

Or, "this is the whole of man." It makes a man of him when he fears God and keeps his commandments; he has that which makes him "the whole man."

14. *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Depend upon it that it will be so. At the last great day, there will be a revelation of everything, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Nor need the righteous fear that revelation, for they will only magnify in that day the amazing grace of God which has put all their iniquities away; and then shall all men know how great the grace of God was in passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—748, 747, 753.

Harvest Joy

A Sermon

(No. 2265)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day, July 17th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, July 6th, 1890.

"Thou hast magnified the nation, and increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."—Isaiah 9:3.

Notice that I make a correction in the version from which I am reading. The Authorized Version has it, "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy." This is not consistent with the connection; the Revised Version has very properly put it, "Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased their joy." I have not any learning to display; but I think I could show it to you, if this were the proper time, how the passage came to be read with a "not", and I could also prove to you that, in this instance, the Revisers were right in making their alteration.

To-night, there are about eighty-two persons, who have confessed Christ before the church, and have been baptized, who are to be received into our fellowship; and we feel very grateful for this large addition to our members; and all the more so because it is no strange thing; but month by month, all the year round, they continue to come, though, not in such large numbers as at this time. God be thanked for thus blessing us! We cannot allow these occasions to pass over without joying before the Lord as men rejoice when they gather in their sheaves of corn.

To bring out your joy, think of how we should feel if we did not have an increase in the church, where very few are ever added to them. The good old people seem quite content to be very few. Their notion is that the way to heaven is very narrow, as indeed it is, and that therefore they must not expect many to find their way. I remember a church where the good old deacons used to say of the converts, "Summer them and winter them. Keep them out till we have tried them for a very long time." It came to pass, after the process of "summering and wintering", that a great many of them never came forward at all. Though they were very excellent people, they never summoned courage enough to join such a church. Did you ever hear a farmer say of his wheat, "Summer it and winter it, and then take it into the barn"? No, farmers are not such fools. But these good men were so very wise that they became otherwise; so they said, "Keep the corn out in the field; else you will bring in some poppies, or some corn-flowers, and we do not want them. Keep the converts out of the church till you are sure that there are no hypocrites among them." Well, dear friends, we are not at all of this mind. We try to use every caution, and great prudence; and our friends do not come into this church without experiencing an examination, some of them even think it to be an ordeal; yet I find that the more difficult it is to get into a church, the more people want to come into it; and whenever the barriers are lowered, and you tell people that they may come without any test as to the state of their souls, nobody cares to come. Well, we have taken pains and care, and have sought only to welcome the worthy, that is, those who are trusting in Jesus, yet we have had a great number come. But suppose that we had none. Well, I hope every Christian man and woman here

would be troubled about it. I should not wonder if the question arose, "Had we not better put somebody else on the platform?" That somebody who is now here would be the first to say, "If I am doing no good, let somebody else come and try; for it would be sad and sickening business to be fishing for souls, and never catching anything." Last winter, at Menton, I went out in a boat, where I was assured that there were shoals of fish; and I had a line, I should think it was a hundred and fifty feet long, and after waiting hour after hour, and never feeling the fish bite, I gave up the useless occupation. I think every minister is bound to give up the spiritual fishery in any particular place if, after many days' toil, he has caught nothing for Christ. Rachel says, "Give me children, or I die." Christ servant says, "Give me converts, or I die." Indeed, we are dead as far as our ministry is concerned unless God blesses it.

We also feel that we ought to be glad when others are joined to the church, because we look back, with exquisite pleasure, upon our own joining it. I remember the trouble it cost me to join the church. I think I went to see the pastor some four or five days running; he was always too busy to see me, till at last I told him it did not matter, for I want to go to the church-meeting, and propose myself as a member; and then he, all of a sudden, found time to see me, and so I managed to get into the church, and confess my faith in Christ. Oh, dear friends, that was one of the best days' work I ever did, when I openly declared my faith in Christ, and united myself with his people! I think many here could say the same; they remember when they united with the people of God, and publicly avowed their faith. You do not regret it brethren, do you? I am sure you feel that it was a happy day when you could say,—

"'Tis done! The great transaction's done:

I am my Lord's, and he is mine."

By the peace of mind which has come to us from joining with the people of God after believing in Christ, we feel glad to see other young soldiers stooping to take up the cross of Christ, and following him, "without the camp, bearing his reproach."

I. Looking at our text, I notice in it, first, A WORD OF DISCRIMINATION. If you look carefully at the passage, you will soon see it: "*Thou* hast multiplied the nation, and increased the joy."

Observe, first, that *conversion must be the Lord's work*. The only multiplication of the Church of God that is to be desired is that which God sends: "Thou hast multiplied the nation." If we add to our churches by becoming worldly, by taking in persons who have never been born again; if we add to our churches by accommodating the life of the Christian to the life of the worldling, our increase is worth nothing at all; it is a loss rather than a gain. If we add to our churches by excitement, by making appeals to the passions, rather than by explaining truth to the understanding; if we add to our churches otherwise than by the power of the Spirit of God making men new creatures in Christ Jesus, the increase is of no worth whatever. A man picked himself up from the gutter, and rolled up against Mr. Rowland Hill, one night as he went home, and he said, "Mr. Hill, I am pleased to see you, sir. I am one of your converts." Rowland said, "I thought it was very likely you were. You are not one of God's converts, or else you would not be drunk." There is a great lesson in that answer. My converts are no good; Rowland Hill's converts could get drunk; but the converts of the Spirit of God, those are really renewed in the spirit of their mind, by a supernatural operation, these are a real increase to the church of God. "Thou hast multiplied the nation." Pray hard that the Lord may continue to send us converts. He never sends the wrong people. However poor they may be,

however illiterate, if they are converted, as they will be if the Lord sends them, they will be the very people that we want. May God send us thousands more!

The text also teaches us, with a word of discrimination, that *conversion must be such as the Lord describes* in this chapter: "The peoples that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." When God brings men to the church, they are the people who have undergone a very remarkable change. They have come out of darkness, palpable, horrible, into light, marvelous and delightful. God sends no other than these. If you are not changed characters, if you are not new creatures in Christ Jesus, if you cannot say, "One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see," the church cannot receive you as you are, and God has not sent you. Now, who can turn us from darkness unto light but God? Who can work this great miracle within the heart? Darkness of heart is very hard to move. Who but God can make the eternal light burst through the natural darkness, and turn us from the power of Satan unto God?

Next, *conversion must have a distinct relation to Christ*. Look down the chapter, just a little way, and you come to this wonderful passage: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be on his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." We want converts who know this Christ, men and women to whom he is "Wonderful", to whom he has become the "Counselor." We want no additions to the church of those who cannot call him "The mighty God. The everlasting Father." We want men and women to whom Christ has become "The Prince of Peace." If these are added to us, the church groweth exceedingly. If others are added, they do but increase our burden; they become our weakness; in many cases they become our disgrace. Dear hearers, you know whether you are trusting Christ or not. If you are, come and confess him. If you are not, weep in secret places, and cry to God the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ to you as the Wonderful, Counselor, and the mighty God, and then, when you know him as your Saviour, come and join yourself to his people, and God will, in your case, have multiplied the nation.

Once more, about this discrimination, *the joy must be such as God gives*. The text says, "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased the joy." The joy that we ought to have to-night, the joy of any growing church, will be joy such as God gives. That is the kind of joy we desire to have. If anybody wishes to see the church grow that we may excel other churches, that is not the joy that God gives. If we like to see converts because we are glad that our opinions should be spread, God does not give that joy. If we crave converts that we may steal them from other people, God does not give that joy, if it be a joy. I do not think God is the lover of sheep-stealers, and there are plenty such about. We do not desire to increase our numbers by taking Christian people away from other Christian communities. No, the joy which God gives us is clear, unselfish delight in Christ being glorified, in souls being saved, in truths being spread, and in error being baffled. God give us a joy over those who are added to us, which shall be pure, and Christlike, and heavenly! Oh, that he might increase such joy! I think that he *has* increased it.

Did you ever worship in a place where there were more pews than people? Did you ever go to a church or chapel where the preacher could preach upon anything except the gospel of Christ, where you might hear about anything except the precious blood of Christ? That, the minister would be sure not to mention. Then, I like I see you go grumbling down the aisle after every service, or you sit there, and look up at the pulpit, and long for what you never hear, till the Sabbath becomes more wearisome than any day of the week. Oh, dear! Few people; little to be got; very little to be

given; a terrible "starvation camp", where every man looks at his fellow, and wonders who is going to die next. Well, now, we ought to thank God that it is not so with us. Look on this company gathered here to-night. Think of the congregation we had this morning; remember the deep attention, and think in how many cases God has blessed the Word to the hearers. I never, personally, felt so weak, or felt as great a burden in preaching; yet I never had so large a blessing; there are more converts than ever. Glory be to God, this is the kind of joy that comes from him, in his Word, in his power, that out of weakness makes his servant strong.

So much by way of discrimination.

II. Now, secondly, notice a WORD OF DESCRIPTION, which is the main part of the text. The joy of the church in receiving converts may be compared to the joy in harvest. In all nations, the time of reaping the corn, and gathering it into the garner, has been regarded as a festival. What is the joy of harvest?

Well, it is *a joy which we ought to expect*. The husbandman expects a harvest. He says, "It is so many weeks to harvest." He sows his seed with a view to harvest, He turns in a man to clear out the weeds with a view to a harvest. Well, now, every church should be looking out for a spiritual harvest. One said to me, once, "I have preached for several years, and I believe God has blessed the word; but nobody ever comes forward to tell me so." I said to him, "Next Lord's-day, say to the people, 'I shall be in the vestry when the sermon is finished, to see friends who have been converted.' " To his surprise, ten or twelve came in; and he was quite taken aback; but, of course, quite delighted. He had not looked for a harvest, so of course he did not get it. You know the story I tell of my first student, Mr. Medhurst. He went out to preach on Tower Hill, , Sunday after Sunday. He was not then my student; but one of the young men in the church. He came to me, and said, "I have been out preaching now for several months on tower Hill, and I have not seen one conversion." I said to him, rather sharply, "Do you expect God is going to bless you every time you choose to open your mouth?" He answered, "Oh! No, sir; I do not expect him to do that." "Then," I replied, "that is why you do not get a blessing." We ought to expect a blessing. God has said, "My Word shall not return unto me void;" and it will not. We ought to look for a harvest. He who preaches the gospel with his whole heart, ought to be surprised if he does not hear of conversions; and he ought to begin to say in his heart, "I will know the reason why," and never stop till he has found it out. The joy of the harvest is what we have a right to expect.

The joy of harvest, next, *is a joy which has respect for former toil*. He is bound to rejoice in a harvest who has sorrowed in ploughing, and in the sowing of the seed, and in watching his crop when it was in the ear, and when frost, and blight, and mildew, threatened to destroy it. Brothers and sisters, many of us here can rejoice with the joy of harvest, because, in those converted to Christ, we see the fruit of our soul's travail. I thank God first, and I thank many of you next, that when I sit to see enquirers, I find that I am very generally the spiritual grandfather of those who come, rather than their father in the faith; for I find that you, whom God gave me in years past are, many of you, diligent in seeking the souls of others. In the case of many of you who join the church, their conversion is due to this sister and to that, to this brother and to that, rather than distinctly to my ministry. I am very glad to have it so. During the last two days I have spoken to two friends, both of whom said to me, "I am your spiritual grandchild." One from America said so this morning. I asked, "How is that?" The answer was, "Mr. So-and-so, whom you brought to Christ, came out to America, and he brought me to Christ." You who have had any part in the conversion of these eighty-two, who are to be received to-night, will rejoice; in proportion as you have sighed, and

prayed, and been beaten, and foiled, and disappointed, in that very proportion you will rejoice with the joy of harvest.

But, next, it is *a joy which has solid ground to go upon*. I do not know of a more joyful occasion than when young men and women, and, for the matter of that, old men and women, too, are brought to confess Christ, and to unite with his people. It is a very joyful thing to attend a wedding; but it is always a speculation as to how it will turn out; but when you come to see a soul yield itself to Christ, there is no speculation about that; you have a blessed certainty. Oh, methinks the angels sing more sweetly than ever as they hear a man, or woman, or child say, "I trust in Jesus; I confess his name." When we know and believe that true faith in Christ means present salvation, there is a great joy about that. I heard, the other day, of some preachers who say that there is no such thing as present salvation; and though they constantly preach, they tell the people, every now and then, that they must be saved when they come to die; but there is no such thing as being saved now. I should like to present those brethren with a little "Catechism for the Young and Ignorant:", which Mr. Cruden was wont to give away; for, if they are not "young", they certainly must be "ignorant" of the first principles of the faith. You are saved, dear hearer, if you have believed in Christ Jesus. You are saved even now. If you were not, I do not see any reason why we should rejoice over you with the joy of harvest.

Moreover, we believe that, if you have trusted Christ, you will be saved eternally. Angels do not rejoice prematurely over repentant sinners. They never have to say to one another, "Gabriel, Michael, you made a very terrible mistake the other day. You rejoiced in the presence of God over that man who, after all, has gone down to hell. You rang the bells too soon." Angels do not do that. Jesus gives to his sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of his hand. Therefore, we feel that the confession of Christ is, in itself, a thing to rejoice over; and the immediate salvation that goes with it, and the eternal salvation that is included in it, warrant us in rejoicing with the joy of the harvest.

Moreover, this is *a joy which looks to the future*. Men rejoice in the harvest because they remember that, all through the winter, they will feed upon the food which they are now gathering. The poorest man in London has reason to be thankful for a good harvest; for it will help to make food cheaper. We are to enjoy in days to come what we gather in the harvest-time. There are sixteen girls coming from the Orphanage to join the church, and I am rejoicing in my heart over sixteen women who will, I trust, during a long life glorify Christ; sixteen matrons in the church who shall be Deborahs, Dorcasses, and Phoebes, or whoever else you may like to think of among holy women. The boys also who come, however young they may be, and however little they may appear in some men's eyes, we cannot tell to what they will grow. I may be receiving to-night a Livingstone, or a Moffat, or a Williams, or a Whitefield, or a Wesley, or some other servant of God, who, in some sphere or other, will serve him right nobly.

Beloved, some of us will soon be gone. There are some here who are older than I am, who, in the natural course of things, will soon sleep in the cemetery. Are you not glad to see others coming forward? They will "hold the fort" when you can no longer stand upon its walls; and, on account of this hope of the future, I rejoice with the joy of harvest.

This is *a joy which we may join*; for, in the harvest, anybody who likes may rejoice. There is the proprietor of the field; he rejoices. How greatly Christ rejoices! There are labourers; they may shout as they bring home the loads; they know what that field of wheat has cost. Let us, who are working for Jesus here, have to joy of harvest. The on-lookers, too, as they go by, see the harvest

gathered in, will stop, and even give a shout over the hedge. If you are not yourself saved, you might be glad that other people are. Even if you are not yourself going to heaven, rejoice that others are choosing the blessed road. I invite even you to come, and share with us the joy of harvest. The gleaner, Ruth, over yonder says, "I have stooped many times. I have almost broken my back over the work; and I have only picked up this little handful." I know you, sister; and I am pleased that you should bring even one to Christ. I know you, my brother; and I rejoice with you that you should bring even one child to the Saviour. Though you be but a gleaner, join heartily with us to-night in the joy of the harvest.

Then something happens in our harvest that cannot happen in the common harvest; for the harvested ones rejoice, Sheaves cannot sing, ears of wheat cannot lift up their voices; but in our harvest the happiest of all are those who are called by divine grace. And, while they are happy, and we are happy, and all are happy, the angels hovering over the assembly to-night will mark this the first Sabbath in July, and it shall be a red-letter day even to them, so many shall to-night, for the first time, come to the table of their Lord, and here confess his name.

I have a great deal more to say, but our time is nearly gone. I can only say that this is *a joy which has its moderating tone*. "Why!" say you, "what is that?" The farmer says, "I have got that load in very well; but I wonder how it will thresh out." I often think of you who are added to the church, and I think that you are first-rate people, and that I never saw better; but I wonder how you will turn out when you get inside the church. There are members of the church whom I never hear of as doing anything for Christ; they may be working away quietly, but I am afraid that some are not. I know that there are some in this church who are no better than they should be; indeed, that is true of us all; but there are some who are not what they ought to be, as to practical service for Christ. We get many passengers to ride in the coach, but not so many to pull it; plenty of people to eat the fruit, but not so many to plant fresh trees. Yet I say not even this very heavily, or with any great emphasis, for the bulk of the members of this church are earnestly engaged in the service of God, for which I bless his name. Still that is the question concerning the harvest, "How will it thresh out?"

There is another question: How much of it will be found to be real wheat in the last great day? Ah, we may judge our very best, and examine very carefully; but there always will be the goats in the sheep, and the tares with the wheat; and that is the dash of bitterness in our cup of rejoicing. God grant that we may not have many added to us who will deteriorate instead of growing better! How will they stand at the last great day? "Well," says one, "I am glad that you make that remark; I have always been opposed to revivals, because they bring in so many, and many of the converts fall away." Dear friends, do you remember Mr. Fullerton's answer to that? I thought it was as good and as complete as it was humorous. He said that when persons say that they do not like revivals because certain of the converts afterwards turn back, and they are like his countryman, who picked up a sovereign; but when he went with it to the bank, it turned out to be a light sovereign, and he only got eighteen shillings for it. Mark you, he found it, so the eighteen shillings were clear gain. Some time after, he saw another sovereign lying in the road, and he would not pick it up; "for," he said, "I lost two shillings by the one I picked up the other day; I shall not take you up; very likely I should only get eighteen shillings for you." So he passed on, and left it where it was. I cannot imagine an Irishman being so unwise; certainly, no Scotchman would have been; and I think no Englishman. However, that is the style of unwisdom of a man who says that at a revival, so many come in, and then so many turn out to be bad. Well, but those who remain are a clear gain, and you

ought to desire to have a like gain again and again; you will get rich through such losses, if God will continue to give them to you. However, I hope that I shall not have any light sovereigns to-night. Yet, if these converts so not turn out to be twenty shillings in the pound, but only eighteen shillings, I will be greatly rejoiced to have the eighteen shillings, and God shall have all the glory.

I think that I will here pause, though there is another division of my discourse; and, in closing, I will ask four questions.

First, *What say we of those who never sow?* Well, they will never reap; they will never have the joy of harvest. Am I addressing, in this great assembly, any professing Christians who never sow, never speak a word for Christ, never call at a house, and try to introduce the Saviour's name, never seek to bring children to the Saviour, take no part in the Sunday-school, or any other service for Christ? Do I address some lazy man here, spiritually alive only for himself? Oh, poor soul, I would not like to be you, because I doubt whether you can be spiritually alive at all! Surely, he who lives for himself is dead while he lives; and you will never know the joy of bringing souls to Christ; and when you get to heaven, if you ever do get there, you will never be able to say, "Here am I, Father, and the children thou hast given me." Thou wilt have to abide eternally alone, having brought no fruit unto God in the form of converts from sin. Shake yourselves up, brothers and sisters, from sinful sloth. "Oh!" says one, "I am not my brother's keeper." No, I will tell you your name; it is Cain. You are your brother's murderer; for every professing Christian, who is not his brother's keeper, is his brother's killer; and be you sure that it is so; for you may kill by neglect quite as surely as you may kill by the bow or by the dagger.

Next, *What say we to those who have never reaped?* Well, that depends. Perhaps you have only just begun to sow. Do not expect to reap before God's time. "In due season ye shall reap if ye faint not." There is a set season for reaping. But, if you have been a very long time sowing, and you have never reaped, may I ask the question, Where do you buy your seed? If I were to sow my garden year by year, and nothing ever came up, I should change my seeds-man. Perhaps that you have bad seed, my dear friend, and have not sown the gospel pure and undiluted. You have not brought it out in all its fulness. Go to the Word of God, and get "seed for the sower" of a kind that will feed your own soul, for it is "bread for the eater"; when you sow that kind of seed, it will come up.

Next, *What shall I say to those who know the Lord, but have never confessed him.* What shall I say to you? Well, I do not think that I will say what I think; but I think very seriously about persons who have been converted, and yet never tell the man who was the means of saving them that it has happened. "Well," says one, "I do not think that I shall confess Christ; the dying thief did not confess him, did he? He was not baptized." No, but he was a dying thief, recollect; and if you are not baptized, I think that you will be a living thief, for you will rob God of his glory, and you will rob his servant also of the comfort which he ought to receive. Our wages are to hear that souls are saved; and, if we do not hear of it, we are robbed of our wages. You muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn, if you allow a man to toil and labour, and you get good from his services, and you give him no return by way of encouragement. Come out, you who have hitherto hidden away like cowards! Men or women, if you love Christ, and have never confessed him, come out straight away, and be not ashamed to say, "I am a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb." May the great Captain of our salvation force you to do this right speedily!

Once more, *What say we to those who do confess Christ, and who are going to confess him to-night?* Well, we say this: "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?" Beloved, when you do come in, keep your garments unspotted from the world. Come in with a true

heart, and a reverent spirit, with this prayer upon your lips, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." May none of you who are to-night gathered into the barn turn out to be mere weeds dried in the sun! The Lord save you, and keep you; and may you remember that the vows of the Lord are upon you; and may you never, in any way, dishonour that great name by which you are henceforth to be named!

God bless every one of this great mass of people! "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," for "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." God save all of us from that fearful doom, for Christ's sake! Amen.

ISAIAH 49:13-26.

Verse 13. *Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.*

When God blesses his Church, he blesses the world through her. Hence, heaven and earth are invited to be glad in the gladness of the Church of God. Oh, that God would visit his church; nay, he has already done so, and I feel inclined to cry out, as the text does, "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth: and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people."

14. *But Zion said, the LORD hath forsaken me, and my LORD hath forgotten me.*

We often judge contrary to the truth; and when God is blessing us, we dream that he has forgotten us. Oh, wicked unbelief; cruel unbelief! It robs God of glory; it robs us of comfort. It snatches the song out of our mouth, and fills our soul with groaning: "Zion said, the LORD hath forsaken me, and my LORD hath forgotten me."

15. *Can a woman forget the sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb. Yes, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee.*

The child is in a condition in which it reminds the mother of itself; her sucking child, her own child. Can she forget it? It is not according to nature,—

" 'Yet,' saith the Lord, 'should nature change,

And mothers monsters prove,

Sion still dwells upon the heart

Of everlasting love.' "

What is true of God's Church as a whole, is true of every member of it. If any of you think that God has passed over you, one of his believing children, you think what is untrue. He cannot do it. It would be contrary to his nature. As long as he is God, he must remember his people.

16. *Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;*

How appropriately Christ can say this when he looks on the nail-prints, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands"! As I said, this morning, Jesus can give nothing, he can take nothing, he can do nothing, he can hold nothing, without remembering his people: "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." How I love that verse of Toplady's hymn that speaks of this blessed truth!—

"My name from the palms of his hands

Eternity will not erase;

Impress'd on his heart it remains

In marks of indelible grace:

Yes, I to the end shall endure,

As sure as the earnest is given;

More happy, but not more secure,

The glorified spirits in heaven."

16, 17. *Thy walls are continually before me. Thy children shall make haste;*

There shall be many of them. Converts shall be added to the church in great numbers. They shall hurry up; they shall not be long in coming. Very often they delay too long. The promise is, "Thy children shall make haste."

17. *Thy destroyers and they that make thee waste shall go forth of thee.*

I wish this were carried out. If it were, many of the churches of Christ, which are plagued with false doctrines and worldly habits, which are laying them waste, would be delivered from those curses. The enemies outside the walls, however malicious they are, will never be so mischievous as the traitors inside the fortress. Save Troy from the wooden horse, and save Zion from the traitors in her midst, that seek to do her harm.

18. *Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold; all these gather themselves together, and come to thee.*

There is a great company coming. The church is going to be increased. Have faith in God. We are not going to receive them now by ones and twos; we thank God we receive them by tens and scores. They are coming by hundreds and by thousands; let us expect them. By faith, let us see them even now coming.

18. *As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.*

What an ornament to a church her converts are! These are our jewels. We care nothing for gorgeous architecture or grand music in the worship of God. Our true building is composed of our converts; our best music is their confession of faith. May God give us more of it!

19-21. *For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? And who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?*

Sometimes a church is brought very low; there are no additions, there is no unity, everything is breaking up, and going to pieces. When God visits that church, what a change is seen! Then people come flocking to it, and the church wonders whence the converts came. May the Lord make us wonder in that fashion! It will take a great deal to astonish us, after all these years of mercy; yet the Lord can do it. It may be he will make these latter days to be better than the former. Though we have had nearly forty years of blessing together, he may yet increase it, and give us to rejoice yet more and more.

22. *Thus saith the LORD GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.*

We do not mind how they are brought if they do but come; some in the arms, and some after the Oriental method of putting the child on the shoulder. When God lifts up his hand, great wonders of mercy and grace are wrought.

24. *And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers:*

It will take a long time before they learn that art, for kings and queens have generally been destroyers of the Church of Christ. Those will be grand days when kings shall be the nourishers of the Church, and queens her nursing mothers.

23. *They shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet:*

I have heard the first part of this verse quoted as an argument for the union of Church and State: "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and queens thy nursing mothers." I have not the slightest objection, if they will bow down to the Church "with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of her feet." What is proposed to us is that the Church should bow down to the State, with her face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of the feet of the state, by becoming obedient to rules and regulations made by princes and parliaments. This is not according to the mind of God, nor according to the heart of his people.

23. *And thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.*

If we wait for Christ, for his coming, for the help which he brings, for the salvation that is wrought by him, we shall not be ashamed.

24-26. *Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.*

The mighty may hold their prey with a strong hand; but there is a stronger hand that will deliver the captive. It is Jehovah, the Saviour, the Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob, who says, "I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children." Here is a divine promise for every parent to plead: "I will save thy children." May the Lord give you grace to claim that promise, even now, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—423, 1,004.

*It is remarkable that this sermon and exposition, which were selected long ago for publication this month, should be issued just as the Tabernacle church is again having a large ingathering of converts. Those who have read the sermons regularly, have been struck with the singular appropriateness of several of them, either to the condition of the Tabernacle church, or the general state of the churches of our land. A notable instance of this fact is described in the "Personal Notes" of the *Sword and the Trowel* for July. Many can see the overruling hand of the Lord even in the order in which the sermons have been published.

Blessing for Blessing

A Sermon

(No. 2266)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day, July 24th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, October 26th, 1890.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."—Ephesians 1:3, 4.

God blesses us; let us bless him. I pray that every heart here may take its own part in this service of praise.

"O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord,

And all that in me is,

Be stirred up his holy name

To magnify and bless!"

Sit in your seats, and keep on blessing God from the first word of the sermon to the last; and then go on blessing God till the last hour of life, and enter into heaven into the eternal glory, still blessing God. It should be our life to bless him who gave us our life. It should be our delight to bless him whom give us all our delights. So says the text, and so let us do: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. Our first occupation, at this time, will be that of BLESSING GOD.

But how can we bless God? Without doubt the less is blessed of the Greater. Can the Greater be blessed by the less? Yes, but it must be in a modified sense. God blesses us with all spiritual blessings; but we cannot give him any blessings. He needs nothing at our hand; and if he did, he could not give it. "If I were hungry," saith the Lord, "I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." God has an all-sufficiency within himself, and can never be thought of as dependent upon his creatures, or as receiving anything from his creatures which he needs to receive. He is infinitely blessed already; we cannot add to his blessedness. When he blesses us, he gives us a blessedness that we never had before; but when we bless him, we cannot by one iota increase his absolutely infinite perfectness. David said to the Lord, "My goodness extendeth not to thee." This was as if he had said, Let me be as holy, as devout, and as earnest as I may, I can do nothing for thee; thou art too high, too holy, too great for me to be really able to bless thee in the sense which thou dost bless me.

How, then, do we bless God? Well, I should say, first, that this language is *the expression of gratitude*. We say with David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," and we say with Paul, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." We can bless God by praising him, extolling him, desiring all honour for him, ascribing all good to him, magnifying and lauding his holy name. Well, we will do that. Sit still, if you will, and let your heart be silent unto God; for no language can ever express the gratitude that, I trust, we feel to him who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ

Jesus. Praise him also in your speech. Break the silence; speak of his glory. Invite other to cry with you, "Hallelujah!" or "Hallels unto Jah!" "Praise to Jehovah!" Ascribe ye greatness unto our God. Oh, that all flesh would magnify the Lord with us!

This language is also the *utterance of assent* to all the blessedness that is ascribed to the Lord. After hearing how great he is, how glorious he is, how happy he is, we bless him by saying, "Amen; so let it be! So would we have it! He is none to great for us, none too blessed for us. Let him be great, glorious and blessed, beyond all conception." I think that we bless God when we say concerning the whole of his character, "Amen. This God is our God for ever and ever." Let him be just what the Bible says he is; we accept him as such. Sternly just, he will not spare the guilty. Amen, blessed be his name! Infinitely gracious, ready to forgive. Amen, so let it be! Everywhere present, always omniscient. Amen, so again do we wish him to be! Everlastingly the same, unchanging in his truth, his promise, his nature. We again say that we are glad of it, and we bless him. He is just such a God as we love. He is indeed God to us, because he is really God, and we can see that he is so, and every attribute ascribed to him is a fresh proof to us that Jehovah is the Lord. Thus, we bless him by adoration.

We also bless God in *the spreading of his kingdom*. We can win hearts to him through his mighty grace blessing our service. We can fight against evil; we can set up a standard for the truth. We can be willing to suffer in repute, and every way else, for his name's sake. We can by his grace do all this, and thus we are blessing God. Surely, dear friends, if it is well-pleasing in God's sight that sinners should repent, if it makes heaven the gladder, and makes joy in the presence of the angels that men should repent, we are in the best and most practical way blessing God when we labour to bring men to repentance through faith in Christ Jesus.

There is also another way of blessing God which, I trust, we shall all endeavour to practise; and that is by *the doing good to his children*. When they are sick, visit them. When they are downcast, comfort them. When they are poor, relieve them. When they are hard pressed by outward adversaries, stand at their side, and help them. You cannot bless the Head, but you can bless the feet; and when you have refreshed the feet, you have refreshed the Head. He will say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." If they be naked, and you clothe them; if they be sick, and you visit them; if they be hungry, and you feed them; you do in this respect bless God. David not only said, "Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee;" but added, "but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent in whom is all my delight." You can be good to them, and in that respect you may be blessing God. He has done so much for us, that we would fain do something for him; and when we have reached the limit of our possibilities, we long to do more. We wish that we had more money to give, more talent to use, more time that we could devote to his cause, we wish that we had more heart and more brain; sometimes we wish that we had more tongue, and we sing,—

"Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise!"

This word "blessed" is an attempt to break the narrow circle of our capacity. It is an earnest endeavour of a burning heart to lay at God's feet crowns of glory which it cannot find: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

II. But now, secondly, we shall spend a little time in VIEWING GOD in the light in which Paul sets him before us: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We bless the God of nature. What beauties he has strewn around us! We bless the God of providence. How bountifully doth he send us harvests and fruitful seasons! We bless the God of grace who hath redeemed us, and adopted us as his children. But here is a peculiar aspect of God, which should call forth our highest praises; for he is called "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

When we see God *in connection with Christ*, we see God through Christ, when we see God in Christ, then our hearts are all aflame, and we burst out with, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." God apart from Christ—that is a great and glorious theme; but the human mind fails to grasp it. The infinite Jehovah, who can conceive him? "Our God is a consuming fire." Who can draw near to him? But in the Mediator, in the Person of the God, the Man, in whom we find blended human sympathy and divine glory, we can draw nigh to God. There it is that we get our hands upon the golden harp-strings, and resolve that every string shall be struck to the praise of God in Christ Jesus.

But note carefully that God is described here as *the God our Lord Jesus Christ*. When Jesus knelt in prayer, he prayed to our God. When Jesus leaned in faith upon the promises, he trusted in God that he would deliver him. When our Saviour sang on the passover night, the song was unto God. When he prayed in Gethsemane, with bloody sweat, the prayer was unto our God. Jesus said to Mary at the sepulchre, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." How we ought to bless God when we think that he is the God, whom our Redeemer blesses! This is the God who said of Christ, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Delightful thought! When I approach Jehovah, I approach the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Surely, when I see his blood-stained footprints there on the ground before me, though I put my shoe off from my foot, for the place is holy ground, yet I follow with confidence where my Friend, my Saviour, my Husband, my Head has been before me; and I rejoice as I worship the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is also called *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. This is a great mystery. Think not that we shall ever understand the high relationship between the first and second Persons of the blessed Trinity, the Father and the Son. We speak of eternal filiation, which is a term that does not convey to us any great meaning; it simply covers up our ignorance. How God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as God, we do not know; and perhaps to wish to gaze into this tremendous mystery were as great a folly as to look at the sun, and blind ourselves with its brilliance. It is so; that ought to be enough for us. God the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ as to his divine nature: "Thou art my Son; this day I have begotten thee." He is also his Father as to the human side of his nature. He was begotten of the Holy Ghost. That body of his, that human life, came of God; not of Joseph, not of man. Born of a woman, God sent forth his Son; but he was his Son then. It was God's son that was born at Bethlehem. Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Now take the two natures of their wondrous blending in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you see how the great God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, sweet thought, he is my Father, too; my Father is Christ's Father. Jesus Christ's Father is our Father, and he teaches us all to call him, "Our Father, which art in heaven." Often in prayer he said, "Father"; and he bids us say the same, putting the plural pronoun before it, "Our Father." Now will you not bless the Lord, who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you not feel a glowing in your hearts, as you think of the near and dear relationship into which you

are brought through Jesus Christ? The God of Jesus Christ, the Father of Jesus Christ, is my God, my Father, too. Blessed, blessed, blessed, for ever blessed be that dear name!

III. Our third occupation, at this time, is that of RECOUNTING HIS GREAT MERCIES. I will read the rest of the third verse: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

This recapitulation of mercies is written with *full assurance*; and you will not bless God unless you have a touch of that same experience. Paul does not say, "Who has, we hope and trust, blessed us," but he writes, "Who hath blessed us." Ah, beloved, if you have a full assurance that God has blessed you in Christ, and that now his smile rests upon you, and all the benisons of the covenant are stored there for you, I think that you cannot help saying, "Blessed, blessed be the name of the Most High!" that doubt, that trembling, this it is that empties out the marrow from the bone of our blessedness. If you have suspicions about the truth of this precious Book, if you have questions about the truth of the doctrines of grace, if you have doubts about your own interest in those things. I do not wonder that you do not praise God, for a blessing which is only mine by peradventure, well, peradventure I shall be grateful for it; but peradventure I shall not. But if I know whom I have believed, if I have a firm grip of spiritual mercies, if all heavenly things are mine in Christ my Lord, I can sing, "Wake up, my glory; awake psaltery and harp; I myself will awake right early." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings."

With this full assurance should come *intense delight*: "Who hath blessed us." God has blessed us. Come, brethren, he has not done some trifle for us, which we can afford to ignore. He has not merely given us some absolutely necessary boons, which we must have, for we could not live without them; but he has in grace dealt still more abundantly with us. He has gone beyond workhouse fare, and made us a feast with saints and princes. He has given us more than home-spun garments; he has put upon us robes of beauty and of glory, even his own spotless righteousness. He has blessed us; we are blessed; we feel that we are. Each believer can say:—

"I feel like singing all the time,
For my tears are wiped away;
For Jesus is a Friend of mine,
I'll praise him every day.
I'll praise him! Praise him! Praise him all the time!"

We are not sitting here, and groaning, and crying, and fretting, and worrying, and questioning our own salvation. He has blessed us; and therefore we will bless him. If you think little of what God has done for you, you will do very little for him; but if you have a great notion of his great mercy to you, you will be greatly grateful to you gracious God.

Let me also remark, next, that as assurance and delight lead to blessing God, so does a *right understanding* of his mercies. To help your understanding, notice what Paul says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings." An enlightened man is grateful to God for temporal blessings; but he is much more grateful to God for spiritual blessings, for temporal blessings do not last long; they are soon gone. Temporal blessings as not definite marks of divine favour, since God gives them to the unworthy, and to the wicked, as well as to the righteous. The corn, and wine, and oil, are for Dives; and Lazarus gets even less than his share. Our thanks are due to God for all temporal blessings; they are more than we deserve. But our thanks ought to go to God in thunders of hallelujahs for spiritual blessings. A new heart is better than a new coat. To feed on Christ is better than to have the best earthly food. To be an heir

of God is better than being the heir of the greatest nobleman. To have God for our portion is blessed, infinitely more blessed than to own broad acres of land. God hath blessed us with spiritual blessings. These are the rarest, the richest, the most enduring of all blessings; they are priceless in value. Wherefore, let me beg you to join in blessing the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed you with spiritual blessings.

But did you notice the word "all"? I must bring that out clearly. I must turn the microscope on it. "Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings." Surely, Paul means that we have not a spiritual blessing which God did not give. We have never earned one; we could never create one. All spiritual blessings come from the Father; he has really given us all spiritual blessings. "I have not received them," says one. That is your own fault. He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. A new heart, a tender conscience, a submissive will, faith, hope, love, patience, we have all these in Christ. Regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, perfection are all in Christ. If we do not take them out, it is the fault of our palsied hand, that has not strength enough to grasp them; but he has given us all spiritual blessings in Christ. Whenever you read your Bible, and see a great promise, do not hesitate to claim it. He hath given us all spiritual blessings in Christ. "I am afraid," says one, "that I should be presuming if I took some of the promises." He hath given us all spiritual blessings in Christ. You are in your Father's house; you cannot steal; for your Father says, "Help yourself to what you like." He has made over his whole estate of spiritual wealth to every believing child of his; wherefore take freely, and you will, by doing so, glorify God. He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ.

This he has done in the "heavenly places." What does that mean, "Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places"? Does it not mean that he is working upon us all spiritual blessings out of the heaven where he dwells? Or does it mean much more, that his is sending us all these spiritual blessings to bring us to the heaven where he dwells, and where he would have us dwell?

I want to stir up your heart by reminding you that all the spiritual blessings we receive are the richer and rarer because they are given to us "in Christ." Here are the blessings; and Christ is the golden casket that holds them all. When the City of London makes a man a freeman of the city, the document giving him his liberty is usually presented to him enclosed in a golden casket. Christ is that golden casket, in which we find the charter of our eternal liberty. He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. If they came to us any other way, we might lose them; or we might not be sure that they were genuine; but when they come to us in Christ, they come to stay, and we know that they are real. If Christ is mine, all blessings in heavenly places are mine.

I seemed, to myself, to be talking very drily of things that ought to be swimming in a sea of joy and delight. Beloved, do not let my faint words rob my Lord of any of his glory. He has done such great things for you; bless his name. We cannot stand up, and ask for instruments of music with which to sound his praise; but we can sit still, and each one say, "Blessed be his name! It is all true; he has blessed me; I know that he has. He has blessed me, with a liberal hand, with all spiritual blessings. He has blessed me, just where I wanted blessing, where I was poorest in spiritual things. I could make my way in business, but I could not make my own way in grace; so he has blessed me with all spiritual blessings; and he has made the garments all the dearer because of the wardrobe in which he has hung them. He has given me these royal things in Christ; and as I look to my dear Lord, and see what there is for me stored up in him, I prize each thing the more because it is in

him. Come, Holy Spirit, set our hearts on fire with blessing and praise to God for all the great things that he has done for us!"

IV. I shall close with this fourth remark: Let us bless God, BEHOLDING THE MANNER OF HIS GIFTS. That is described in the fourth verse: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

Now, brethren, we are to praise God because all spiritual blessings have come to us in the same way as our election came, "according as he hath chosen us in him." How did that come? Well, it came of *his free, sovereign grace*. He loved us because he would love us. He chose us before he chose us. "Ye have not chosen me; but I have chosen you." If there is any virtue, if there be any praise in us now, he put it there. To the bottomless abyss of his own infinite goodness we must trace the election of his grace. Well, now, every blessing comes to us in the same way. God hath not blessed thee, my brother, with usefulness because thou didst deserve it; but because of his grace. He did not redeem thee, or regenerate thee, or sanctify thee, or uphold thee, because of anything in thee. Again and again, by the prophet Ezekiel, did the Lord remind his ancient people that the blessings he bestowed upon them were all gifts of his grace. "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake." And again, "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for you own ways, O house of Israel." Every blessing comes to us with the hall-mark of sovereign grace upon it. As the Lord distributed the gifts of his grace, he says, "May I not do as I will with my own?" He does so, and we bless, and praise, and adore the sovereign grace of God, which having chosen us, continues to bless us according as he hath chosen us in Christ.

Next, we have to bless God that all his gifts come to us *in Christ*. Notice Paul's words, "according as he hath chosen us in him." God called us in Christ. He justified us in Christ. He sanctified us in Christ. He will perfect us in Christ. He will glorify us in Christ. We have everything in Christ, and we have nothing apart from Christ. Let us praise and bless the name of the Lord that this sacred channel of his grace is as glorious as the grace itself. There is as much grace in the gift of Christ to save us as there is in the salvation which Christ has wrought out for us. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Again, all our blessings come from *the divine purpose*. Listen: "Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him." No spiritual blessing comes to any man by chance. No man gets a boon from God through his "good luck"; it all comes according to the eternal purpose of God which he purposes or ever the earth was.

"Long e'er the sun's refulgent ray
Primeval shades of darkness drove,
They on his sacred bosom lay,
Loved with an everlasting love."

"Before the foundation of the world", says the text, there was a purpose in the heart of God, and in that purpose we were chosen, and by that same purpose God continues to bless us. Look, beloved, God never gives his people either a gift or a grace without his purpose. Has God given you a brain clear, quick, capacious? Think for him. Has God given you a tongue fluent, eloquent? Speak for him. He does not give you these gifts without purpose. Has God given you influence among your fellow-men? Use it for him. Your election came according to his purpose; and so have all your gifts, and much more, all your graces. Have you a strong, bright-eyes faith? Have you

burning zeal? Have you vehement love? Have you any of these gifts of the covenant? Use them for a purpose. God has given them for a purpose; find out what that purpose is, and glorify God thereby.

Lastly, the text tells us that God blesses us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." God's choice of us was not because we were holy, by *to make us holy*; and God's purpose will not be fulfilled unless we are made holy. Some people, when they talk about salvation, mean escaping from hell, and getting into heaven by the skin of their teeth. We never mean any such thing. We mean deliverance from evil, deliverance from sin. Like a dog in the manger, they cannot eat the hay themselves, and they growl at those who can. If you wish to be safe from sin, ask God for that great blessing, and he will give it to you; but if you do not want it, do not complain if God says, "I shall give it to such and such a person, and you that do not even ask for it shall be left without it." If you do not care to be holy, you shall not be holy. If you did not care for it, and wish for it, you might have it, for God denies it to none who seek it at his hands. But if you neither wish for it, nor value it, why do you lift your puny fist against the God of heaven because he hath chosen others, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love?

The object of our election is our holiness, and the object of every spiritual blessing is our holiness. God is aiming at making us holy. Are you not glad of that? May I not say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because his aim in every gift is to make us holy"? Brothers and sisters, would we not sacrifice everything we have, and count it no sacrifice, if we might be perfectly holy? I said to a young girl, who came to join the church, "Mary, are you perfect?" She looked at me and said, "No, sir." I said, "Would you like to be?" "Oh, that I would! I long for it; I cry for it." Surely, the God who makes us long to be perfect, has already wrought a great work in us; and if we can say that, to be perfect, would be heaven to us, then we are already on the road to heaven, and God is working out in us his eternal purpose, which is, "that we should be holy."

There is one thing more: "That we should be holy and *without blame before him in love*." Does that mean that we are to be loving, full of love, and without blame in that matter? Well, I am afraid that there are not very many Christians who are without blame on the score of love. I know a man, a noble man intellectually, and, in some respects, spiritually. I believe that he would die at the stake for the grand old Calvinistic faith; but he is as hard as iron; you cannot feel any kind of love to him, for he does not feel any kind of love to anybody else. That man is not without blame before God in love. I have known others; wonderful Christians they appear to be, they could pray for a week; but if you are poor, and ask them for a little help, your asking will all be in vain. I do not think that they are without blame before God in love. O brothers, God has chosen us to be loving, he has ordained us to be loving; and all the innumerable blessings which he has given to us, he sends to win us to a loving spirit, that we may be without blame in that matter. Our dear friend, Mr. William Olney, whom we remember here still, and never can forget, was, I think, without blame in that matter of love. I sometimes thought that he used to shed his love on some who might have been the better for a hard word; for they were deceivers; but he could not bring his mind to think that anybody could be a deceiver; and if anybody was in want of help, no matter though their own misconduct had brought them into poverty, his hand was in his pocket, and out again, very quickly with help for them. He never failed in love; and I pray that you and I, with prudence and wisdom mixed with it, may be without blame before God in the matter of love. Love your fellow-Christians.

Love poor sinners to Christ. Love those that despitefully use you. Love those round about you who are strangers to the love of God. It may be that they will see in your love some little image of the love of God, as in a drop of water you may sometimes see the sun and the heavens reflected. God make us to be reflections of the love of God! His purpose is that we may be holy and without blame before him in love.

Now, I have set before you a rare treasury. Does this treasury belong to you? My dear hearers, is Christ yours? Are you trusting him? If not, there is nothing yours. Without Christ, you can do nothing, and you are nothing, and you have nothing. Come to Jesus as you are, and put your trust in him, and then all things are yours. If Christ be yours, beloved, then I charge you bless the Lord, ay, bless the Lord again and again, for you will never bless him as much as he deserves to be blessed. Let us finish this service as we closed our worship this morning, by singing the doxology,—

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

EPHESIANS 1

The Epistle to the Ephesians is a complete Body of Divinity. In the first chapter you have the doctrines of the gospel; in the next, you have the experience of the Christians; and before the Epistle is finished, you have the precepts of the Christian faith. Whosoever would see Christianity in on treatise, let him "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the Epistle to the Ephesians.

1, 2. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus; grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

All down through the ages this benediction comes to us, even to as many of us as are "the faithful in Christ Jesus." "Grace be to you," brethren and sisters, grace in every form of it, the free favour of God, all that active force of grace which comes of his unmerited love. May you have a fresh draught of it at this time! "and peace." May you feel a deep peace with God, with your own conscience, and with all the world! Oh, that you might find an atmosphere of quiet calm about your mind at this very moment! The double blessing of "grace" and "peace" comes "from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

3, 4. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,*

One of the first doctrines of our holy faith is that of the union of all believing souls with Christ. We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. Apart from Christ we are nothing; in Christ we have "all spiritual blessings" We are rich as Christ is rich, when we are united to him by the living bond of faith. Another great doctrine of Holy Scripture is that of election. We are blessed in Christ according as the Father "hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Why did God choose any unto eternal life? Was it because of any holiness in them then existing, or foreseen to exist? No, by no means; for we read that: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,"

4. *That we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*

We are chosen, not because we are holy, but that we may be made holy. The election precedes the character, and is indeed the moving cause in producing the character. Before the foundation of the world, God chose us in Christ, "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." You see, then, beloved brethren and sisters, the end for which the Lord chose you by his grace.

5. *Having predestinated us*

Having destined us before we were born,

5. *Unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,*

The chosen ones are adopted; they become the children of God. The universal Fatherhood of God, except in a very special sense, is a doctrine totally unknown to Scripture. God is the Father of those whom he adopts into his family, who are born again into his family, and no man hath any right to believe God to be his Father except through the new birth, and through adoption. And why God thus elects or adopts is declared here: "According to the good pleasure of his will." He does as he pleases. That old word of God is still true: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Men do not like that doctrine; it galls them terribly; but it is the truth of God for all that. He is Master and King, and he will sit on the throne, and none shall drag him thence.

6. *To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

There is another precious doctrine, the acceptance of those who are adopted. We are beloved of God; he has a complacency toward us; he takes a delight in us; we are acceptable in his sight. Oh, what a blessing this is! But remember that it is all in Christ: "Accepted in the beloved." Because Christ is accepted, therefore those who are in him are accepted.

7, 8. *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;*

In the working out of the economy of grace, God has been lavish with his love; but yet there have been wisdom and prudence in it. He did not suffer the full light of the gospel to break in upon our eyes at first, lest we should have been blinded by it. Jesus had many things to say unto his disciples; but they could not bear them all at once; so, by little and little he has led us on, and led us up, abounding always in his grace, and only limiting the display of it by our capacity to receive it.

9, 10. *Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all thing in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*

Everything that is in Christ shall be gathered in; all his chosen, all that the Father gave him, all that he hath redeemed by blood, all that he hath effectually brought into union with himself shall be gathered together in one. There shall be one flock under one Shepherd.

11. *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance,*

Not only shall we have it, but we have it now. We have heaven in the price of it, in the principles of it, in the promise of it, in the foretaste of it.

11, 12. *Being predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

The enmity of men's hearts to this doctrine of predestination was seen in the House of Common, not a fortnight ago, when one who ought to have known better talked about "the gloomy tenets of Calvin." I know nothing of Calvin's gloomy tenets; but I do know that I read here of predestination, and I read here that God hath his own way, and his own will, and that he reigns and rules, and so he will until the world's end; and all who are loyal subjects wish God to rule. He is a traitor who would not have God to be King; for who is infinitely good and kind as God is? Let him have his divine will. Who wishes to restrain him? Whether we wish is or not, however, the Lord reigneth;

let the earth rejoice, and let his adversaries tremble. Our predestination is "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

13, 14. *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

Those who believe in Christ have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them: the Holy Spirit is a part of heaven, "the earnest of our inheritance"; and wherever he dwells, it is not possible that the heart should lose the inheritance. It is entailed upon those in whom the Spirit dwells. Judge, there, dear brethren, whether the Spirit of God dwells in you or no.

15-23. *Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; they ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward, who believe; according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things in the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

How Paul glows as he writes on this great theme! He waxes warm, and rises to an enthusiasm of eloquence. We could not stop to explain his words; that were to spoil their mystic poetry. Oh, to have a heart that can glorify Christ as Paul did! Truly, if we know ourselves to be one with Christ, and know the privileges which come to us through that blessed gate, we may indeed extol him with all our heart and soul.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—232; Ps. 103, Version I.; 219; and the Doxology.

Life from the Dead

A Sermon

(No. 2267)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day, July 31st, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, March 13th, 1890.

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."—Ephesians 2:1.

OUR TRANSLATORS, as you observe, have put in the words "hath he quickened", because Paul had thrown the sense a little farther on, and it was possible for the reader not to catch it. They have but anticipated the statement of the fourth and fifth verses: "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ."

Here is the point. God has quickened us, who were dead in trespasses and sins, spiritually dead. We were full of vigour towards everything which was contrary to the law or the holiness of God, we walked according the course of this world; but as for anything spiritual, we were not only somewhat incapable, and somewhat weakened; but we were actually and absolutely dead. We had no sense with which to comprehend spiritual things. We had neither the eye that could see, nor the ear that could hear, nor the power that could feel.

We were dead, all of us; and yet we were not all like on another. Death may be universal over a certain number of bodies, and yet those bodies may look very different. The dead that lie on the battle-field, torn of dogs or kites, rotting, corrupting in the sun, what a horrible sight! The corpse looks like life still; yet is your beloved one in the coffin as dead as the mangled bodies on the battle-field. Corruption has not yet done its work, and tender care has guarded the body as yet from what will surely come to it; yet is there death, sure, complete death, in the one case as well as in the other.

So we have many who are lovely, amiable, morally admirably, like him whom the Saviour looked upon and loved; yet they are dead for all that. We have others who are drunken, profane, unchaste; they are dead, not more dead than the others; but their death has left its terrible traces more plainly visible. Sin brings forth death, and death brings forth corruption. Whether we were corrupt or not, is not a question that I need to raise here; let everyone judge concerning himself. But dead we were, most certainly. Even though trained by godly parents, though well instructed in the gospel scheme, though saturated with the piety that surrounded us, we were dead, as dead as the harlot of the street, as dead as the thief in the jail.

Now, the text tells us that, though we were dead, yet Christ has come, and by his Spirit he has raised us out of the grave. This text brings us Easter tidings; it sings of resurrection; it sounds in our ear the trumpet of a new life, and introduces us into a world of joy and gladness. We were dead; but we are quickened by the Spirit of God. I cannot help stopping a minute to know whether it is so with you, my dear hearers, and praying that what I might have to say act as a kind of sieve, separating between the really living and those who only think that they are alive, so that, if you

have not been quickened, if you are only "a child of nature, finely dressed," but not spiritually alive, you may be made aware of it. If you have been quickened, even though your life be feeble, you may cry to the living God with the "Abba, Father," which never comes from any lip but that which has been touched and quickened by the Holy Spirit.

I. First, let us talk a little about OUR QUICKENING. You who have been quickened will understand what I say. To those who have not, I daresay it will seem as an idle tale.

Well, dear friends, if we have been quickened, we have been *quickened from above*. "You hath HE quickened." God himself has had dealings with us. He has raised us from the dead. He made us at the first; he has new-made us. He gave us life when we were born; but he has given us now a higher life, which could not be found anywhere else. He must always give it. No man ever made himself to live. No preacher, however earnest, can make one hearer to live. No parent, however prayerful, no teacher, however tearful, can make a child live unto God. "You hath HE quickened," is true of all who are quickened. It is a divine spark, a light from the great central Sun of light, the great Father of Lights. Is it so with us? Have we had a divine touch, a superhuman energy, a something which all the learning and all the wisdom and all the godliness of man could never work in us? Have we been quickened from above? If so, I daresay that we remember something of it. We cannot describe it; no man can describe his first birth; it remains a mystery. Neither can he describe his new birth; that is still a greater mystery, for it is a secret inward work of the Holy Ghost, of which we feel the effect, but we cannot tell how it is wrought.

I think that, usually, when the divine life comes, the first consciousness that we get of a quickening is *a sense of pain*. I have heard that when a man is nearly drowned, while he lies under the power of death, he feels little or nothing, perhaps has even pleasurable dreams; but when, in the process of restoring him, they have rubbed him till the blood begins to flow, and the life begins to revive a little, he is conscious of pricking and great pain. One of the tokens that life is coming back to him is, that he wakes up out of a pleasant sleep, and feels pain. Whether it be so or not with every person restored from drowning, I do not know; but I think that it is so with every person restored from drowning in the river of sin. When the life begins to come to him, he feels as he never felt before; sin that was pleasant becomes a horror to him. That which was easy to him becomes a bed of thorns. Thank God, dear hearer, if you have living pangs. It is an awful thing to have your conscience hardened, as in the very fires of hell, till it becomes like steel. To have consciousness is a great mercy, even if it be only painful consciousness, and if every movement of life within seems to harrow up your soul. This divine life usually begins with pain.

Then, *everything surprises you*. If a person had never lived before, and had come into life a full-grown man, everything would be as strange to him as it is to a little-child; and everything is strange to a new-born man in the spiritual realm into which he is born. He is startled a hundred times. Sin appears as sin; he cannot understand it. He had looked at sin before, but had never seen it to be sin. And Christ appears now so glorious to him; he had heard of Christ before, and had some apprehensions of him; but now he is surprised to find that the One who he said had no form nor comeliness is, after all, altogether lovely. To the new-born soul everything is a surprise. He makes no end of blunders; he makes many miscalculations because everything is new to him. He that sitteth upon the throne saith, "Behold, I make all things new;" and the renewed man says, "My Lord, it is even so." One said to me, when joining the church, "Either I am a new creature, or else the world is altogether altered from what it was. There is a change somewhere;" and that change is from death to life, from darkness into God's marvellous light.

Now, as life comes thus with strange surprises, and mingled with pain, so, dear friends, it comes often *with many questions*. The child has a thousand things to ask; it has to learn everything. We little think of the experiments that children have to go through before they arrive even at the use of their eyes. They do not know that things are at a distance; they have to learn that fact by looking many times. So long as the object falls upon the retina. The child is not aware of whether it is distant or a near object till some time after. What you think that you and I knew from our birth, we did not so know; we had to learn it. And when a man is born into the kingdom of God, he has to learn everything; and consequently, if he is wise, he questions older and wiser believers about this and about that. I pray you that are instructed, and have become fathers, never laugh at babes in grace, if they ask you the most absurd questions. Encourage them to do so, let them tell you their difficulties. You, by God's grace are a man; this little one is but a new-born babe; hear what he has to say. You mothers, do this with your little children. You are interested, you are pleased, you are amused, with what they say. Thus ought instructed saints to deal with those who have been newly quickened. They come to us, and ask, "What is this? What is that? What is the other?" It is a time of asking, a time of enquiring. It is well, also, if it is a time of sitting at Jesus' feet, for there is no other place so safe to a new-born believer as the feet of Jesus. If he gets to the feet of anybody else, he is apt to get ill-instructed at a time when everything warps his judgment, when he is exceedingly impressionable, and not likely to forget the mistakes that he has made, if he has borrowed them from others. So you see what the divine life does when it comes into the soul. It comes to us with pain; it gives us many surprises; and it suggests a large number of questions.

We begin then to *make a great many attempts* at things which we never attempted before. The new-born child of God is just like the new-born child of man in some things; and after a time that child begins to walk. No, it does not; it begins to crawl; it does not walk at first. It creeps along, pleased to make any kind of progress; and when it gets up on its little feet, it moves from one chair to another, trembling at every step it takes, and presently, down it goes. But it gets up again, and so it learns to walk. Do you remember when the new life came into you? I do. I remember the first week of that new life, and how, on the second Sabbath, I went to the place where I had heard the gospel to my soul's salvation, thinking that I would attend there. But, during that week, I had made a great many experiments, and tumbled down a great many times, and the preacher took for his text, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" I thought, "Yes; I know all about that; that is my case." When the preacher said that Paul was not a Christian when he wrote those words, though I was only seven days old in divine things, I knew better than that, so I never went there any more. I knew that no man but a Christian ever could or would cry out against sin with that bitter wail; and that, if the grace of God was not with him, he would rest satisfied and contented; but that, if he felt that sin was a horrible thing, and he was a wretched man because of it, and must be delivered from it, then he surely must be a child of God, especially if he could add, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Beloved, we make many mistakes, and we shall continue to do so. At the same time, we learn by our experiments. You remember when you began to pray; would you like to have your first prayer printed? I believe that God liked it better than many of the collects. You might not like it so well; it would not look well in print. You remember when you first began to confess Christ to a friend. Oh, you did stutter and stammer over it! There were more tears than words; it was not a "dry" discourse; you wetted it well with tears of grief and anxiety. That was the new life putting forth powers with which it was not itself acquainted; and I believe that there are some of God's children

who have powers that they will never find unless they try to use them. I should like some of you young men who do not pray at the prayer-meeting to make a start. And some of you older men, perhaps, have never preached yet; but you might if you tried; I wish you would. "I should break down," says one. I wish you would. A break-down sermon, that breaks the preacher down, might break the people down, too. There might be many advantages about that kind of discourse.

This, then, was the way in which the new life, spiritual life, came into us. We did not know what it was when it came; we had never felt like that before; we could not think that we really had passed from death to life; and yet, in looking back, we are persuaded that the throes within, the anguish of heart, the longing, and the pleading, and the wrestling, and the crying, would never have been in a dead heart, but were the sure marks that God had quickened us, and we had passed into newness of life.

II. Now, secondly, let us think of OUR PRESENT LIFE. "You hath he quickened." Well, then, we have a new life. What is the effect of this life upon us? I speak to you who are quickened by grace.

Well, first, we have become now *sentient towards God*. The unconverted man lives in God's world, sees God's works, hears God's Word, goes up to God's house on God's day, and yet he does not know that there is any God. Perhaps he believes that there is, because he was brought up to believe it; but he is not cognizant of God; God has not entered into him; he has not come into contact with God. Beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, I think that you and I can say, that to us the surest fact in all the world is that there is a God. No God? I live in him. Tell a fish in the sea there is no water. No God? Tell a man who is breathing that there is no air. No God? I dare not come downstairs without speaking to him. No God? I would not think of closing my eyes in sleep unless I had some sense of his love shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost. "Oh!" says one, "I have lived fifty years, and I have never felt anything of God." Say that you had been dead fifty years; that is nearer to the mark. But if you had been quickened by the Holy Spirit fifty minutes, this would have been the first fact in the front rank of all fact, God is, and he is my Father, and I am his child. Now you become sentient to his frown, his smile, his threat, or his promise. You feel him; his presence is photographed upon your spirit; your very heart trembles with awe of him, and you say with Jacob, "Surely God is in this place." That is one result of spiritual life.

Now you have become also *sympathetic with similar life in others*. You have a wide range, for the life of God, his life in his new-born child, is the same life that is in every Christian. It is the same like in the new-born believer as in yonder bright spirits that stand before the throne of God. The life of Christ, the life of God, is infused into us in that moment when we are quickened from our death in sin. What a wonderful thing it is to have become sympathetic with God! What he desires, we desire. His glory is the first object of our being. He loves his Son, and we love his Son. We desire to see his kingdom come as he does, and we pray for his will to be done on earth, even as it is in heaven. We wish that death did not remain, the old nature hampering us; but, in perfect proportion as the new life is really in us, we now run parallel with God. The holiness which he delights in we aspire after. Not with equal footsteps, but with tottering gait, we follow in that selfsame path that God has marked out for himself. "My soul followeth hard after thee; they right hand upholdeth me."

The new life that made us sympathetic with God, and holy angels, and holy men, and with everything that is from above, has also made us *capable of great pleasure*. life is usually capable of pleasure, but the new life is capable of the highest conceivable pleasure. I am certain that no

ungodly man has any conception of the joy which often fills the believer's spirit. If worldlings could only know the bliss of living near to God, and of basking in the light of his countenance, they would throw their wealth into the sea, and ten thousand times as much, if they might but get a glimpse of this joy that can never be bought, but which God gives to all who trust his dear Son. We are not always alike. Alas! We are very changeable; but when God is with us, when the days are spiritually bright and long, and we have come into the midsummer of our heavenly bliss, we would not change places with the angels, knowing that by-and-by we shall be nearer to the throne than they are; and, while they are God's honoured servants, yet they are not beloved sons as we are. Oh, the thrill of joy that has sometimes gone through our spirits! We could almost have died with delight at times when we have realized the glorious things that God has prepared for them that love him. This joy we never knew till we received the new life.

But I must add that we are also *capable of acute pain* to which we were strangers once. God has made our conscience quick as the apple of the eye; he has made our soul as sensitive as a raw wound, so that the very shadow of sin falling on the believer's heart will cause him great pain; and, if he does go into the actual sin, then, like David, he talks about his bones being broken, and it is not too strong a figure of the sorrow that comes upon the believing heart when sin has been committed, and God has been grieved. The heart itself then, is broken, and bleeds at ten thousand wounds. Yet this is one of the results of our possessing the new life; and I will say this, the sharpest pang of spiritual life is better than the highest joy of carnal life. When the believer is at his worst, he is better than the unbeliever at his best; his reasons for happiness are always transcendently above all the reasons for joy that worldlings can never know.

Now, dear friends, if we have received spiritual life, you see what a range of being we have, how we can rise up to the seventh heaven or sink down into the abyss. This new life makes us *capable of walking with God*; that is a grand thing. We speak of Enoch walking with God, and we look at the holiness of his life; but did anybody ever think of the majesty of his life? How does God walk? It needs a Milton to conceive of the walk of God; but he that hath the divine life walks with God; and sometimes he seems to step from Alp to Alp, from sea and ocean, accomplishing what, unaided, he would never even attempt. He that has the divine life is lifted up into the infinities; he gets to hear that which cannot be heard, and see that which cannot be seen, for "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit," when he has given us the new life.

One effect of this divine life is to *put life into everything that we do*. They tell me that "creeds are dead." Yes, yes! It is a pleasant thing to hear an honest confession; they are dead to dead men. I hold nothing as truth that I can put away on a shelf, and leave there. My creed is part of my being. I believe it to be true; and believing it to be true, I feel its living force upon my nature every day. When a man tells you that his creed is a dead thing, do not deny it for a minute; there is no doubt of the fact. He knows about himself better than you do. Oh, dear friends, let *us* never have a dead creed! That which you believe, you must believe up to the hilt; believe it livingly, believe it really; for that is not believed at all which is only believed in the letter, but is not felt in the power of it.

If you have been quickened by the Spirit of God, your prayers are living prayers. Oh, the many dead prayers that are heard at the bedside; so many good words rushed through at a canter! He that is alive unto God asks for what he wants, and believes that he shall have it, and he gets it. That is living prayer. Beware of dead prayers; they are a mockery to the Most High. I do not think that a

living man can always pray by clockwork, at such a time and such a time. It would be something like the minister's sermon which he "got up" beforehand, and upon which he wrote in the margin "weep here," "here you must show great emotion." Of course that was all rubbish; it cannot be done to order. You cannot resolve to "groan at one o'clock, and weep at three o'clock." Life will not be bound like that, I love to have an appointed season for prayer, and woe unto the man who does not have his time for prayer! But, at the same time, our living prayer bursts out hours before the appointed time, or sometimes it will not come at the time. You have to wait till another season, and then your soul is like a hind let loose. Why, sometimes we can pray, and prevail, and come off conquerors; and at another time, we can only bow at the throne, and groan out, "Lord, help me; I cannot pray; the springs seem to be all sealed." That is the result of life. Living things change. There are some personages in St. Paul's Cathedral; I have not seen them lately, but I have seen them. When I lived in the country, I came up to look at the notabilities in St. Paul's Cathedral. I have heard that they have never had a headache in the last hundred years, and no rheumatic pains, nor have they been troubled with the gout, The reason is that they are cut in marble, and they are dead; but a living man feels the fog and the winds; he knows whether it is an east wind or a west wind that is blowing. Before he gets up in the morning, he begins to feel sometimes lively and sometimes ill; he does not understand himself. Sometimes he feels merry, and can sing hymns; at another time, he can do nothing else but sigh and cry, though he scarcely knows wherefore. Yes, life is a strange thing; and if you have the life of God in your soul, you will undergo many changes, and not always be what you want to be.

If we are alive unto God, every part of our worship should be living. What a deal of dead worship there is! If we go on with our services in regular routine, a large number of our friends find it difficult to keep awake. I fear that some people go to a place of worship because they get a better sleep there than anywhere else. That is not worship which consists in doing as Hodge did, when he said, "I like Sunday, for then I can go to church, and put my legs up, and think of nothing at all." That is all the worship a great many render to God, just getting to a place of worship, and there sitting still, and thinking of nothing at all. But if you are a living child of God, you cannot do that. If, sometimes, through the infirmity of the flesh, you fall into that state of slumber, you loathe yourselves for it, but you rouse yourself up, and say, "I must worship my God; I must sing, I must praise God. I must draw near to him in prayer."

III. I must come to my third point; for our time flies. Notice what OUR PRESENT POSITION IS, if God has quickened us.

Our present position is this, first, that *we are raised from the dead*. "He hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together." We cannot live where we used to live. We cannot wear what we used to wear. There is nobody here who would like to go and live in a grave. If you have been raised from the dead, after you had been buried in Norwood Cemetery, I would warrant you that you would not go there to-night to sleep. So the man, who has once been raised by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, quits the dead; his old company does not suit him. If you had been raised from the dead, and had come out of your tomb, you would not go about London streets with your shroud on. You are a living man. How is it that I find some who say they are people of God; but yet are rather fond of wearing their grave-clothes? I mean, that they like the amusements of the world; they like to put on their shroud sometimes just for a treat. Oh, do not so! If God has made you to live, come away from the dead; come away from their habits, and manners and customs. Life sees no charm in death. The living child of God likes to get as far as ever he can

away from the death that once held him bound. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." That is the first part of our position, that we have come to live a separate life now, and have quitted the path we trod before.

Next to that, we are *one with Christ*. He hath "quicken'd us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together." I told you just now that the life which the Holy Spirit gives us when we are born again, is the life of God. We are made partakers of the divine nature, or course, in a modified sense, but still in a true sense. The life everlasting, the life that can never die, is put into us then, even as Christ said, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The believer's life is the life of Christ in the believer. "Because I live, ye shall live also." What a mystic union there is between the believer and his Lord! Realize that; believe in it; rejoice in it; triumph in it. Christ and you are one now, and you are made to live together with him. God grant you to know the joy of that condition!

Once more, we are told, "He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." That is very wonderful. We have not only left the dead, and become joined to Christ, but we are made to *sit in heaven with Christ*. A man is where his head is, is he not? And every believer is where his Head is; and if we are members of Christ's body, we are in heaven. It is a very blessed experience to be able to walk on earth, and look up to heaven; but it is a higher experience to live in heaven, and look down on the earth; and this is what the believer may do. HE may sit in the heavenlies; Christ is there as his Representative. The believer may take possession of what his Representative is holding on his behalf. Oh, to live in heaven, to dwell there, to let the heart be caught up from this poor life into the life that is above! This is where we should be, where we may be if we are quickened by the divine life.

One thing more, and I have done. We are in this position, that God is now working in us, through this divine life, to make us *the most wonderful reflectors of his grace* that he has yet formed. He has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, "that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." The ages to come will have for their wonder the quickened children of God. When God made the world, it was a wonder, and the angels came from afar to see his handiwork. But when Christ makes the new creation, they will say no more that God made the heaven and the earth, but they will say in higher strains, "He made these new-born men and women. He made for them, and in them, new heavens and a new earth."

Ah! Beloved, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." God has given us a life that is more precious than the Koh-i-noor, a life that will outlast the sun and moon. When all things that are shall be like old ocean's foam, which dissolves into the wave that bears it, and is gone for ever; we shall live, and we shall live in Christ, and with Christ, glorified for ever. When the moon has become black as sackcloth of hair, the life that is within us shall be as bright as when God first gave it to us. Thou hast the dew of thy youth, O child of God; and thou shalt have yet more of it, and be like thy Lord, when he shall take thee away from every trace of death, and the corrupt atmosphere of this poor world, and thou shalt dwell with the living God in the land of the living, for ever and for ever!

The practical outcome of all this, that some of you do not know anything at all about it. If you do not, let the fact impress you. If there be a divine life to which you are a stranger, how long will you be a stranger to it? If there be a spiritual death, and you are dead, be startled; for within a little

while God will say, "Bury my dead out of my sight." And what will happen to you when the word of God is, "Depart, depart, depart, depart," and unto the graveyard of souls, to the fire that never shall be quenched, you and the rest of the dead are taken away? "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living," and, unless we are made alive unto him, he cannot be our God either here or hereafter. The Lord impress this solemn truth on all your hearts by his own spirit; for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EPHESIANS 2

Verse 1. *And you he hath quickened.*

Is it so? Could the apostle say that to you, and to me?

1. *Who were dead in trespasses and sins;*

Look back to what you used to be, to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged: "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."

2. *Wherein in time past ye walked*

With a terrible activity of spiritual death;

3. *According to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*

He makes them to be his forge. There he blows his coals, there he fabricates his instruments. Do you not hear the noise of the infernal bellows when "the children of disobedience: swear, and use unclean language? Ah, such were some of us; but we are cleansed! The evil spirit has been driven out, and he no more works in us.

3. *Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

You that now commune with God at the mercy-seat, you that are now his favoured children, and have received power to become the sons of God, you were once heirs of wrath: "By nature the children of wrath, even as others." Holy Scripture is not complimentary to unrenewed human nature. You may search it through and through to find a single flattering word to unregenerate man; but you will search in vain. This style of speech is left to those who scout divine inspiration. They draw their inspiration from another fount, from a desire to walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. They can se flattering speeches in addressing the ungodly; but the Holy Ghost never does.

4, 5. *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins,*

God loved us even when we were dead in sins. His love does not depend upon what we are; it flows from his own heart. It is not love of something good in us; it is love of us because of everything good in him. Here you see the greatness of his grace, in that "he loved us, even when we were dead in sins."

5. *Hath quickened us together with Christ,*

Ah! That accounts for everything: "together with Christ." When we get "together with Christ", then are we made alive, then are we saved. Are *you*. my dear hearers, "quickened together with Christ"?

5-7. *(By grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

See how Paul's language grows and swells and rises as he proceeds! Just now, we read of "God, who is rich in mercy"; now the apostle speaks of "the exceeding riches of his grace", exceeding expression, exceeding comprehension, exceeding even sin itself, though that is all but infinite. "The exceeding riches of his grace" are infinity itself; but they all come to us "through Christ Jesus." Paul will speak of nothing good except that which comes "through Christ Jesus." This is the one conduit-pipe through which the streams of living water flow to the dead in sin; God's grace comes to us "Through Christ Jesus", and through him alone.

8. *For by grace are ye saved through faith;*

We have this expression, "by grace are ye saved," twice over in this chapter. Paul knew that he needed to repeat himself, or people would forget what he taught. At bottom, all the wanderings from the faith at the present day amount to this, salvation by works instead of salvation by grace. The battle of the Reformation has to be fought over again. Men are justified by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. All the enmity of natural men is against that truth. They want to be saved by their own morality, and all sorts of things that they put instead of salvation by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

8, 9. *And that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*

"Oh!" said one to me just now, "the man who is saved by his own righteousness cannot do much in the line of praising." "No, my dear brother," I replied, "except he praises himself; and he can generally do that pretty well." Your self-made man usually worships his creator very earnestly; and your self-saved man glorifies him that saved him.

10. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus*

Nothing without Christ Jesus, you see. The mark of the pierced hand is on everything: "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus."

10. *Unto Good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

God has decreed that he will have a holy people. This is his purpose, his ordinance, to which he will always stand. He will make it good. He will make sinful people holy, and disobedient people obedient to the faith.

11. *Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;*

Remember what you were. You were not the chosen Israelites, you have not the covenant mark in your flesh.

12. *That at that time ye were without Christ,*

Which is the worst state of all, far worse than being without circumcision.

12. *Being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,*

Outsiders, rank outsiders, far away from any rights, or any participation in the rights of God's children.

12. *And strangers from the covenants of promise,*

Utter strangers to the covenants made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

12. *Having no hope, and without God in the world:*

It is an awful description, but a truthful description, of what we were.

13. *But now*

The apostle has turned over a new leaf in the book of our history: "but now." Oh, what a change from the past to the present! "But now"—

13. *In Christ Jesus*

See how Paul keeps harping on that one string. Note how he links us with Christ Jesus. There is nothing for us without Christ and his cross.

13. *Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*

Paul can never have too much of Christ. It is Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ; like the harp of Anacreon. He wished to sing of Cadmus; but his harp resounded love alone; and so the harp of Paul resounds with Christ alone, Christ alone. He always comes back to that theme. It was said of one eminent commentator that he could not find Christ in the Scripture where he was; but it was said of Cocceius that he found Christ where he was not. I would rather find Christ where he is not, than not to find him where he is. There are plenty who err in that second direction nowadays.

14. *For he is our peace,*

Paul cannot do without Christ, you see. He will bring him in everywhere.

14. *Who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; There is no longer the division between Jews and Gentiles.*

15. *Having abolished in his flesh.*

See, it is always Christ, his flesh, his blood, his life. There must always be something about him: "Having abolished in his flesh."

15, 16. *The enmity, even the law of commandments containeth in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he*

I cannot help reminding you, that you must not overlook the fact that Paul will not go a hair's breadth away from Christ.

16-18. *Might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

There is the whole Trinity in that one verse, Christ, the Spirit, the Father. It needs the Trinity to make a Christian, and when you have got a Christian, it needs the Trinity to make a prayer. You cannot pray a single prayer aright without Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

19. *Now therefore*

Another of Paul's blessed "nows." It was "but now" a little while ago; now he has another "now." "Now therefore"—

19. *Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;*

You are not only in the kingdom, but you are in the royal household, which is better still. You are princes of the blood imperial. You are peers of the court of heaven: "and the household of God."

20. *And are built*

You are not loose stones; you are built—

20, 21 *Upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom*

You see, it is always that, in him, in Christ: "in whom"—

21. *All the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*

There is no church without Christ, no temple without him as its cornerstone, its priest, its glory.

22. *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

And all this hangs upon that first sentence, "You hath he quickened." Is it so, beloved? If you are spiritually dead, nothing here belongs to you; but if he hath quickened you, you may take every single sentence of the chapter, and say, "That is mine, and glory be the grace of God!"

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—463, 476, 461.

A Question for Communicants

A Sermon

(No. 2268)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day, August 7th, 1892,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, June 1st, 1890.

"What mean ye by this service?"—Exodus 12:26.

IN A SPIRITUAL religion, everything must be understood. That which is not spiritual, but ritualistic, contents itself with the outward form. Under the Jewish dispensation, there was a very strong tendency in that direction; but it was kept to some extent in check. Under the Christian faith, this tendency must not be tolerated at all. We must know the meaning of what we do; otherwise we are not profited. We do not believe in the faith of the man who was asked what he believed, and who replied that he believe what the church believed. "But what does the church believe?" "The church believes what I believe." "Well, but what do you and the church believe?" "We both believe the same thing." He could not be got to explain himself any further. We look upon such expressions as the talk of ignorance, and not the language of faith. Faith knows what she believes, and can give a reason for the hope that is in her meekness and fear.

Concerning the Passover, the young people among the Jews were encouraged to ask their parents this question, "What means ye by this service?" Children should be encouraged now to ask such gracious questions. I am afraid they are not prompted to do so as they used to be in Puritan times. After the sermon always came the catechizing of the children when they were at home; and every father was bound to be attentive, because he had to ask the boys and girls in the evening what they had heard; and they were more attentive then than now, because they had to be prepared to answer any questions of their parents in return. Cultivate in your children a desire to understand everything connected with our holy faith.

In this chapter, from which I had culled my text, the parents are taught how to answer their children. If the parent be ignorant, a question from his child is inconvenient. He finds his ignorance exposed, and he perhaps is vexed with the child who has been the innocent means of unveiling him to himself. Be ready to tell your children what the ordinances of the gospel mean. Explain baptism to them, explain the Lord's supper to them; and above all, explain the gospel; and let them know as far as words can make it plain, what is that great mystery whereby we are saved, whereby sin is forgiven, and we are made the children of God.

I thought it would be profitable, if God gave me strength for the exercise, very briefly to answer the question supposed to be put by an intelligent youth, "What mean ye by this service?"—this service that is called by some people "Holy Communion"; which is sometimes called the "Eucharist"; and among us is called "the Lord's supper", or "the breaking of bread." What does it mean?

It means many things; but chiefly five, of which I will speak now.

I. This supper is, first of all, A MEMORIAL.

If you want to keep something in mind from generation to generation, you may attempt it in many ways. You may erect a bronze column, or you may engrave a record of it upon brass in the church. The column will get sold for old bronze, and somebody will steal the brasses from the church; and the memorial will disappear. You may write it upon marble if you please; but in our climate, at any rate, the inscription is very apt to be obliterated; and the old stones, though they last long, may after a time be as dumb as the treasures of Nineveh and Egypt were for centuries. These monuments did preserve the records, but they were hidden under the sand, or buried beneath the ruins of cities; and though they have a tongue now, and are speaking forcibly, yet whatever had been entrusted to them would have been forgotten while they were lying under the sand of the desert, or in the *débris* of the palaces of Koyunjik. There are other ways of preserving memorials, such as writing in books; but books can be lost. Many valuable works of the ancients have entirely ceased, and no copies of them can be found. Some of the books mentioned in the Old Testament, which were not inspired books, but still were books which we should greatly value now, have quite passed out of existence.

It is found that, upon the whole, one of the best ways of remembering a fact is to have some ceremony connected with it, which shall be frequently performed, so as to keep the fact in memory. I suppose that Absalom will never be forgotten. He built himself a pillar in the king's dale; he knew his own infamous history, and he thought it might be forgotten. No one would care to remember it so he built himself a monument; and there it stands, or what is reputed to be that monument, to this day, and every Arab who passes by the spot throws a stone at it. Absalom will better be remembered by the ceremony of throwing stones at his tomb than by any record in marble.

To turn your thoughts to something infinitely higher, I cannot conceive of a surer and better method of keeping the death of Christ in mind than of meeting together, as we shall do to-night, for the breaking of bread, and the pouring out of the juice of the vine in memory of his death. Other facts may be forgotten; this one never can be. To-night, and every first day of the week, in ten thousand places of worship, believers meet together for the breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ's cross and passion, his precious death and burial. Those great facts can never pass out of mind. Jesus said to his disciples, "This do in remembrance of me." In obeying his command you are doing what if most effectual in keeping your Lord in remembrance. As I preach to-night, having no sort of reliance upon my own words, I want you to practise them as I go along; then you will be like the woman who said that, when she heard a sermon about light weights and short measures, thought she forgot what the preacher said, when she got home, she recollected to burn her bushel, which was short. So, if you can just practice the sermon as you hear it, it will be well.

Recollect, then, that you come to this table to-night to *remember an absent Friend*. Jesus has gone away. He who loved us better than any other ever loved us, has left us for a while. We sometimes take little parting gifts from friends, and they say to us—

"When this you see,
Remember me."

Probably, almost everybody here has, at some time or other, had certain tokens of remembrance by which they might be reminded of some dear one who is far away across the seas; out of sight, but not out of mind. You come to the communion-table, then, to remember your absent Friend.

You come, also, chiefly to *remember his great deed of love*. This supper is a memorial of what Jesus did for you when he was on the earth. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." He laid down his life for you; remember that to-night. "He loved me,

and gave himself for me;" dwell on that fact. Let these words wake the echoes in your hearts, "Gethsemane!" "Gabbatha!" "Golgotha!" Can you forget all that Jesus suffered there on your behalf? If you have let these things slip in any degree from your heart's affections, come and write them down again. Come to the table, and there celebrate the memorial of his love, and wounds, and agonies, and death for you.

"In memory of the Saviour's love,
We keep the sacred feast,
Where every humble contrite heart
Is made a welcome guest,
"By faith we take the bread of life,
With which our souls are fed;
And cup, in token of his blood
That was for sinners shed."

You are also called upon to *remember a dear Friend who*, although he has gone away, *has gone about your business*. It was expedient for you that he should go away. He is doing you more good where he has gone than he could have done if he stayed here. He is pressing on your suit to-night. Your business would miscarry were it not for him; but within the veil that hides him from you, he is pleading for you. His power, his dignity, his merit, are all freely being employed for you. He is pleading the causes of your soul. Can you, will you, forget him? Will you not now forget everything else, and indulge the sweet memory of your faithful Lover, your dear Husband, who is married to you in ties of everlasting wedlock? Come, I pray you, keep the memorial of this dear Friend.

And you have to *remember a Friend who will return very soon*. He only tells you to do this till he comes. He is coming back to us. His own words are, "Behold, I come quickly!" That is not quite the meaning of what he said; it was, "Behold, *I am coming* quickly!" He is on his way, his chariot is hurrying towards us the axles of the wheels are hot with speed. He is coming as fast as he can. The long-suffering of God delays him, till sinners are brought in, till the full number of his elect shall be accomplished; but he is not delaying; he is not lingering; he is not slack, as some men count slackness; he is coming quickly. Will you not remember him? Soon will his hand be on the door; soon for you, at any rate, he may cry, "Arise, my love, my dove, my fair one, and come away;" and soon he may be here among us, and then we shall reign with him for ever and ever.

I charge my own heart to remember my dear Lord to-night; and I pray you, brothers and sisters, let not the feebleness of my reminder deprive you now of the happiness of thinking much of Christ your Lord. Sit you still, and let all other thoughts be gone, and think only of him who loved you and died for you. Let your thoughts go back to Calvary, as you sing, in mournful accents,—

"O sacred head once wounded,
With grief and pain weigh'd down,
How scornfully surrounded
With thorns, thine only crown!
How pale art thou with anguish,
With sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish,
Which once was bright as morn!"

Oh, eyes full of tears! Oh, shoulders once beaten with the gory lash! Oh, hands once nailed to the cruel tree! Oh, feet once fastened to the bitter cross! Soon shall we behold the Christ who loved us, and died for us. Wherefore let us observe this sacred feast in remembrance of him.

II. But I must be briefer on my second point. The second meaning of the Lord's supper is that it is AN EXHIBITION. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." We are helped to remember it by the type, the emblem, the metaphor which is supplied to us by this supper. How is that? Is there any likeness to the death of Christ in this supper? I answer, there is a great likeness.

There is *his broken body*, represented by the bread which is broken, and intended for use. His dear body was broken, marred, sadly marred, given over to the hands of death, laid in the sepulchre, wrapped about with fine linen, left there, as his enemies thought, never to rise again. In that broken bread, broken that even believing children may eat their morsel, you see Christ's body given up for his people's sake.

But there stands a cup. It is full of the red juice of the grape. What means it? He himself shall explain it: "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Now, *the shedding of blood* is the great token of death. One would not long talk of killing without speaking of blood-shedding; in fact, bloodshed usually means dying by a violent death; and so did he die. They pierced his hands and his feet; the soldier thrust his lance into his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. That stream of blood was the token that he really was dead. He hath poured out from his veins his precious life to purchase his redeemed. The broken bread, the cluster pressed into the cup, and leaving nothing but its blood-red juice, these two things symbolize Christ's death.

But, most of all, this is an exhibition of *the two things separate*, the bread and the cup. We have heard of some mixing the bread with the wine; that is not the Lord's supper. We have heard of others partaking of the wafer, as they call it, and leaving the cup; this is not taking the Lord's supper. They must be both there; the bread here, the wine-cup there; because the separation of the blood from the flesh is the surest token of death. "The blood is the life thereof;" and if the blood be drained away, there is death. Therefore the blood is represented by the cup, and the flesh is represented by the bread; these two separated are the great token and emblem of Christ's death.

We show, display, exhibit, symbolize, the death of our Lord at this table in this fashion; we partake of both symbols, eating of the bread, drinking of the cup, *the whole ministering to the support of our life*. At this table we say to all of you who do not know Christ, Christ's death is our life, and the remembrance of Christ's death is the food of our life. If any of you are spectators of the ordinance, this is the meaning of our little acted sermon, Christ has died. Christ's death is the support of our faith, the food of our souls; in token whereof we take this bread and this cup, and eat and drink. So this supper is a showing forth of Christ's death. How many here can say that Christ's death is their life? How many of you can say that you feed upon him? Dear friends, you must not come to the table unless you can say it; but if you can, come and welcome; and if you cannot, oh! may the Lord teach you the lesson that is so needful, the lesson that is so blessed, when it is once learnt, that Christ on the cross is the one hope of eternal glory.

You have thus had two meanings of the Lord's supper; first, it is a memorial; and next, an exhibition.

III. The Lord's supper is, next, A COMMUNION.

We must have this brought out prominently, or we shall miss a great deal. *We are at the Lord's table*; we eat of his bread, we drink out of his cup. This betokens friendship. When, in the East, a

man has eaten of an Arab's salt, he is henceforth under his protecting care; and he who has spiritually eaten of Christ's bread, has come under Christ's protection; Christ will take care of him. All feuds are ended; an eternal peace is established between the two. It was a tender parable in which Nathan spoke of a man who had a little ewe lamb, which did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom. This is your privilege, to lie in Christ's bosom, to drink out of his cup, and to eat of his bread. This is a very sweet fellowship; enjoy it to-night to the full.

We go further than that, for we not only eat of his bread, but symbolically *we feast upon him*. His flesh is meat indeed; and his blood is drink indeed. Can I really feed upon Christ? Really, yes. Carnally, no. There is no such thing as the carnal eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood; that were a horrible thing; that were to make a man a cannibal; but the spiritual feeding upon the Incarnate God, this is what we mean. He gives us his flesh to eat, and we thus enter into a fellowship of the most intense and mysterious kind; not merely eating with him, but eating him; not merely receiving from him, but receiving him himself to be the life of our hearts. May you get to that point to-night! I believe in the real presence of Christ; I do not believe in the carnal presence of the Romanist. I believe in the real presence of the believer; but that reality is none the less real because it is spiritual; and only spiritual men can discern it.

Now, beloved, if we really come in the right spirit to this table, when we have eaten the bread, it becomes part of us; when the wine is sipped, the juice of the grape enters into our constitution; we cannot separate it from ourselves. Such is our fellowship with Christ. *He is one with us, and we are one with him.* "*Quis separabit?*" "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" We are one with Christ; partners with him; all that he has is ours; all that we have is his. He gives himself to us; we yield ourselves to him. It is Christ and Co., only the little "Co." drops its name to be swallowed up in him who is all in all. There is the meaning of the bread and the cup. We take Christ into ourselves, as he has taken us up into his greater self.

But communion also means that *we are one with each other*. I wish that you would catch that thought. I am afraid there are some members of the church here, who have never realized their union with all the rest of the members. "We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." One is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren. There should be an intimate feeling of fellowship, a readiness to help and love one another. Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

I cannot shake off from myself the idea that this makes up a large part of the meaning of the Lord's supper, the communion of saints with each other as well as the communion of the saints with Christ. May we enjoy it to-night! For my part, I like to feel, when I come to the table, that I am going to have communion, not only with this church, large as it is, not merely with the members of one denomination (I wish there were no denominations), not merely with the company of one body of Christians—would to God, there were but one body of Christians throughout the world!—but freely inviting all who belong to any part of the visible church; I delight to think that at this table to-night I shall have fellowship with the brethren in the United States, of all names, and sorts, and ages, and ranks. There cannot be two churches of Christ. There is but one Church, one Head, and one body. Though there are some very naughty children in the Lord's family, they must not be kept without their supper; there is some other way of chastening them; and as long as there is true living communion between one Christian and another, where God has given the thing signified, I dare not keep back the sign. If he gives them to have fellowship with Christ, who am I that shall say, "Thou shalt have not fellowship with me"? I dare not say it.

The meaning of this supper, then, is communion.

IV. But a fourth meaning of the Lord's supper is A COVENANTING. Our Lord said to his disciples, "This cup is the new testament, or covenant, in my blood." We do well to sing,—

"Thy body broken for my sake,
My bread from heaven shall be;
Thy testamental cup I take,
And thus remember thee."

When we come to the Lord's table, we must be careful that we there *take Christ to be our God in covenant*. We take the one living God for ever and ever. He gives himself to us, and we take him, and we declare, "This God is our God for ever and ever; he shall be our Guide even unto death." Do you understand that covenant relationship, every one of you? Do you know what you are doing when you take the piece of bread, and eat it, and take the cup and drink of it? If you are truly a believer in Christ, God is in covenant with you through the body and the blood of Christ, and you recognize that blessed truth, and take him to be your God.

Now, the covenant runs thus, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God." When, therefore, we come to this covenanting table, we *agree that we will be the Lord's people*; henceforth, not the devil's, not the world's, not our own; but the Lord's. When the Lord's people are chastened, we expect to be chastened with them. When the Lord's people are persecuted, we expect to be persecuted with them. We must take them for better or worse, to have and to hold, and death itself must not part us from the Lord's people. That is the meaning of coming to this table, recognizing that, between you and God there is an agreement made that must not be broken, a covenant ordered in all things and sure, by which God becomes yours and you become his, so that you are for ever to be one of those that belong wholly to him.

Here, at the communion-table, God, the covenant God, *seals his love to us*. "Come hither, my child," saith the Lord, "I love thee, and I gave myself for thee, in token whereof put this bread into thy mouth, to remind thee of how I gave myself for thee. I love thee, so that thou art mine. I have called thee by my name, in token whereof I remind thee that I bought thee with my precious blood. Therefore, let that sip of the juice of the vine go into thy body, to remind thee that by my precious blood, which was shed for many, I have redeemed thee from going down into the pit." There are seals at that table, new seals of the covenant, new tokens, new love gifts from the Lord, to remind you of what he has done for you.

And you are to come here to-night *to testify anew your love to God*. Here you say, "My Master, let me eat with thee." If any of you have lost your first love, and have grown spiritually cold, the Saviour stands at the door, and knocks, and he says, "Open to me," and he also says that if we open to him, he will come in, and sup with us, and we with him. He said that to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans, the church which was neither cold nor hot, which he threatened to spew out of his mouth. If thou art only fit to make Christ sick, yet if thou wilt open the door to him, he will come and feast with thee to-night, and all shall be well with thee. He testifies his love to you. Come and testify yours to him to-night. That is the meaning of this bread and this cup. Your covenant with death is broken, your agreement with hell is disannulled; and now you are in covenant with God, and he is in covenant with you, even in an everlasting covenant, which shall never be broken.

V. Lastly, and very briefly, this supper signifies A THANKSGIVING. It is often called, by friends who love hard words, the "Eucharist." We have some friends who always carry a gold pencil, on purpose to put down every word that nobody understands, that they may use it next

Sunday in their sermon. Such people call the Lord's supper the "Eucharist", which signifies "the giving of thanks." This is the thanksgiving service of the Church of God. It ought to be celebrated every Lord's-day. Every Sabbath should be a thanksgiving Sunday, for Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, and we ought to give thanks every time we celebrate his resurrection. Certainly we should do so when we celebrate his death. What are we going to do to-night by way of thanksgiving?

Well, we are coming to a festival, not a funeral. The choice festival of the Jewish faith was the Passover. The Lord's supper takes its place with higher joys; we come to this feast to *testify our joy in Christ*. There is bread, but there is also wine upon the table. This is to show that it is a festival for joy and delight, and you cannot praise Christ better, and give thanks to him better than by rejoicing in him. Praise him by your grateful joy. I think that we should always come to the Lord's table with a feeling of deep reverence; but that reverence should never tend to bondage. We want you not to come here quivering and shaking, as if you were slaves that came to eat a morsel of your master's bread, under fear of the lash. No, no; come, ye children; come, ye beloved ones of the Lord! Come, ye table companions of Christ, and sit at the festival he has prepared, and let your joy be full of thanksgiving!

We come to the table, next, actually to *praise the Lord for giving Christ to us*. When our Lord broke the bread, he gave thanks; so shall we to-night. Come ye, beloved, thankfully to praise the Father for the gift of Christ; and as you take the bread into your mouth, say in your heart, "Bless the Lord!" and as you drink of the cup, say in your spirit, "Blessed be his holy name! Blessed be the Father, for his eternal love to us; blessed be Jesus, for his love which has saved us to know all these precious things!"

One way in which we show our thanks to Christ is that *we receive with gratitude the emblems of his death*. Each one who communes with us will receive the bread, and eat it, and take the cup, and drink it. We do not hold it up, and look at it; we do not kneel down, and pay it homage; we receive it. We have done so now these many years. How long is it since we began this holy feast? Well, with some of us, it is over forty years since our first communion, and we do not want any better food. We desire to keep in memory the same Christ, to feed upon the same doctrine of the incarnation and atoning sacrifice; and if we should be spared, beloved, another forty years, which is far from likely, we shall have a sweeter tooth for Christ even than we have now. He will be more dear to us, more precious, more delightful, even than he is to-night. So we come to the table to show our gratitude by receiving and receiving again.

Let me whisper in your ear, when this communion is over, and you shall leave this table, "Pray, beloved, that you may *go away in the same spirit as your Lord and Master did*, when after rising from supper, he went out to the garden, not there to have a sweet hour of lonely communion with God, but there to sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. He went there to be arrested, to be hurried off to the bar of Annas, and Caiaphas, and Pilate, and Herod, and the rest of them. He went there, in fact to die; but he went away singing." So I want you to go away from this communion singing praises to God. As my dear brother said in prayer, you must have your Gethsemanes, your Golgothas; but I want you to go away from this table singing. Whatever comes, high or low, bright or dark, heaven or another age in this dark wilderness, brethren, let us sing. We often say, "Let us pray;" but to-night, at the table, I say, "Let us sing." Let us sing unto the Lord because of his great gift to us, which we to-night remember, and set forth, and commune with, and

covenant with. Let us sing unto the Lord as long as we live; for we can never sufficiently praise him for all that he has done for us.

"We'll praise our risen Lord,
While at his feet we sit,
His griefs a hallow'd theme afford
For sweetest music fit."

Thus I have explained all about the Lord's supper; do you know anything about it? Some of you are going away. You are going away! Yes, and the day shall come when you will not have anywhere to go! When the great marriage supper is spread, and the feast of the gracious shall be held, and the whole universe shall be gathered, oh! where will you go? You will not be allowed to linger at the door, neither will you go home to wait till others shall return from the festival. You must be driven from God's presence if you come not by faith in Christ to that great feast. The fiery swords of the angel-guards shall be unsheathed, and they shall pursue you through the blackness of eternal darkness, down to infinite despair! The Lord have mercy upon you to-night, that he may have mercy upon you in that day, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

MATTHEW 26:26-30; and 1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-34.

We will read, first, Matthew's account of the institution of the Lord's supper.

Matthew xxvi. 26. *And as they were eating,*

In the middle of the Paschal Feast our Lord instituted the sacred festival which was ever afterwards to be known as "the Lord's supper." The one ordinance was made to melt gradually into the other: "as they were eating."

26. *Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; this is my body.*

"This represents my body." He could not possibly have meant that the bread was his body; for there was his body sitting at the table, whole and entire. They would have been astonished beyond measure if they had understood him literally; but they did not do so, any more than when Christ said, "I am the door," or "I am the Good Shepherd."

27. *And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;*

"Every one of you." Was this the Lord's supper? Yes. What say the Romanists about it? Why, that the people may not drink the cup! Yet our Saviour says to his disciples, "Drink ye all of it."

28. *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

They had had sin brought to their minds; they had had a personal reminder of their own liability to sin; now they were to have a perpetual pledge of the pardon of sin, in the cup, which was the emblem of Christ's blood, "shed for many for the remission of sins."

29. *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

Jesus took the Nazarite vow to drink no more, to partake no more of the fruit of the vine, till he should meet us again in his Father's kingdom. He has pledged us once for all in that cup, and now he abstains until he meets us again. Thus he looks forward to a glorious meeting; but he bids us take the cup, and thus remember him until he comes.

30. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

To his last great battle the Champion goes singing, attended by feeble followers, who could not protect him; but who could sing with him. I think he must have led the tune; his disciples were too sorrowful to sing until his clear voice started the Hallelujah Psalms; but they joined him in the holy

exercise, for "they" as well as their Lord sang the hymn. When you are about to face a trial, offer a prayer; but, if you can, also sing a hymn. It will show great faith if, before you enter into the burning fiery furnace, you can sing psalms unto the Lord who redeemeth his people.

Now let us read Paul's version of this same matter.

1 Corinthians xi. 20, 21. *When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.*

These Corinthians had fallen into a very queer state. I do not think that any Baptist Church that I have ever known of has acted in this fashion; but when churches have no ministers, when there is an open ministry where everybody talketh and nobody listeneth, they fall into a queer condition, especially into divisions and heart-breaking strifes. It was so in the case of this church at Corinth. Here everybody brought his own provision, and some ate to the full, and others had not enough; and they thought that they were observing "the Lord's supper."

22. *What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?*

There is your proper place if you want a meal. Go home, and eat and drink; do not come to the sanctuary for such a purpose: "Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?"

22, 23. *Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. For I have received of the Lord that which I delivered unto you,*

He had received it by a special revelation, Poor Paul was brought in late, and he was like one born out of due time. He had not been present in the upper room with Christ at the first famous breaking of bread; so the Lord came and gave him a special revelation concerning this sacred feast, so that, whenever he spoke or wrote to any of the churches about the Lord's supper, he could say, "I have received of the Lord that which I delivered unto you."

23, 24. *That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.*

The Lord's supper is a simple service of remembrance. Nothing is said about an altar, or a priest, or a sacrifice. Our Lord took bread, gave thanks for it, brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." Mark that "*this do*"; it will not be right to do something else instead of this; and we must not do this for any other purpose than the one he mentions, "This do in remembrance of me." This command raises a previous question, "Do we know him?" we cannot remember Christ if we do not know him.

25, 26. *After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drinketh it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

"By Christ redeemed, in Christ restored,

We keep the memory adored,

And show the death of our dear Lord,

Until he come!

"And thus that dark betrayal-night,

With the last advent we unite;

By one blest chain of loving rite

Until he come!"

27. *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.*

If such a man has treated "this bread" and "this cup" with contempt, he has treated "the body and blood of the Lord" with contempt; it shall be so reckoned to him. Many have been troubled by this verse. They have said, "We are unworthy." You are, this is quite true; but the text does not say anything about your being unworthy. Paul uses an adverb, not an adjective. His words are, "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily," that is, in an unfit way, to gain something by it, as men used to take what they called "the sacrament" to get into certain offices, or as some come to the communion-table for the sake of the charitable gifts that are for the poor of the church; this is to eat and drink "unworthily." To come carelessly, to come contemptuously, to say, "I do not care whether I am a Christian, or not; but I shall come to the communion," this is to eat and drink "unworthily." Notice the *ly*; we are all unworthy of this sacred feast, and if unworthiness could shut us out, who would dare to be here?

28. *But let a man examine himself,*

Let a man look himself up and down, as a lawyer cross-questions a witness, as a man examines money to see whether it has the true ring of gold about it; or not: "Let a man examine himself."

28. *And so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

Let him come as a true believer, as sincere; if not perfect, yet true; if not all he ought to be, yet in Christ; if not all he wants to be, yet still on the way to it, by being in Christ, who is "the way, the truth and the life."

29. *For he that eateth, and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*

He does not see the meaning of the emblem of Christ's death. He degrades the symbol by making it take the place of the thing signified. He sees the bread, but not the body; and he damnifies himself, condemns himself, by such eating. He is a loser rather than a gainer by eating and drinking unworthily.

30. *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.*

Persons coming to the Lord's table in an improper spirit are very apt to come under God's discipline; some will be taken ill; and some will die. This discipline is being carried on in every true church of God. God's providence will work in this way if many treat the table of the Lord as the Corinthians did, acting as if it were a common place for eating and drinking. Many of them were weak and sickly, and many died.

31. *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.*

If we are God's people, we shall be judged by him here for our wrongdoing. We shall not be like the world that is left to the day of judgment; but we shall be judged now. God will visit with temporal judgments those of his children who sin against him.

32. *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.*

You know that a man will see a great deal that is wrong in children in the street, and say nothing about it; but if it is his own who is up to mischief, he will give him a sweet taste of the rod. So, if you belong to God, you cannot sin deeply without having a present judgment, a present discipline; and you ought to be thankful for it, painful though it may seem to be for the time, for "when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

33. *Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.*

How gently Paul talks to these Corinthians! They deserve to be scolded; but he is very tender with them. He says, "If you must come together in this way, at least have the good manners to stop for one another; and if you do come to the communion of the Lord, treat it with that respect and reverence which it deserves.

34. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come,

May we to-night keep this feast in due order under the power of the Holy Spirit, and may we find a blessing in it to God's praise! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—938, 947.

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