



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 13: 1867

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 13: 1867* by Charles Spurgeon

Title: Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 13: 1867
URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons13.html>
Author(s): Spurgeon, Charles Haddon (1834-1892)
Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library
Date Created: 2002-08-27
CCEL Subjects: All; Sermons;
LC Call no: BV42
LC Subjects: Practical theology
Worship (Public and Private) Including the church year, Christian symbols, liturgy, prayer, hymnology
Times and Seasons. The church year

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Loving Advice for Anxious Seekers

A Sermon

(No. 735)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, February 17th, 1866, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”—James 1:5.

IF YOU ARE acquainted with the context, you will at once perceive that this verse has a special reference to persons in trouble. Much-tempted and severely-trying saints are frequently at their wits' end, and though they may be persuaded that in the end good will come out of all their afflictions, yet for the present they may be so distracted as not to know what to do. How fitly spoken and how reasonable is this word of the apostle, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God;” and such wisdom shall the Lord afford his afflicted sons, that the trying of their faith shall produce patience, and they themselves shall count it all joy that they have fallen in divers trials.

However, the promise is not to be limited to any one particular application, for the word, “If *any* of you,” is so wide, so extensive, that whatever may be our necessity, whatever the dilemma which perplexes us, this text consoles us with the counsel, “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.”

This text might be peculiarly comforting to some of you who are working for God. You cannot work long for your heavenly Lord without perceiving that you need a greater wisdom than you own. Why, even in directing an enquirer to the cross of Christ, simple work as that may seem to be, we shall often discover our own inability and folly. In rebuking the backslider, in comforting the desponding, in restoring the fallen, in guiding the ignorant, we shall need to be taught of God, or else we shall meet with more failures than successes. To every honest Christian worker this text speaks with all the soft melody of an angel's whisper. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” Thy lips shall overflow with knowledge, and thy tongue shall drop with words of wisdom, if thou wilt but wait on God and hear him before thou speakest to thy fellow men. Thou shalt be made wise to win souls if thou wilt learn to sit at the Master's feet, that he may teach thee the art which he followed when on earth, and follows still.

But the class of persons who just now win my heart's warmest sympathies are those who are seeking the Saviour; and, as the text says, “If *any* of you,” I thought I should be quite right in giving seekers a share in it. They are seeking Christ, but they are in the dark: their soul desires Him, but it has little light, little guidance, and their cry is. “O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!” I thought that this text might be as the balm of Gilead to some of these unwise ones, who have found out all of a sudden their own sin and folly. I thought it would say to them, “If you, poor si” Let us put ourselves, then, at once in order for this work of comforting seekers, and may God, the Holy Ghost, make it effectual.

I. First, I shall call your attention to THE GREAT LACK OF MANY SEEKERS, NAMELY, WISDOM. This lack occurs from divers reasons. Sometimes it is *their pride* which makes them

fools. Like Naaman, they would do some *great thing* if the prophet had bidden them, but they will not wash and be clean.

The natural heart rebels against the simplicity of the way of salvation. "What! am I to do nothing but simply accept the righteousness already finished? Am I to leave off doing, and merely to look unto Him who was nailed to the tree, and find all my salvation in Him? "Well, then," saith the proud heart, "I cannot understand it." It cannot understand it because it doth not love it. Now, soul, if this be thy difficulty, and I believe, in nine cases out of ten, a proud heart is at the root of all difficulty about the sinner's coming to Christ—if this it is which turns you aside and makes you foolish, then go to God about it, and seek wisdom from Him. He will show you the folly of this pride of yours, and teach you that simply to trust in Jesus is at once the safest and most suitable way of salvation. He will make you see that if the way of salvation had been by doing, the method would not have suited you, for what could you do? If it had been by feeling, it would not have suited you either, for what can your hard heart feel? How can you make yourself tender of heart? But, seeing that it is by faith, it is therefore by grace. O that you may be made wise enough to stoop and kiss the silver sceptre which is outstretched to you, to come and buy this wine and milk, without money and without price, and accept with you whole heart, with intense joy, this perfect righteousness, this finished salvation which Christ hath wrought out and brought in for every seeking soul.

Many persons also, are made foolish, so that they lack wisdom through *their despair*. Probably, nothing makes a man seem so much like a maniac as the loss of hope. When the mariner feels that the vessel is sinking, that the proud waves must soon overwhelm her, then he reels to and fro, and staggers like a drunken man, because he is at his wits' end. Ah! poor heart, when thou seest the blackness of sin, I do not wonder that thou art driven to despair; and when thy sins come howling behind thee, like so many ravenous wolves, all seeking to devour thee, I do not marvel that thou shouldst be ready even to lay violent hands upon thyself. It is no strange thing for men to be sorely tempted when they are under a sense of sin. And now thou knowest not what to do. If thou couldst be calm and quiet, we could tell you plainly the way of peace, and you might understand that there is no reason for despair, since Jesus died and rose again, and is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him;" but you cannot give us a calm hearing, for you are distracted, and you think that this comfort applies to everybody but you. You lack wisdom because you are in such a worry and turmoil. As John Bunyan used to say, you are much troubled up and down in your thoughts. I pray you, then, ask wisdom of God, and even out of the depths if you cry unto him, he will be pleased to instruct you and bring you out into a safe way.

No doubt many other persons lack wisdom because they are *not instructed in gospel doctrine*. It is wonderful how Satan will plague many timid hearts with the doctrine of election. That doctrine, rightly understood, is full of comfort; but, distorted and misrepresented, it often appears to be a bolt to shut sinners out from mercy—the fact being that it shuts none out, but shuts tens of thousands in. Why, the very doctrine of the atonement is not understood by many, while they are under a sense of sin. If they could see that Christ took their sins and carried their sorrows; if they could perceive the meaning of the word, "substitution," light might break in. The window of the understanding is blocked up with ignorance, if we could but clean away the cobwebs and filth, then might the light of the knowledge of Christ come streaming in, and they might rejoice in his salvation. Well, dear friends, if you are be-mired and be-puzzled with difficult doctrine, the text comes to you and says, "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God."

Ignorance also of Christian experience is another cause for the lack of wisdom. I have seen many enquirers who have told me what they have felt, and to them it was so amazing, that they half expected to see every individual hair of my head stand upright while they told me their feelings; and when I said, "Oh! yes, yes, I have felt just like that; that is the common way of most souls that come to Christ;" they have looked surprised beyond measure. The very road which is most safe, you think to be most dangerous; and that which leads to Christ, you fancy leads to hell. Little do you know the value of that stripping work which you so much dread. "Surely," say you, "I am being stripped that I may be cast away;" whereas the Lord only strips those whom he intends afterwards to clothe with the robe of his salvation. Those cuttings of the lancet are sharp, and you think that the surgeon means to kill, but he intends to cure. When God is making you feel the burden of your guilt, you suppose that now he has forgotten to be gracious, whereas it is now that he is gracious to you in very deed, and is using the best means of making you understand and value his grace. The way of life is a new road to you, poor seeking soul, and therefore you lack wisdom in it and make many mistakes about it. The text lovingly advises, "Ask of God;" "Ask of God." Very likely, in addition to all this, which may well enough make you lack wisdom, there are *certain singularities in the action of providence towards you*, which will fill you with dismay. Ever since you have begun to think about the Lord Jesus, things have gone cross with you in the outward world. You have not only trouble within, but, strange as you think it is, you have now trouble without: it partly arises from friends who say you are mad—would God they were bitten with the same madness!—partly from circumstances over which you can have no control. It is not at all unusual for God to make a complete shipwreck of that vessel in which his people sail, although he fulfills his promise, that not a hair of their heads shall perish. I should not wonder if he would cause two seas to meet around your barque, so that there should not be more than a few boards and broken pieces of the ship left to you, but oh! if you have faith in Christ, he will certainly bring you safe to shore. It is not at all an uncommon thing for the Lord to add to the inward scourgings of conscience the outward lashings of affliction. These double scourgings are meant for proud, stubborn hearts, that they may be humbly brought to Jesus' feet, for of us it may be said, in truth, as Solomon saith of the child, "Foolishness is bound in his heart; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." God is thus, dear hearer, bringing folly out of you by the smarts of his rod. It is written, "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil," and therefore the Lord is making your wounds to be black and blue, and I should not wonder if he will even let them putrefy, till you have to say with Isaiah, "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." Then it is that eternal mercy will take advantage of your dire extremity, and your deep distress shall bring you to Christ who never would have been brought by any other means. To close this somewhat painful picture. Many lack wisdom because in addition to all their fears and their ignorance, they are fiercely attacked by *Satan*. John Bunyan tells us of Apollyon, that he said, "No king will willingly lose his subjects." Of course, he will not; and Apollyon, as he sees his subjects one after another desert him to enlist under the banner of King Jesus, howls at his losses, and he leaves no stone unturned to keep souls back from mercy. Just at that critical moment himself, "It is now or never. If I do not nip these buds, they will become flowers and fruits; but if I can bring in a withering frost, I shall kill the young plant." The great enemy makes a dead set at anxious souls. He it is who digs that Slough of Despond right in front of the wicket gate, and keeps the big dog to howl before the door, so that poor trembling Mercy may go into a fainting fit, and find herself too weak to knock at the door. "Now," saith he to all his servants, "shoot your arrows

at that awakened soul; it is about to escape from me: empty your quivers, ye soldiers of the pit; launch your hot temptations, ye fiends of hell! Sting that soul with infidel insinuations and hideous blasphemies, for if I once lose it I have lost it forever; therefore, hold it, ye princes of the pit, hold it fast, if ye can." Now, in such a plight as that, with your foolish heart, and the wicked world, and the evil one, and your sins in dreadful alliance to destroy you, what could such a poor timid one as you do, if it were not for this precious word, "If any of *you*"—that must mean you—"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not"?"

II. We shall now mention the second point in the text. THE PROPER PLACE OF A SEEKERS RESORT—"Let him ask of God."

My dear friends, bear me witness that it is my constant effort to teach you the spirituality of true religion, and the necessity of our own hearts having personal dealings with the living God. Now, though this you have heard thousands of times, I was about to say from me, yet, once again, I must remind you of it: the text says, "Let him ask of God." Now, you perceive, that the man is directed at once to God, without any intermediate object, or ceremony, or person. You are not told here to seek direction from good books; they may become very useful as auxiliary helps, but the best of human books, if followed slavishly, will mislead. For instance, I am sure that hundreds of persons have been kept in unnecessary bondage through that wonderful and admirable book, "Doddrige's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul." It has been the means of the conversion of hundreds; it has been profitable to thousands more; but there is a point in which it fails, so that, if you slavishly follow it, you may read the book through, and I undertake to say, you will not find comfort by following its exhortations. It fails, as all human guides must, if we trust in them and forget the Great Shepard of Israel. When a man is really under concern of soul, he is in a condition of considerable danger. Then it is that an artful false teacher may get hold of him, and cozen him into heresy and unscriptural doctrine. Hence the text does not say, "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask his priest;" that is about the worst thing he can do; for he who sets himself up for a priest, is either a deceiver or deceived. "Let him ask of God," that is the advice of the Scripture. We are all so ready to go to books, to go to men, to go to ceremonies, to anything except God. Man will worship God with his eyes, and his arms, and his knees, and his mouth—with anything but his heart—and we are all of us anxious, more or less, until we are renewed by grace, to get off the heart-worship of God. Juan de Valdey says, that, "Just as an ignorant man takes a crucifix and says, 'This crucifix will help me to think of Christ,' so he bows before it and never does think of Christ at all, but stops short at the crucifix; so," says he, "the learned man takes his book and says, 'This book will teach me the mysteries of the kingdom,' but instead of giving his thoughts to the mysteries of godliness, he reads his book mechanically and stops at the book, instead of meditating and diving into the truth." It is the action of the mind that God accepts, not the motion of the body; it is the thought communing with him; it is the soul coming into contact with the soul of God; it is the spirit-worship which the Lord accepts. Consequently, the text does not say, "Let him ask books," nor "ask priests," but, "let him ask of God."

Above all, do not let the seeker ask of himself and follow his own imaginings and feelings. All human guides are bad, but you yourself will be your own worst guide. "Let him ask of God." When a man can fairly and honestly say, "I have bowed the knee unto the Lord God of Israel, and asked him, for Jesus' sake, to guide me and to direct me by his Spirit, and then I turned to the Book of God, asking God to be my guide into the book," I cannot believe but what such a man will soon obtain saving wisdom.

I beg to caution all of you against stopping short of really asking *of God*. I conjure you by the living God, do not be satisfied with asking of me. I am no priest, except as all believers are priests, thank God. I wear no title of ecclesiastical dominion. Be not content with asking my brethren, the deacons and elders: God has made many of them wise in helping souls out of difficulties; do not be satisfied with the advice of any man, however godly and holy, but go direct to the Lord God of heaven and earth, and say unto him, "Lord, teach thou me! Show me thy way, O God! Teach me in thy truth!" You are not bidden to go to any second-hand source of wisdom, but to God the only wise, who alone can direct you. "Let him ask of God."

Such advice as this must be good. You cannot suspect us of any interested motive in exhorting you to this. It is your good which we seek, and not our own glory. It must be the best to go to head-quarters: you will surely be led aright if so you seek direction. Some say, Lo, here! others say, Lo, there! But if you go to God, and then with his guidance study his word, you shall not fail of wisdom. How can you?

Moreover, remember that there is one blessed person of the divine Unity who makes it his especial office to teach us! Hence, if you go to God for wisdom, you only go for that which it is his nature and his office to give. The Holy Ghost is given to this end: "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." When you go to God, you may say to him these words, "O Father, you have been pleased to reveal to us the Holy Spirit, who is to lighten our darkness, and to remove our ignorance. Oh, let that Spirit of thine dwell in me; I am willing to be taught by thy Spirit, through thy word, or through thy ministers, but I come first to thee because I know that thy word and thy ministers, apart from thyself, cannot teach me anything. O Lord, teach thou me." I do not mean by any word of mine to make you think little of Scripture—God forbid!—nor little of those who may speak to you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, but I did mean to make you look even at that Book, and at God's ministers, as being subservient to the Holy Ghost himself. Go to him; ask him: for there in the Book is the letter that killeth; he, he alone can make you to know the living essence and the quickening power of that word. Without the Holy Ghost, my dear hearer, you must still be as blind with the light as you would have been without it. You will be as foolish after having been taught the gospel in the theory of it, as you were before you knew it. Let the Holy Spirit, however, teach you, and you shall know all things that are necessary for this life and godliness.

Thus, then, we have brought two points before you: the great lack of the seeker is "wisdom;" and the right place to get that lack removed.

III. Thirdly, THE RIGHT MODE IN WHICH TO GO TO GOD. "*Let him ask.*" Oh! That simple word, "Let him *ask*"—"let him *ask!*" No form of asking is prescribed, no words laid down, no method dictated, no hour set apart, no rubric printed; but there it stands in gracious simplicity, "let him *ask.*" He

who will not have mercy when it is to be had for the asking for, deserves to die without it. While I am thinking of this word, before I plunge into its fullest meaning, I may well say, if God will give wisdom to the seeker only because he asks for it, what shall I say of the folly which will not even ask to be *made* wise? May God forgive you such folly for the past, and deliver you from it for the future.

The text says, "Let him ask," which is a method implying that *ignorance is confessed*. No man will ask wisdom till he knows that he is ignorant. Come, dear hearer, confess your ignorance into the ear of God, who is as present here as you are; say unto him, "Lord, I have discovered now that

I am not so wise as I thought I was; I am foolish and vain. Lord, teach thou me.” Make a full confession, and this shall be a good beginning for prayer.

Asking has also in it the fact the *God is believed in*. We cannot ask of a person of whose existence we have any doubt, and we will not ask of a person of whose hearing us we have serious suspicions. Who would stand in the desert of Sahara and cry aloud, where there is no living ear to hear? Now, my dear hearer, thou believest that there is a God. Ask, then! Dost thou not believe that he is here, that he will hear thy cry, that he will be pleased in answer to thy cry to give thee what thou askest for? Now, if thou canst believe that there is a God, that he is here and that he will hear thee, then confess thy ignorance, and ask him now to give thee the promised wisdom for Jesus' sake.

There is in this method of approaching God by asking, also, *a clear sight that salvation is by grace*. It does not say, “Let him buy of God, let him demand of God, let him earn from God.” Oh! no—“let him ask of God.” It is the beggar's word. The beggar asks an alms. You are to ask as the beggar asks of you in the street, and God will give to you far more liberally than ye to the poor. You must confess that you have no merit of your own. If you will not acknowledge that, neither will God hear your prayers; but come now with the acknowledgment of ignorance, with the confession of sin, and believing that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and he will even now give you the wisdom which saves the soul.

Observe here, what *an acknowledgment of dependence* there is. The man sees that he cannot find wisdom anywhere else, but that it must come from God. He turns his eye to the only fountain, and leaves the broken cisterns. Do this, dear hearer. I feel as if the text did not want any explanation from me, but only wanted carrying out by you. Let him ask of God. I think I can hear fifty-thousand objections from different parts of the building. One is saying, “But I don't understand, ask of God.” If thou has made some difficulties for thyself, if thou art such a fool as to be tying knots and wanting to get them untied before thou wilt believe in Jesus, then I have nothing to say to thee, except it were, beware lest thou dost tie a knot that shall destroy thy soul; but if thou be troubled with an honest objection, I say to thee *now*, in God's name, “*Ask of God.*” You need not wait till you get home, you need not stay till you have left that seat, but now, silently, in your soul, as Hannah did when she went up to the tabernacle, breathe the prayer, “O God, teach thou me: lead me to the foot of the cross; help me to see Jesus; save my soul this day; end the doubtful strife; answer these questions; bring me, as an humble seeker, to lie before the footstool of thy sovereign mercy, and to receive pardon through the mediatorial sacrifice. “Let him ask—that is all—*let him ask.*”

IV. Fourthly, the text has in it ABUNDANT ENCOURAGEMENT for such a seeker.

There are four encouragements here. “Let him ask of God, *who giveth to all men.*” What a wide statement—Who “giveth to all men!” I will take it in its broadest extent. In natural things, God does give to all men life, health, food, raiment. Who “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good;” who causeth the rain to descend upon the fields of the just and of the unjust. Every creature is favoured with divine benevolence; and there is not a creature, from the tiniest ephemera which creepeth upon the green leaf of the forest, up to the swift-winged angel who adoringly flies upon his Master's will, which is not made to partake of the gifts of the Great Father of Lights. Now, if God hath gifts for all men, how much more will he have gifts for that man who earnestly turns his tearful eye to heaven and cries, “My Father, give me wisdom, that I may be reconciled to thee through the death of thy Son”? Why, the grass, as Herbert says, never asked for the dew, and yet every blade has its own drop; and shall you daily cry for the dew of grace, and there be no drop of heaven's grace for you? Impossible. Fancy your own child saying, “My father, my father, I want

to be obedient, I want to be holy;" and suppose that you have power to make your child so, could you find it in your heart to refuse? No; it would be a greater joy to you to give than it could be to the child to accept.

But it has been said, the text ought not be understood in that broad sense. Very probably it ought not so to be. I conceive that there is implied the limitation that God giveth to all *who seek*. Though the limitation is not stated, yet I think it is intended, because of spiritual mercies God does not give to all men liberally. There are some men who live and die without the liberal favours of grace, because they wantonly and wickedly refuse them; but he gives to all true seekers liberally. We may take that view of it, and we may find you hundreds of witnesses to prove the truth of it, and can find them in this very place this morning. Here is one witness; I myself personally sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. My dear brethren, and my sisters too, I know that you could spring up like a great army, if it were a fitting thing to asy you to do, and you could say, "'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him.' 'The God of Jacob hath not despised nor abhorred the cries of his people.'" Now, soul, if God has heard so many who sought his face, why should he not hear you? Is it not a comfort to think that hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands have gone to God, and there has never been a case in which he has refused one? Will he begin with you? Shall you be the first rejected seeker? Oh! then, what a strange destiny yours will be, to have to say to another world, "I am the first who sought grace, and found it not; I wept at the foot of the cross, and I found no mercy; I said, 'Lord, remember me,' but he would not remember me." You will never be able to say that. Hell will never make its boast over such a case; heaven will never have its honour tarnished by one such solitary instance. Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore. Your hearts shall live that seek him.

The next comfort is, he gives to all men *liberally*. God does not give as we do, a mere trifle to the beggar, but he bestows his wealth by handfuls. Solomon asked for wisdom: God gave him wealth and power. In nearly every instance of prayer in the Old Testament, God gives ten times as much as is asked for. Jacob asked that he might have bread to eat, and raiment to put on: God made him to be two bands. The Lord will "do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think." This is the divine habit. He not only redeems his promises, but when he might meet them in silver he prefers to pay them in gold. He is exceedingly bountiful. Dear hearers, we have found him so when we have tried him, and do you think that he will begin to be niggardly with you? If he should liberally forgive your sins, he will be none the poorer; if he withhold forgiveness, he will be none the richer. Why should he stint his favour? You want to wash away your sins: there is a river of grace to wash in. You want grace to refresh your souls: he has floods to pour upon the dry ground. We read of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Ho! ye leviathan sinners, here is an ocean of mercy for you to swim in. Ho! ye elephantine sinners, here is an ark large enough to hold you and float you above the waters of the deluge! Ho! ye gigantic sinners, whose sins of pride reach up to heaven, and whose feet of lust are plunged in the mire of hell, the sacred hiding-place is large enough to hide even you. The Lord is great in mercy. Oh! who would not ask of so liberal a God, whose thoughts as the heavens are above the earth.

It is added as a third comfort, "*and upbraideth not.*" That is a sweet word. If you help a friend who is in debt, and wants to borrow money, you say, "Remember, I do not like it, you ought not to be in such a state." Your brother wants some aid; you have helped him many times, and will again, but still you upbraid him and tell him he is very imprudent; he ought not to get into these messes; he ought to manage his business better." If you do not tell him so with the mouth, you look

at him, and he thinks to himself, "It's very kind of him to give me the help, but really it is very humiliating to me to have to ask him because I get so severe a lesson." I suppose we do right to upbraid. I have no doubt we do so with good motives. But God never does upbraid seeking souls. He giveth liberally, and does not dim the lustre of his grace by harsh rebukes. He does not say, "Ah! you sinner, how came you to commit such sin; I will forgive you, but —————." The Father does not talk thus to the returning prodigal. One would have supposed that when the prodigal came back, the father would have said, "Well, dear boy, you are forgiven, but never let me see you do that again. How wrong of you to take that portion of my goods, and spend it in that way! I shall never be so well off as before; you have wasted half my living; and now think where you have been: what a dishonour you have cast upon your father's name and character through wasting your living with harlots. I forgive: I cannot forget." My brethren, it was not so. The prodigal remembered his sins, but his father forgot them all, and exclaimed with joy, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." O soul, if thou didst but know the heart of the Saviour, thou wouldst not tarry in sin. If thou couldst but know the overflowing love of the divine Father, thou wouldst not linger in unbelief."

"His heart is made of tenderness,
His bowels melt with love."

Fool as thou art, be not such a fool as to be unwilling to ask for wisdom, but now breathe the prayer, "Teach me, O God, to trust thy dear Son this day."

Then comes the last encouragement. "*It shall be given him.*" Looking through my text last night, I asked the question—Is that last sentence wanted? "Let him ask of God, which giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." Now, if the Lord gives to all men, he will certainly give to the seeker. Is that last promise wanted? And I came to this conclusion, that it would have not been there if it was not required. There are some sinners that cannot be contented to draw obvious inferences; they must have it in black and white. Such is the fearfulness of their nature, they must have the promise in so many express words. Here they have it, "it shall be given him." You are not left to suppose that it shall be, or infer that it may be, but it is written, "it shall be given him."

But to whom shall it be given? *If any of you lack wisdom.* "Well," says one, "I am quite out of all catalogues; I am one by myself." Well, but you are surely contained in this "*any of you.*" "Ah!" says one, "but I have a private fault, a sin, an offense which I would not dare to mention, which I believe has damned me for ever." Yet the text says, "If any of you." If I saw a door open, and it said "If *any of you* be hungry, let him come in here," I should not stop outside because I feared that I was not quite the person intended, I should say "It is their business who mean to keep me out, to be more specific in their invitation. They have put it '*any of you.*' I am certainly one of the sons of men, and I will step in to the feast." Ah soul! if God had meant to shut thee out, he would have been more plain about it, but here is not a shutting-out word at all. It says, "If any of you lack wisdom"—well, that is you, surely—that lack of wisdom helps to include you within the boundary. It does not limit the character; it widens it to you, because you feel how foolish you are. The promise is, "it shall be given him." "Suppose I do not get it," you say. You must not suppose God to be a liar. How can you suppose such a blasphemy? "Let him ask of God, and *it shall be given him.*" "But," says one, "suppose my sins should prove to be too great!" I cannot, will not suppose anything which can come in conflict with the positive word of God. "Let him ask of God, and it shall be given him." Do you think God does not mean what he says? O sinner, will you add to all your other sins this sin of thinking that God would lie? O man, he invites you to ask of him wisdom, and he

says he will give it to you; doubt not the Lord, distrust not the veracity of Jehovah, but come at once humbly, trembling, to the foot of the Saviour's cross. View him lifted on high, as the great atoning sacrifice; look to his streaming wounds; behold his brow still covered with the crimson drops which flow from the wounds caused by his thorny crown. Look to him and live. There's life in a look at the Crucified One: look to him, and the promise is that you should be saved. I commend the text to the careful, thoughtful, believing acceptance of every sinner here. Ask that the sun may not go down until you each and all have received the promise which the text presents to you. May the Holy Spirit now give his own blessing, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew 5:1-12.

A Sermon to Open Neglecters and Nominal Followers of Religion

A Sermon

(No. 742)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, March 24th, 1866, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Agricultural Hall, Islington

“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”—Matthew 21:28-32.

THE SIGHT OF THIS VAST ARENA, and of this crowded assembly, reminds me of other spectacles which, in days happily long past, were seen in the amphitheatres of the old Roman Empire. Around, tier upon tier, were the assembled multitudes, with their cruel eyes and iron hearts; and in the center stood a solitary, friendless man, waiting till the doors of the lion's den should be uplifted, that he might yield himself up a witness for Christ and a sacrifice to the popular fury. There would have been no difficulty then to have divided the precious from the vile in that audience. The most thoughtless wayfarer who should enter into the amphitheatre, would know at once who was the disciple of Christ and who were the enemies of the Crucified One. There stood the bravely-calm disciple, about to die, but all around, in those mighty tiers of the Colosseum, or of the amphitheatre of some provincial town, as the case might be, there sat matrons and nobles, princes and peasants, plebeians and patricians, senators and soldiers, all gazing downward with the same fierce, un pitying look; all boisterous for their heathen gods, and all vociferous in the joy with which they gazed upon the agonies of the disciple of the hated Galilean, butchered to make a Roman holiday. Another sight is before us to-day, with far more happy associations; but alas! it is a far more difficult task this day to separate the chaff from the wheat, the precious from the vile, than in the day when the apostle fought with beasts at Ephesus. Here, in this arena, I hope there are hundreds, if not thousands, who would be prepared to die for our Lord Jesus; and in yonder crowded seats, we may count by hundreds those who bear the name and accept the gospel of the Man of Nazareth; and yet, I fear me, that both in these living hills on either side, and upon this vast floor, there are many enemies of the Son of God, who are forgetful of his righteous claims—who have cast from them those cords of love which should bind them to his throne, and have never submitted to the mighty love which showed itself in his cross and in his wounds. I cannot attempt the separation. You must grow together until the harvest. To divide you were a task which at this hour angels could not perform, but which one day they will easily accomplish, when at their Master's bidding, the harvest being come, they shall gather together first the tares in bundles to burn them, and afterwards the wheat into Jehovah's barn. I shall not attempt the division, but I shall ask each man to attempt it for himself in his own case. I say unto you, young men and maidens, old men and fathers, this

day examine yourselves whether you be in the faith. Let no man take it for granted that he is a Christian because he has helped to swell the numbers of a Christian assembly. Let no man judge his fellow, but let each man judge himself. To each one of you I say, with deepest earnestness, let a division be made by your conscience, and let your understandings separate between him that feareth God and him that feareth him not. Though no man clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side, shall go through the midst of you to set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations of this city, let conscience take the inkhorn and honestly make the mark, or leave the favored sign unmade, and let each man question himself this morning, "Am I on the Lord's side? Am I for Christ, or for his enemies? Do I gather with him, or do I scatter abroad?" "Divide! divide!" they say in the House of Commons; let us say the same in this great congregation this day. Political divisions are but trifles compared with the all-important distinction which I would have you consider. Divide as you will be divided to the right and to the left in the great day when Christ shall judge the world in righteousness. Divide as you will be divided when the bliss of heaven, or the woes of hell, shall be your everlasting portion.

If the whole of us were thus divided into two camps, and we could say these have made a covenant with God by sacrifice, and those on the other hand are still enemies to God by wicked works, looking at the last class we might still feel it necessary by way of personal application to make a division among them; for although all unbelievers are alike unpardoned and unsaved, yet they are not alike in the circumstances of their case and the outward forms of their sins. Alike in being without Christ, they are still very varied in their mental and moral condition. I trust I was guided by the Spirit of God to my text this morning, for it is of such a character, that while it enables me to address the whole mass of the unconverted, it gives me a hopeful opportunity of getting at the conscience of each by dividing the great company of the unconverted into two distinct classes. O that for each tribe of unbelievers, there may be a blessing in store this day.

First, we shall speak to *those who are avowedly disobedient to God*; and, secondly, to those who are *deceptively submissive to him*.

I. First, we have a word for **THOSE WHO ARE AVOWEDLY DISOBEDIENT TO GOD**. There are many such here. God has said to you as he says to all who hear the gospel, "Son, go work to day in my vineyard;" and you have replied, perhaps honestly, but certainly very boldly, very unkindly, very unjustly, "I will not." You have made no bones about it, but given a refusal point-blank to the claims of your Creator. You have spoken your mind right out, not only in words, but in a more forcible and unmistakable manner, for actions speak far more loudly than words. You have said, over and over again, by your actions, "I will not serve God, or believe in his Son Jesus." My dear friend, I am glad to see you here this morning, and trust that matters will change with you ere you leave this hall; but at present you have not yielded even an outward obedience to God, but in all ways have said, "I will not." *Practically* you have said, "I will not worship God, I will not attend a place of worship on the Sunday—it is a weariness intolerable to me. I shall not sing the praise of my Maker—I will not pretend to bless the God for whom I have no love. In public prayer I shall not join—I have no heart for it. I shall not make a pretense of repeating morning and nightly prayer in private—what is the good of it? I will not pray at all; I do not believe in its efficacy, and I will not be such a hypocrite as to follow a vain practice in which I have no belief whatever. As for what is called sin, I love it and will not give it up." You are proud of being called an honest man, for you own the claims of your fellow men upon you, but you scorn to be thought religious, for you do not admit the rights of your Maker. To the righteous requests of others you yield a

cheerful obedience, but to the just and tender requests of God you give a plain and evident denial. As clearly as actions can speak, you say by your neglect of the Sabbath, by your disregard of prayer, by your never reading the Bible, by your perseverance in known sin, and by the whole course of your life, "I will not." Like Pharaoh, you have demanded, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" You are of the same mind as those of old, who said, "It is vain to serve God, and what profit is there if we keep his ordinances?"

Moreover, my friend, you have not as yet given an assent to the doctrines of God's Word; on the contrary, *intellectually* as well as practically, you go not at God's bidding. You have set up in your mind the idea that you must understand everything before you will believe it—an idea, let me tell you, which you will never be able to carry out, for you cannot understand your own existence; and there are ten thousand other things around you which you never can comprehend, but which you must believe or remain for ever a gigantic fool. Still you cavil at this doctrine and that doctrine, railing at the gospel system in general; and if you were asked at a working man's conference, why you did not go to a place of worship, you would perhaps say that you kept away from worship because you did not like this doctrine or that. Let me say on my own account, that as far as I am personally concerned, it is a very small consideration to me whether you do like my doctrine or do not; for your own sake I am anxious above measure that you should believe the truth as it is in Jesus; but while you live in sin, your dislike of a doctrine will very probably only make me feel the more sure of its truth, and lead me to preach it with more confidence and vehemence. Think you that we are to learn God's truth from the likings or dislikings of those who refuse to worship him, and want an excuse for their sins? O unconverted men and women, it is very long before we shall come to you to learn what you would have us preach, and when we fall so low as to do that, you yourselves will despise us. What! shall the physician ask his patient what kind of medicine he would wish to have prescribed? Then the man needs no physician, he can prescribe for himself. Show the doctor out at the back door directly. What is the use of such a physician? Of what service is a minister who will truckle to depraved tastes and sinful appetites, and say, "How would you like me to preach to you? What smooth things shall I offer you?" Ah souls! we have some higher end to be served than merely pleasing you. We would save you by distasteful truths, for honeyed lies will ruin you. That teaching which the carnal mind most delights in, is the most deadly and delusive. With many of you, your beliefs, and tastes, and likes, must be changed, or else you will never enter heaven. I admit that in a measure I like your honesty in having said outright, "I will not serve God;" but it is an honesty which makes me shudder, for it betrays a heart hard as the nether millstone.

Again, you have said, "I will not serve God," and up to this time it is very possible that you have never been in the humor to repent of having said it, for the ways of sin are sweet to you, and your heart is fixed in its rebellion. You have never felt that conviction of sin, which the Holy Spirit has wrought in some of us; if you had felt it, you would soon have been shaken out of your "I will not." If God's power of grace, of which thousands of us bear witness that it is as real a power as that which guides the stars or wings the wind—if God's almighty grace should once get a hold of you, you would no longer say, "I do not believe this or that;" for, as tremblingly as any of those whom you now despise, you would cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" Up till now you have never felt that power, and therefore I cannot wonder that you do not acknowledge it, although the testimony of honest witnesses ought to have some weight with you. You are practically, intellectually, and avowedly no Christian; you have never deceived yourself and others by making a profession

which you do not honor, but you have gone on in your own chosen path, saying with more or less resolution, in answer to every call of the gospel, "I will not."

We said just now that the answer of the son to his father as recorded in our text was very plain; it was not, however, very genuine, or such as his father might have expected. His father said, "Son, go work to day in my vineyard;" and the son rudely said, "I will not, that is flat;" and without another word of apology or reason went his way. This is not quite as it should be. Is it? Even so, my friend, you may have been too hasty and so have been unjust. Is it not very possible you have denied to God and to his gospel the respect which both really deserve? You have spoken very plainly, but at the same time very thoughtlessly, very harshly to the God who has deserved better things of you. Have you ever given the claims of the Lord Jesus a fair consideration? Have you not dismissed the gospel with a sneer quite unworthy of you? Have you not been afraid to look the matters between God and your soul fairly in the face? I believe it to be the case of hundreds here; I know it to be the case of thousands and tens of thousands in London. They have put their foot down, and they have said, "None of your religion for me! I have made up my mind and I will never alter; I hate it and will not listen to it." Does no small voice within ever tell them that this is not fair to themselves or to God? Is the matter so easily to be decided? Suppose it should turn out that the religion of Jesus is true, what then? What will be the lot of those who despised him? My hearer, the religion of Jesus is true, and I have proved its truth in my own case; do, I pray you, consider it, and do not trifle away your immortal soul. Thus saith the Lord, "Consider your ways."

It is now time for me to tell the openly ungodly what is his real state. You have been more than a little proud of your honesty; and looking down upon certain professors of religion you have said, "Ah! I make no such pretences as they do, I am honest, I am." Friend, you cannot have a greater abhorrence of hypocrites than I have; if you can find a fair chance of laughing at them, pray do so. If by any means you can stick pins into their wind-bags, and let the gas of their profession out, pray do so. I try to do a little of it in my way, do you do the same! You and I are agreed in this, I hope, in heartily hating anything like sham and falsehood; but if you begin to hold your head up, and think yourself so very superior because you make no profession, I must take you down a little by reminding you that it is no credit to a thief that he makes no profession of being honest, and it is not thought to be exceedingly honorable to a man that he makes no profession of speaking the truth. For the fact is, that a man who does not profess to be honest is a professed thief, and he who does not claim to speak the truth is an acknowledged liar; thus in escaping one horn you are thrown upon another, you miss the rock but run upon the quicksand. You are a confessed and avowed neglecter of God, a professed despiser of the great salvation, an acknowledged disbeliever in the Christ of God. When our Government at any time arrests persons suspected of Fenianism, they have no difficulty about those gentlemen who glory in wearing the green uniform and flaunting the big feather. "Come along," says the constable, "you are the man, for you wear the regimentals of a rebel." Even so when the angel of justice arrests the enemies of the Lord, he will have no difficulty in accusing and arresting you, for, laying his hand upon your shoulder, he will say, "You wear the regimentals of an enemy of God; you plainly, and unblushingly, acknowledge that you do not fear God nor trust in his salvation." No witnesses need be called concerning you at the last great day; you will stand up, not quite so bravely as you do to-day, for, when the heavens are on a blaze, and the earth is rocking to and fro, and the great white cloud fills the field of vision, and the eyes of the great Judge shall burn like lamps of fire, you will put on a different mien and a different carriage from that which you maintain before a poor preacher of the gospel Ah! my ungodly hearer, with

such a case as thine there shall be no need to judge, for out of thine own mouth shalt thou be condemned.

Yet I came not here to tell you of your sins only, but to help you to escape from them. It is necessary that this much should be said, but we now turn to something far more pleasant. I am in hopes this day that some of you will listen to that little word in the text, "*afterward.*" He said, "I will not; but *afterward* he repented, and went." It is a long lane, which has no turning, let us trust that we have come to the turning now. There is space left you for repentance; though you may have been a drunkard, or a swearer, or unchaste, the die is not yet cast, a change is yet possible. May God grant that you may have reached the time when it shall be said of you, "Afterward he repented; he changed his mind; he believed upon Jesus, and obeyed the word of the Lord, and went." Perhaps the son in the parable thought a little more calmly about it. He said to himself, "I will consider the matter, second thoughts are often best. I growled at my good father, and gave him a sharp answer, and I saw the tear standing in the good man's eye. I am sorry I grieved him. The thought of grieving him makes me change my mind. I said 'No' to him," said he, "but I did not think about it. I forgot that if I go and work in my father's vineyard, I shall be working for myself, for I am his eldest son, and all that he has will belong to me, so that I am very foolish to refuse to work to my own advantage. Ah! now I see my father had my advantage at heart, I will even go as he bade me." See, he shoulders his tools, and away he marches to labor with all his might. He said, "I will not," but he repented and went, and it is admitted by all that he did the will of his father. Oh, I hope that many a man and woman now in this Agricultural Hall will this day cry, "I do retract what I have said. I will go to my Father, and will say to him, 'I will do thy bidding. I will not grieve thy love. I will not lose the opportunity of advancing my soul's best interest; I obey the gospel command.'" I will suppose that I see one such before me, and I will speak to him. Perhaps he said, "I will not," because he really did not understand what religion was. How few after all know what the way of salvation is; though they go to church, and to chapel, they have not yet learned God's plan of pardoning sinners. Do you know the plan of salvation? Hear it and live by it. You have offended God; God must punish sin; it is a fixed law that sin must be punished; how then can God have mercy upon you? Why, only in this way: Jesus Christ came from heaven and he suffered in the room, place, and stead of all who trust him; suffered what they ought to have suffered, so that God is just, and yet at the same time he is able to forgive the very chief of sinners through the merits of his dear Son. Your debts, if you be a believer in him, Christ has paid on your behalf. If you do but come and rest upon Jesus and upon Jesus only, God cannot punish you for your sins, for he punished Jesus for them, and it would not be just of him to punish Christ and then to punish you, to exact payment first from the Surety and afterwards from the debtor. My dear hearer, whoever thou mayst be, whatever thy past life may have been, if thou wilt trust Christ, thou shalt be saved from all thy sin in a moment, the whole of thy past life shall be blotted out; there shall not remain in God's book so much as a single charge against thy soul, for Christ who died for thee, shall take thy guilt away and leave thee without a blot before the face of God. Read the last verse of my text, and you will see that it was by believing that men entered into the kingdom of God of old, and it is still by believing that men are saved. "Behold the Lamb of God," said John the Baptist, and if you look to that bleeding Lamb, you shall live. Do you understand this? Is it not simple? Is it not suitable to you. Will you still refuse to obey it? Does not the Holy Spirit prompt you to relent? Do you not even now say, "Is it so simple? I will even trust in Jesus:

'Guilty, but with heart relenting,

To the Savior's wounds I'll fly.'

I will come, by God's help, this morning, lest death should come before the sun sets. I will trust Christ to save me. Precious way of salvation! Why should I not be saved?"

It is possible too, that you may have said, "I will not," because you really thought there was no hope for you. Ah! my friend, let me assure you—and oh! how glad I am to be able to do it—that there is hope for the vilest through the precious blood of Jesus. No man can have gone too far for the long arm of Christ to reach him. Christ delights to save the biggest sinners. He said to his apostles, "Preach the gospel to every creature, but begin"—where? "begin at Jerusalem. There live the wretches who spat in my face. There live the cruel ones that drove the nails through my hands. Go and preach the gospel to them first. Tell them that I am able to save, not little sinners merely, but the very chief of sinners. Tell them to trust in me and they shall live." Where are you, you despairing one? I know the devil will try to keep the sound of the gospel from your ears if he can, and therefore, I would "cry aloud and spare not." O ye despairing sinners, there is no room for despair this side the gates of hell. If you have gone through the foulest kennels of iniquity, no stain can stand out against the power of the cleansing blood.

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose ALL their guilty stains."

Oh, I trust, now that you know there is hope for you, you will say, "I will even come at once, and put my trust in Jesus."

While I would thus encourage you to repent of your neglect of God, let me invite you to come to Jesus, and press it upon you yet again. Ah! my dear friend, you will soon be dying, and though some wicked men, in their stupid insensibility, die very calmly, and as David said, "They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men, but their strength is firm," yet, whether they perceive it or not, it is a dreadful thing to die with unpardoned sin hanging about you. What will your guilty soul do when it leaves the body? Think of it a minute. It is a matter worthy of your thought. Some of you, in all probability, will die this week. It is not probable that so many thousands of us will march through a whole week, and be found alive at the other end of it. Well then, as we *may* some of us go soon, and all of us *must* go ere long, let us look before us and think a bit. Imagine your soul unclothed of the body. You have left the body behind you, and your disembodied spirit finds itself in a new world. Oh, it will be a glorious thing if that separated spirit shall see Jesus whom it has loved, and fly at once into his bosom, and drink for ever of the crystal fountain of ever-flowing bliss: but it will be a horrible thing if instead of it, your naked shivering spirit should wake up to find itself friendless, homeless, helpless, hopeless, tormented with remorse, afflicted with despair. What if it should have to cry out forever, "I knew my duty but I did it not, I knew the way of salvation but I would not run in it. I heard the gospel, but I shut my ears to it. I lived and at length left the world without Christ, and here I am, past hope, no repenting now, no believing now, no escaping now, for mercy and love no longer rule the hour." Have pity on thyself, my hearer. I have pity on thee. Oh, if my hand could pluck thee from that flame, how cheerfully would I do it! Shall I pity thee and wilt thou not pity thyself? Oh, if my pleadings should by God's grace persuade you to trust in Christ this morning, I would plead with you while voice, and lungs, and heart, and life held out! But oh, have pity on thyself! Pity that poor naked spirit which so soon will be quivering with utmost agony, a self-caused agony, an agony from which it would not escape,

an agony of which it was warned, but which it chose to endure sooner than give up sin and yield to the scepter of sovereign grace.

I would fain hope that you are saying, "I do now repent, and by God's grace I will go." If so, let me tell you there are a great many in heaven who once, like you, said, "I will not," but they afterwards repented and are now saved. I will give you one picture. Yonder, I see a company of men on horseback, and there is one, the proudest of them all, to whom they act as a guard; they are going to Damascus, that he may take Christians to prison and compel them to blaspheme. Saul of Tarsus is the name of that cruel, murderous persecutor. When Stephen was put to death, God said to this man Saul, "Go, work in my vineyard," but Saul said plainly, "I will not," and to prove his enmity, he helped to put Stephen to death. There he is riding in hot haste, upon his evil errand, none more set and determined against the Lord. Yet my Lord Jesus can tame the lion, and even make a lamb of him. As he rides along, a bright light is seen, brighter than the sun at noonday; he falls from his horse, he lies trembling on the ground, and he hears a voice out of heaven, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Lifting up his eyes with astonishment, he sees that he had ignorantly been persecuting the Son of God. What a change that one discovery wrought in him. That voice, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest," broke his hard heart, and won him to the cause. You know how three days after that, that once proud and bigoted man was baptized upon profession of the faith of Christ, whom he had just now persecuted! and if you want to see an earnest preacher, where can you find a better than the apostle Paul, who, with heart on fire, writes again and again, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." I hope there is a Saul here, who is to be struck down this morning. Lord, strike him down! Eternal Spirit strike him down *now!* You did not know perhaps, that you had been fighting God, but you thought the religion of Jesus to be a foolish dream. You did not know that you had insulted the dying Savior; now you do know it, may your conscience be affected, and from this day forth may you serve the Lord.

I must leave this second point when I have just said this. If there be one here who after a long refusal, at last relents, and is willing to become a servant of God by faith in Jesus Christ, let me tell him for his encouragement, he shall not be one whit behind those who have been so long making a profession without being true to it, for the text says, "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom;" but what else? "Go into the kingdom" *before* those who made a profession of serving God, but who were not true to it. You great sinners shall have no back seats in heaven! There shall be no outer court for you. You great sinners shall have as much love as the best, as much joy as the brightest of saints. You shall be near to Christ; you shall sit with him upon his throne; you shall wear the crown; your fingers shall touch the golden harps; you shall rejoice with the joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. Will ye not come? Christ forgets your past ill manners, and bids ye come to-day. "Come," saith he, "unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Thirty years of sin shall be forgiven, and it shall not take thirty minutes to do it in. Fifty, sixty, seventy years of iniquity shall all disappear as the morning's hoar-frost disappears before the sun. Come and trust my Master, hiding in his bleeding wounds.

"Raise thy downcast eyes, and see
 What throngs His throne surround!
 These, though sinners once like thee,
 Have full salvation found.
 Yield not then to unbelief;
 He says, 'There yet is room:'

Though of sinners thou art chief,
Since Jesus calls thee, come."

II. Bear with me a little time while I speak to the second character, THE DECEPTIVELY SUBMISSIVE, by far the most numerous everywhere in England, probably the most numerous in this assembly. Oh! you, my own regular hearers, you who have heard my voice these thirteen years many of you are in this class. You have said to the Great Father, "I go, sir!" but you have not gone. Let me sorrowfully sketch your portraits: you have regularly frequented a place of worship, and you would shudder to waste a single Sunday in an excursion, or in any form of Sabbath breaking. Outwardly you have said, "I go, sir." When the hymn is given out, you stand up and sing, and yet you do not sing with the heart. When I say, "Let us pray!" you cover your faces, but you do not pray with real prayer. You utter a polite, respectful "I go, sir," but you do not go. You give a notional assent to the gospel. If I were to mention any doctrine, you would say, "Yes, that is true. I believe that." But your heart does not believe: you do not believe the gospel in the core of your nature, for if you did, it would have an effect upon you. A man may say, "I believe my house is on fire," but if he goes to bed and falls to sleep, it does not look as if he believed it, for when a man's house is on fire he tries to escape. If some of you really believed that there is a hell, and that there is a heaven, as you believe other things, you would act very differently from what you now do. I must add that many of you say, "I go, sir," in a very solemn sense, for when we preach earnestly the tears run down your cheeks, and you go home to your bedrooms, and you pray a little, and everybody thinks that your concern of mind will end in conversion: but your goodness is "like the morning cloud and the early dew." You are like dunghills with snow upon them: while the snow lasts you look white and fair, but when the snow melts the dunghill remains a dunghill still. Oh, how many very impressible hearts are like that! You sin, and yet you come to a place of worship, and tremble under the word; you transgress, and you weep and transgress again; you feel the power of the gospel after a fashion, and yet you revolt against it more and more. Ah! my friends, I can look some of you in the face and know that I am describing some of your cases to the letter. You have been telling lies to God all these years, by saying, "I go, sir," while you have not gone. You know that to be saved you must believe in Jesus, but you have not believed. You know that you must be born again, but you are still strangers to the new birth. You are as religious as the seats you sit on, but no more; and you are as likely to get to heaven as those seats are, but not one whit more, for you are dead in sin, and death cannot enter heaven. O my dear hearers, I lament that ever I should be called to say such a thing as this, and not be more affected by the fact; and, wonder of wonders, that you, some of you, know it to be true, and yet do not feel alarmed thereby! It is the easiest thing in the world to impress some of you by a sermon, but, I fear me, you never will get beyond mere transient impressions. Like the water when lashed, the wound soon heals. You know, and you know, and you know; and you feel, and feel, and feel again, and yet your sins, your self-righteousness, your carelessness, or your willful wickedness, cause you, after having said, "I go, sir," to forget the promise and lie unto God.

Now, I spoke very honestly to the other class, and must be equally plain with you. You, too, *criminate yourselves*. There will be no need of witnesses against you. You have admitted that the gospel is true. You did not quarrel with the doctrine of future punishment or future glory. You attended a place of worship, and you said that God was good and worthy to be served; you confessed that you owed allegiance to him, and ought to render it. You have even knelt down and in prayer you have said, "Lord, I deserve thy wrath." The great God has only to turn to some of your formal

prayers to find quite enough evidence to secure your condemnation. Those morning prayers of yours, those evening prayers, hypocritical every one of them, will be more than sufficient to condemn you of your own mouth. Take heed! take heed, I pray you, while you are yet in the land of hope.

All this while, as the thirty-second verse reminds me, while you have remained unsaved, you have seen publicans and harlots saved by the very gospel which has had no power upon you. Do not you know it, young man? You, I mean, the son of a godly mother? You know that you are not saved, and yet you had a drunken workman in your father's employment, and he has been these last few years a sober Christian man, he is saved, and you perhaps have taken to the habits which he has forsaken. You know that there have been picked off of the streets poor fallen women who have been brought to know Christ, who are among the sweetest and fairest flowers in Christ's garden now, though they were once castaways; and yet some of you respectable people who never committed any outward vice in your lives, are still unconverted, and still saying to Christ, "I go, sir," but you have not gone. You are still without God! Without Christ! Lost, lost, lost! Yet fairer outward characters could scarcely be found. I could fain weep for you! Oh! beware, beware of being like the apples of Sodom, which are green to look upon, but when crushed, crumble to ashes. Beware of being like John Bunyan's trees that were green outside, but inwardly rotten, and only fit to be tinder for the devil's tinder-box. Oh! beware of saying as some of you do, "I go, sir," while you go not. I sometimes see sick people who quite alarm and distress me. I say to them, "My dear friend, you are dying; have you a hope?" There is no answer. "Do you know your lost state?" "Yes, sir. "Christ died for sinners." "Yes, sir." "Faith gives us of his grace." "Yes, sir. They say, "Yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir." I sometimes wish before God they would contradict me, for if they would but have honesty enough to say, "I do not believe a word of it," I should know how to deal with them. Stubborn oaks are leveled by the gale, but those who bend like the willow before every wind, what wind shall break them? O dear brethren, beware of being gospel hardened; or, what is the same thing, softened but for a season. Beware of being a promising hearer of the word, and nothing more!

I do not mean to close my discourse by speaking to you in this apparently harsh way, which; harsh as it seems, is full of love to your soul. I have a good word for *you* too. I trust that you, in this Agricultural Hall, will have a change wrought in you by the Holy Ghost, for although these many years you have made false professions before God; there is yet room in his gospel feast for you. Did you notice the text? "The publicans and sinners enter into the kingdom of heaven *before you*." Then it is clear you may come after them, because it could not be said they entered *before you*, if you did not come after them. If the Lord shall break your heart, you will be willing to take the Lord Jesus for your all in all in just the same way as a drunkard must, though you have not been a drunkard. You will be willing to rest in the merit of Jesus just as a harlot must, though you have never been such. There is room for you, young people, yet, though you have broken your vows, and quenched your convictions. Ay, and you grey-headed people may be brought yet, though you have lived so long in the outward means, but have never given up your hearts to Jesus. Oh, come! This twenty-fourth day of March, may the Lord bring you in this very place may the Lord lead you to say silently, "By the grace of God I will not be an open pretender any longer; I will give myself up to those dear hands that bled for me, and that dear heart that was pierced for me, and I will this day submit to Jesus' way.

The fact is, to close the subject, there is, my dear friends, the same gospel to be preached to one class of men as to every other class. I pray God the day may never come when we shall be

found in our preaching talking about working classes, and middle classes, and upper classes. I know no difference between you, you are the same to me when I preach the gospel, whether you are kings and queens, or crossing sweepers; satin and cotton, broadcloth and fustian, are alike to the gospel. If you are peers of the realm, we trim not our gospel to suit you, and if you are the basest of thieves, we do not exclude you from the voice of mercy. The gospel comes to men as sinners, all equally fallen in Adam, equally lost and ruined by sin. I have not one gospel for Her Majesty the Queen, and another gospel for the beggar-woman. No, there is but one way of salvation, but one foundation, but one propitiation, but one gospel. Look to the cross of Christ and live. High was the brazen serpent lifted, and all that Moses said was, "Look." Was a prince of the house of Judah bitten, he was told to look; without looking his lion standard of costly emblazonry could not avail him; was some poor wretch in the camp bitten, he must look, and the efficacy was the same for him as for the greatest of the host. Look! look! look to Jesus. Believe in the Son of God and live! One brazen serpent for all the camp, one Christ for all ranks and conditions of men. What a blessing would it be if we were all enabled to trust Christ this morning! My brethren, why not?—He is worthy of the confidence of all. The Spirit of God is able to work faith in all. O poor sinner, look to him! Dear hearers, I may never speak to some of you again, and I would therefore be pressing with you; by the hour of death, by the solemnities of eternity, I do implore and beseech you accept the only remedy for sin which even God himself will ever offer to the dying sons of men, the remedy of a bleeding Substitute, suffering in your room and stead, believed on and accepted in the heart. Cast yourself flat upon Christ. The way of salvation is just this—rest alone upon Christ! Depend wholly upon him. The negro was asked what he did, and he said, "I jest fall down on de rock, and he dat is down on de rock cannot fall no lower." Down on the rock, sinner! Down on the rock! The everlasting rock of ages! You cannot fall lower than that. I will conclude with a well-known illustration. Your condition is like that of a child in a burning house, who, having escaped to the edge of the window, hung on by the window-sill. The flames were pouring out of the window underneath, and the poor lad would soon be burnt, or falling would be dashed to pieces; he therefore held on with the clutch of death. He did not dare to relax his grasp till a strong man stood underneath, and said, "Boy! drop! drop! I'll catch you." Now, it was no saving faith for the boy to believe that the man was strong—that was a good help towards faith—but he might have known that and yet have perished; it was faith when the boy let go and dropped down into his big friend's arms. There are you, sinner, clinging to your sins or to your good works. The Savior cries, "Drop! drop into my arms!" It is not doing, it is leaving off doing. It is not working, it is trusting in that work which Jesus has already done. Trust! that is the word, simple, solid, hearty, earnest trust. Trust and it will not take an hour to save you, the moment you trust you are saved. You may have come in here as black as hell, but if you trust in Jesus you are wholly forgiven. In an instant, swifter than a flash of lightning the deed of grace is done. O may God the Spirit do it now, bringing you to trust, that you may be saved.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 103.

Alive or Dead—Which?

A Sermon

(No. 755)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, June 16th, 1867, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”—1 John 5:12.

LAST Sabbath morning we addressed you upon the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit in the believer, and upon the glorious fact of his dwelling in the hearts of the regenerate. Now, it frequently happens that when we discourse upon the work of the Holy Spirit, there are certain weak and uninstructed brethren who straightway fall into questionings and despondencies, because they in some point or other are unable to discern the work of grace within themselves. That work may be prospering within them, but through the turmoil of their spirits and the dimness of their mental vision, they do not at once perceive it, and therefore they are distracted and alarmed. There is a consoling doctrine which is intended to yield comfort to souls thus afflicted; it is the great truth, that “Whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ, hath everlasting life.” If they would remember this gospel-declaration, they might also with advantage consider the other spiritual fact, and by weighing the two truths in their minds, they might receive much permanent blessing; while at the present, by having an eye to one only, they throw themselves off their balance, and make to themselves many sorrows. It is not, however, the easiest thing in the world to preach clearly, with judicious blending, the operations of the Spirit, and the doctrine of complete salvation by faith in Jesus Christ; however clear our utterance, we shall seem sometimes to make one truth entrench upon the other. It is the mark of the Christian minister, who is taught of God, that he rightly divides the Word of truth; but this right dividing is so far from being an easy thing, that it must be taught us by no less a teacher than God the Holy Spirit. When our Lord addressed Nicodemus, he experienced the same difficulty which at this day every watchful minister observes in his hearers; he found that a description of the inner work must be accompanied by the publication of the gospel of faith, or it would only cause bewilderment and depression. Our Lord began, in the third chapter of John's gospel, by telling Nicodemus that he must be born again, and explaining to him the mysterious character of the new birth. Whereupon Nicodemus was filled with wonder, and unbelievably exclaimed, “How can these things be?” He does not seem to have made the smallest advance towards faith by hearing of the new birth, and therefore on the selfsame occasion our Lord turned aside from the doctrine of regeneration, the inner work, to speak to him of the doctrine of faith, or the work of Christ, which is the object of saving faith. Thus it comes to pass that the very same chapter which has in it that searching passage, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” contains also these encouraging words, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” From which I gather, my brethren, that those unwise revivalists who perpetually cry up, “Believe and live!” and by their silence, and sometimes by their unguarded remarks, disparage repentance and other works of the Holy Spirit,

have not our Saviour's example for so doing; and on the other hand, those conservative divines who continually cry up inward experience, and preach the work of the Spirit, but forget to publish the gospel message, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," these also have neither example nor precedent from our Lord Jesus Christ or his apostles, but mar the truth by leaving out a portion of it. If we can with all boldness and distinctness declare the inward work which the Holy Ghost accomplishes in the soul by working in us to will and to do of God's good pleasure, and at the same time can tell the sinner most plainly that the object of his faith is not the work within, but the work which Jesus Christ accomplished upon the cross for him, we shall have dealt faithfully with divine truth, and wisely with our hearer's soul. The faith which brings salvation, looks away from everything that is inward to that which was accomplished and completed by our once slain but now ascended Lord; and yet no man has this faith except as it is wrought in him by the quickening Spirit. If we can preach both these truths in harmonious proportion, it seems to me that we shall have hit upon that form of Christian teaching which, while it is consistent with truth, is also healthful to the soul. Having on the previous Sabbath done our best with the one subject, we now seek to give the other its fair prominence.

We have in the text mention made of certain men who are *living*, and of others who are *dead*; and, as the two are put together in the text, we shall close by some observations upon *the conduct of those who have life towards those who are destitute of it*.

I. First, then, CONCERNING THE LIVING.

Our text testifies that "He that hath the Son hath life." Of course, by "life" here is meant not mere existence, or natural life; for we all have that whether we have the Son of God or no—in the image of the first Adam we are all created living souls, and continue in life until the Lord recalls the breath from our nostrils—but the life here intended is spiritual life, the life received at the new birth, by which we perceive and enter into the heavenly kingdom, come under new and spiritual laws, are moved by new motives, and exist in a new world. The life here meant is the life of God in the soul, which is given us when we are new created in the image of the second Adam, who was made a quickening spirit; a celestial form of life inwardly perceptible to the person who possesses it, and outwardly discernible to spiritual observers by its holy effects and heavenly fruits. This spiritual life is the sure mark of deliverance from the penal death which the sentence of the law pronounced. Man under the law is condemned, sentence of death is recorded against him; but man under grace is free from the law, and is not adjudged to death, but lives by virtue of a legal justification, which absolves him from guilt, and consequently liberates him from death. These two kinds of life, the life which is given by the judge to the offender when he is pardoned, and the life which is imparted from the divine Father, the heir of heaven is begotten again unto a lively hope—these two lives blend together and ensure for us the life eternal, such as they possess who stand upon the "sea of glass," and tune their tongues to the music of celestial hosts. Eternal life is spiritual life made perfect. If we live by virtue of our pardon and justification, and if, moreover, we live because we are quickened by the Holy Spirit, we shall also live in the glory of the eternal Father, being made in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true God and eternal life. This is the life here intended—life spiritual, life eternal.

By the term "having the Son," we understand possessing the Lord Jesus Christ. There is the finished work of Jesus, and faith appropriates it. We trust in Christ, and Christ becomes ours. As the result of grace in our souls, we chose the Lord Jesus as the ground of our dependence, and then we accept him as the Lord of our hearts, the guide of our actions, and supreme delight of our souls.

He that hath the Son, then, is a man who is trusting alone in Jesus, in whom Jesus Christ rules and reigns; and such a man is most surely the possessor of spiritual and eternal life at the present moment. It is not said "he shall have life"—he *has* it, he enjoys it now, he is at this hour quickened spirit; God has breathed into him a new life, by which he is made a partaker of the divine nature, and is one of the seed according to promise, and this life he has by virtue of his having received the Son of God to be his all.

I have thus briefly opened up the words of the text, and having broken the bone, let us now discuss the marrow and fatness of it. Whoever in this world possesses Christ by faith is most certainly alive unto God by a life eternal. I shall remark, in the first place, that *having the Son is good evidence of eternal life*, from the fact that faith by which a man receives Christ is in itself a living act. Faith is the hand of the soul, but a dead man cannot stretch out his icy limbs to take of that which is presented to him. If I, as a guilty, needy sinner, with my empty hand receive the fullness of Christ, I have performed a living act; the hand may quiver with weakness, but life is there. Faith is the eye of the soul, by which the sin-bitten sinner looks to Christ, lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; but from forth the stony eyes of death no glance of faith can dart. There may be all the organization by which it should look, but if life be absent the eye cannot see. If, therefore, my eye of faith has looked alone to Jesus, and I depend upon him, I must be a living soul, that act has proved me to be alive unto God. Looking to Jesus is a very simple act, indeed, it is a childlike act, but still it is a living one: no sight gleams from the eyeballs of death. Faith, again, is the mouth of the soul; by faith we feed upon Christ. Jesus Christ is digested and inwardly assimilated, so that our soul lives upon him; but a dead man cannot eat. Whoever heard of carcasses gathering to a banquet? There may be the mouth, the teeth, and the palate, and so forth, the organization may be perfect, but the dead man neither tastes the sweet nor relishes the delicious. If, then, I have received Christ Jesus as the bread, which came down from heaven, as the spiritual drink from the rock, I have performed an action which is in itself a clear evidence that I belong to the living in Zion.

Now, my dear friends, perhaps some of you have hardly any other evidence of grace but this, you know that you have received Christ; you know that you do look to Jesus and lay hold upon him. Well, then, you could not have done this if you had not obtained eternal life, and the text is evidently true, "He that hath the Son hath life."

Furthermore, faith in Jesus is good evidence of life, because of the things, which accompany it. Now, no man ever did come to Jesus Christ and receive him until he had felt his need of a Saviour: no sickness, no physician: no wound, no surgeon. No soul asks for pardon or obtains it till he has felt that sin is an evil for which pardon is necessary; that is to say, repentance always comes with faith. There must be a loathing of sin and a dread of its consequences, or there is no faith. Now, as repentance is an evident sign of life, faith in Jesus must involve spiritual life. What if I say that repentance is like the cry of the new-born babe, which indicates that the child is alive? That cry of "God be merciful to me a sinner I" is as sure a sign of life as the song of cherubim before the throne. There could have been no laying hold of Christ without true repentance of sin, which repentance becomes in its turn a clear proof of the possession of the inner life which springs from incorruptible seed, and therefore liveth and abideth for ever.

Where there is faith, again, there is always prayer. Depend upon it, that if Saul of Tarsus cries, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" it will ere long be said of him, "Behold, he prayeth." No soul believes in Jesus Christ without exercising its faith and its desires in prayer; but prayer is the

breath of the soul, and where there is breath there must be life. Can the dead pray unto God? Shall a dead soul cry out for mercy? No, beloved, the falling of a tear, the upward glancing of an eye when none but God is near—these may be very weak prayers as men judge them, but they are as much signs of life as Jacob's wrestling at the brook Jabbok, or Elijah's prevailing with God on Carmel's brow. So, then, he that hath an interest in the Lord Jesus, since his faith is attended by repentance and prayer, and many other holy graces, has a multitude of sure and certain evidences of eternal life within the soul.

So might I say, that the consequences of receiving Christ are also good evidences of heavenly life; for when a man receives the Son of God, he obtains a measure of peace and joy; and peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost are not to be found in the sepulchres of dead souls. When Ezekiel saw the dry bones in the valley, I do not find that any of them were singing for joy of heart, or silently musing in unutterable thankfulness. There was a sort of peace in the valley, the horrible repose of death, the grim silence of the grave; but living, sparkling peace, flowing like a river, those dry bones could not know. Job says of the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" Joy in God is too wonderful a work of God for mere professors to forge a passable counterfeit of it. Artificial flowers may be very like the real beauties of the garden, but they lack the joyous perfume and honeyed stores of life, and the bees soon find out the difference: the honey juice and the delicate aroma are not to be matched. The like might be said of all the results of faith, which are far too numerous for me to speak of them in detail this morning, such as purging the conscience from dead works, enlightenment by the Spirit, godly fear, the spirit of adoption, brotherly love, separation from the world, the consecration of life, holy gratitude which mounts like flame to heaven, and sacred affection which ascends like altar-smoke—none of these can be found in the charnel-house of fallen humanity; they can only be discovered in the house of life, where God worketh according to his good pleasure. He that hath the Son, it is clear, has life, because the act by which he lays hold upon the Son of God, the concomitants of that act, and the consequences of that act, all infallibly betoken the possession of life eternal.

The possession of the Lord Jesus Christ is the evidence of faith in many ways. It is God's mark upon a living soul. See you yonder battle-field, strewn with men who have fallen in the terrible conflict! many have been slain, many more are wounded, and there they lie in ghastly confusion, the dead all stark and stiff, covered with their own crimson, and the wounded faint and bleeding, unable to leave the spot whereon they have fallen. Surgeons have gone over the field rapidly, ascertaining which are corpses beyond the reach of mercy's healing hand, and which are men faint with loss of blood. Each living man has a paper fastened conspicuously on his breast, and when the soldiers are sent out with the ambulances to gather up the wounded, they do not themselves need to stay and judge which may be living and which may be dead; they see a mark upon the living, and lifting them up right tenderly they bear them to the hospital, where their wounds may be dressed. Now, faith in the Son is God's infallible mark, which he has set upon every poor wounded sinner whose bleeding heart has received the Lord Jesus; though he faints and feels as lifeless as though he were mortally wounded, yet he most surely lives if he believes, for the possession of Jesus is the token which cannot deceive. Faith is God's mark witnessing in unmistakable language—"this soul liveth." Jesus saith, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Tenderly, tenderly, ye ministers of Christ, and ye blood-bought ones who care for the broken-hearted, lift up this wounded one, bear him away, bind up his wounds with comfortable promises, and restore his ebbing life with precious consolations from the Book

of God. Whatever else we cannot see, if a simple trust in Jesus is discernible in a convert, we need feel no suspicions, but receive him at once as a brother beloved; for this is the Father's will, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.

Moreover, the possession of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes a clear evidence of life, because, indeed, it is in some sense the source, fountain, and nourishment of life. Here is a hand, "Is it alive?" Many questions may be asked about it which will be unsatisfactory as evidence of life. "Has it a delicate complexion? Are the fingers well fashioned?" The answers may be, as you please, yes or no, and yet life may be present or absent. "Is it adorned with gold rings, set with emeralds or diamonds? Or, does it wear an elegant, well-fitting glove?" The answer may be whichever you please; none of those things will at all effect the life of the hand, It may be white as ivory, or brown as autumn leaves; it may be clad in mailed gauntlet, or soiled with stains of blood, and yet it may be either clay cold in death or warm with life. But here is a question which cuts at the main point, "Is the hand vitally connected with a living head?" If it be so, then the conclusion is inevitable, that the hand is most surely alive. Now, faith by which we receive the Son of God, is the grace which vitally unites the members with Christ, their living Head; and where there is a vital union with the Son of God, there must be life. While the branch is vitally in the stem, it will have life; if it is not always bearing fruit, yet it always has life in itself, because it is in union with the living stem; and thus, beloved, the fact of having the Son becomes an evidence of life, because it is the source of life.

In another aspect of it, having the Son is not only the source of life, but the result of life. When the great doors were opened of the Black Hole in Calcutta, and the pure air went streaming in, there were many lungs which did not receive that air, for the simple reason that the most of those who had been so barbarously confined were dead, and to them the fresh oxygen had come too late; but there were a few which gladly and at once received the breath of heaven, and such as were still alive walked forth from amidst the corpses into the open air. Now, when a man receives Jesus into his soul as life from the dead, his faith is the sure indicator of a spiritual and mysterious life within him, in the power of which he is able to receive the Lord. Jesus is freely preached to you, his grace is free as the air, but the dead do not breathe that air—those who breathe it are, beyond all doubt, alive. Christ is presented to you in the preaching of the gospel as freely as the water from the drinking fountain at the corner of the street; but the dead man drinketh not, his lips care not for the flowing crystal He who drinks is evidently alive. The reception of Jesus Christ is the sure result of a heavenly life palpitating within the soul Thus you see the evidence is good, from several points of the compass; looking at the soul's business from several ways, faith still becomes with equal clearness a witness that the man who has it possesses the divine life within him.

Let me further remark, that *the possession of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith is sufficient evidence of eternal life*. "I do not know," says one, "when I was converted." My dear friend, have you the Son of God? Do you trust in Jesus Christ? That is quite enough. If thou canst from the heart say, "I trust Jesus Christ," though thou hast no spiritual biography worth recording, thou hast life. Many aged persons have either forgotten their birthdays, or have lost the register, and cannot tell exactly how old they are; but that does not at all prove that they are not alive; so your not knowing precisely when you were converted, is no evidence that you are not saved. No doubt, it is very comfortable to be able to refer to a distinct date and place when the great change took place, but in many instances, there could be no such reference made, because the change was extremely gradual. In some parts of the world the sun rises on a sudden, and sets just as quickly; but here, in England,

we enjoy those delightful twilight's which herald the morning and foreshadow the night. With many converts, there is a long twilight of soul, in which they are not all darkness, but certainly not all light; they can scarcely tell where the darkness ended and where the light began. Dear friends, do not worry yourselves about the almanac of grace; care more about its present reality and less about its past history. "He that hath the Son of God, hath life;" though he may not know when he laid hold upon the Son of God, yet if he hath him now, he has no need to harbour the raven of mistrust.

Faith is sufficient evidence, even in the absence of any great knowledge. I would to God that we were all taught in the word, and could enter into the doctrines which are food for strong men in Christ, but yet then we should know very little of election; though the difference between sanctification and justification might seem too high for us to comprehend, yet if we have the Son of God we have life. No doubt there have been some who have entered heaven who were little better than half-witted, and yet, through simple faith in Jesus, they were as surely saved as a Newton or a Locke, who, with all their understanding and all their philosophy, could not rest upon a better foundation than the merit of that condescending Redeemer upon whom the poorest fool in the kingdom may depend with safety. If thou hast Christ, learn as much as thou canst; seek to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; but if thine understanding be dull, do not tremble as though thy soul depended upon thy knowledge, for "He that hath the Son hath life," however ignorant he may be.

So, again, it may be that you have never passed through any special horrors and alarms. When some pilgrims come to the wicket gate, the Slough of Despond pours forth its filth, and the black dog howls at them as they knock at mercy's door, but many others are brought to Jesus gently, being carried like lambs in his bosom. Many of Christ's flowers bloom in sheltered spots, and feel not the frosts of sharp temptation. Jesus has bands of love to draw with, as well as a scourge of small cords to draw with. Many gentle spirits are led to find their all in the Christ of God, and yet they know very little of the depths of their inward depravity, and less still of the evil suggestions of Satan. My dear friends, do not let this distress you, I was about to say, even be thankful for it. Have you looked to Jesus Christ have you depended alone in him? That is, for the present, sufficient evidence without anything else. "He that hath the Son of God hath life."

Methinks I hear some one say, "Ah! but I have been reading the biography of such-and-such a good man, and I find him frequently in the seventh heaven of communion, so full of joy and rapture. Oh, that I knew something about that!", Well, I wish you did. I would have you covet earnestly the best gifts. But, my dear friend, you must not think that because you have not enjoyed these raptures, therefore you are not saved. Many go to heaven with very little comfort on the road. I do not commend them for their want of comfort; but I do advise you, instead of loading to singular experiences as a ground of confidence, look to the bleeding Saviour, and rest alone in him, for if you have him you have eternal life. To compare ourselves among ourselves is not wise. Experiences greatly differ. All Israelites are of the loins of Jacob, but all are not of the tribe of Judah. I do not doubt that the physiognomies of all the Jewish tribes differed; yet still the great type of father Jacob could be seen in the face of every Jew. So the spiritual physiognomies of all the children of God will differ, for there are diversities of operations; but notwithstanding, there is a unity of spirit which cannot be broken. Beloved, have you the Son of God? If so, you have life; and even if that life should be somewhat sickly, which is not desirable, yet it will help to make it stronger if you distinctly know that it is the life eternal. When a man's life becomes feeble, it would be of no service

to him to doubt whether it is life at all; but it helps him much to know that it is the life of God, and is therefore sure to be victorious over death and hell, and though it be but a spark, it is such a spark that all the devils in hell cannot tread it but, and all the waters of affliction cannot quench it. If thou hast the Son, poor feeble trembling one, thou hast a life which will co-exist with the life of God; a life which “neither things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,” shall be able to destroy; because they cannot separate thee from the Lord Jesus; and because he lives thou shalt live also.

It is a great mercy that *having the Son is abiding evidence*. “He that hath the Son *hath* life.” I know what it is to see every other evidence I ever gloried in go drifting down the stream far out of sight. It is frequently my inward experience to see sin and unworthiness marked upon everything I have ever done for God. As far as he has done any good thing by me or in me, it lives; but oftentimes as I look back upon my years of ministry, and see multitudes of sermons, and prayers, and other efforts, I have thought of them all as being less than nothing and vanity, tainted, and marred, and spoiled by my personal imperfections. I could not depend on the whole of them to make so much as a feather weight towards my salvation. When you begin to doubt your inward graces, and to judge all your past life, and find it wanting, it is sweet even then to say, “One thing I know, I rest in Jesus. Whatever else may be false, this is clearly true—

’Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee.’”

Job says that the poor man clings to the rock for shelter, and that poor man is blessed who remains in that position, evermore clinging to that Rock of his salvation.

“For ever here my rest shall be,
Close to thy wounded side;
This all my trust and all my plea,
For me the Saviour died.”

I suppose, dear friends, that your experience, like mine, leads you to lean less on self and more upon the Lord. You sometimes come out in full feather, all glorious to behold, and you shine like a full developed and advanced saint; but how soon your mountain moves, for the Lord hides his face! a moulting season sets in, and soon all your plumes and honors are trailed in the mire, and you hasten to hide yourself from your own sight, for you feel utterly ashamed. It is very probable that at such a time you have a much truer opinion of yourself than in your prosperity—you are much nearer the mark when you despise yourself than when you find somewhat wherein to glory. It is unspeakably precious in hours of discouragement, then, to fly straight away to Jesus, with the contrite cry of—

“Just as I am—without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd’st me come to thee.
O Lamb of God, I come.”

I have heard of persons boasting that they had outgrown that hymn, but I know I never shall. I must be content still to come to Jesus with no qualification for mercy except that which my sin and misery may give me in the eyes of his free grace. It is a thousand mercies that, although clouds may obscure other evidences, they cannot prevent our coming to the great propitiation, and casting ourselves upon its cleansing power.

Dear friends, I may close this first head by saying, that *having the Son is infallible evidence of life*. “He that hath the Son *hath* life.” It is not said that he may, perhaps, have it, or that some who have the Son have life, but there is no exception to the rule. As sure as God’s word is true, “He that hath the Son hath life,” be he who he may, or what he may. This gracious assurance includes those of you who labor in the depths of poverty, you who are in the furnace of affliction, you returning backsliders who still hang on Christ, you believers under a cloud, you who mourn your many shortcomings: by faith you dare to rest in Jesus, and you have therefore passed from death unto life. Be of good cheer, beloved, drink of the well of hope, and in joyful confidence in the Lord, press forward in your heavenward pilgrimage.

II. Now a word CONCERNING THE DEAD.

“He that hath not the Son of God hath not life”—that is, he hath not spiritual life, sentence of death is recorded against him in the book of God. His natural life is spared him in this ‘world, but he is condemned already, and is in the eye of the law dead while he lives. Think of that, some of you, for these words refer to you. The unbeliever has no spiritual life; he neither laments his soul’s need, nor rejoices that it may be supplied; he lives without prayer, and he knows nothing of secret fellowship with God, because he has no inward life to produce these priceless things, consequently, he will have no eternal life; he will exist for ever, but his existence will be a protracted death—of life he would not taste; he will have none of the joys of paradise, no sight of God’s face; he will not swell the song of eternal happiness, nor drink of the river of ever-flowing bliss. He is a walking corpse, a moving carcass, a body in which death holds the place of life. He hath not the Son of God—that is, he has never trusted in Jesus to save him, and never submitted himself to the guidance and governing of the King in Zion.

Now observe that the not having the Son of God is clear evidence of the absence of spiritual life; for the man who has not trusted in Jesus has made God a liar. Shall pure spiritual life make God a liar? Shall he receive life from God who persists in denying God’s testimony? How shall God blot out his sentence of condemnation while the criminal remains such an enemy to his own Creator as to count him a liar? The history of his unbelief proves that he is not a spiritually living man, for up till now he has chosen darkness, which is the lit dwelling-place of death, and has loved corruption, which is the fruit of the grave. Would the spiritually quickened have done this? He has quenched his conscience; he has done despite to the Spirit of grace; he has preferred sin to righteousness, and the pleasures of this world to the joys’ of heaven; he has seen no beauty in Christ, no suitability in his salvation: the man must be blind, he must be devoid of all spiritual sense—in fact, he must be dead, or he would not have acted so.

Let me tell you that for a hearer of the gospel not to believe on the Son of God must be, in the judgment of angels, a very astounding crime. How they must marvel when they see that God was made flesh to redeem the sons of men, and yet men do not believe in the incarnate Saviour! The “faithful saying, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” is not depended upon by tens of thousands; though it is worthy of all acceptance,” yet the mass of mankind give it no acceptance. What must angels think of such men? They no doubt understand the reason of it, that the mind is so perverted and corrupt that manhood is nothing better than a reeking sepulcher. Unbelief of the gospel is the great damning sin of man; the not laying hold of Jesus is the sin of sins—it is like Jeroboam, of whom we read that he sinned and made Israel to sin. It is the egg in which all manner of mischief lies. Not believing in Jesus Christ is *the* condemnation emphatically.

“This is *the* condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.”

Recollect, my dear hearers, if you have never received Christ, that this is overwhelming evidence that you are dead in sin. You have been sprinkled in your infancy; you have been confirmed, perhaps you have been immersed, possibly you have joined the church; but if you have not the Son of God, all those outward things have not the weight of a grain of sand in the scale. “Oh! but,” you may say, “I have been assured on good authority that ‘I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven,’ in my baptism!” You were so assured upon the authority of a book which has deceived many, and will, I fear, deceive tens of thousands more. It is not true that you are an inheritor of heaven, if you have not Christ. If thou hast believed in Christ thou hast life, but if thou hast not the Son of God thou hast no heavenly life; and let all the priests that ever lived assure thee of thy being a child of God by thy baptism, I tell them flat to their faces that they lie in their throats, and that some of them know they do. The Word of God is to be taken and not theirs, and that word saith, “He that hath not the Son hath not life.” Out on these false priests and their infant sprinkling too—what have they to do to pretend to be the servants of God when they are deceivers of souls? No outward ceremonies, though they be multiplied ten thousand-fold, and rendered gorgeous by all the pomp and glory of the world; nay, even though God himself should command them, could even give to thee spiritual life. Thou must have Christ, for he is the life of the soul, and without him thou art dead in sin. “Oh! but,” perhaps you may say, “I have always lived a chaste, upright, moral life; I have been attentive to religious duties; I could allege many particulars which might go to prove that I live unto God.” Ay, but all thy particulars, however well they might be alleged, would prove nothing in the teeth of such a text as this, “He that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” I tell thee, moralist, what thou art; thou art a corpse well washed and decently laid out, daintily robed in fair white linen, sprinkled plenteously with sweet perfumes, and wrapped in myrrh, and cassia, and aloes, with flowers wreathed about thy brow, and thy bosom bedecked by the hand of affection with sweetly blushing roses; but thou hast no life, and therefore thy destiny is the grave, corruption is thine heritage, and thy place of abode is fixed, “where their worm dieth not, and the fire not quenched,” for, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” With all his excellencies and moralities, with all his baptisms and his sacraments, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” There is no middle place, no specially reserved and superior abodes for these noble and virtuous unbelievers. If they have not believed, they shall be bound up in bundles with the rest, for God has appointed to unbelievers their portion with liars, and thieves, and whoremongers, and drunkards, and idolaters. Beware, ye unbelievers, for your unbelief will be to the Judge himself, at the great assize, and to the attendant angels most condemning evidence against you. “Take him away; Christ has not known him, and he has not known Christ; he had not the Son, and he shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

Now, if such things were spoken concerning some people in Africa or New Zealand, you ought to be concerned about these miserable souls, though they are so far away; but they are spoken about some of you: some of you are dead. Is not this terrible? Oh, if by some touch of an angel’s wand our bodies should all become as our souls are, how many corpses would fill these aisles, and crowd these pews! John once wished for Gaius, that his body might prosper and be in health even as his soul prospered. Now, suppose our bodies were to prosper just as our souls do! Why, there would sit in one place a living woman, and side by side with her a dead husband; further on, a living child, and then a dead grey headed grandsire. Oh! what a sight this place would be! We should hasten to

gather up our skirts, those of us who are alive, and say, "Let us begone! How can we sit side by side with corpses?" The effect would be startling to the last degree, and yet, most probably, the spiritual fact does not disturb us at all; we know it to be true, but we take it as a matter of course, and we go our way with scarce a prayer for our poor dead neighbors.

III. I close the sermon by a few observations CONCERNING THE LIVING AS THEY DWELL AMONG THE DEAD. As the living are constrained to live among the dead, as the children of God are mixed up by Providence with the heirs of wrath, what manner of persons ought they to be?

In the first place, let us take care that we do not become contaminated by the corruption of the dead. You who have the Son of God, mind that you are not injured by those who have not the Son. We have heard of such accidents when the anatomist has been making an examination of a dead body: he has been prying with his scalpel among the bones, and nerves, and sinews, and perhaps he has pricked his finger, and the dead matter has infected his blood, and death has been swift and sure. Now, I have heard of some professed Christians, wanting to see, they said, the ways of the ungodly, going into low places of amusement, to spy out the land, to judge for themselves. Such conduct is dangerous and worse. My dear friends, I never found it necessary, in my ministry, to do anything of the kind, and yet I think I have had no small success in winning souls. I must confess, I should feel very much afraid to go into hell, to put my head between the lion's jaws, for the sake of looking down his throat. I should think I was guilty of a gross presumption if I went into the company of the lewd and the profane to see what they were doing. I should fear that perhaps it might turn out that I was only a mere professor, and so should taint myself with the dead matter of the sin of those with whom I mingled, and perish in my iniquity. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing I" The resort of the ungodly is not the place for you. "Let the dead bury their dead, but as for thee," said Christ, "follow thou me."

If we must in this life, in a measure, mingle with the dead, let us take care that we never suffer the supremacy of the dead to be acknowledged over the living. It would be a strange thing if the dead were to rule the living: the dead must be laid into their coffins, and put away in their narrow cells according as the living may decree. Yet sometimes I have seen the dead have the dominion of this world; that is to say, they have set the fashion, and living Christians have followed. The carnal world has said, "This is the way of trade!" and the Christian man has replied, "I will follow the custom." Christian, this must not be. "Ay, but," saith one, "I must do as others do, for you know we must live." This also is not true, for there is no necessity for our living; there is a very great necessity for our dying sooner than living, if we cannot live without doing wrong. O Christian, you must never endure that corruption should conquer grace. By God's grace, if you get at all under the power of custom, you must cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" You must wrestle till you conquer, and cry, "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

What I think we should do towards dead souls is this—we should pity them. When the early Christians dwelt in the catacombs, where they could not go about without seeing graves, they must have had strange thoughts arising in their minds. Now, my brethren, you are in a similar plight, you cannot walk through London without thinking, "The most of these I meet with are dead in sin." Some of these dead souls live in your own house; they are your own children, your own servants. When you go out to work, you have to stand at the same bench with spiritually dead men. You cannot turn aside from your daily labor to enter the house of God but what you meet the dead even there. Ought not this to make us pray for them: "Eternal Spirit, quicken them! They cannot have

life unless they have the Son of God. O bring them to receive the Son of God"? Beloved, in connection with such prayer, be diligent to deliver the quickening message. The quickening message is, "Believe, and live." "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." Ought you not, you living ones, to be perpetually repeating the great life-word, depending upon the Holy Spirit to put energy into it. Do, I pray you, seek to win souls, and from this day separating yourselves from the world as to its maxims and its customs, plunge into the very thick of it wherein you can serve your Master, plucking brands from the burning, and winning souls from going down to the pit.

May the Lord bless this simple word this morning, for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 John 5.

Songs of Deliverance

A Sermon

(No. 763)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, July 28TH, 1867, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates.”—Judges 5:11.

DEBORAH sang concerning the overthrow of Israel's enemies, and the deliverance vouchsafed to the tribes: we have a far richer theme for music; we have been delivered from worse enemies, and saved by a greater salvation. Let our gratitude be deeper; let our song be more jubilant. Glory be unto God, we can say that our sins, which were like mighty hosts, have been swept away, not by that ancient river, the river Kishon, but by streams which flowed from Jesus' side. Our great enemy has been overcome, and his head is broken. Not Sisera, but Satan has been overthrown: the “seed of the woman has bruised his head” for ever. We are now ransomed from the galling yoke; we walk at liberty through the power of the great Liberator, the Lord Jesus.

The results which accrued from the conquest achieved by Barak, are upon a small scale similar to those which come to us through the deliverance wrought out by the Lord Jesus Christ. I shall take our text and spiritualize it, viewing its joyous details as emblematic of the blessings granted to us through our Redeemer. Those who went to draw water at the wells after Barak's victory, were no longer disturbed by the robbers who lurked at the fountains for purposes of plunder; and instead of drawing the water by stealth and in hasty fear, the women joined their voices around the well head, and sang of the mighty acts of God; and the citizens who had been cooped up within the town walls, and dared not show themselves in the suburbs, ventured beyond the gates into the open country, transacted their business openly, and enjoyed the sweets of security. I think we can readily see that this is an instructive type of the condition into which our Lord Jesus Christ has brought us, through the destruction of our sins and the overthrow of the powers of darkness.

We shall, this morning, first, for a little time, think of *the wells of salvation as cleared of enemies*; then we shall talk together upon *the songs of praise to be rehearsed at the wells*; and, thirdly, we shall have a little to say upon *the visitation of the gates, which we can now enjoy with safety*.

I. Our text tells us of WELLS CLEARED FROM THE FOE, and speaks of those who “are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water.”

We thank God that *we who are the children of the Most High, have wells to go to*. The world is a wilderness; say what we will of it, we cannot make it into anything else. “This is not our rest; it is polluted.” We are passing through the desert of earth to the Promised Land of heaven, but we praise God that we have wells to drink of on the road. As Israel drank at Elim, and as the patriarchs drank at Beersheba, so have we wells of salvation, out of which we joyfully draw the living water. Our great inexhaustible well is the *Lord Jesus Christ*. He is, indeed, the great “deep that lieth under,” the “deep that coucheth beneath,” the secret spring and source from which the crystal streams of life flow, through the wells of instrumentality and ordinance. “All my fresh springs are in thee.”

Whenever we come to the Lord Jesus Christ, we drink and are refreshed. No thirst can abide where he is. "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him," saith he, "shall never thirst." Glory be to his name, we know the truth of this—

"I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him."

As often as we muse upon his person, commune with him in holy fellowship, think of his wounds, triumph in his ascension, and long for his second advent, so often doth our spirit drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, and we lift up our head.

Arising out of this greatest fountain, we have wells from which we draw the waters of comfort. First there is *this book*, this golden book, this book of God, this god of books, the word of God, with its thousands of promises, suitable to every case, applicable to all seasons, faithful and true, yea and Amen in Christ Jesus. Oh! how frequently when we have been fainting and ready to die, we have found that promise true, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground I" when we have turned to the word, and searched there and found the promise, and fed upon it, as one that findeth great spoil have we rejoiced in God's word. The doctrines of this book are inexpressibly reviving to us. He that understandeth them shall find them to be a well of life and comfort. I need not instance those doctrines, for you know them, you feed upon them, they are your daily bread. Beloved, when we think of God's eternal love to his people, when we meditate upon redemption by blood, when we consider the truth of effectual calling by the Holy Spirit, when we remember the immutable faithfulness of the Most High, the covenant suretyship of our Lord Jesus, when we look forward to the perfection which will be ultimately ours, and to the haven of eternal rest to which every one of the Lord's people shall be brought, we do indeed find that—

"Here in the fair gospel-field,
Wells of free salvation yield
Streams of life, a plenteous store,
And our soul shall thirst no more."

As the word read is thus precious, so is *the word preached*. If we listen to one whom God helps to speak in his name, we shall often find ourselves returning from the place of worship in a very different state from that in which we entered it. How often have you lost your burdens when you have been sitting in the assembly of the saints! I know, ye feeble ones, ye have oftentimes been refreshed; ye have bowed yourselves down to Siloah's brook that flows hard by the oracle of God, and as you drank of its cooling streams, you have felt as though you could face the enemy once more, and go back to a world of toil and trouble, strong for labor, and patient for the endurance of suffering. Happy are ye to whom the word has come with demonstration of the Spirit and with power. The fruitful lips of the preacher who speaks experimentally, who speaks clearly, who speaks of that which he has tasted and handled of the good word of truth—these sanctified lips, I say, "drop as the rain," and "distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb." The mouth of the righteous becometh a well of life unto the people of God.

So, my brethren, it is also with the well of the *ordinances*. I think we shall never forget the time when we drew water out of the well of baptism—when we were baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, upon our profession of faith. We found believers' immersion to be a most instructive emblem of our death, burial, and resurrection with the Lord

Jesus; and we have not forgotten, to this day, that we then avowed ourselves to be dead to the world, dead to the law, dead to self, dead with Christ; nor has the thought of resurrection with Jesus, as typified by the uplifting out of the pool, been forgotten by us. We know and feel that we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God, and we rejoice that he “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” The recollection of that happy day when we gave ourselves up publicly and unreservedly to Jesus, is still fragrant. Oh! how sweet to sing humbly but heartily—

“‘Tis done! the great transaction’s done;

I am my Lord’s, and he is mine:

He drew me, and I followed on,

Charm’d to confess the voice divine.”

So with the Lord’s Supper. My witness is, and I think I speak the mind of many of God’s people now present, that coming as some of us do, weekly, to the Lord’s table, we do not find the breaking of bread to have lost its significance—it is always fresh to us. I have often remarked on Lord’s-day evening, whatever the subject may have been, whether Sinai has thundered over our heads, or the plaintive notes of Calvary have pierced our hearts, it always seems equally appropriate to come to the breaking of bread. Shame on the Christian church that she should put it off to once a month, and mar the first day of the week by depriving it of its glory in the meeting together for fellowship and breaking of bread, and showing forth of the death of Christ till he come. They who once know the sweetness of each Lord’s-day celebrating his Supper, will not be content, I am sure, to put it off to less frequent seasons. Beloved, when the Holy Ghost is with us, ordinances are wells to the Christian, wells of rich comfort and of near communion.

But I must not forget *the mercy seat*. What a well that is to the Christian when he can draw nigh unto God with true heart! It is a glorious thing to have such a well as that in the family, where, in prayer with the children, you can bring all the necessities of the household before God, and mention each child if you will, and all the troubles of the past, or all the expected difficulties of the coming day. Let us never give up that well. But, as for private prayer, brethren, this world were drear indeed if we could not pour out our sorrows into our Father’s ear. This is the poor man’s riches; this is the sick man’s medicine; this is the faint man’s cordial; this is the weak one’s strength; this is the ignorant man’s school; this is the strong man’s confidence. Neglect prayer, and you will soon discover that all your spiritual powers wax weak; but be much in supplication—and he that is mighty on his knees, is mighty everywhere. He that looketh God in the face every morning, will never fear the face of man; and he who looketh Christ in the face each evening, may well close his eyes in sweet repose, feeling that, if he should never wake to this world of care, he shall wake up in the likeness of his Lord. Oh, yes! the mercy seat is a well of refreshment indeed! Over and above this, *every form of fellowship* with Jesus, wrought in us by the Spirit, is a well of salvation. This is an unknown thing to the ungodly, he entereth not into this secret; but you, my fellow Christians, know what communion with God means, for oftentimes, even when we are in business, or taken up with the world’s cares, our hearts are away with our Beloved on the mountains of myrrh and in the beds of spices; we get us away from the world’s toils to lean our head upon his bosom, to set in his banqueting-house, and see the love-banner waving over our heads. Beloved, we are no strangers to Jesus Christ, blessed be his name, and he is no stranger to us; we have seen him through the lattices of the ordinances; we have found the means of grace to be like windows of agate and gates of carbuncle, through which we have beheld him; we have him in our hearts full often, he embraces

our soul—we carry the fire of his love flaming on the altar of our affections. He is our dear companion, our ever present help in time of trouble.

Thus have I mentioned some of the wells. Now, concerning them all, it may be said, *that they can never be stopped up by our foes*. We read that in old times the enemies stopped up the wells, but neither hell nor its infernal train can ever fill up one of the wells which the Lord has digged and filled by his Spirit. If outward ordinances be stopped, yet the great deep that lieth under will find a vent somewhere; and if we were forbidden to draw near to the Lord's table, or to meet to listen to the word, yet, blessed be God, we could pray, and we could have secret fellowship with Jesus, and so the wells could not so be stopped that the thirsty Christian should be deprived of his drink in due season.

Moreover, as they cannot be stopped, so *neither can they be taken away from us*. The Philistine king, Abimelech, strove with Abraham and with Isaac to take away the wells; but these are ours by covenant engagements, these are given to us in the eternal council, they are guaranteed to us by the solemn league of the eternal Three; and none of these covenant blessings shall be wrested from the heirs of life, who are heirs of all things in Christ Jesus.

Though these fountains cannot be stopped up or taken away, yet we can be molested in coming near to them. It seems that archers and wells frequently go together. It was the blessing of Joseph—"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall." But what next? "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." And so in the text: here are wells, but there is the noise of archers, which greatly disturbs those who go to draw water. Brethren and sisters—I think you know, but I will refresh your memories—you know what the noise of archers has been to you when you have tried to draw water. Years ago, with some of us, *our sins were the archers* that shot at us when we would fain come to Christ and drink of his salvation. When we bowed the knee in prayer, a fiery arrow would dart into our hearts—"How dare you pray? God heareth not sinners!" When we read the word of God, another barbed shaft would be shot against us—"What hast thou to do with God's word? There can be no promise there for such as thou art. Knowest thou not that thou art a condemned sinner, and that book curses thee solemnly? Turn away from it, of what service can it be to thee?" Do you not remember how you were wont to come up to this house sighing for comfort, and though the preacher frequently invited you to Christ, and tried to exhibit a crucified Saviour before your eyes, yet the noise of the archers prevented you drawing from the well? Arrow after arrow of remorse, conviction, terror, and alarm, pierced your soul, so that you could not obtain peace with God. You used to envy the very least of the Lord's people when you saw them rejoicing in Christ, while you could not so much as hope yourself. You were told to believe, but faith seemed impossible to you. You were hidden to rest upon the finished work, but you only could say, "I would, but cannot trust." The twanging of the bow and the whizzing of the shaft were a terrible noise which prevented all drawing of water; while sometimes Satan beat the big hell drum in your ears: "The wrath to come! The wrath to come! The wrath to come!" And as you thought about the judgment day, and the great white throne, and the resurrection, and the dividing of the sheep from the goats, and the "Depart, ye cursed," and the everlasting fire, and all the terrors of a dread eternity, divested of every beam of hope, it seemed impossible for you to draw water out of any one of the wells, though perhaps you tried them all, and tried them again and again, as I did, year after year, and yet could not obtain so much as a single drop to cool your parched tongue, while it seemed as if it would cleave to the roof of your mouth in utter despair. Ah! but beloved, you are delivered from the noise of archers

now; your sins which are many, are forgiven you; now you can come to Jesus, now you can come to the ordinances, now you can read the Bible, now you can hear the word, and you find that God's paths drop fatness. There is to you a river, the streams whereof make glad all your powers. Oh! how precious now these wells have become, because you can in unmolested peace draw water; and though sometimes the devil would fain shoot at you, yet you know you have a glorious shield, who is the Lord's anointed, and has turned away all wrath from you, so that none can lay anything to your charge, for you are accepted in the Beloved, justified by faith, and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Will not you who are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, bless the Lord?

But I should not wonder if since that first race of archers called sins has died out, some of you have been much molested by another tribe of bowmen, who a great deal trouble me at times, namely, the archers called *doubts and fears*. These sad villains will, if they can, attack every soul that desires to enjoy the means of grace and the grace of the means. "Ah!" says Satan, even to God's child, "remember your slips and your failings! Recollect your shortcomings, your slackness in prayer, your indifference to God's glory, your hardness of heart! How can you think of receiving a promise?" Just as you are going to grasp some divine word out of your Bible and suck out its honey, it seems as though something smote your hand, and you were obliged to drop the text altogether, lest you should be acting presumptuously. No hymn of joyful assurance suited you, but you began moaning out—

"'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his or am I not?"

It is poor work coming to the Lord's table when you are afraid that you are none of his; it is wretched work even listening to the ministry when you dare not claim the precious things which are delivered; yes, and even the word of God is a comfortless book when you cannot feel that you have a saving interest in its promises. Yet I thank God, when our faith is in exercise, and our hope is clear, we can see our interest in Christ; we come to him just as we came at first, and cast ourselves wholly upon him. Then we no longer fear the archers, but are rid of every fear; we "know whom we have believed, and are persuaded that he is able to keep that which we have committed unto him;" and, no longer disturbed by our enemies, we sit by the well's brink, and are refreshed.

Yet, I should not wonder if another band of archers has sometimes attacked you when you have been at the wells, namely, *your cares*. Dear mother, the thought of the children at home, has frequently disturbed your devotions in the assembly of the saints. Good friend engaged in business, you do not always find it easy to put a hedge between Saturday and Sunday. The cares of the week will stray into the sacred enclosure of the day of rest, and thus the cruel archers worry you. Ay, and perhaps in the case of those of us who are engaged in God's work, even our solemn engagements enlist against us a set of archers unknown to others; I mean anxieties about the right conducting of services, and arranging the various departments of the church. We become, like Martha, cumbered with much serving, even though we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and this deprives us of the delightful sitting at his feet, which is heaven below. It is well to be able to cast all our cares on him who careth for us, and thus, by an act of faith in our heavenly Father, to be delivered from the noise of these archers.

One thing you have, dear friends, for which you cannot be too thankful, namely, you have a deliverance from the archers of *ecclesiastical discord*. We have peace within our borders. We have not this bickering and that division, we are not divided brother against brother, as some of our churches are, which are rent by schisms, torn in pieces by stripes, which might well cause them great searchings of heart; when we do come together, we come to edify one another in peace, for we love each other in the Lord. We have not to lament that the house of God is a place of our sorest wounding; it is to us a place of rest—where our best friends, our kindred dwell, where God our Saviour reigns. We are delivered from that noise of archers at church-meetings; and you who know how sharply some can shoot, may well be glad of rest.

Again, we are happily delivered from *political persecutions*. We have not to set scouts upon the mountains, as the covenants of old, when they met in some lonely glen for worship. We have not to put one of the deacons at the door to warn us when the constables were coming to arrest us, as the members of this very church did according to our records, in years gone by. The minister has not to escape and hide himself from the officers, and the members have no need to hasten to their homes like scattered sheep, hunted by the wolf in the form of an armed band, but every man under his own vine and fig tree we sit, none making us afraid, for which we are not thankful enough, I am quite sure. May God grant that, recollecting our peaceful privileges in being now screened from persecutions, from ecclesiastical troubles, from carnal cares, from inward doubts, and above all, from the plague of sin, we may be like those who in the days of Deborah, were delivered from the noise of archers in the places of the drawing of water.

Enough upon that, only make sure that you pay your need of gratitude to your gracious God. This reminding you of your mercies I am afraid is dull work to some of you, but if you had them taken away, you would think differently. One might almost sigh for a brush of persecution to wake some of you up! Just a little salt cast here and there to make some of the sore places smart! Surely we go to sleep unless the whip be now and then laid on. A stake or two at Smithfield might once again give back the old fire of enthusiasm to the church, but in these warm sunny days we forget our mercies. We go to sleep upon the bench, instead of tugging at the oar; and when we ought to be serving God with all our might and soul, I fear that the most of us who are saved are dreaming our lonely way to heaven, indifferent to a very great extent to the glory of God, and forgetful of our indebtedness to Christ for what he has done for us.

II. Now we turn the subject, and come secondly to notice THE SONGS BY THE WELL.

As when the people came to the wells of old, they were wont to talk with one another if all was peaceful, so when we come up to the ordinances of God's house, and enjoy fellowship with Jesus, we should not spend our time in idle chat, but we should rehearse the works of the Lord. In Deborah's day, when one friend came to the well and met another, and half-a-dozen gathered together, one would say, "Delightful change this! We could not come to the well a month ago without being afraid that an arrow would pierce our hearts." "Ah!" said another, "our family went without water for a long time. We were all bitten with thirst because we dare not come to the well." Then, another would say, "But have you heard how it is? It was that woman, the wife of Lapidoth, Deborah, who called out Barak, and went with him to the battle. Have you not heard of the glorious fight they had, and how the river Kishon swept Jabin away, and Jacl smote Sisera through the temples?" "The Lord hath done it," said another. "It was the Lord's doing, and is not it marvelous in our eyes?" And so, around the well's brink, when they were delivered from the noise of archers, they rehearsed the works of God; and before they wended their way to their several homes, they said one to another,

“Let us sing unto the praise of God who has set our country free;” and so, catching the tune, each woman went back to her village home, bearing the pitcher for her household, and singing as she went. This is very much what we ought to do. When we come together, we ought to rehearse the work that Jesus Christ has done for us, the great work which he did on Calvary; the great work which he is doing now, as he stands before the Father’s throne. We should talk experimentally, and tell one another of what we have known, what Christ has done for us; through what troubles we have been sustained; in what perils we have been preserved; what blessings we have enjoyed; what ills, so well deserved, have been averted from us. We have not enough of this rehearsing the works of the Lord. It was a sign of the saints in the olden times, that “They that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard.” O let us get back to that primitive simplicity of conversation, and let us rehearse, as the text says, the righteous acts of Jehovah; let us go through our rehearsals for the grand orchestra of the skies. Let us begin to praise God and stir each other up to gratitude here, that we may be getting ready to join the overwhelming hallelujah with the ten thousand times ten thousand who for ever praise God and the Lamb. Around all the wells, whicheckver they may be, of which we drink, let our conversation be concerning Christ and his dying love; concerning the Holy Spirit and his conquering power; concerning the providence of God and its goodness and its faithfulness; and then, as we wend our way to our different homes, let us go with music in our hearts, and music on our lips, to take music to our households, each man and woman magnifying the name of the Lord.

Did you observe carefully what it was they sang of? “The acts of the Lord.” But there is an adjective appended, “The righteous acts of the Lord.” Righteousness is that attribute which the carnal man fears but he who sees the righteousness of God satisfied by the atonement of Christ, is charmed even by the severe aspect of God dressed as a judge. The justified child of God is not afraid of the righteousness of God, for he can meet all its demands. He likens it to the golden lions which stood in pairs upon the steps of the throne of Solomon—not meant to drive away the petitioner, but to let him see how strong, how powerful, was that throne upon which Israel leaned. I see the righteousness and holiness of God like huge colossal lions, as I look at his throne, and I delight, as I ascend the steps to bow before the glorious Father’s face, to know that his righteousness is engaged to save those for whom Jesus died. Let us recount the righteous vengeance of Calvary, the terrors that God cast forth upon his Son when he cursed our sins by making Christ to be a curse for us, though he knew no sin. This is a subject upon which we should delight to dwell.

Then, if you observe, it was “the righteous acts of the Lord toward his people.” Yes; the very marrow of the gospel lies in special, discriminating, distinguishing grace. As for your universal grace, let those have it who care for such meatless bones; but the special gospel of electing love, of distinguishing grace, this is the gospel which is like butter in a lordly dish to a child of God, and he that has once fed on it will take no meaner fare. I delight to believe in the universal benevolence of God—he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works; but his saints shall bless him, for they are not received with benevolence merely, but with complacency; they are not only his servants, but his sons; not so much the works of his hands, as the children of his loins, the darlings of his bosom, the favourites of his heart, the objects of his eternal choice, the delight of his eyes, his peculiar treasure, his chosen portion, his precious jewels, his rest and delight. The Lord prizes his saints above all the world beside. He gave Egypt and Ethiopia for them—he did more, he gave his Son for them; he gave heaven’s brightest jewel, heaven’s glory, heaven’s heaven he gave that he might redeem them from all iniquity, to be his own peculiar people. Thus, my

beloved brethren, take care when you converse upon the Lord's acts, that you speak of his peculiar favor towards Israel, his chosen, his elect.

Note with care that the works which are to be rehearsed are done towards the inhabitants of the villages of Israel. Does not this suggest that we ought frequently to magnify the Lord's choice favor and tender indulgence towards the least and feeblest of his family? Those villagers, those who knew so little, those who possessed so little, those who could do so little, those who were so weak, so undefended, these were rescued by the divine hand. Speak, then, of the mercy of God towards the little ones of Israel, and you will have no narrow field of speech. Why, if there be a choice word in the Bible, it is always for the weak ones; if there be a peculiarly precious promise, it is generally for the feeble minded. The best carriage in all the world that I ever heard of is Jesus' bosom, but then that is for the lamb, not for those who are strong, but for the tender and frail. Those most compassionate of sentences in which Jesus seems to have most fully expressed his gentleness, and to have employed the tenderest similes, are evidently spoken with an eye to the trembling and timid. Take for instance that one, "The bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Such words as these we may well talk of together when we meet at the wells of ordinances, and so rehearse the praise of God and his righteous acts, even his righteous acts towards the villagers of Israel.

III. Lastly, the text says, "Then shall the people of the Lord GO DOWN TO THE GATES;" by which, several things may be intended.

First, when the people of God are altogether delivered from their sins, and their cares, and their troubles, by the great redemption of the Lord Jesus and the power of his Spirit, then they enjoy *great liberty*. At times we are like Jeremiah, who said, "I am shut up and cannot come forth;" or like another whose way was hedged up with thorns; but when we live in great nearness to Christ, the gates are all opened, and we are the Lord's freemen: instead of needing to keep within the limits which fear prescribes, we take our walks abroad in the fields of blessed liberty and gospel privilege. We walk from Dan to Beersheba in covenant mercies. Do you know what the liberty of a child of God is, dear friends, or are you all your lifetime subject to bondage? If you are a child of God, you do know something of it, but if you are not initiated into the mystery of the inner life, you will very probably confound liberty with license. The liberty of the man of the world is liberty to commit evil without restraint: the liberty of a child of God is to walk in holiness without hindrance. When the believer's ways are enlarged, he delights to run in the statutes of the Lord; obedience is freedom to the Lord's servant. Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light. I fear that very many of you who are present this morning are slaves—some of you slaves to fashion, you wear the fetters most conspicuously. You are the serfs of custom, and you have not the moral courage to rebel. You bow your necks to human dictation, and own that you must do what others do. You have neither the man hood nor the grace to strike out a path of your own. Now, the true child of God does not care one snap of his finger what others may do, to his own Master he stands or falls. He does what is right, and would sooner take the lion of hell by the beard than do wrong. If others like his integrity, so much the better for them; if they do not like it, they are condemned out of their own mouths. I take it that the genuine Christian who has once come to fear God, fears nobody else; that he scorns to hamper himself with the sinful customs which sway the slavish hordes of mankind. He chooses for himself by the light of God's word, and when he sees a thing to be right, he does it, and he asks no man liberty on that account. It is a most glorious liberty which a man possesses when he is no

longer in bondage to me, to smart under their threats or to fatten in their smiles. Glorious was that ancient father who threw back the threatenings of his enemies, and laughed them to scorn. "We will banish you!" said they. "No!" said the Christian hero, "you cannot do that, because I shall be at home anywhere; I am a citizen of heaven; I am a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth." "But we will shut you out from all your friends!" "No!" he said, "you are not able even to do that, since my best Friend will always be with me." "We shall deprive you of your goods!" But he replied, "That I know you cannot do, for I gave them all away to the poor but yesterday." "Well, we will take away your life!" "In that, too, I am undismayed," said he, "for death will only give me the life for which I long." No wounds could be inflicted upon a warrior so invulnerable; just so secure is every man who is clad in the armor of faith. He is above the molestation of mankind, for his life is hidden with Christ; his Conversation is in heaven; he is free from fear, since he has nothing to fear; all his interests are secure. He has cast himself upon his God in Christ, and since God has made him free, he is free indeed. "He is the freeman whom the truth makes free, and all are slaves beside." You do not know what a joy it is to walk erect in conscious, mental, moral, spiritual, God-given freedom. Slaves of priest-craft, we pity you, your chains we would not wear for all the wealth of India! Bondslaves of the law, we mourn for you, for your service is heavy, and your captivity is terrible. Serfs of custom, you are more to be scorned than pitied: break your bands asunder, and wear the yoke no more. This day we feel as emancipated slaves must have felt when the last fetter fell to the ground. O glorious liberty, no price can show thine excellence, and all the things which we can desire are not to be compared with thee.

To go down to the gates, however, means something else, for citizens went down to the gates to *exercise authority and judgment*. He that is in Christ discerneth spirits, and separateth between the excellent and the reprobate. "The spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." The saints, being led of the Spirit, discern between the precious and the vile; they know the voice of their Shepherd, but a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers. The saints judge this world, and by their living testimony condemn its sin. "Know ye not that we shall judge angels" in the day of the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ? Instead of being judged and following others, they who love God become the leaders in right, and are as God's mouth rebuking iniquity.

To go down to the gates signified also to go forth *to war*. When a Christian man is saved, he is not content with his own safety, he longs to see others blessed. He can now go out of the gates to attack the foe who once held him in bondage, and therefore he girds on his weapon. When will the church of God be inflamed by the sacred desire of carrying the war for Christ into the enemy's territory? I think I see a great deal in our churches now of a dangerously lethargic conservatism, a settling down contented with our churches, delighted to strengthen our own hands to keep together what we have, and careless about enlargement. The object of many churches of considerable age seems to be consolidation, and nothing more: but rest assured that the truest consolidation is enlargement, the best conservatism is progress, the truest way to keep what you have is to get more, the best way to retain the grace you now possess is to crave for more and more of the blessed spiritual gift. Brethren, if Christ has delivered us from the noise of archers, and we are at perfect peace with heaven, do not let us fold our arms and say, "The work is done, let us sleep in peace." O you saved men, hasten to the armoury, array yourselves in the panoply, and grasp the sword, for now you are called by Christ to a holy warfare. If you are saved, you must seek to save others; if you have received the light, carry it into the dark places. If you have escaped from the jaw of the

lion, and the paw of the bear, now go forth to fight with the monster and tear others from his power. I trust that the most of you are engaged in some Christian service, but so often as I come into this pulpit and think of the numbers of believers in this church, I feel concerned that we should not suffer any part of our territory to lie idle as waste ground, that we should not have a single member in this church who is doing nothing. I shall be satisfied, perfectly satisfied, if each one is doing what he can; we cannot expect more, neither does the Lord expect according to what a man has not, but according to what he has. But are you, my brethren, who have been lifted up into the glorious position of saved souls, are you glorifying Christ and finishing the work which is given you to do? I fear that some of you are not. You can eat the fat and drink the sweet, but you make but small return unto your Lord. I speak to you as a loving brother in Christ, and I pray you think how life will look in the light of its last hour. Think of your residence on earth as you will view it from those summits of bliss beyond the river! Will you wish then to have wasted time, to have lost opportunities? If you could know regrets in the realm of blessedness, would not these be the regrets that you have not served Christ better, loved him more, spoken of him oftener, given more generously to his cause, and more uniformly proved yourselves to be consecrated to him? I am afraid that such would be the form of the regrets of paradise, if any could intrude within those gates of pearl. Come, let us live while we live! Let us live up to the utmost stretch of our manhood! Let us ask the Lord to brace our nerves, to string our sinews, and make us true crusaders, knights of the blood-red cross consecrated men and women, who, for the love we bear Christ's name, will count labor to be ease, and suffering to be joy, and reproach to be honor, and loss to be gain! If we have never yet given ourselves wholly up to Christ as his disciples, now hard by his cross, where we see his wounds still bleeding afresh, and himself quivering in pain for us, let us pledge ourselves in his strength, that we give ourselves wholly to him without reserve, and so may he help us by his Spirit, that the vow may be redeemed and the resolve may be carried out, that we may love Christ, and dying may find it gain.

Brethren and sisters, I cannot press this home to you as I would; I must leave it with your own consciences and with the eternal Spirit. If Jesus be not worthy, do not serve him; but if he be right honorable, serve him as he ought to be served. If heaven and eternal things be not weighty, then trifle with them; but if they be solemn realities, I beseech you as honest men treat them as realities. If there be a day coming when all your business, and your worldly cares, and your fleeting pleasures, will seem to be mere children's toys, if there be an hour coming when to have served God will be glory, when to have won souls will be renown, then live as in the light of that truth, and God help you by his blessed Spirit. Amen and Amen.

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