



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 18: 1872

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 18: 1872* by Charles Spurgeon

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The Glorious Master and the Swooning Disciple

A Sermon

(No. 1028)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, January 7th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”—Revelation 1:17-18.

LOW THOUGHTS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST are exceedingly mischievous to believers. If you sink your estimate of him you shift everything else in the same proportion. He who thinks lightly of the Savior thinks so much the less of the evil of *sin*; and, consequently, he becomes callous as to the past, careless as to the present, and venturesome as to the future. He thinks little of the punishment due to sin, because he has small notions of the atonement made for sin. Christian activity for right is also abated; as well as holy horror of wrong. He who thinks lightly of the Lord Jesus renders to him but small *service*; he does not estimate the Redeemer's love at a rate high enough to stir his soul to ardor; if he does not count the blood wherewith he was redeemed an unholy thing, yet he thinks it a small matter, not at all sufficient to claim from him life-long service. Gratitude is weak when favors are undervalued. He serves little who loves little, and he loves little who has no sense of having been greatly beloved. The man who thinks lightly of Christ also has but poor comfort as to his own *security*. With a little Savior I am still in danger, but if he be the mighty God, able to save unto the uttermost, then am I safe in his protecting hand, and my consolations are rich and abounding. In these, and a thousand other ways, an unworthy estimate of our Lord will prove most solemnly injurious. The Lord deliver us from this evil.

If our conceptions of the Lord Jesus are very enlarged, they will only be his due. We cannot exaggerate here. He deserves higher praise than we can ever render to him. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high is he above our loftiest conceptions. Even when the angels strike their loudest notes, and chant his praises most exultingly on their highest festal days, the music falls far short of his excellence. He is higher than a seraph's most soaring thought! Rise then, my brethren, as on eagle's wings, and let your adoring souls magnify and extol the Lord your Savior.

When our thoughts of Jesus are expanded and elevated, we obtain right ideas upon other matters. In the light of his love and atoning sacrifice, we see the depth of the degradation from which such a Redeemer has uplifted us, and we hate, with all our hearts, the sins which pierced such an altogether lovely one, and made it needful for the Lord of life to die. Forming some adequate estimate of what Jesus has done for us, our gratitude grows, and with our gratitude our love—while love compels us to consecration, and consecration suggests heroic self-denying actions. Then are we bold to speak for him, and ready, if needs be, to suffer for him while we feel we could give up all we have to increase his glory, without so much as dreaming that we had made a sacrifice.

Let your thoughts of Christ be high, and your delight in him will be high too; your sense of security will be strong, and with that sense of security will come the sacred joy and peace which always keep the heart which confidently reposes in the mediator's hands. If thou wouldst thyself

be raised, let thy thoughts of Christ be raised. If thou wouldst rise above these earthly toys, thou must have higher and more elevated thoughts of him who is high above all things. Earth sinks as Jesus rises. Honor the Son even as thou wouldst honor the Father, and, in so doing, thy soul shall be sanctified and brought into closer fellowship with the great Father of Spirits, whose delight it is to glorify his Son.

My object, this morning, is to suggest some few truths to your recollection which may help to set the Lord Jesus on a glorious high throne within your hearts. My motto, this morning, will be—
 “Bring forth the royal diadem
 And crown him Lord of all.”

My anxiety is that he may be crowned with many crowns in all these many hearts, and that you may now perform those exercises of faith, those delightful acts of adoring love, which shall bring to him great glory.

I. Coming to the text, the first thing we notice in it is **THE DISCIPLE OVERPOWERED**. We will meditate a little while upon that. John writes, “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.”

The beloved disciple was favored with an unusual vision of his glorified Lord. In the blaze of that revelation even his eagle eye was dimmed and his holy soul was overwhelmed. He was overpowered, but not with ecstasy. At first sight it would have seemed certain that excess of delight would have been John’s most prominent feeling; it would appear certain that to see his long lost Master, whom he had so dearly loved, would have caused a rush of joy to John’s soul, and that if overpowered at all, it would have been with ecstatic bliss. That it was not so is clear from the fact that our Lord said to him, “Fear not.” Fear was far more in the ascendant than holy joy. I will not say that John was unhappy, but, certainly, it was not delight which prostrated him at the Savior’s feet; and I gather from this that if we, in our present embodied state, were favored with an unveiled vision of Christ, it would not make a heaven for us; we may think it would, but we know not what spirit we are of. Such new wine, if put into these old bottles, would cause them to burst. Not heaven but deadly faintness would be the result of the beatific vision, if granted to these earthly eyes. We should not say, if we could behold the King in his beauty as we now are, “I gazed upon him, and my heart leaped for joy,” but like John we should have to confess, “When I saw him I fell at his feet as dead.” There is a time for everything, and this period of our sojourn in flesh and blood is not the season for seeing the Redeemer face to face: that vision will be ours when we are fully prepared for it. We are as yet too feeble to bear the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. I do not say but what we are so prepared by his grace that, if now he took us away from this body, we should be able to bear the splendor of his face; but, I do say, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and that when, as an exception to the rule, a mortal man is permitted to behold his Lord, his flesh and blood are made to feel the sentence of death within themselves, and to fall as if slain by the revelation of the Lord. We ought, therefore, to thank God that “he holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it.” That face which shines as the sun in its strength, manifests its love by wearing as yet a concealing veil. Be grateful, that while you are to be here to serve him, and to do his will in suffering for him, he does not deprive you of your power to serve or suffer, by overwhelming you with excessive revelations. It is an instance of the glory of God’s grace that he conceals his majesty from his people, and wraps clouds and darkness round about him; this he does not to deny his saints a bliss which they might covet, but to preserve them from an unseasonable joy, which, as yet, they are not capable of bearing. We shall see him as he is, when he shall be like him, but not till then. That for a while we may be able to perform the duties

of this mortal life, and not lie perpetually stretched like dead men at his feet, he doth not manifest himself to us in the clear light which shone upon the seer of Patmos.

I beg you to notice with care this beloved disciple in his fainting fit, and note first, *the occasion* of it. He says, "I saw *him*." This it was that made him faint with fear. "I saw HIM." He had seen him on earth, but not in his full glory as the first begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. When our Savior dwelt among men, in order to their redemption, he made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant; for this reason he restrained the flashings of his Deity, and the godhead shone through the manhood with occasional and softened rays. But now, Jesus was resplendent as the ancient of days, girt with a golden girdle, with a countenance outshining the sun in its strength, and this even the best beloved apostle could not endure. He could gaze with dauntless eye upon the throne of jasper and the rainbow of emerald, he could view with rapture the sea of glass like unto crystal, and the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, but the vision of the Lord himself was too much for him. He who quailed not when the doors of both heaven and hell were opened to him in vision, yet fell lifeless when he saw the Lord. None either in earth or heaven can compare with Jesus in glory. Oh for the day when we shall gaze upon his glory and partake in it. Such is his sacred will concerning us. "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." To bear that sight we shall need to be purified and strengthened. God himself must enlarge and strengthen our faculties, for as yet, like the disciples upon labor, we should be bewildered by the brightness.

Here was the occasion of his faintness. But what was *the reason* why a sight of Christ so overcame Him? I take it we have the reason in the text, it was partly fear. But, why fear? Was not John beloved of the Lord Jesus? Did he not also know the Savior's love to him? Yes, but for all that, he was afraid, or else the Master would not have said to him, "Fear not." That fear originated partly in a sense of his own weakness and insignificance in the presence of the divine strength and greatness. How shall an insect live in the furnace of the sun? How can mortal eye behold unquenched the light of Deity, or mortal ear hear that voice which is as many waters? We are such infirmity, folly and nothingness, that, if we have but a glimpse of omnipotence, awe and reverence prostrate us to the earth. Daniel tells us that when he saw the great vision by the river Hiddekel, there remained no strength in him, for his comeliness was turned in on him into corruption, and he fell into a deep sleep upon his face. John, also, at that time, perhaps, perceived more impressively than ever the purity and immaculate boldness of Christ: and, being conscious of his own imperfection, he felt like Isaiah when he cried "Woe is me, I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the Lord of Hosts." Even his faith, though fixed upon the Lord, our righteousness, was not able to bear him up under the first surprising view of uncreated holiness. Methinks his feelings severe like those of the patriarch of Uz, when he says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The most spiritual and sanctified minds, when they fully perceive the majesty and holiness of God, are so greatly conscious of the great disproportion between themselves and the Lord, that they are humbled and filled with holy awe, and even with dread and alarm. The reverence which is commendable is pushed by the infirmity of our nature into a fear which is excessive, and that which is good in itself is made deadly unto us; so prone are we to err on the one side or the other.

There is no doubt, too, that a part of the fear which caused John to swoon arose from a partial ignorance or forgetfulness of his Lord. Shall we charge this upon one who wrote one of the gospels, and three choice epistles? Yes, it was doubtless so, because the Master went on to instruct and teach

him in order to remove his fear. He needed fresh knowledge or old truths brought home with renewed power, in order to cure his dread. As soon as he knew his Lord he recovered his strength. The wonderful person who then stood before him bade him know that he was the first and the last, the ever living and Almighty Lord. The knowledge of Jesus is the best remedy for fears: when we are better acquainted with our Lord we part company with half our doubts—these bats and owls cannot bear the sun. Jesus in his person, work, offices, and relations, is a mine of consolation; every truth which is connected with him is an argument against fear: when our heart shall be filled with perfect love to him fear will be cast out, as Satan was cast down from heaven. Study then your Lord. Make it your life's object to know him. Seek the Holy Spirit's illumination, and the choice privilege of fellowship, and your despondency and distress will vanish as night birds fly to hide themselves when the day breaketh. It is folly to walk in sorrow when we might constantly rejoice. We do not read that John was any more afraid after the Lord had discoursed lovingly upon his own glorious person and character. That divine enlightenment which was given to his mind, purged from it any secret mistake and misjudgment which had created excessive fear.

But, while we thus notice the occasion and the reasons, we must not forget *the extent* to which John was overpowered. He says, "I fell at his feet as dead;" He does not say in a partial swoon, or overcome with amazement: he uses a very strong description, "I fell at his feet as dead." He was not dead, but he was "as dead;" that is to say, he could see no more, the blaze of Jesus' face had blinded him; he could hear no more, the voice like the sound of many waters had stunned his ear; no bodily faculty retained its power. His soul, too, had lost consciousness under the pressure put upon it; he was unable to think much less to act. He was stripped not only of self-glory and strength, but almost of life itself. This is by no means a desirable natural condition, but it is much to be coveted spiritually. It is an infinite blessing to us to be utterly emptied, stripped, spoiled, and slain before the Lord. Our strength is our weakness, our life is our death, and when both are entirely gone, we begin to be strong and in very deed to live. To lie at Jesus' feet is a right experience; to lie there as sick and wounded is better, but to lie there as dead is best of all; a man is taught in the mysteries of the kingdom, who comes to that. Moses with dim legal light needs to be told to put off his shoe from off his foot in the presence of the Lord of Hosts, but John is manifestly far in advance of him, because he lies lower, and is like a dead man before the Infinite Majesty. How blessed a death is death in Christ! How divine a thing is life in him. If I might see Christ at this moment upon the terms of instant death, I would joyfully accept the offer, the bliss would far exceed the penalty. But as for the death of all within us, that is of the flesh and of fallen nature, it is beyond measure desirable, and if for nothing else; my soul would pant more and more to see Jesus. May that two-edged sword which cometh out of his mouth smite all my besetting sins; may the brightness of his countenance scorch and burn up in me the very roots of evil: may he mount his white horse and ride through my soul conquering, and to conquer, casting out of me all that is of the old dragon and his inventions, and bringing every thought into subjection to himself. There would I lie at his dear conquering feet, slain by his mighty grace.

Only one other reflection while we look at this fainting apostle, observe well *the place* where he was overpowered. Oh, lovely thought. "I fell as dead;" but where? "I fell *at his feet* as dead." It matters not what aileth us if we lie at Jesus' feet. Better be dead there than alive anywhere else. He is ever gentle and tender, never breaking the bruised reed or quenching the smoking flax. In proportion as he perceives that our weakness is manifest to us, in that degree will he display his tenderness. He carrieth the lambs in his bosom, and doth gently lead those that are with young;

feebleness wins on him. When he sees a dear disciple prostrate at his feet, he is ready at once to touch him with the hand of his familiar love, and to revive him by his own strength. "He restoreth my soul." "He giveth power unto the faint." He saith unto our pitiful weakness, "Fear not, I am the first and the last." To be as dead were not desirable, but to be as dead at Jesus' feet is safe and profitable. Well doth our poet say, when expressing his desire to escape from all worldly bonds.

"But oh, for this, no strength have I,
My strength is at his feet to lie."

II. And now, having seen the disciple overpowered, I shall ask your consideration of THAT SAME DISCIPLE RESTORED. He was not long in the condition of death, for the Master laid his right hand upon him, and said to him, "Fear not." Here then, we shall notice, that when the children of God become exceeding faint and feeble, and their own sense of impurity and nothingness becomes painful, and even killing to them, the Lord has ways of restoring and reviving their spirits.

And first, he does it by a *condescending approach*. "He laid his hand upon me." It is noticeable, that in the great cures which our Savior wrought, he almost always touched the patient. He could with a word have healed, but to prove his fellowship with the sick, he put his hand upon the leper, and upon the blind eye, and touched the deaf ear; thus manifesting his condescending contact with the infirmities of our nature. The Master could have spoken a word to John, and have revived him; but he did not stand at a distance, or guard himself with a "Touch me not" but, instead of that, he commenced his care with a touch. No other hand could have revived the apostle, but the hand which was pierced for him had matchless power. There is mighty healing in the royal hand of our Immanuel. When the Holy Spirit inspires us with a sense of the relationship which Christ bears to us, of the sympathy which Christ feels with us, of the kinship and fellowfeeling which reign in Jesus' breast, then are we comforted. To know that he is not ashamed to call us brethren is a wellspring of comfort to a tried child of God; to feel his presence, to perceive the touch of his hand, and to hear him say: "I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God," this is new life to our waning spirits. Oh what bliss is this. "In all their afflictions he was afflicted." He is a brother born for adversity, a sympathetic and tender friend touched with a feeling of our infirmities. "He laid his hand upon me." "O child of God, pray for a manifestation of the kinsman Christ to thy soul; ask that he would instruct thee as to the fact that he enters into thy grief, having himself endured the like. Thou art one with him, and he is one with thee; and as surely as the head feels the pain of the members, so does Jesus share in all the sorrows of his people. Let this be a comfort to thee, thou who art now lying as dead before the risen Lord. He comes near to thee, not to kill thee, but to revive thee by most intimate intercourse, talking with thee as a man speaketh with his friend. O man, greatly beloved, be not so overwhelmed with the greatness of thy Lord as to forget his love, his great love, his familiar love, which at this moment lays its hand upon thee.

The same action implies *the communication of divine strength*. "He laid his *right* hand upon me." It is the hand of favor, it is also the hand of power. God gives strength to those who have none. He puts power into the faint. When the child of God is brought very low, it is not a mere subject for consideration or theme for reflection that can lift him up: sick men want more than instruction, they require cordials and supports. There must be actual strength and energy imparted to a swooning soul, and, glory be to God, by his own Holy Spirit, Jesus can and does communicate energy to his people in the time of weakness. He is come that we may have life, and that we may have it more abundantly. The omnipotence of God is made to rest upon us, so that we even glory in infirmities. "My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness," is a blessed

promise, which has been fulfilled to the letter to many of us. Our own strength has departed, and then the power of God has flowed in to fill up the vacuum. I cannot explain the process: these are secrets and mysteries to be experienced rather than expounded; but as the coming of the Spirit of God into us first of all makes us live in regeneration, so the renewed coming of the power of God into our soul raises us up from our weakness and our faintness into fresh energy. Be thou encouraged, then, thou fainting spirit today. They that trust upon the Lord shall renew their strength. All power belongeth unto the Lord, and he will give it plenteously to those who have none of their own. Be of good courage and wait upon him for none shall be ashamed who make him their confidence.

Then there followed *a word from the Master's own mouth*. He spoke and said, "Fear not." Here he applied the remedy to the disease. Christ himself is our medicine, as well as our physician. His voice which stilled the sea, also casts out all our fears. The word of God, as we find it in this book, is very consoling; the word of God, as we hear it from Christ's ministers, has great power in it; but the real and true power of the word lies in Jesus THE WORD. When the truth falls fresh from his own lips, then is it power. Right truly did the Master say, "the words which I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." With what power did those syllables fall on the fluttered heart of John—"Fear not." Oh that we might hear the same voice by the Spirit in our inmost souls.

"Oh might I hear thine heavenly tongue,
But whisper '*Thou art mine.*'
Those gentle words should raise my song
To notes almost divine."

Truly there are many voices and each has its significance, but the voice of Jesus has a heaven of bliss in its every accent. Let but my beloved speak to me, and I will forego the angelic symphonies. Though he should only say, "Fear not," and not a word beyond, it were worth worlds to see him open his mouth unto us. But you say, can we still hear Jesus speak to us? Ay, by his Spirit. His Spirit still hath fellowship with the hearts of men, and he can bring the word of Scripture right home into the soul, until it becometh no more the letter but the living, quickening word of Christ. Do you know what I mean by this? If you do not, it is not possible to tell you; and if you do, you will need no explanation. Jesus speaks to the heart, the truth comes not in word only, but in demonstration of the Spirit and with power. O thou troubled believer, thou who art abashed by the very glory thou hast been made to see, be assured that Jesus will draw near unto thy soul, and touch thee, and speak with thee, so that thou shalt be strengthened with might by his Spirit in thine inner man. Had John not fallen as dead, he might never have heard the voice and felt the touch of his Lord. Sweet is the fall which leads to such a rise again.

In order to complete the cure of his servant our Lord went on to give him fuller instruction in that very matter which had overpowered him. Sometimes like cures like. If in a certain sense it is true of divine revelations, that "shallow draughts intoxicate the brain," it is assuredly true that "drinking largely sobers us again." If a glimpse of Christ makes holy men to faint, a clearer sight of him will set them on their feet again. Our Lord went on to instruct John in the glory of his person and power, that his fears might be removed. And truly, brethren, John was in a right state for such celestial instruction; he who is lowly is ready to learn mysteries. He was like wax ready for the seal; or as paper cleansed of all other writing. Because we think we know, we know not; but the death of the pride of knowledge is the birth of true understanding. The Lord loves best for pupils those who lie lowest before him. "The meek will he guide in judgment, the meek will he teach his way." "With the lowly is wisdom." Where Jesus is the teacher, and instructs the heart in the things

concerning, himself, the soul is made to inherit substance, and its treasures are filled. Blessed are the men who are taught by him who is the wisdom of God, even though while they watch at the posts of his doors they lie as dead men; they are blessed, for they shall find life, and obtain favor of the Lord.

III. We will now advance to the third point of our discourse which contains the pith of it. We have observed the beloved disciple overpowered and we have seen him afterwards revived; now we shall consider for awhile THE SAME DISCIPLE STILL FURTHER INSTRUCTED. Let me have your attention, dear friends, to the glorious truth which is now opening up before us in the text. John was first of all instructed as to *the Lord's person*. "Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead." As to the Lord's person, Jesus revealed to his disciple that he was most truly divine. "I am the first and the last." This language can be used of none but God himself; none but he is first; none but he is last; none but God can be first and last. Now, our Lord Jesus Christ was evidently first. He existed before he was born into the world. We read, "a body hast thou prepared me." Then Christ was a previously existing one for whom that body was prepared; and he it is who said, "Lo, I come, to do thy will O God." He came into the world, but he had from old eternity dwelt in the bosom of the Father. John the Baptist was born into the world before the Savior, of whom he was the forerunner, but what does he say? His testimony is "he, coming after me, is preferred before me, for he was before me." He is first in order of honor because first in order of existence. John was the elder as man, but as God the Lord Jesus is from everlasting. Go back in history as far as you will; with one leap ascend to the days of Moses, and there is Christ before you, for we read: "Let us not tempt Christ as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents." There was Christ, then, in the wilderness vexed by the people. He it was whose voice then shook the earth, but who will yet shake not the earth only but also heaven. Go further back to Abraham, and we find the angel of the covenant there. Our Lord expressly says, "Before Abraham was I am." Mark you, not "I was," but "I am;"—he speaks in a God-like manner. Ascend even to the age of Noah, the second parent of our race, and there we discover Jesus Christ preaching to those spirits who are now in prison, who sometime were disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing." It was Christ in Noah, who by the Spirit preached to the antediluvian sinners. We go further back to the creation of the world, and are find "In the beginning was the word, and the word was God;" and if we fly back to old eternity, before the creating hand commenced its work, we find in Proverbs, the eighth chapter, the witness of the incarnate wisdom himself. "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled. Before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world." Our Lord is thus the first: and so assuredly will he be the last; for all things consist and subsist through the perpetual emanations of his infinite power; and when the kings of the earth shall sleep in the dust, and the popovers thereof shall have passed away, when the treasures of time shall have melted, and its most enduring memorials shall have gone like the mists of the morning, he shall be the same, and of his years there shall be no end. Christ is the true Melchisedec, without beginning of days or end of years, "made a priest not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." This was revealed to John for his comfort, and it stands true to us today, and is equally fraught with consolation.

Moreover, by the words “the first and the last” are signified, in most languages, the sum and substance of all things. We say sometimes the top and the bottom of it is so and so; we mean that it is the whole of it. And the Greeks were wont to say, “This is the prow and stern of the business,” meaning that it is the whole. And so Jesus Christ, in being first and last, is all in all. And, truly, it is so in the working of redemption and salvation; he begins, carries on, completes; he asks no creature help and will have none. To us he is the author and the finisher of our faith, the alpha of our first comfort, and the omega of our final bliss. We worship Christ as the sum and substance of all good. Herein is wealth of comfort, and, therefore, did the Lord instruct his servant, John, therein, he did as much as say, “John, thou needest no ear, for I am no enemy, no stranger, no avenging spirit, but God himself, in whom thou has learned to put thy trust. Thou believest in God, believe also in me.” To every trembling believer we would say, Why dost thou fear? Jesus is all. Art thou afraid of him, thy brother, thy Savior, thy friend. Then, what dost thou fear? Anything old? He is the first. Anything to come? He is the last. Anything in all the world? He is all in all, from the first to the last. What dost thou want? If thou hast him thou hast all. Dost thou need more than all? Hast thou discovered a need within thy spirit, a grievous lack which troubles thee? How can that be when thy Lord Jesus fills all things, and all things are yours in him. If thou hast, indeed, placed thy confidence in him, and made him all thy salvation, to what end and for what cause shouldst thou be troubled with any sort of fear? Having a divine person to be thy protector and thy Savior, Why shouldst thou be afraid?

In addition, however, to rendering to John the comfort derived from his person, our blessed Master went on to comfort him with the truth of *his self existence*. “I am he that liveth,” saith he, “or I am the living one.” Creatures are not living in themselves, they borrow leave to be; to God alone it belongs to exist necessarily. He is the *I AM*, and such is Christ. Why then dost thou fear? If the existence of thy Lord, thy Savior, were precarious and dependent upon some extraneous circumstances, thou wouldst have cause for fear, for thou wouldst be in constant jeopardy. If he had to borrow permission to be, derived strength from creatures, and needed to look hither and thither for strength to sustain his own existence, thou wouldst be ever in danger, and consequently in distress; but, since Jesus cannot possibly cease to be, or be other than he is, or less than he is, what occasion canst thou have for alarm? A self-existent Savior, and yet a troubled Christian! Oh, let it not be so. “Fear not, I am he that liveth.”

And, if these two sources of consolation should not suffice, the Lord in the glory of his tenderness mentions a third—viz, *his atoning death*. He says, “I was dead,” the original more correctly rendered is “was made dead.” Here we come upon the human nature of our Redeemer. As God and as man he had two natures, but he was not two persons. As one person he ever lives, and yet he was made to die. He came into this world in human form that he might be capable of death; the pure spirit of God could not die, it was not possible that he, the *I AM*, could be subject to death; but he allied himself with humanity, and in that human form Jesus could die, and did die. In very deed, and truth, and not in semblance; Jesus bowed his head, and gave up the ghost, and they laid his corpse in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Here to the child of God is a fruitful source of consolation. He died, then the atonement is complete; without the shedding of blood there is no remission, but the death of the Son of God brings plenteous pardon. There must be in the death of such a one of sufficient merit to remove guilt and cleanse transgression. Is it not written, “He hath washed us from our sins in his own blood?” Dost thou not hear that song in heaven? Will not its music make thee glad? His

own blood hath washed thee; if thou believest in him thou art clean. Look to Calvary, and as thou lookest there and perceivest that he was dead, “fear not.”

And then the master declared his *endless life*, “I am alive for evermore.” He who offered up the atonement lives again to claim the effect of his sacrifice. He has presented the meritorious sacrifice, and now he has gone to heaven to plead the sacrifice before the throne of God, and to lay claim to the place which he has prepared for them that love him. Thou hast no dead Savior to trust to: thou reliest in him who once died—this is comfort to thee, but he lives, the great Redeemer lives. He has risen from the tomb; he has climbed the hills of heaven; he sits at the right hand of the Father, prepared to defend his people. If thou hadst a Christ in the sepulcher that were sorrow upon sorrow; but thou hast a Christ in heaven, who can die no more. Be thou of good cheer.

And then, to close the whole, the Master said “Amen, and hath the keys of hell and of death.” *The mediatorial office* which Christ now occupies is one of great power. He is “God over all, blessed for ever.” His dominion is over land and seas and over heaven and the regions of the dead. There is nothing hid from the energy of his power. He is Lord of all. “He hath the keys of hell and of death.” By the word “*hell*” may be meant here the entire invisible land, the whole realm of spirits: Christ is Lord there, adored in heaven and feared in hell. But, if we restrict the sense to the common meaning of the word in our language, he is Lord of hell. The devil despite his malignity can do nothing but what Christ permits him. He is a chained enemy; he may rave and rage, but he cannot injure the child of God. Christ hath him ever in check, and when he permits him to wander abroad, he makes the wrath of man and the wrath of devils to praise him, and the remainder he doth restrain. Why dost thou fear therefore? Thou sayest, “I am a sinner—Satan will prevail against me.” But Christ saith “I am master of Satan, I am Lord of hell, he cannot prevail against thee.” He cannot leave hell unless Christ permits him, for Christ can turn the key and lock him in. He could not take thee there, for Christ has locked thee out and keeps the key. Thou art eternally and perpetually safe from all the machinations of the powers of darkness. And dost thou tremble at *death*? Is it that which alarms thee? Have the pains and groans and dying strifes sounded in thine ear till thou art timid and afraid? Then remember Christ hath the keys of death. Thou canst not die until he permits. If men of blood should seek thy life, they could not smite thee till thy Lord should allow it; and if plagues and death should fly about thee, and thousands die at thy right hand, and ten thousands at thy left, thou canst not die till the Lord wills it. Thou art immortal till he saith “return.” The iron gate of death opens not of its own accord to thee, a thousand angels could not drag thee to the tomb; thou comest there only at his call. Fear not, therefore, but remember that death is no longer death to the saints of God, they fall asleep in Jesus. Since thy Lord will be with thee, it will not be death to die; thou shalt find death to thee an enemy muzzled and chained: the wasp shall have lost its sting, it shall be a bee that shall bring thee honey; out of the lion, as Samson did, shalt thou get sweetness to thyself. Death is overborne, and when it arrives, Jesus will come with it, and make thy dying bed most soft to thee.

Remember one thought more. He that hath the key of death will annihilate death; for thy body shall not become the prey of the worm for ever. At the trump of the archangel thy body shall rise again. There shall not a bone or a piece of a bone of one of his people perish, their very dust is precious in his sight. They sleep awhile, and rest from their labors; but, from beds of dust and silent clay, the Lord of life shall call them all. O death, where is thy sting! O grave, wherein thy victory! Since Jesus who died and ever lives has the keys of death and hell at his girdle, we will not fear to

die, let the time appointed be when it may. So that you see there was abundance of comfort for the sinking spirit of the apostle John.

Let me close by saying, in the glory and exaltation of Christ is *the saint's cordial*. Some of us have tried it when our mouths were full of bitterness, and we have rejoiced and been exceeding glad at the thought. A reigning Savior makes a joyful people. Run there for comfort, ye sons of sorrow: rejoice ye in your king all ye his saints.

But this same glorious Savior will be *the sinner's terror*. They shall hide their faces at the last from the brightness of his glory; they shall ask the hills and mountains to conceal them from his face who sits upon the throne. A glorious monarch is the rebel's horror. By so much as he whom you have rejected is great and glorious, by so much shall the punishment from his right hand be intolerable. Oh that you were wise enough to cease from fighting with the Almighty Lord.

But, lastly, he is also *the penitent's hope*; for now, to-day, if you would be forgiven, the exalted Savior presents himself to you most freely. He is exalted on high, but what for? It is to give "repentance and remission of sins." The greater he is the better for those who need great mercy; the more royal and kingly he is the better for humble, broken, bleeding hearts. "Oh, kiss the son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way while his wrath is kindled but a little." From the highest heaven he stretches down the silver scepter; touch it by a simple faith. May he enable you to do it, and though as yet you fall at his feet as dead, you shall hear him say this morning, "Fear not, I am he that liveth, and was dead, and am alive for evermore, and am, therefore, able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by me, seeing I ever live to make intercession for thee." God bless you, dear friends, by his Spirit. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Proverbs 8:17-36; Revelation 1.

A Call to Holy Living

A Sermon

(No. 1029)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, January 14th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“What do ye more than others?”—Matthew 5:47.

IT IS A VERY GREAT FAULT in any ministry if the doctrine of justification by faith alone be not most clearly taught. I will go further, and add, that it is not only a great fault, but a fatal one; for souls will never find their way to heaven by a ministry that is indistinct upon the most fundamental of gospel truths. We are justified by faith, and not by the works of the law. The merit by which a soul enters heaven is not its own; it is the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I am quite sure that you will all hold me guiltless of ever having spoken about this great doctrine in any other than unmistakable language; if I have erred, it is not in that direction. At the same time, it is a dangerous state of things if doctrine is made to drive out precept, and faith is held up as making holiness a superfluity. Sanctification must not be forgotten or overlaid by justification. We must teach plainly that the faith which saves the soul is not a dead faith, but a faith which operates with purifying effect upon our entire nature, and produces in us fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God. It is not by personal holiness that a man shall enter heaven, but yet without holiness shall no man see the Lord. It is not by good works that we are justified, but if a man shall continue to live an ungodly life, his faith will not justify him; for it is not the faith of God's elect; since that faith is wrought by the Holy Spirit, and conforms men to the image of Christ. We must learn to place the precepts in their right position. They are not the base of the column, but they are the capital of it. Precepts are not given to us as a way to obtain life, but as the way in which to exhibit life. The commands of Christ are not upon the legal tenor of “this do and live,” but upon the gospel system of “live and do this.” We are not to be attentive to the precepts in order to be saved, but because we are saved. Our master motive is to be gratitude to him who has saved us with a great salvation. I am sure that every renewed heart here will feel no opposition to the most holy precepts of our Lord. However severely pure that law may seem to be which we have read just now from this fifth chapter of Matthew, our hearts agree with it, and we ask that we may be so renewed that our lives may be conformed to it. The regenerate never rebel against any precept, saying, “This, is too pure;” on the contrary, our new-born nature is enamoured of its holiness, and we cry, “Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes.” Even though we find that when we would do good evil is present with us, yet our inmost soul longs after holiness, and pines to be delivered from every evil way. At any rate, Dear friends, if it be not so with you, you may well question whether you are indeed the children of God. My desire, this morning, is to insist upon the precepts which tend to holiness, and I pray the Holy Spirit to excite desires after a high degree of purity in all believing hearts.

Too many persons judge themselves by others; and if upon the whole they discover that they are no worse than the mass of mankind, they give themselves a mark of special commendation; they strike a sort of average amongst their neighbors, and if they cannot pretend to be the very best,

yet, if they are not the very worst, they are pretty comfortable. There are certain scribes and Pharisees among their acquaintance, who fast thrice in the week, and pay tithes of all they possess, and they look upon those as very superior persons whom they would not attempt to compete with them; but they thank God that they are far above those horrible publicans, and those dreadful sinners, who are put outside the pale of society, and, therefore, they feel quite easy in their minds, and they go to their place of worship as if they were saints, and bear the name of Christian as if it belonged to them; they share in Christian privileges, and sit with God's people, as if they were truly of the family, their marks and evidences being just these, that they do about as much upon the whole as other people, and if they are not first they are not altogether last. The nests of such people ought to be grievously disturbed when they read the chapter before us, for there the Master insists upon a higher standard than the world's highest, and tells us that except our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. In our text, the great Master asks of those who are professors of his faith, that they should not only do as much as others to prove their title, but that they should do more than others; and he makes this a test question concerning their being really his followers: "What do ye more than others?"

I shall try, this morning, *first*, to show that there are *grounds for expecting more from Christians than from others*; *secondly*, I shall try to indicate *the matters in which we naturally expect more from them than from others*; and, *thirdly*, I shall give some *reasons why it should be the aim of every saved soul to do more than others*.

I. We will consider THE GROUNDS FOR EXPECTING MORE FROM CHRISTIANS THAN FROM OTHERS. There are legitimate reasons why the world, the church, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself, may expect more from Christians than from the rest of mankind. And, the first is, because *they profess more*. Professions should always be supported by facts, or else they are deceits, impostures, and hypocrisies. A Christian professes himself to be a renewed man; he has learned the evil of sin, repented of it, and fled from it to Christ Jesus; he professes to have been pardoned, and to have received a new heart and a right spirit; he professes, also, to be a child of God, and an heir of heaven. Other men do not profess this. Some, who make no profession, wish that they could hope that these things belonged to them; others of them, altogether, despise these things; but, in neither case, do they profess to be what the Christian is. Now, Christian, if you profess this, your life must prove it, or else, if your life gives the lie to your religious pretensions, you stand convicted of a flagrant falsehood, a fraud on men and a felony against God. It is a high crime and misdemeanor for a man to assume the name of a son of God, when he is utterly devoid of the divine nature, and lives in unholiness. In proportion as the privilege and the honor of a child of God is great, the sin of false pretensions to grace is increased. If you say you are regenerated, renewed, and sanctified, then be all that this means, or else cease your boasting. Vainly do they boast of scholarship who cannot read a letter, and idle is that vaunting of valor which leaves a man afraid of his shadow. You remember the ancient story of the traveler who, upon his return to his native city, boasted of the extraordinary feats which he had performed, and how, in particular, he had astonished all by his amazing leaps. I forget how many paces he had cleared, but something very wonderful indeed. Those who stood round opened their mouths in amazement, as they heard the marvel, but one sage was less believing, and, therefore, marked out the exact length on the ground, and said, "If you leaped as far as that abroad, perhaps you will do the same here, and then we will believe you." The world, in these times, will be sure to ask for proofs; the age for mere assertion is over. Men will say to you, you claim to have experienced this, and to be that; now, just act accordingly and we

will believe you; and, if you do not give them a fair and honest reply, they will not mutter it in secret places, but they will make it plain to your face that they believe you to be a mere pretender; and, what is worse, they will blame the Christian religion of which you are so unworthy a professor. Alas! we may well blush for many of you professors. How might you blush for yourselves if you were capable of it; but it is to be feared that many are past shame and have brazen foreheads. How has Christ been dishonored, crucified afresh, and put to all open shame by ungodly men who have dared to take his name upon themselves. When one of the great painters was engaged upon the portraits of Peter and Paul, a cardinal who stood by observed that he thought the painter put too much red into their faces. "No," said the artist, "it is to show how much the apostles blush for the conduct of those who call themselves their successors." Ye professors are the successors of the early saints, but do you not dishonor their names? In how many cases may your pastors blush for you, and weep over you, because you cause the holy name to be blasphemed. Now have all much cause for heart-searching here, but the misery is that the very men who have most cause to be anxious will refuse to search themselves. Instead of doing more than others, it is to be feared that many are not doing as much as others. Even worldly men are more honest than some professors, and I might add more generous and more sober. There are thousands who do not profess to be converted, who, nevertheless, are scrupulous in their dealings and exact in their mercantile transactions, while some base-born professors have fleeced the public, have issued lying prospectuses of bubble companies, and have ended in gigantic bankruptcies: if we have much of this, religion will be a scoff and a byword throughout the land. God save us from making a profession if we have not grace to live up to it.

But, secondly, we may well expect more from Christians than others, because it is a fact in the case of those who are truly Christians that *they are more than others*. It is not mere talk, it is a fact that the believer in Christ is born again. He is not only as other men are, made by God, but he has been twice made, new born, new created in Christ Jesus. It is no fiction but a matter of truthful experience; we have passed from death unto life. We have received the Spirit of God into our souls, which has implanted in us a new nature higher than the nature of other men, as much higher than the common soul of man as the soul of man is above the nature of the beast; for the children of God are partakers of the divine nature, God dwelleth in them, and the Spirit of God inhabits them as a king inhabits his palace. They are more than other men. They are so not only because of their regeneration, but because of that eternal act of God which set them apart in the covenant of grace or ever the earth was. God has a chosen people. "I have chosen you out of the world," saith Christ. There are some upon whom everlasting love fixed its eye of grace or ever the mountains pierced the clouds or the rivers sought the sea. These are more than others, and are infinitely more indebted to God's love than others. He hath loved them with an everlasting love, and because of this he has drawn them to himself. These men, because chosen of God, have been redeemed as other men were not. There is a sense in which the atonement of Christ reaches to all mankind; but, undoubtedly, Scripture teaches us that there is a people whom Christ has "redeemed from among men." "He laid down his life for his sheep:" "he loved his church, and gave himself *for it*." There is a particular redemption, and in this every truly regenerated child of God is most certainly a partaker. Upon him is the blood mark, and he is Christ's. Of all such, it may be said, "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." They have God's nature in them, they have God's election upon them, they have God's redemption emancipating them, so that they are more than others. They are precious sons of God while others are heirs of wrath; they are in the light while the whole world lieth in

darkness; they are sheep of his pasture while the rest of the world roam upon the wild mountains of vanity. Now, if they are more than others they ought to produce more than others in their lives. I will not insist upon the reasoning here, because I rather appeal to every believer's heart than to his head. According as ye have received so will love suggest to you to render. Can any holiness be too precise in return for the infinite love which has been bestowed upon you from before the foundation of the world? Can any service be too hard to repay the suffering which your Savior bore for your redemption? Can any self-denial be too severe to prove that the Holy in you has subdued your flesh and overcome your corruptions? I say the argument appeals to your love: I will not utter it in legal tones lest you should think you hear the whip of the law behind me, but even the Master himself I think would put it to you thus, "Inasmuch as I have loved you thus, and have redeemed you with such a price, and have begotten you unto my self by the power of my Spirit, what manner of people ought ye to be in all holy conversation?" What must be expected from those so signally distinguished by the sovereign grace of God?

Again, it is certain that true Christians *can do more than others*. "Can," saith one, "why, they can do nothing." True, but through Christ that strengtheneth them they can do all things; and Christ does strengthen his people. I admit their weakness, I admit, nay, I mourn and experimentally lament, in my own person, their feebleness; but, for all that, they are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Jesus Christ lends to them his conquering energy, and, as his blood has overcome the enemy, they overcome through the blood of the Lamb. God has given them his Son, and in the power of Jesus they can and must vanquish sin.

Moreover, what is the indwelling Spirit within us? Is he not Omnipotence itself? The Holy Ghost who has come upon us is no influence which might be limited in its efficacy; but he is a divine person, who dwelleth with us and shall be in us. Who shall set any limit to the power of that man in whom the Holy Ghost himself dwells? All believers, are must never dare to say, "That habit we cannot give up." We can and must overturn all the idols in our hearts. We may never say, "That height of devotion I can never reach." Brethren, Omnipotence doth gird us; God giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are never to sit down and say, "I must be a sinner up to such-and-such a point; I cannot get beyond that attainment." What saith the Scripture? "Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;" after this perfection we are to strain, and towards this mark of our high calling we are to press. God who dwells in us is working in us daily to will and to do according to his own good pleasure, so that we can do what the dead sinner cannot do; we can do what sinners, without the Spirit, cannot do; and, if we can, we must. Surely, it is required of a man according to what he hath, and where much is given much will be required. Let us take care that we quench not the Spirit, that by our unbelief we restrain not his divine energies; but let us strive, God striving in us, after the highest conceivable standard of holiness and of separation from the world. O Spirit of God, do thou help us that we may be sanctified by thy grace, spirit, soul, and body.

Yet further, more is to be expected of Christians than others, because *they have more*. "But they are poor," saith one. True, but the poorest Christian possesses more than the richest unbeliever. You shall set before me now the pauper who is a believer, and the emperor who has no faith in Christ, and I am persuaded that the poor, aged pauper would not exchange her lot though the imperial purple should be offered her. She would refuse to leave her Savior though the world were offered her. Methinks she would quote Dr. Watts, and say—

"Go you that boast in all your stores,

And tell how bright they shine;
 Your heaps of glittering dust are yours,
 But my Redeemer's mine."

While the poor believer feels that his God is his portion he despises rather than covets the glories of the world.

Brethren in Christ, you know right well that you possess the covenant of grace, a covenant rich beyond comparison. When Moses looked from the top of Nebo and saw the land from Lebanon even to the river of Egypt, no such prospect gladdened his gaze as that which rises before the eye of your faith when you survey the covenant ordered in all things and sure. More than that, you have Christ in the covenant, and Christ is all. All the glories of his immaculate manhood and his infinite Godhead, and all his merits, and all his conquests, and all his glories, all are yours, seeing you are his. And what is most of all, God is yours. "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." And having God to be your God, Providence is yours—all things work together for your good. Life's goods are yours and so are its ills, this world is yours and worlds beyond the river; time and eternity, things present and things to come, life and death, all are yours. And yet no good thing was yours by natural inheritance. To good was yours by purchase from your own earnings or procurement of your own labor; they are all the gifts of the sovereign grace of God. Brethren, we all debtors: who shall tell how much we owe? If I said to any of you, "Take thy pen and sit down quickly, and write how much thou owest to thy Lord," if you had to sit there till you completed the wondrous tale, you certainly would never leave those seats. Depths of mercy, that I, a sinner, should ever have a hope of heaven, but oh, heights of mercy! that I should be adopted into the family of God, and made a joint heir with Christ Jesus of all the heritage of the Firstborn of God; to have all that God is, and all that God has, to be the portion of my cup, this is grace indeed! My cup runneth over! Bless the Lord, O my soul!

And now, after all this, ought you not to do more than others? Shall the servant who has but his daily pay love the master better than the child who has the father's heart? Shall the stranger who comes into the house occasionally love the master of the house better than his spouse who is beloved of his soul? Oh, by the favors you have received, countless and immense; by the precious fountain-head of mercy, from which all those favors come; by the many years in which goodness and mercy have followed you all your days; if you be not indeed insensible, and your hearts changed to adamant, I beseech you, brethren, do more than others; serve your Lord with an intensity which others cannot reach, and live for him with an ardor of which they cannot conceive. I think there is a good argument here. It will be powerful reasoning, if you feel it to be so. Do you feel it, brother? And feeling it, will you try to live it out?

Believers ought to do more than others, in the next place, because *they are looking for more than others*. The ungodly man's look-out is dark and dreary: when he dares open the window and look, what seeth he? Come hither, come hither, ungodly man, I must take thee to the battlements of thine house and bid thee look abroad. What seest thou? Ah, he closes his eye and refuses to look, for he sees a river, the name of which is Death, and he seeth that the waves are black and foaming with the wrath of God. Look, sir, look, I pray you, for to close your eyes upon it will not dry it up. And see you what is beyond that river? Ah, he dares not think for after death to him cometh hell and the wrath of God. O man, look, I beseech thee, look, for it will be thy portion except thou relent and fly to Christ for mercy. But no, he covers his eyes, and gets him back to his gaieties, for he cannot bear to look at what will surely be his portion. But come, thou Christian, thou who hast

washed thy robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; what seest thou? Suppose it should be thy lot to die before the Master comes in the Second Advent, what seest thou? "I see," saith he, "but a couch whereon I recline and close mine eyes on earth to open them in heaven; I see angels waiting round that bed, and the Master, the Lord of life, ready to receive my spirit." "What next do you see?" "Nay, I cannot tell you, for my eyes are dazzled with the glory, and my tongue is not able to describe what God revealeth to his children by his Spirit; but there is the never-ending glory, for ever with the Lord, the rest that knows no fear, the Sabbath without end." Oh, the glory, the glory that lasteth on for aye in the presence of the Master whom we have served, and the Father who hath loved us of old! This is your prospect now; and brethren, as your prospect is so bright, I beseech you do ye more than others.

II. This is a very large field, but we must leave it because our time fails us, and we must call your attention to those **MATTERS IN WHICH WE MAY NATURALLY LOOK FOR THE CHRISTIAN TO DO MORE THAN OTHERS.**

I thought I would not utter my own ideas this morning, but to fortify myself, would go back to the Master's own language; so I must refer you again to this fifth chapter of Matthew, and you will see in looking from the thirteenth to the sixteenth verses, that our Lord expects his people *to set a store godly example* than others do. Observe, they are to be the salt of the earth, they are to be the light of the world, they are to be as a city set on a hill, and therefore seen of all. If you were not a professor, my friend, you would certainly have some influence, and be under responsibilities for it; but as a Christian, your place in this world is peculiarly that of influence. You are not like a stone, affected by the atmosphere, or overgrown by moss, a merely passive thing; no, you are active, and are to affect others, as the salt which operates and seasons. You are not a candle unlit, which can exist without affecting others; you are a lighted candle, and you cannot be so lit without scattering light around. You are made on purpose to exert influence, and your Master warns you that if your influence be not salutary and good you are a hopelessly useless person for when the salt has lost its savor it is good for nothing but to be trampled under foot. You are expected, therefore, to influence others for good. You are an employer; let your influence be felt by your servants. You are a child at home; let influence be felt around the social hearth. You are, perhaps, a domestic servant; then take care that, like the little maid who waited on Naaman's wife, you seek the good of the household. Your influence must act quietly and unostentatiously, like the influence of salt, which is not noisy but yet potent. You cannot get through this world rightly by saying, "If I do no good, at least, I do no hurt;" that might be the plea of a stone or a brick, but it cannot be an apology for savourless salt; for if when the salt is rubbed into the meat it does not season and preserve it, it is bad salt, and has not performed its work, but has caused loss to the owner, and left the meat to become putrid. And if you in this world, according to your capacity and means, do not affect other people for good, you have convicted yourself of being useless, worthless, a cumberer of the ground. The Master expects, as he has put the pungent influence of his grace into you, that you should be as salt; as he has put the burning light of his grace upon you, that you should be as a lamp, and scatter light all round. Take good heed of that. It is no saying of mine, it is the saying of him whom ye call Master and Lord. Think you hear him speaking it from those dear lips, which are like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh, and instead of seeing my hands lifted up in warning, think you see the print of the nails in his hand, and let the words come home with force to your soul.

Next, if I read from the seventeenth to the twentieth verse, I am taught that our Lord expects from his people *a more exact performance of the divine will* than even the Pharisees pretend to

give. Observe, he speaks here about jots and tittles never passing away, and about those who break the least of his commandments, and teach men so; and I gather that he would have us observe the very least of his words and treasure up his commandments. Do you think, dear brethren, there would be so many sects among Christians if all believers honestly wanted to know the truth and to know Christ's will? I do not think there would be. I cannot think our Lord has written a book so doubtful and ambiguous in its expressions that men need differ in interpreting it upon plain points. I am afraid we bring prejudice to it, the prejudice of our constitutional temperament, or of our parents, or of the church with which we are associated, and we pay reverence to somebody else's book, perhaps a catechism, perhaps the Book of Common Prayer, over and beyond the Bible itself. Now, this is all wrong, and we must purge ourselves of it and come to the word of God itself: and, when we come to this book, it must be candidly and humbly, with this feeling, "I desire now to unlearn the most precious doctrine or practice I have ever learned if the Lord will show me that it is inconsistent with his will; and I desire to learn that truth which will bring me most into derision, or that ordinance which will submit me to the greatest inconvenience, if it is his will, for I am his servant, and I desire nothing to support my own opinion, or to be my own rule." I think we shall all get pretty near together, if, in the Spirit of God, we begin reading our Bibles in this way. Surely the Lord expects this of us. I do not think he expects this of some professors, for certainly he will never get it; they are quite satisfied to say, "I attend my parish church, and that is the faith of our church;" or, "My grandmother joined the Dissenters, and, therefore, I keep to them; besides, after all you know there are no sects in heaven." That last assertion is one of the most shallow pretences ever designed on earth, to excuse men from being scrupulously obedient to every word of their Lord and Master. I do not doubt, O disciple, but what you will reach heaven, even though you mistake some of the Master's teaching, but I do doubt your ever reaching there if you wilfully despise his words, or decline to learn what he came to teach. Our Lord has said unto us, "Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," and therefore, if you will not become disciples, and learn of Christ, we have not even begun with you, neither can you be baptised, or bear the name of the Triune God. Jesus will have you obey his will, as well as trust his grace. Mind that, beloved. This demand for exact obedience is no word of mine, but of the Master.

Look again, from the twenty-first to the twenty-sixth verse, and though I do not pretend to expound every word, I remark that Christ would have his people excel all others *in gentleness*. Others will retaliate on those who vex them, and call them hard names, and will even go the length of saying "fool;" and, perhaps, go still further, and even come to cursing and imprecating terrible judgments. A quarrelsome man when he is in a quarrel with another rather takes pleasure in it; he does not mind how many hate him, or how many he hates; his religion is quite consistent with the worst temper; he can say his prayers, or he can offer his gifts to his God, and yet be as malicious as he likes; but with the Christian it is not so, and must not be so. We are to bear a great deal of wrong before we make any reply whatever, and when we do give an answer, we must, if we would be like our Master, give a gentle one. Heaping coals of fire upon the head of our enemy by returning abundant kindness is the right revenge for a Christian, and all other revenge is denied to him. He is not to stand upon his rights; he is rather to say, "I know it is my right, but I will yield it sooner than I will contend; I know this man does me an injustice, but I will bear it sooner than my temper shall be ruffled, or my spirit shall be defiled, by a thought of evil." "Oh," saith one, "this is a hard measure." Do you think it so? Are you a Christian then? for while in my soul I feel it is difficult,

my heart feels I desire to do it, and I love it, and aspire after it; and I think every real Christian, though by reason of infirmity he often breaks this blessed rule, yet sees the beauty of it, and does not think it hard. Nay, rather the hard point to him is that he should fall so short of the gentle, loving nature of his dear Lord and Master.

But, I must pass on, for the next point in which the Christian is to excel is *in purity*. Read from the twenty-seventh to the thirty-second verse—I do not go into particulars, but purity is earnestly commanded. The ungodly man says, “Well, I do not commit any act of fornication; you do not hear me sing a lascivious song,” and saying that he feels content: but the Christian’s Master expects us to carry the point a great deal farther. An unchaste look is a crime to us, and an evil thought is a sin. Oh, it shocks me beyond measure when I hear of professedly Christian people who fall into the commission of immodest actions,—not such as are called criminal in common society, but loose, fleshly, and full of lasciviousness. I beseech you all of you in your conversation with one other, avoid anything which has the appearance of impurity in this respect. Looks and gestures step by step lead on to fouler things, and sport which begins in folly ends in lewdness. Be ye chaste as the driven snow, let not an immodest glance defile you. We do not like to say much about these things, they are so delicate, and we tremble lest we should suggest what we would prevent; but, oh, by the tears of Jesus, by the wounds of Jesus, by the death of Jesus, hate even the garment spotted by the flesh; and avoid everything that savours of unchastity. Flee youthful lusts as Joseph did. Run any risk sooner than fall into uncleanness, for it is a deep ditch, and the abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein. Strong temptation lie in wait for the young in a great city like this, but let the young man learn of God to cleanse his way, by taking heed there to according to his word. May you all be kept from falling, and be presented faultless before the presence of God with exceeding great joy. You are not to be commonly chaste, you are to be much more than that: the very look and thought of impurity are to be hateful to you. Help us, O Spirit of God.

Next to that, the Christian is to be more than others *in truthfulness*. Read on from the thirty-third to the thirty-seventh verse, and the gist of all is, that whereas another man utters the truth because he swears, you are to speak the truth because you can do no otherwise. Your ordinary word is to be as true as the extraordinary oath of the man who stands in the witness box in the court of justice. You are to avoid those evasions, alcove modes of concealing truth which are common enough in trade, those exaggerations, those lies which are a common nuisance. Why, our advertisements swarm with lies; our shop windows are daubed with them—such as “tremendous sacrifices,” when the only sacrificed person is the customer. All the world sees through puffery, and yet even professors go on puffing and exaggerating. Shun it, Christian. If you tell a man you sell him an article under cost price, let it be under cost price, or do not say so. There are other modes of commending your wares which will be quite as effectual as falsehood. Scorn to earn a farthing by uttering that which is not true, and what you might allow in your next door neighbor, and say, “Well, he is under a different rule from me;” do not for a moment tolerate in yourself; the strict literal truth in all things should be the law of the child of God. Let your “yea, be yea,” and your “nay, nay.”

We have already touched upon the point which our Savior mentions from the thirty-eighth to the forty-second verse, namely, that the Christian should excel *in forbearance*. He should be ready to suffer wrong again and again sooner than be provoked to resistance, much less retaliation. That I have already spoken of, but may we excel in it.

And lastly, from the forty-second to the forty-eighth verse, our Savior shows that he expects us to excel *in love to all mankind*, and in the practical fruit of it, in trying to do them good. We

ought to be, above all others, the most loving people, and the most good-doing people. Your man who buttons himself up within himself, and says, "Well, let every man see to himself, that is what I say; every man for himself and God for us all;" the man who goes through the world paying his way with strict justice, but all the while having no heart to feel for the sick, and the poor, and the needy, with no care about anybody else's soul, his whole hearts enclosed within his own ribs, all buttoned up in his own broadcloth such; a man is very like the devil, but he certainly is not like Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ's heart was expansive and unselfish. He gave himself for his enemies, and died breathing a prayer over them; he lived never for himself. You could not put your finger on one point of his life and say, "here he lived for himself alone." Neither his prayers nor his preachings, his miracles or his sufferings, his woes or his glories were with an eye to himself. He saved others, but himself he would not save. His followers must in this follow him closely. Selfishness is as foreign to Christianity as darkness to light. The true Christian lives to do good, he looks abroad to see whom he may serve, and with this eye he looks upon the wicked, upon the fallen and the offcasts, seeking to reclaim them. Yes, in the same way he looks upon his personal enemies, and aims at winning them by repeated kindnesses. No nationality must confine his goodwill, no sect or clan monopolise his benevolence. No depravity of character or poverty of condition must sicken his lovingkindness, for Jesus received sinners and ate with them. Our love must embrace those who lie hard by the gates of hell, and we must endeavor with words of truth and deeds of love to bring them to Christ, who can uplift them to heaven. Oh that you may all be gentle, quiet, meek in spirit, but full of an ardent, burning affection towards your fellowmen; so shall you be known to be Christ's disciples.

"Oh," say you, "these are great things." Yes, but you have a great Spirit to help you, and you owe a great deal to your precious Lord and Master. Did I hear one say, "I will avoid sin by being very retired; I will find out a quiet place where I shall not be tempted, and where I shall have few calls upon me." Pretty soldier you who when your Captain says, "Win the victory," reply, "I will keep clear of the fight." No, Christian, go about your trade, go into the busy mart, attend to your business, attend to your family, attend to those matters which God has allotted to you, and glorify God in the battle of life by doing more than others. Will God enable you so to do.

III. Now, into about two minutes we must condense what ought to have occupied at least a quarter-of an-hour. The last head was to deal with REASONS FOR OUR DOING MORE THAN OTHERS. They were just these. First, *by our fruits we are to be known*. Men will never know us by our faith, for that is within us; they know us by our works, which are visible to them. Bring forth, therefore, the fruits of grace that the world may know you have been with Jesus. Remember also that *works are to be evidence at the last*. It is consistent with the gospel of grace, no doubt, for it is a truth clearly revealed, that we shall be judged according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil; and you know that when the Lord gives us the description of the judgment, he did not say to his disciples, "Ye believed in me," or "Ye loved me"—these were secret matters—but he said, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was sick and in prison, and ye visited me." It is by your works ye will be judged. O believers, may grace enable you to abound in them.

It is by such works that the mouths of gainsayers are to be stopped. One holy action is a better argument against blasphemers than a thousand eloquent discourses. You are our replies to sceptics—you who having been rescued from sin maintain a life of holiness. When they see the

men that are healed, standing with Peter and John, they can say nothing against them. Oh, by your works confound gainsayers!

These works, too, bring glory to God. “That they, seeing your good works may glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

And these works also ensure peace to your own conscience, and have much to do with your close communion with God. “How can two walk together except they be agreed?” If ye walk contrary to him he will walk contrary to you. Your sins will separate between you and your God, but the Holy Spirit, where he maintains holiness, maintains peace and communion in the soul. “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” “If ye keep my commandments,” saith the Savior, “Ye shall abide in my love”—shall abide in the conscious fellowship of that love, and in the enjoyment of it. May God help you, may God help you, for his name’s sake.

Look ye here, ye who say you believe in Christ and are living in sin: what does this make of your boastings? Look you here, ye that say “I have only to believe by-and-by, and I may live as I like, and yet be saved.” Is it so? Is it so? “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where will the ungodly and the wicked appear?” As for those whose ungodly lives stare them in the face, so far from being saved by their pretended faith, they are trees twice dead, plucked up by the roots. If they say they continue in sin that grace may abound, their damnation is just. The salvation of Christ is not a salvation in sin, but a salvation from sin. They who would be saved by him must come and trust him just as they are, and he will enable them to forsake their sin; but while they continue to say, “We will take pleasure in sin,” there is no salvation possible for them. God bring us to Christ, and nail our sins to his cross, and give us life in our Savior’s life. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew 5.

The Pilgrim's Longings

A Sermon

(No. 1030)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”—Hebrews 11:15-16.

ABRAHAM left his country at God's command, and he never went back again. The proof of faith lies in perseverance. There is a sort of faith which does run well, but it is soon hindered, and it doth not obey the truth. That is not the faith to which the promise is given. The faith of God's elect continues and abides. Being connected with the living and incorruptible seed, it lives and abides for ever. Abraham returned not; Isaac returned not; Jacob returned not. The promise was to them as “strangers and sojourners,” and so they continued. The apostle tells us, however, that they were not forced so to continue; they did not remain because they *could not* return. Had they been mindful of the place from whence they came out, they might have found opportunities to go back. Frequent opportunities came in their way; there was communication kept up between them and the old family house at Padan-Aram: they had news sometimes from the old quarters. More than that, there were messages exchanged, servants were sometimes sent, and you know there was a new relation entered into—did not Rebekah come from thence? And Jacob, one of the patriarchs, was driven to go down into the land, but he could not stay there; he was always unrestful, till at last he stole a march upon Laban and came back into the proper life—the life which he had chosen, the life which God had commanded him, the life of a pilgrim and a stranger in the land of promise. You see, then, they had many opportunities to have returned, to have settled comfortably, and tilled the ground as their fathers did before them; but they continued to follow the uncomfortable shifting life of wanderers of the weary foot, who dwelt in tents, who own no foot of land—they were aliens in the country which God had given them by promise.

Now, our position is very similar to theirs. As many of us as have believed in Christ have been called out. The very meaning of a church is, “called out by Christ.” We have been separated. I trust we know what it is to have gone without the camp, bearing Christ's reproach. Henceforth, in this world we have no home, no true home for our spirits; our home is beyond the flood; we are looking for it amongst the unseen things; we are strangers and sojourners as all our fathers were, dwellers in this wilderness, passing through it to reach the Canaan which is to be the land of our perpetual inheritance.

I. I propose, then, first of all this evening, to speak to you upon the opportunities which we have had, and still have, to return to the old house, if we were mindful of it. Indeed, it seems to me as if the word “opportunity” as it occurs in the text, were hardly strong enough to express the influence and incentive, the provocations and solicitations, by which, in our case, we have been urged. It is a wonder of wonders that we have not gone back to the world, with its sinful pleasures and its

idolatrous customs. When I think of the strength of divine grace, I do not marvel that saints should persevere; but, when I remember the weakness of their nature, it seems a miracle of miracles that there should be one Christian in the world who could maintain his steadfastness for a single hour. It is nothing short of Godhead's utmost stretch of might that keeps the feet of the saints, and preserves them from going back to their old unregenerate condition. We have had opportunities to have returned. My brethren, we have such opportunities in our daily calling. Some of you are engaged in the midst of ungodly men, and those engagements supply you with constant opportunities to sin as they do, to fall into their excesses, to lapse into their forgetfulness of God, or even to take part in their blasphemies. Oh, have you not often strong inducements, if it were not for the grace of God, to become as they are? Or, if your occupation keeps you alone, yet, my brethren, there is one who is pretty sure to intrude upon our privacy, to corrupt our thoughts, to kindle strange desires in our breasts, to tantalise us with morbid fancies, and to seek our mischief. The Tempter he is, the Destroyer he would be, if we were not delivered from his snares. Ah, how frequently will solitude have temptations as severe as publicity could possibly bring. There are perils in company, but there are perils likewise in our loneliness. We have many opportunities to return. In the parlour, pleasantly conversing, or in the kitchen, perhaps, occupied with the day's work—toiling in the field, or trading on the mart, busy on the land or tossed about on the sea, there are critical seasons on which destiny itself might appear to hang contingent. Where can we fly to escape from these opportunities that haunt us everywhere and peril us in every thing? If we should mount upon the wings of the wind, could we find "a lodge in some vast wilderness," think ye, then, we might be quite clear from all the opportunities to go back to the old sins in which we once indulged? No. Each man's calling may seem to him to be more full of temptation than his fellow's. It is not so. Our temptations are pretty equally distributed, I dare say, after all, and all of us might say, that we find in our avocations, from hour to hour, many opportunities to return.

But, dear brethren, it is not merely in our business and in our calling; the mischief lies in our bone and in our flesh. Opportunities to return! Ah! Who that knows himself does not find strong, incentives to return. Ah! how often will our imagination paint sin in very glowing colors, and, though we loathe sin and loathe ourselves for thinking of it, yet how many a man might say, "had it not been for divine grace, where should I have been?—for my feet had almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped." How strong is the evil in the most upright man! How stern is the conflict to keep under the body, lest corruption should prevail. You may be diligent in secret prayer, and, perhaps, the devil may have seemed asleep till you began to pray, and when you were most fervent, then will he also become most rampant. When you get nearer to God, Satan will sometimes seem to get nearer to you. Opportunities to return, as long as you are in this body, will be with you. To the very edge of Jordan you will meet with temptations. When you sit expectant on the banks of the last river, waiting, for the summons to cross, it may be that your fiercest temptation will come even then. Oh, this flesh, the body of this death—wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from it? But while it continues with me, I shall find opportunities to return.

So too, dear brethren and sisters, these opportunities to return are adapted to our circumstances and adjusted to any condition of life, and any change through which we may pass. For instance how often have professors, when they have prospered, found opportunities to return! I sigh to think of many that appeared to be very earnest Christians when they were struggling for bread, who have become very dull and cold now that they have grown rich and increased in goods. How often does it happen in this land of ours, that a poor earnest Christian has associated with the people of God

at all meetings, and felt proud to be there, but he has risen in the world and stood an inch or two above others in common esteem, and he could not go with God's people any longer: he must seek out the world's church and join in to get a share of the respectability and prestige that will always congregate in the domain of fashion. Henceforth, the man has turned aside from the faith, if not altogether in his heart, at least in his life. Beware of the high places: they are very slippery. There is not all the enjoyment you may think to be gathered in retirement and in ease. On the contrary, luxury often pulleth up, and abundance makes the heart to swell with vanity. If any of you are prospering in this world, oh watch, for you are in imminent danger of being mindful to return to the place whence you came out.

But, the peril is as instant every whit in adversity. Alas, I have had to mourn over Christian men—at least I thought they were such—who have waxed very poor, and when they have grown poor, they hardly felt they could associate with those they knew in better circumstances. I think they were mistaken in the notion that they would be despised. I should lie ashamed of the Christian who would despise his fellow, because God was dealing with him somewhat severely in Providence. Yet there is a feeling in the human heart, and, though there may be no unkind treatment, yet, oftentimes, the sensitive spirit is apt to imagine it, and I have observed some absent themselves by degrees from the assembly of God with a sense of shame. It is smoothing the way to return to your old place; and, indeed, I have not wondered when I have seen some professors grow cold, when I have thought where they were compelled to live, and how they have been constrained to pass their time. Perhaps they were living at home before, but now they have to take a room where they can have no quiet, but where sounds of blasphemy greet them, or, in some cases, where they have to go to the workhouse, and be far away from all Christian intercourse or anything that could comfort them. It is only God's grace that can keep your graces alive under such circumstances. You see, whether you grow rich or whether you grow poor, you will have these opportunities to return. If you want to go back to sin, to carnality, to a love of the world, to your old condition, you never need to be prevented from doing so by want of opportunities: it will be something else that will prevent you, for these opportunities are plentiful and countless.

Opportunities to return! Let me say just one thing more about them. They are often furnished by the example of others.

“When any turn from Zion's way,

Alas, what numbers do!

Methinks I hear my Savior say,

Wilt thou forsake me too?”

The departures from the faith of those whom we highly esteem are, at least while we are young, very severe trials to us. We keenly suspect whether that religion can be true which was feigned so cunningly and betrayed so wantonly, by one who seemed to be a model, but proved to be a hypocrite. It staggers us: we cannot make it out. Opportunities to return you have now; but ah! may grace be given you so that, if others play the Judas, instead of leading you to do the same, it may only bind you more fast to your Lord, and make you walk more carefully, lest you also prove a son of perdition.

And ah, my brethren and sisters, if some of us were to return, we should have this opportunity—a cordial welcome from our former comrades. None of our old friends would refuse to receive us. There is many a Christian who, if he were to go back to the gaiety of the world, would find the world await him with open arms. He was the favourite of the ball-room once; he was the wit “that set the table in a roar;” he was the man who above all was courted when he moved in the circles

of the vain and frivolous: glad enough would they be to see him come back. What a shout of triumph would they raise, and how would they fraternize with him! Oh, may the day never come to you, you young people especially, who have lately put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and professed his name, when you shall be welcomed by the world, but may you for ever forget your kindred and your father's house, so shall the king greatly desire your beauty, for he is the Lord, and worship you him. Separation from the world will endear you to the Savior, and bring you into conscious enjoyment of his presence; but, of opportunities to return there is no lack.

Perhaps, you will say, "Why does the Lord make them so plentiful? Could he not have kept us from temptation?" There is no doubt he could, but it was never the Master's intention that we should all be hothouse plants. He taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," but, at the same time, he does lead us there, and intends to do it, and this for the proving of our faith, to see whether it be true faith or not. Depend upon it, faith that is never tried is not true faith. It must be sooner or later exercised. God does not create useless things: he intends that the faith he gives should have its test, should glorify his name. These opportunities to return are meant to try your faith, and they are sent to you to prove that you are a volunteer soldier. Why, if grace was a sort of chain that manacled you, so that you could not leave your Lord; if it had become a physical impossibility to forsake the Savior, there would be no credit in it. He that does not run away because his legs are too weak, does not prove himself a hero; but he that could run, but will not run; he that could desert his Lord, but will not desert him, has within him a principle of grace stronger than any fetter could be—the highest, firmest, noblest bond that unites a man to the Savior. By this shall you know whether you are Christ's or not. When you have opportunity to return, if you do not return, that shall prove you are his. Two men are going along a road, and there is a dog behind them. I do not know to which of them that dog belongs, but I shall be able to tell you directly. They are coming to a crossroad: one goes to the right, the other goes to the left. Now which man does the dog follow? That is his master. So when Christ and the world go together, you cannot tell which you are following; but, when there is a separation, and Christ goes one way, and your interest and your pleasure seem to go the other way, if you can part with the world and keep with Christ, then you are one of his. After this manner these opportunities to return may serve us a good purpose: they prove our faith, while they try our character; thus helping us to see whether we are indeed the Lord's or not.

But, we must pass on (for we have a very wealthy text) to notice the second point.

II. We cannot take any opportunity to go back, because we desire something better than we could get by returning to that country from whence we came out. An insatiable desire has been implanted in us by divine grace which urges us to—

"Forget the steps already trod,
And onward press our way."

Notice how the text puts it:—"But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly." Brethren, you desire something better than this world, do you not? Has the world ever satisfied you? Perhaps it did when you were dead in sin. A dead world may satisfy a dead heart; but ever since you have known something of better things, and brighter realities, have you been ever contented with earthly things and emptier vanities? Perhaps you have tried to fill your soul with the daintiest provisions the world can offer; to wit—God has prospered you, and you have said, "Oh, this is well." Your children have been about you, you have had many household joys, and you have said, "I could stay here for ever." Did not you find very soon that there was a thorn in the flesh? Did you ever gather a rose in this world that was altogether without a thorn? Hare you not been obliged to say, after

you have had all that the world could give you, “Vanity of Vanities, all is vanity?” I am sure it has been so with me, with you, with all my kinsfolk in Christ, and with all my yokefellow in his service. All God’s saints would confess that were the Lord to say to them, “You shall have all the world, and that shall be your portion,” they would be broken-hearted men. “Nay, my Lord,” they would reply, “do not put me off with these bidding presents; feed me not upon these husks. Though thou shouldst give me Joseph’s lot, the ancient mountains, and the precious things of the lasting hills,” “Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey;” yea, though thou shouldst confer on me the precious things of the earth, and the fullness thereof, I would prefer before them all the goodwill of him that dwelt in the bush. Give me thyself, and take these all away, if so it please thee, but do not, my Lord, do not think I can be content with Egypt since I have set forth for Canaan, or that I can settle down in the wilderness now that I am journeying to the land of promise. We desire something better.

There is this about a Christian that, even when he does not *enjoy* something better, he *desires* it; of that, verily, I am quite sure. How much of character is revealed in our desires. I felt greatly encouraged when I read this, “Now they desire a better”—The word “country” has been inserted by our translators. It weakens the sense; vague but vast is the craving expressed in the sentence, “They desire a better”—I know I long for something far better, something infinitely preferable to that which my eyes can see or that my tongue can express. I do not always enjoy that something better. Dark is my path; I cannot see my Lord; I cannot enjoy his presence; sometimes I am like one that is banished from him; but I *desire* his blessing, I *desire* his presence; and, though to desire may be but a little thing, let me say a good desire is more than nature ever grew: grace has given it. It is a great thing to be desirous. “They desire a better country.” And, because we desire this better thing, we cannot go back and be content with things which gratified us once.

More than that, if ever the child of God gets entangled for awhile, he is uneasy by reason of it. Abraham’s slips, for he had one or two, were made when he had left the land, and gone down among the Philistines; but he was not easy there: he must come back again. And Jacob—he had found a wife—nay, two—in Laban’s land, but he was not content there. No, no child of God can be, whatever he may find in this world. We shall never find a heaven here. We may hunt the world through, and say, “This looks like a little paradise,” but there is not any paradise this side of the skies, for a child of God at any rate. There is enough out there in the farm yard for the hogs, but there is not that which is suitable for the children. There is enough in the world for sinners, but not for saints. They have stronger, sharper, and more vehement desires, for they have a nobler life within them, and they desire a better country, and even if they get entangled for awhile in this country, and in a certain measure identified with citizens of it, they are ill at ease—their citizenship is in heaven, and they cannot rest anywhere but there. After all, we confess to-night, and rejoice in the confession, that our best hopes are for things that are out of sight: our expectations are our largest possessions. The things that we have a title to, that we value, are ours to-day by faith: we do not enjoy them yet. But when our heirship shall be fully manifested, and we shall come to the full ripe age—oh, then shall we come into our inheritance, to our wealth, to the mansions, and to the glory, and to the presence of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thus you see the reason why the Christian cannot go back. Though he has many opportunities he does not embrace any, he shrinks with repugnance from them all, for, through divine grace, he has had produced in his heart desires for something better.

Even when he does not realize as yet, or actually enjoy, that infinite good, which is something better than creature comfort or worldly ambition, the desires themselves become mighty bonds that keep him from returning to his former state. Dear brethren, let us cultivate these desires more and more. If they have such a separating, salutary, sanctifying influence upon our heart, and effect upon our character, in keeping us from the world, let us cultivate them much. Do you think that we meditate enough upon heaven? Look at the miser. When does he forget his gold? He dreams of it. He has locked it up tonight and he goes to bed, but he is afraid he heard a footstep down the stairs, and he goes to see. He looks to the iron safe: he would be quite sure that it is well secured. He cannot forget his dear gold. Let us think of heaven, of Christ, and of the blessings of the covenant, and let us thus keep our desires wide awake, and stimulate them to active exercise. The more they draw us to heaven, the more they withdraw us from the world.

III. It would be unreasonable if we did not vehemently resist every opportunity and every solicitation to go back.

The men of faith to whom the apostle referred in our text were not only strangers and pilgrims, but it is specially observed that *they confessed* that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They were a grand company. From an unit they had multiplied into a countless host. Sprang there not even of one, and him as good as dead, as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable? Now, brethren, you see we have here a very strong reason for not returning. It is because you are the descendants, the spiritual descendants, of the patriarchs. Let me try to show you how urgent a motive for steadfastness this is. Practically, it comprises two or three considerations of the highest moment. One thing it implies very obviously is that you thoroughly admire their example and fervently emulate their spirit. As you have glanced over the scroll of history, or narrowly scanned the records of men's lives, the pomp of Pharaoh has not dazzled you, but the purity of Joseph has charmed you; the choice of Moses was to your taste, though it did involve leaving a court where he was flattered, for fellowship with enslaved kinsmen by whom he was suspected; and, you would rather have been with Daniel in the lions' den than with Darius on the throne of empire. You have transferred their strong will to your own deliberate choice. And, when the jeer has been raised against canting methodists, you have said, "I am one of them." You have confessed as occasion served before the world, you have professed as duty called before the church, you have accepted the consequences as honesty demanded before angels and men. Therefore, in your heart of hearts you feel that you cannot go back. The vows of God are upon you. It is well they are. Review them often: refresh your memory with them frequently; recur to them and renew them in every time of trial and temptation. Howbeit, repent of them never, or woe betide you. There is a secret virtue in the confession, if it be steadfastly adhered to and zealously maintained. It is a talisman, believe me, against the contagion of an evil atmosphere that might otherwise instil poison into your constitution.

Again, there is another thing; you have joined yourself to an ancient fraternity that has something more than rules to guide or legends to captivate; for it has a combination of both, seeing it is rich in poetic lore. Why, it is on this that patriotism feeds as its daintiest morsel. "Thy statutes," said David, "have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." Brother! there hath no sorrow befallen thee but what thy noble ancestors have celebrated in cheery tones, and set to music in cheerful strains. Oh, beloved! if you could forget the statutes, can you ever fail to remember the songs? There has never been a revival in the church that has not witnessed to the value of our psalmody. God be praised for our psalms and spiritual songs. Oh, how often they have made melody in our

hearts to the Lord! While our voices blend, do not our very souls become more and more richly cemented? They are, in truth, the pilgrim's solace.

Another thing strikes me. I should not like you to overlook it. There is, in this chapter, a special commendation for faith in a pleasing variety of operations. But the speciality of the strangers and pilgrims is that they *all died in faith*. So, then, you cannot go back, because you cannot accomplish the end for which you went forward till you die. You have joined the company that makes the goal of life the object for which you live. Your aim is to make a noble exit. "Prepare to meet thy God" was the motto you started with. To go back can hardly cross your thoughts, when to look back seems to you charged with peril. Our lease of mortal life is fast running out. The time of our sojourn on earth is getting more and more brief. Therefore, because our salvation is nearer than when we first believed, it is but meet that our desire to reach the better country, and to enter the heavenly city should become more and more vehement, as "we nightly pitch our roving tent a day's march nearer home." It comes to this, brethren. You feel that you have little to show for your faith. It never built an ark like Noah; it never offered a sacrifice like Abraham; it never subdued kingdoms like Joshua; it never quenched the violence of fire as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Well, be it so; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved; and all those that die in faith are gathered with the great cloud of witnesses. Is not this enough to cheer the rank and file of the church?

IV. But, I must close with the sweetest part of the text, wherein it is shown that we have a great and blessed assurance vouchsafed to us as an acknowledgment, on the part of God, of those opportunities, and those yearnings persisted in. "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city." Because they are strangers, add because they will not go back to their old abode, "therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." He might well be ashamed of that. What poor people God's people are—poor, many of them, in circumstances, but how many of them I might very well call poor as to spiritual things. I do not think if any of us had such a family as God has, we should ever have patience with them. We cannot, when we judge ourselves rightly, have patience with ourselves; but, how is it that God bears with the ill manners of such a froward, weak, foolish, forgetful generation as his people are. He might well be ashamed to be called their God, if he looked upon them as they are, and estimated them upon their merits. Own them! How can he own them? Does he not himself sometimes say of them, "How can I put them among the children?" Yet he devises means, and brings about the purposes of his grace. Viewed as they are, they may be compared to a rabble in so many respects, that it is marvellous he is not ashamed of them. Still, he never does discountenance them, and he proves that he is not ashamed of them, for he calls himself their God. "I will be your God," saith he, and he oftentimes seems to speak of it as a very joyful thing to his own heart. "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." While he calls himself their God, he never forbids them to call him their God. In the presence of the great ones of the earth they may call him their God—anywhere—and he is not ashamed to be so called. Matchless condescension this! Have you not sometimes heard of a man who has become rich and has risen in the world, who has had some poor brother or some distant relative. When he has seen him in the street, he has been obliged to speak to him and own him. But oh, how reluctantly it was done. I dare say he wished him a long way off, especially if he had some haughty acquaintance with him at the time, who would perhaps turn round, and say, "Why, who is that wretched, seedy-looking fellow you spoke to?" He does not like to say, "That's my brother;" or, "That's a relative of mine." Not so our Lord Jesus Christ. However low his people may sink, he is not ashamed to call them brethren. They may look up to him in all the depths of

their degradation. They may call him a brother. He is in very fact a brother, born for their adversity, able and ready to redress their grievances, he is not ashamed to call them brethren. One reason for this seems to me to be, because he does not judge of them according to their present circumstances, but much rather according to their pleasant prospects. He takes account of what he has prepared for them. Notice the text, “Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: *for he hath prepared for them a city.*” They are poor now, but God, to whom things to come are things present, sees them in their fair white linen, which is the righteousness of the saints. All you can see in that poor child of God is a hard-working laboring man, mocked and despised of his fellows. But what does God see in him? He sees in him a dignity and a glory assimilated to his own. He hath put all things under the feet of such a man as that, and crowned him with glory and honor in the person of Christ, and the angels themselves are ministering servants to such. You see his outward attire, not his inner self—you see the earthly tabernacle, but the spirit newborn, immortal and divine—you see not that. Howbeit, God does. Or, if you have spiritual discernment to perceive the spiritual creature, you only see it as it is veiled by reason of the flesh, and beclouded by the atmosphere of this world; but he sees it as it will appear, when it shall be radiant like unto Christ, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. God sees the poorest, the least proficient disciple as a man in Christ; a perfect man come unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; such indeed as he will be in that day when he shall see Christ, for then he shall be like him as he is. It seems too, in the text, that God looks to what he had prepared for these poor people. He hath prepared for them a city. Methinks, that by what he has prepared for them, we may judge how he esteems and loves them—estimating them by what he means them to be, rather than by what they appear to be at present. Look at this preparation just a minute. “he hath prepared for them”—“*them.*” Though I delight to preach a free gospel, and to preach it to every creature under heaven, we must never forget to remind you of the speciality. “He hath prepared for them a city”—that is, for such as are strangers and foreigners—for such as have faith, and, therefore, have left the world, and gone out to follow Christ. “He hath prepared for *them*”—not “for all of you”—only for such of you as answer the description on which we have been meditating has he prepared “a city.”

Note what it is he has made ready for them. It is a city. This indicates a permanent abode. They dwelt in tents—Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob—but he has prepared for them a city. Here we are tent dwellers, and the tent is soon to be taken down. “We know that this earthly house of our” tent “shall be dissolved, but we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” “He hath prepared a city.” A city is a place of genial associations. In a lonely hamlet one has little company. In a city, especially where all the inhabitants shall be united in one glorious brotherhood, the true communism of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity may be realised in the purest sense and highest possible degree. In a city such as this there are plentiful occasions for intercourse, where mutual interests shall enhance mutual joy. “He hath prepared a city.” It is a city too possessing immunities, and conferring dignity upon its residents. To be a burgess of the City of London is thought to be a great honor, and upon princes is it sometimes conferred; but, we shall have the highest honor that can be given, when we shall be citizens of the city which God has prepared.

I must not dwell on this theme, delightful as it is; I want a few words with you, my friends, direct and personal, before I close. Do not wonder, those of you who are the children of God, do not wonder if you have discomforts here. If you are what you profess to be, you are strangers: you do not expect men of this world to treat you as members of their community. If they do, be afraid. Dogs don't bark as a man goes by that they know: they bark at strangers. When people persecute

you and slander *you*, no marvel. If you are a stranger, they naturally bark at you. Do not expect to find the comforts in this world that you crave after, that your flesh would long for. This is our inn, not our home. We tarry for a night: we are away in the morning. We may bear the annoyances of the eventide and the night, for the morning will break so soon. Remember that your greatest joy, while you are a pilgrim, is your God. So the text says, "Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." Do you want a richer source of consolation than you have? Here is one that can never be diminished, much less exhausted. When the created streams are dry, go to this eternal fountain, and find it ever springing up. Your joy is your God: make your God your joy.

Now, what shall be said to those who are not strangers and foreigners? Ah, you dwell in a land where you find some sort of repose; but I have heavy tidings for you. This land in which you dwell, and all the works thereof, must be burned up. The city of which you, who have never been converted to Christ, are citizens, is a City of Destruction, and, as is its name, such will be its end. The King will send his armies against that guilty city and destroy it, and if you are citizens of it, you will lose all you have—you will lose your souls—lose yourselves. "Whither away?" saith one—"Where can I find comfort then and security?" You must do as Lot did, when the angels pressed him and said, "Haste to the Mount lest thou be consumed." To what mountain, say you, shall I go? The mountain of safety is Calvary. Where Jesus died, there you shall live. There is death everywhere else but there. But there is life arising from his death. Oh, fly to him. "But how?" saith one. Trust him. God gave his Son, equal with himself, to bear the burden of human sin; and he died, a substitute for sinners,—a real substitute, an efficient substitute, for all who trust in him. If thou wilt trust thy soul with Jesus, thou art saved. Thy sin was laid on him: it is forgiven thee. It was blotted out when he nailed the handwriting of ordinances that were against thee to his cross. Trust him now and you are saved; you shall become, henceforth, a stranger and a pilgrim. In the better land you shall find the rest which you never can find here, and need not wish to find, for the land is polluted; let us away from it. The curse has fallen: let us get away to the country that never was cursed, to the city that is for ever blessed, Where Jesus dwells there may we find a home and abide for aye. God add his blessing to this discourse, and give a blessing to your souls, for Jesus Christ' sake. Amen.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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How Can I Obtain Faith?

A Sermon

(No. 1031)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, January 21st, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”—Romans 10:17.

IT IS DIFFICULT to make men understand that the salvation of the gospel is not by works but entirely by grace, that it is not presented to men as the reward of their own endeavors, but is given to them freely upon their accepting it by an act of simple faith or trust in Jesus Christ. However plainly we may preach this truth, there will always be some who will misunderstand us, and as many more who will raise objections against it, as if it were their part to give an opinion, and not to do as they are bidden by the Lord. But when men are brought under the teaching of the word, to see that the pardon of their sins, and the acceptance of their souls does not lie with any merit of their own, or any doings of their own, another difficulty generally presents itself: they say, “What is this faith of which you speak?” and when we assure them that it is a simple trust or confidence in the finished work of Christ, then straightway they say, “How can we get this faith? How can we obtain this confidence?” To us, who have faith, this question is very easy to answer, for when we heard the gladsome news of a finished salvation for lost sinners, complete forgiveness for the guilty, and acceptance for the ungodly, simply upon believing in Jesus we came to Jesus, and we trusted in him, and we continue still to trust, and we have joy and peace through believing. We see far more reasons for belief than for doubt. Yet, nevertheless, there are hundreds and thousands who are awakened, and seriously enquiring, to whom this is a great difficulty—“How can I get the faith which gives me possession of Christ Jesus, and brings me salvation?” Our text is the ready answer, practically a complete answer; not doctrinally or theologically complete, but practically perfect. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” “But faith is the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul is it not?” Certainly. “And it is given by the Spirit to God's own chosen?” Assuredly; yet, nevertheless, it was not necessary for the apostle to mention those facts here. Some persons are always for having a whole system of theology in every sermon, but it is not needful that they should be gratified. Paul is clear enough about the work of the Spirit in other places, and it is not needful that he should introduce that subject into every line he writes. It was practically unnecessary for him to mention that subject in the present instance, and, therefore, he did not do so. It would sometimes puzzle rather than instruct an enquirer if we were to go into the full details of a matter. For instance, if I am thirsty, how shall I quench my thirst? By a draught of water. But in what way can I obtain water? It quite suffices for practical purposes for you to tell me to go to the tap or the fountain. There is no need to explain to me before I drink that the water is supplied by a company, and forced to the spilt by sundry machines, having been first extracted from the great fountains beneath by artesian wells, or drawn from the river at Thames Ditton. Nor would it be needful in answer to my question to trace the river to the clouds, and to treat upon the formation of vapor by the skill and wisdom of God. Practically, to the thirsty man all you want to say is, “There's the water, drink.” I will add another illustration. A man is hungry, and he asks you, “How

can I get bread?" "Go to the baker's," you say. The answer is complete enough for him; it meets the case at once. If he wants a larger declaration of how bread is obtained, we can give it to him at another time when he is no longer hungry; we will tell him how the corn is sown in the furrow of earth, and how by mysterious processes of nature it germinates, grows, and ripens; we will trace it from the reaper to the thresher, and from the thresher to the mill, and we will also show that daily bread is as much a gift from heaven as the manna which dropped down upon the hungry people in the wilderness. But, it is not needful for the feeding, of the hungry that we should on every occasion go into all those details, although we hold very sound views upon them. And when you are dealing with an anxious person, it will suffice to say to him, "Faith cometh by hearing;" further information can be supplied under happier circumstances. I mean to keep to our text this morning, and if any shall charge me with an omission of the work of the Spirit, or a failure to trace all saving faith to the electing grace of God, I shall bear the charge without murmuring, only saying that my soul rejoices as much as that of any man living in the work of the Spirit of God; and, that the electing love of God and his determinate purposes are precious truths to me. If the text was sufficient for Paul; it will, I trust, be sufficient for you.

May the Spirit of God assist us while we meditate upon *the way by which faith cometh*. This shall be followed by a brief indication of *certain obstructions which often lie in that way*; and then we will conclude by dwelling upon *the importance that faith should come to us by that appointed road*.

I. First, then, THE WAY BY WHICH FAITH COMES TO MEN. "Faith cometh by hearing."

It may help to set the truth out more clearly, if we say, *negatively*, that it does not come by any other process than by hearing;—not by any mysterious and strange method, but in the most simple and natural mode conceivable, namely, by the hearing of the word.

Some imagine that faith comes by *hereditary descent*, and they act upon the supposition. Hence, in certain churches, birthright membership is thought to be a proper practice, and the child of a Christian is thought to be a Christian. In some other churches, though the theory would not be stated in so many words, yet it is practically accepted, and children of pious parents are regarded as scarcely needing conversion. The text is forgotten which saith that the heirs of salvation are born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God." The typical covenant secured outward privileges to the children born after the flesh, but under the covenant of grace the blessing is secured to the spiritual and not to the natural seed. "He who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise." (Galatians 4:23). That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and nothing more: the new-born nature is not transmissible from father to son like a natural temperament or a cast of countenance. I know the answer will be that "the promise is to us and to our children," but it will be well for the objector to reply to himself by completing the quotation—"even to as many as the Lord your God shall call." The fact is, that nothing spiritual is inherited by carnal generation. Our children, even if we are far advanced in grace, will still be "shapen in iniquity." No matter how high the sainthood of the professing Christian, his child (when capable of understanding) must for himself become a personal believer in Jesus.

It appears to be thought possible to infuse grace by *sacraments*. There are persons yet alive who teach that a babe may be regenerated by certain aqueous processes, and be thereby placed in "a state of salvation." But is not faith a perpetual concomitant of regeneration? and what is that regeneration worth which leaves a person an unbeliever, and, consequently, "condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God?" Rest assured, that as faith does not come by

descent, neither can it be produced by any rite which recognizes that descent: it comes in one way, and in one way only in every case, and that is, by the hearing of the word. To every person, whoever he may be, though nursed in the bosom of the church, and introduced to that church by the most solemn ritual, we are bound to say, you must hear as well as others, and you must believe as the result of that hearing as well as others, or else you will remain short of saving grace. Faith is not a mystery juggled into us by the postures, genuflexions, and mumblings of priests. We have heard a great deal about sacramental efficacy, but I think a man must have extraordinary hardihood who would say that either baptism, or the so-called Eucharist, are the sure creators of faith; yet see I not what saving service these forms can render to unbelieving men if they leave them in an unbelieving condition, and, consequently, in a state of condemnation. Seeing that without faith it is impossible to please God, the grace supposed to be conveyed by the mere participation in sacraments is of small value, it cannot give the cardinal requisite for acceptance before God. Faith cannot be washed into us by immersion, nor sprinkled upon us in christening; it is not to be poured into us from a chalice, nor generated in us by a consecrated piece of bread. There is no magic about it; it comes by hearing the word of God, and by that way only.

These are superstitions, you tell me, and scarcely need to be mentioned here; very well then, we will have done with them, and treat of superstitions which linger in our own congregations. There are some who fancy that faith cometh by *feeling*. If they could feel emotions either of horror or of exquisite delight, they would then, they think, be the possessors of faith; but till they have felt what they have heard described in certain biographies of undoubtedly good men, they cannot believe, or even if they have a measure of faith, they cannot hope that it is true faith. Faith doth not come by feeling, but through faith arises much of holy feeling, and the more a man lives in the walk of faith, as a rule, the more will he feel and enjoy the light of God's countenance. Faith hath something firmer to stand upon than those ever-changing frames and feelings which, like the weather of our own sunless land, is fickle and frail, and changeth speedily from brightness into gloom. You may get feeling from faith, and the best of it, but you will be long before you will find any faith that is worth the having, if you try to evoke it from frames and feelings.

“My hope is built on nothing less
 Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
 I dare not trust the sweetest frame;
 But wholly lean on Jesus' name;
 On Christ the solid rock I stand,
 All other ground is sinking sand.”

Some, also, have supposed that true faith will come to men by *dreams and visions*. It is surprising how a belief in these things lingers still in what is called this age of light; the notion is still current that if you dream of seeing Jesus, or fancy you have seen him while awake, or if a passage of Scripture strikes you, or if you hear or imagine that you hear a voice speaking to you, you are then a believer. Now, faith in Christ is like faith in anyone else, it comes to us by the same kind of mental processes, and is based upon simple principles and plain matters of fact, and needs no vision of the night. Though you should see all the angels in heaven, it would not prove that you would go to heaven, any more than my having seen the Pope's body guard would be a proof that I shall be made a Cardinal. Things which are seen of the eye save not, for the things which are seen are temporal, and cannot work eternal salvation. Moreover, men saw Christ, and yet pierced him and blasphemed him. Visions have been seen by heathens like Nebuchadnezzar, and angels have appeared to bad

men like Balaam who, though he sighed out, "Let me die the death of the righteous," yet perished, fighting against the God of Israel. True faith has a more solid basis for its fabric than the fleeting fancies of the mind.

I beg you to notice, too, that it does not say in the text that faith comes through the *eloquence*, earnestness, or any other good quality of the preacher. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word, not of man, but of God. The word of God is the substance of faith-creating preaching; it is by the hearing of God's word, and not by any other hearing that saving faith comes to the soul. I may hear a man descant upon the gospel with all the eloquence that can be commanded by the most fluent tongue, yet if my faith comes to me because the man spoke pathetically, or poetically, or argumentatively, or rhetorically, it is a poor miserable faith; being, of the power of the flesh, it will die, and so prove itself unlike the faith which springs from the incorruptible word of God, for that liveth and abideth for ever. On the other hand, I may hope for faith if I am listening to the true gospel, the very word of God, though the man who speaks it may be of stammering lips, and his voice may be disagreeable to my ear, and there may be much about his manner that does not commend itself to me. If he preaches truth it is by hearing not him, the man, but by hearing the word of God, that I shall come to faith. I do desire ever, as a preacher, to feel that it is not my word but God's word that saves souls; we are to explain it and expound it, but we are not to add to it, take from or conceive that we can improve it. We must not go into the pulpit and say, "I have been working out a subject from my own mind, and I am going to give you the result of my thoughts." We had better keep our own thoughts for some other place, and give the people the revealed truth of God. The theory now-a-days is that all preachers worth hearing by this refined generation must be profound thinkers, and inventors of improved theologies. Brethren, let man's thoughts perish for ever; the thoughts of God and not the thoughts of man will save souls. The truth of God should be spoken simply, with as little as possible of the embellishments of metaphysics, and philosophy, and high culture, and all that stuff. I say the word of God delivered as we find it is that which, when heard, brings faith to the souls of men. I counsel you, my occasional hearers, you who perhaps have come freshly to this city, or who reside where you have a choice of ministry, seek not that which tickles your ear, but that which your conscience approves as consistent with the word of God; and, though we or an angel from heaven should preach to you that which is not God's word, do not listen to us, for it will be mischievous to you. Hear you what God the Lord speaketh, and hear nothing else. What though he shall sound forth his word through a ram's horn, if it be God's Spirit that giveth forth a certain sound, it shall be more profitable to your soul than though the silver trumpet should be set to the mouth of falsehood, and the sweetest music should regale your ear. The matter of a discourse is far more important than the manner. Saving faith never comes from hearing falsehood, but from the word of God alone.

I ought, perhaps, to add that the expression "by hearing," though of course literally it must be confined to the hearing of words vocally uttered, is meant to include in its spirit the reading of the word; for reading is a sort of hearing with the eyes, and faith has often come and will often come to men while they are reading the word of God for themselves. We must not kill the spirit of the text by excessive regard to the mere letter of it, and we should do so if we excluded readings, which is a quiet hearing of the still small voice of the printed page. Faith comes by the word of God reaching our minds, and our knowing and understanding it. The entrance of God's word giveth light. "Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live." Thus, we have spoken of it negatively.

Now, *positively*: “Faith cometh by hearing.” Sometimes faith has come into men’s minds by *hearing the simple statement* of the gospel. They have longed to be saved, and they have been told that Jesus the Son of God condescended to come into this world and to take upon himself the form of man, and as man to be partaker of our infirmities, and to offer himself as a sacrifice in the room, place, and stead of sinners; they have, moreover, been told that whosoever trusts in this substitutional sacrifice shall be saved, and straightway they have believed. All they have wanted has been merely to be informed of the way of salvation. God’s Spirit has so prepared them that they have believed almost as soon as they have heard the saving truth. In many cases the only difficulty in the way of salvation has been a want of understanding the word. I know in my own case I would have given all I had, if I might but have been informed what I must do to be saved. Though I frequented places where the gospel was preached, I did not catch the meaning of believing, it puzzled me much. I do not remember to have heard the simple declaration that to trust in Jesus Christ would save my soul; or, possibly, I did hear it with my outward ears, but I must have been strangely infatuated, for I did not understand the sense; and I have often thought if I could have heard the way of faith simply stated, my soul would have leaped into liberty long before. I will not so say; but I am persuaded that faith often comes by hearing the simple declaration that God accepts sinners, not for what they are in themselves but for what Christ is, and that when sinners believe in Jesus they are saved there and then, and are acceptable with God through Jesus Christ his dear Son. The mere statement of this has brought, by the operation of the Spirit of God, faith into the soul. “How is this?” saith one. Well, it is because the gospel commends itself to some hearts as true upon the very first blush of it, it strikes them as being undoubtedly the gospel of God. It is the same in other matters; you sometimes hear a story about which you say, “Well, I do not know, it may be correct, but I shall have to look a little into that before I am certain;” but you often hear statements which you accept at once, because they commend themselves to your understanding, and you feel that they must be true. There are minds which God has so prepared that the moment they hear the gospel they respond to it. I think I hear the seeker after truth exclaim when he heard the gospel, “True? Why, how could it be otherwise? It is so divinely grand, so harmonious, so good, so gracious, so unexpected—nobody could have thought of it but God himself—it must be the truth.” Having long sought goodly pearls of truth, the illuminated eye catches the gleam of the gospel and discerns it to be a priceless gem. Those are blessed indeed who are thus at once brought unto faith by the statement of the gospel.

To some others, the convincing point has been *the suitability of the gospel to their case*, for while they have heard it preached as a gospel for sinners, they have felt that they were certainly among that class. When the preacher has gone on to describe the misery of the fall, the utter ruin of human nature, its deceitfulness, feebleness, fickleness, and folly, the hearer has said, “Is the gospel sent to those who are thus lost, guilty, and impotent? Why, I am precisely in that condition?” And, then, when its great command is stated, namely, simple trust in Jesus, the soul perceives the suitability of the way of grace. We do not go to heaven to bring Christ down, or dive into the deeps to bring him up from the dead; we can neither keep the law nor find an atonement for our transgressions; but this simple trust, oh how suitable it is to undone sinners. Nothing to do—I can do nothing; noticing to bring—I have nothing to bring; it suits my case. Glory be to God for devising a plan so adapted to our wants. From the suitability of the gospel to the sinner, many have been by God’s Spirit led to saving faith in Jesus, and so faith has come by hearing.

In many, I do not doubt, faith has come through hearing of *the condescending pity and the melting love of Jesus*. Oh, that we dwelt more on this; that he loved his enemies, that he died for

the ungodly, that his heart yearns over the lost sheep, that he is willing to receive prodigal sons, for he is full of grace and truth.

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

When such texts as the following have been preached on:—“This man receiveth sinners.” “Come unto me all ye that labor.” “Ho, every one that thirsteth,” etc. “All manner of sin and transgression shall be forgiven unto men.” “Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely.” “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out,” that melting strain has touched the heart, and led the most hardened to believe in a Savior so kind to the undeserving. Men have found it impossible not to believe in a friend so self-sacrificing, a Redeemer so altogether lovely. The sweet love of Jesus has an omnipotence in it to win souls. They yield “by mighty love subdued,” unable to resist its charms, and as if they could hold out no longer, they throw themselves by an act of faith into the Savior’s arms. I can well understand their singing, “I do believe, I must believe in such a friend as this.” Faith comes by hearing of the free forgiveness procured by the agony, the stripes, the wounds, the death of Jesus, the lover of our souls.

At other times, faith has come not so much through hearing the statement of the gospel as from hearing of *its authority*. I may believe a statement because it looks like truth. I may, on the other hand, accept it not at all because I have myself perceived the apparent truth of it, but because of the person who tells it to me. And this is a very right and acceptable kind of faith. What has God said about my salvation? Before I hear it I am prepared to believe it on the testimony of God. He says it, and that is enough for me. I believe this Bible to be his book; I hear what it says, and whatsoever the Lord God hath said I must and will receive, whether it appears plain or not. There are persons who when they have heard the gospel preached have not at first believed it, but if it has pleased the Spirit of God to lead the minister to show that the gospel is of divine appointment, that the way proclaimed is ordained by God himself, and that God has set the sanction of his promise upon it—“He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved”—and has also set upon it the second sanction of his threatening—“He that believeth not shall be damned”—then they have yielded and given over all further question. God bids them trust in Jesus, and they do so through his grace. Without canvassing the statement itself they receive what God teaches, and since he hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation for sin they receive him us such: since he has said, “Look unto me and be saved,” they look because God bids them look, and they are saved. To believe in Jesus is a command from God’s own mouth, and is, therefore, to be obeyed, and the more so, because “he that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son; and this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”

In some cases, too, the coming of faith has been helped by hearing and perceiving *the veracity of the subordinate testifiers of the gospel*,—I mean the writers of the sacred book, the prophets, and chiefly the apostles. These men are worthy of credit—they were honest, unsophisticated men, and they certainly gained nothing by testifying that Christ was the Messiah, and that he died and rose again from the dead. One of them, the Apostle Paul, lost his position, which was one of great eminence, and spent his whole life in toil, and suffering, and reproach, and ended with a bloody death because of what he preached, and thus he proved that he was a sincere, honest, upright man. If Paul or any other of the apostles were in the witness-box, nobody could demur to their evidence; whatever they said we should believe, because the men were truthful witnesses. Now, sometimes, persons have been led into faith in Christ, by feeling that those whom he sent to be testifiers to his

person, death, and resurrection were evidently true to the core, and, therefore, their word was worthy of all acceptance.

I believe, dear friends, that faith has come by hearing in another way. Perhaps the preacher has not so much stated the gospel, and brought forward its authority, as *explained it*. and so faith has come. If we spent our time in nothing else but just explaining the text, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved," we might achieve a blessed life-work, and perhaps might see greater results than when our ministry takes a wider range. When the preacher takes up one by one the soul difficulties which prevent man from seeing what faith is, and keep him away from looking to Christ, and when he tries to show, as he should, that all the hope of the sinner lies out of himself, none of it in himself, that all his help for salvation is laid upon one that is mighty, even Jesus Christ the Son of God, and that he must look away from his own feelings, and prayings, and doings, and even away from his own believings as any ground of confidence, and must rest simply and alone upon the one sacrifice of Jesus; it has often happened that faith has come through the hearing of such an explanatory word.

In some cases, too, faith has come when the word has possessed a peculiar *soul-revealing pointedness* in it to the hearer's particular case. Remember the Samaritan Woman. Our Lord Jesus Christ explained to her the gospel, but she does not appear to have been enlightened by his explanations: it was that home stroke of his—"Go, call thy husband and come hither," which won her to faith. Such revealings of the thoughts and intents of the heart will occur in any God-sent preaching of the gospel, just because the Word pierces to the dividing of soul and spirit, and lays bare the secrets of the soul. Then it is that hearers cry, "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" Thus, by the guidance of the Spirit, the word finds out the man, and faith cometh by hearing.

Faith, also, comes in to many by hearing, when we detail *the experience* of those who have tasted and handled the good word of life; when the preacher or teacher tells how he trusted in Jesus, and found pardon, peace, and life eternal; when he is able to point to others who have felt the same, some of whom, perhaps, were even greater offenders than the person addressed, then conviction and faith are wrought in the mind. We bid you see what Jesus has done for us, in the hope that you will trust and try him for yourselves. Jesus prayed for those who shall believe on him through our word, and we hope you will be among the number.

To set the whole matter clearly, we will suppose that you are laboring under a very serious disease, and a physician professes to heal you. You are quite willing to believe in him, but you cannot blindly follow any man, for there are thousands of quacks and impostors. You naturally want to know something about him. Now, in what way would you go to work to get faith in him? How would faith be likely to come to you? It would come by hearing. You hear him speak and you perceive that he understands your case, for he describes exactly all your symptoms, even those which none know but yourself and a skillful physician. You feel already some confidence in him. He next describes to you as much of the method of cure as you can comprehend, and it seems to you to be very reasonable, and withal suitable to the requirements of your case. His proposal commends itself to your best judgment, and you are already a stage nearer submission to his mode of operation. Then you enquire as to the man's character; you find that he is no mere pretender, but an authorized skillful, longestablished practitioner, well known for truthfulness, uprightness, and every good quality. Moreover, suppose in addition to this he charges you nothing whatever, but does everything gratis, having evidently no motive of gain, but being altogether disinterested,

moved only by real pity for you, and a kind desire to remove your pain and save your life. Can you any longer refuse to believe and submit? But if, in addition to all this, he allows you his case-book, and bids you read case after case similar to your own in which he has effected perfect cure, and if some of these are your own acquaintances, if they are persons whom you know and esteem, why, sir, you will not insult him by saying, "I wish I could believe you;" but you will be unable to help trusting him, unless you are unwilling to be cured. Faith, in such a case, does not depend upon the will at all; you are convinced by hearing, and you become a believer. In the same way faith comes by hearing. You are unreasonable if you sit still and say, "I cannot make myself believe;" of course you cannot, but you hear, do you not, of how Christ heals sinners; you hear that he is backed by divine authority; you see that he really does save those who trust him, and what more of evidence do you want? O soul! it seems to me a harder thing not to believe in Jesus than to believe in him, if you are indeed willing to be made whole. When one has heard these things, and understands them, surely the mind, if it be not wilfully blinded, must receive the Savior. May God forgive your long perverseness, and by his Spirit open your eyes to see the simplicity of that faith which comes by hearing the word of God.

II. My time, however, flies much too rapidly this morning, and I must be brief on the second very important head, namely, **OBSTRUCTIONS WHICH OFTEN BLOCK UP THIS WAY.**

One is a *want of intention*, by which I mean that many persons come to hear, but they have no wish to be led into faith. Like the butterflies which flit from flower to flower, they extract no honey because they come not for such a purpose: while the bees dive into the cups and bells of the flowers, and come up loaded with their luscious food. Oh, if men came to hear, praying to be endowed with faith in Jesus, faith would surely come to them by hearing. Many persons in hearing a sermon, are like children looking, at a cornfield—it is full of yellow garlic, or perhaps of scarlet poppies, and they cry "What a lovely field;" but the farmer thinks not so, he is looking for the wheat. Many a hearer watches for pretty speeches and flowery metaphors, and cries, "How well he puts it! What a well-turned sentence! How sweetly he quotes poetry!" and so on. Bah! Is that what you come to God's house for? O fools and slow of heart, is this your end in hearing the life-giving gospel of the bleeding Lamb? I assure you it is not this that we are aiming at in preaching to you. If you came to look after the good corn, you would care little for the gaudy poppies of a flaunting eloquence so much regarded by the men of these days. Come with the intent to find faith in Jesus; cry to God to make his word effectual to our salvation, and then hearing will be quite another business with you. Alas I fear you will perish, let us preach as we may, while we are regarded by you as mere orators to be criticized, and not as witnesses whose testimony is to be weighed.

Some do not hear aright for *want of attention*. Sleepy hearers are not likely to be led to faith. Eutychus may fall from the third loft and be taken up for dead, but he is not likely to become a believer by sleeping, even though Paul should be the preacher. We want attention in order to the real reception of the word. Oh how pleasant it is to preach to earnest hearers who lean forward to catch every syllable, anxious to know how they can be saved. Wandering hearts lose the benefit of the truth, and vain minds trifle away the privilege of a gospel ministry. Take heed how ye hear, otherwise ye may remain hearers only, and so perish in unbelief.

With many a *want of candor* is another reason why faith does not come by hearing. If a man hears with a prejudiced heart, making up his mind before hand what he will believe, he is not likely to be convinced, he puts himself as far as he can out of the reach of benefit. When the heart rebels against the word: when it says, "If this be true I am living a bad life, and I shall have to give up my

pleasures, therefore will not accept it." Well then, faith does not come and cannot come by such hearing. Faith comes by hearing when a man does, as it were, give himself up to the word of God, like a person who is badly wounded and surrenders himself to the surgeon's hand. Oh, if I had a gangrened limb and it must be taken off, I think I would pray for patience enough to say, "O sir, if you can but spare my life cut to the very bone." When it is the soul that is concerned I would say to the preacher, "Sir, do not flatter me, do not tell me that which will please but delude me; I do not want your flattery, I do not want your fine words. "Sir, tell me what I am, and where I am in the sight of God, and how I can be saved; for it will little satisfy me to wake up in hell and remember that I used to hear a fine orator. I want to be saved in deed and of a truth." "Ah," says one, "but some preachers are not only bold, but rough in their expression." Yes, but suppose you were nearly drowned, and a strong swimmer plunged into the stream and plucked you out just as you were sinking for the last time, if he dislocated your arm would you grumble? No, you would say, "The bone can be set at another time, but my life could not have been restored." And so with the preacher, though he be rough, if it be the truth which he speaks, only pray that it may save your soul, and be content to put up with the man's infirmity, if by any means you may attain to salvation by Jesus Christ.

With some, how ever, hearing does not bring faith, because they hear *without any after meditation*. There is a great trial going on, as you know, in the Tichborne case. Every juryman, I doubt not, wants to judge righteously. I am sure the sleepy one is not likely to do so, and I am pretty clear that the juryman who is most likely to get at the truth will be the man who, when he gets away from the court, having heard attentively all the time, takes home the notes of the evidence, weighs it, and makes comparisons, and endeavors to sift out the truth. So I would say to you when you hear us preach, sift the sermon afterwards, turn our sermons over, pick holes in them if you like, and find out our mistakes; but oh, do search into the truth, and be not content till you find it. If you want to find Christ, the wisdom of God, you should seek for him as for silver. You are likely to believe the truth when your mind turns it over and over. Here is a bag, and I am willing to make a man rich, and, therefore, I drop into it pound after pound, but I find that the bag is just as empty as before; the reason is plain,—there are holes in the bag, and the money drops through. Too many hearers are as a bag full of holes, and golden sermons will not bless them because they wilfully forget all. They will never come to faith because they do but look at their face in the glass of the word, and go their way and forget what manner of men they are. Oh for hearers who only need to know the gospel, and the evidence of it, and then consent thereto, saying, "It is the truth of God, I cannot quarrel with it; I joyfully receive it." Such are saved souls.

III. But, now, I am sorry to be so brief, but I must conclude by speaking, of **THE IMPORTANCE THAT FAITH SHOULD COME TO US BY HEARING**. I will let my words drop rapidly without any ornament, and remind you, dear friend, that if you have been a hearer and faith has not come to you, you are, this moment, in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. You believe not in Christ, and you make God a liar, because ye have not believed in his only-begotten Son. The wrath of God abideth on you. You are dead while you live. Without God, without Christ, and strangers to the covenant of promise. My soul pities you—will you not pity yourselves? Hearers only; faithless, graceless, Christless! Christ died, but you have no part in his death. His blood cleanses from sin, but your sin remains upon you. Christ has risen, and he pleads before the throne,—you have no part in that intercession. He is preparing a place for his people, but that place is not for you. Oh, unhappy soul! oh, wretched soul! out of favor with God, at enmity with eternal

love, destitute of eternal life! Truly, if Jesus were here he would weep over you, as he did over Jerusalem, and say, "How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

Ah, remember, though your present state is terrible it is not all. You will soon die, and you will die without faith. Remember that word of Christ, it is one of the most terrible I know of, "if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." To die in a ditch, to die in a prison, to die on the gallows, none of us would desire it; but to die in your sins! O God, it is hell, it is eternal damnation. May the great Lord save you! But to perish for ever will be your lot as surely as you live, except you believe in Jesus and that speedily, for soon you will be out of the reach of all hearing. No more sermons, no more invitations of grace. Oh, what would you give to have the gospel once more when you are cast away from it! No more the preacher's voice, saying, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die!" No more the pitiful accents of one who loves your souls, and fain would snatch you as firebrands from the flame: around you all will be dark, and hard, and the only message for you will be this,—“He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.”

“There are no acts of pardon passed,
In that cold grave to which we haste;
But darkness, death, and long despair,
Reign in eternal silence there.”

Ah! then it will be no assuagement of your miseries that you once heard the gospel; it will rather increase your torment. Conscience will cry aloud—"I heard the gospel of grace, and I heard the arguments which proved it true, but I rejected a gospel which God himself proclaimed, a gospel which was genuine on the face of it, a gospel full of such love as ought to have melted a rock, a gospel that was brought to me without money and without price, a gospel that was pressed upon me from my infancy to my hoar hairs—I rejected it, I wilfully rejected it, not because it was not true, but because I would believe a lie, and would not believe the living God." Eternal Father, thou who art mighty to save, let not one among us go down into the pit with a lie in his right hand, refusing to accept the gospel of thy blessed Son! The Lord save you all, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 1.

The Two Yokes

A Sermon

(No. 1032)

Delivered on Lord's Day Evening, January 14th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron.”—Jeremiah 28:13.

ALL THROUGH THE BOOK of Jeremiah you will observe that the prophet taught the people not only by words, but by symbols. At one time he took his mantle and hid it in the earth till it was soiled and worn, and then taught them something by wearing it. At another time he took an earthen pot and broke it in their presence. And on this occasion he put a yoke about his own neck as the token that Israel should be subdued beneath the power of Nebuchadnezzar. This was a strange method of teaching. I have sometimes heard complaints made by those who are fond of criticizing things they know nothing about—when a teacher puts a truth very plainly, if he shall, as it were, act what he says, he is upbraided at once as being histrionic. I know not what ungenerous words are hurled at him. Yet after all, this was what Jeremiah did. He taught the people by signs and symbols. So, too, our Lord himself. I doubt not, that when he uttered those words, “Consider the lilies,” he stooped down and plucked a lily; and when he said, “Consider the ravens,” he pointed to the ravens flying overhead, in the sky. At any rate, we know that once he took a little child, and set it in the midst of them. What an outcry there would be if I were to take a little child and set him here and preach about him! Did we use any kind of symbol, to what ridicule we should expose ourselves! The fact is, we might do much more good if we did less regard the general current of public opinion, and ventured to do strange things, that anyhow the truth of God might come home to a slumbering generation, and the Word of God, which must be learnt by them or they must perish, were made to tell upon their minds. The prophet Jeremiah, though exceedingly faithful in his mission, which he discharged as God would have him discharge it, with many tears in great love and deep anxiety, nevertheless had a great obstacle in his way. He was met by false prophets who withstood and contradicted him to his face. Not so very surprising either. It must ever be expected that it will be so. If God shall speak by any man, there shall be some other who protests that God speaks by him to the contrary. If there be a Christ, there will be an Antichrist; if there be a Simon Peter, there will be a Simon Marcus, if there shall be raised up by God a Luther, there shall be an Eckius, or some other controversialist who shall seek to resist and overthrow him. Let no man's heart then fail him if he be flatly contradicted when he bears testimony for God. Let him rather expect it, and go on never caring, for the fact is, the truth will outlive error, and in the long run that Word of God before which all things else are as grass and as the flower, the perishing flower of the field—the Word of God shall endure for ever and triumph over the ruin of all the words of men. Tremble not, ye feeble adherents of the truth, who fear lest your weakness should make the truth itself weak, and the strong logic and the powerful rhetoric of its adversaries should overturn the oracles of God. It cannot be. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the gospel, mighty though

they be both in power and in sophistry. The truth shall abide; the right shall prevail; for God is faithful, and Christ must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

With this, by way of preliminary observation, we will now come to the text, and endeavor to make some use of it for ourselves. Hananiah took off the symbolic yoke, the wooden yoke, from Jeremiah's neck and broke it. Jeremiah comes again, and says, "You have broken the yoke of wood, but God has commanded that ye shall now wear yokes of iron." They were not benefited, therefore, by the change, but the reverse. This is suggestive of a broad principle. From the symbol, which was applicable in one case, we draw a general truth. Whenever men say of God, "Let us break his bands asunder, and cast his cords from us," they may do so if they will; but instead of the yokes of wood they will be sure to get yokes of iron. If they will not submit to the government of Christ, they will have to submit to the tyranny of Satan. Some yoke they will have to wear, and if they reject the easy yoke of the Christ of God, the wooden yoke as it were which he puts on men, there shall be made for them yokes of iron, which they shall neither be able to break off nor yet to support.

So our thought will run this way. First, that *men must wear some yoke or other*; and, secondly, that *the yoke of Christ is a very easy one*; and, thirdly, that *when it is refused, it is inevitable that men should wear a heavier one*.

I. MEN MUST WEAR SOME YOKE. It is so naturally. There is no stage of life in which this is not the case. The child must bear the yoke in his youth. He is an unhappy child that is under no control. Probably there is nothing so ruinous to a man as to be allowed to have his own way, while yet his judgment is not ripe enough to guide him. And when we advance into youth, we are usually placed in some position of life where we are under obligations to some superior, be he parent, or guardian, or employer. Nor if we become what is called our own masters, does it make much difference. As things go now, I think there are no people that are their own masters, for the masters are bound to yield to the terms which the servants dictate; and this condition of things is getting more and more rife. I shall not discuss the right or wrong of this, where questions arise between capitalists and skillful laborers, but I will say that if the employed claim liberty, the masters might very well be allowed a portion of that choice prerogative. As it is now, I am sure he that says, "I am a master," is as much under the yoke to his servants as the servant is under the yoke to his master. That a man who lives in the midst of society should hold some relationship to all around him is indispensable. But men are always for changing their forms of government. Some nations have a revolution almost with every moon, but for all that there is still a yoke upon them; and if it were ever to come to anarchy, to mob rule—ah, I warrant you, it would be a yoke of iron, and of red hot iron too. God save us from it. No yoke is so hard to bear as that yoke which a people put upon themselves when they reject all order, break through all law, and will not submit to any principle or any government, however just or righteous. You cannot get on in this world without a yoke of some sort. We are not going to wear a tyrant's yoke any of us. Let lords and lands have what masters they will: in this land of ours we will be free, and our own masters still; but the selfishness of individuals or of classes must never determine the boundary lines of power or of privilege; for we can only maintain our freedom by everyone of us paying that right obedience to the law which is due from every citizen, if we would promote alike his own comfort and the common weal.

Away from those lower grounds into higher spheres—it is certainly true that we must wear the yoke. God has made us, and not we ourselves; and God has made us to be his servants. We are daily in dependence on him for the bread we eat. If any man shall say he is not dependent upon

God, I will at least reply to him, "You are dependent for the air you breathe and the power to breathe it. The life that is within you hangs upon a thread, and that thread is in the hand of the Most High." Every moment each one of us is most certainly sustained by God. And in return for this support, there is something asked, namely, that we would submit to his will; that we would obey his law, which is perfect, and just, and right, and that having sinned against him we should rebel no longer or continue his enemies, but be reconciled to him. We are made dependent creatures, and from that very fact we must wear a yoke unto God.

Moreover, dear friends, we are all so constituted as creatures, with such passions and propensities, that when we break one yoke, the yoke which it is meet we should wear, and do not serve God, we at once bend our necks to another yoke and begin to serve something else—we serve ourselves, and oh, the slavery of serving one's self! He that makes his belly his god, and bows down to the lusts of the flesh, serves a tyrant indeed. Something or other we must serve, not only because we are dependent creatures, but also it seems to be stamped upon us that we must follow some great principle, and must yield ourselves to some spiritual influence. A yoke of some kind or another we must submit to. The man who shall say, "I am perfectly free, and I live for nothing but myself," is so mean an animal, that he is hardly worthy to be called a man. In his boasted exemption from all regard to his fellow creatures and to his God, he sets himself up, in his own esteem, and that after a diabolical model, alone and apart in his awful selfishness, like an iceberg to melt away, and may be to crush others as he moves along his course. What is he but a beacon, against which all are to be warned? Sir, the yoke fits the human neck, and the human neck was made to wear it. We must have some God, we must have some ruler, we must have some principle, which shall master us, and be it ours in God's name to choose the right and the best master, or else, woe be unto us.

II. Not to dwell longer upon our first point, I proceed to notice THAT THE YOKE OF CHRIST IS AN EASY YOKE. It is, as it were, a yoke of wood. Let us dwell upon this awhile. God grant that some who have never worn that yoke may, by the Holy Spirit's power, be led to carry it.

If you become a servant of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the man of Nazareth, he asks of you nothing but what is absolutely right. His life, which is the Christian's law written out in living characters, is perfection itself. His precepts which distil like dew from his lips, are all pure and good, just and kind. It ought to be enough for a man, and would be enough for him if he were not fallen, to know that all rule is right, and to submit to it at once. When God gives a man a noble spirit, he pants to enlist in honorable service. He craves a post in the council or the camp. His heart's enquiry is, "Where can I find a leader who will always lead me aright? Where shall I discover a law which will never lead me into evil, if I obey it? Where can I discover an example, which I may imitate in its very jots and tittles, and yet never be found any other than I ought to be?" I commend to such spirits, Jesus the Christ of God, for there is nothing in his precepts or his practices, in his profession or his life, that is not consonant with righteousness of the highest order, majestic in its compass, and scrupulously minute in its obedience.

The yoke of Christ is framed in our interest. The law of Christ is drawn up and dictated by our Councillor for our welfare. If man were infinitely wise, and could draw up a code for himself, which would involve no hardship, and entail all that was happy, he could devise no regulations more healthful, more profitable, or more pleasant than those of the Savior; he would discover that to believe in Jesus was the highest wisdom; to repent of sin, the most delightful necessity; to follow after holiness the most blissful pursuit, and to serve God the greatest delight. Service and sovereignty blend here, as when Joseph became Prime Minister of Pharaoh he was lord over all the land of

Egypt. To serve God in very truth is to reign, and to become a servant of Christ, is to be made a king and a priest unto God—to be ennobled with as much dignity as human nature can bear. Jesus Christ, if he forbids you anything, only forbids you what would harm you. Say any of you of sin—“’Tis sweet”? Ah! and so are many I poisoned things. Your nature goes after it. Yes, and many a sick man’s nature craves for that which would be his poison. The Lord Jesus denies to those who take his yoke nothing but that which would be injurious to them. His is a blessed yoke, because it is the yoke of righteousness, and it is the yoke of personal benefit.

Moreover, Christ’s yoke is not exacting. If he assesses us with one hand, he more richly endows us with the other hand. He in his grace always gives to us of his bounty what he asks of us as our duty. Under one view of divine truth, faith is man’s act. The Holy Ghost never believes for anybody. A sinner must believe himself. It is a personal act. But yet in another phase of it, it is the Holy Spirit’s work in the man—he gives the faith which the man exercises towards God. If then faith in Jesus be required, it is not a hard thing, because the Spirit works in men the very faith which Jesus seeks of them. If to repent of sin be thought difficult—how shall we get tears out of a rock?—the reply is, true repentance is the gift of the Holy Ghost, and when it is sought of the Lord, it is never denied. Christ is exalted on high to give not only the pardon of sin, but to give the repentance which comes before the pardon. To give repentance and remission of sins is the very office of Christ. If, then, the precepts should seem difficult, the difficulty is removed, because the virtues and graces which are a matter of precept are also a matter of promise. What is commanded in one Scripture, is conceded in another as an absolute gift of God according to the covenant of his grace. It is an easy yoke, then, sinner. Dost thou say: “I cannot believe”? Hast thou asked for faith? Is thy heart hard? Hast thou asked to have it softened? If ye cannot come to Christ with broken hearts, come *for* broken hearts, for they are his gift. He will give you all—all that his gospel demands, for he is Alpha and Omega, the author and the finisher of our faith. It is an easy yoke, then, since he gives what he requires.

That the yoke of Christ is easy, I might call to witness all those who have ever proved it. Never did a man wear it but he always loved to wear it. I think I have heard that Queen Elizabeth carried the crown in the procession of her sister Mary at the coronation, and she remarked that it was very heavy, but some one standing by told her it would not be heavy when she had to wear it herself. So the precepts which some men do but carry in their hands seem very heavy; but when a man comes to know Christ and to love him, those very precepts become light and easy. “I could not,” says one, “be a Christian as I am: it would be very hurtful to me: I should have to give up much that I have learned to prize.” Ah! but suppose you were made a new man in Christ Jesus, there would be nothing irksome at all about renouncing old habits. Here is a raven, to tutor it into cleanly living, it must forego all carrion, it must feed upon these grains sweet and pure. The raven might pine and repine at this as a hardship, unless by some transmuting influence the raven were turned into a dove. Then it would be no hardship to forsake the carrion, which its new nature would loathe; nor would it be grievous to feed upon the clean winnowed grain, for its appetite would crave it. And, O beloved, the life of the true Christian is not a life chafed and galled with vexatious prohibitions, because pursuits which, to the non-Christian heart are distasteful and repulsive, to the renewed heart are a matter of intense delight. A man shall carry a bucket of water on his head and be very tired with the burden, but that same man when he dives into the sea shall have a thousand buckets on his head without perceiving their weight, because he is in the element and it entirely surrounds him. The duties of holiness are very irksome to men who are not in the element of

holiness; but when once those men are cast into the element of grace, then they bear ten times more and feel no weight, but are refreshed thereby with joy unspeakable. Christ's yoke is easy, for the new heart rejoices in it.

The yoke of Christ is rendered easy by the bright example of Christ, and by the blessed fellowship with him to which his people are called. Christ himself carried it. Have you never read in Grecian story—I think there are one or two cases to the point—how the Grecian soldiers on their long marches grew exceedingly weary, and wished that the war were closed: they felt so dispirited. But there was a man whom they almost adored as a god—Alexander himself—and they saw him always sharing their toil. If the road was rough, the monarch walked with them: if they were short of a draught of water, Alexander would share their thirst. At the sight of him every man grew strong. Oh! it is grand to the believer to feel that, if there be a trial or a difficulty in the Christianity, Christ has borne it, and Christ is with us, bearing it still. Not like the scribes and Pharisees, who laid heavy burdens, grievous to be borne, upon men's shoulders, and they themselves would not touch them with one of their fingers; our Lord has taken the load himself and carried it, and he now says to the disciples, "Take my yoke upon you—the very yoke I carried—and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: I have borne the trial which you have to bear and endured to the end, as you shall do through my grace."

There is one remarkable fact about the yoke of Christ which I should like to mention. All who have borne it have always had grace given equal to the weight of the burden. I have never, yet discovered one cross-bearer among the children of God who ever expressed regret that to become a Christian and took upon himself the yoke. I have been familiar with death-beds: I have witnessed strange scenes, for the bony hand of death pulls back many curtains and plucks off many masks from faces that were accustomed to wear them. One thing however, I can solemnly say I have never seen. I have never seen a Christian weary of His Master's service. I have never heard from an aged pilgrim a word of complaint against Christ, or against his yoke. There have been a great many Christians beyond all suspicion of fanaticism, of whom none would suppose that they strove to act a part inconsistent with their true character, yet not one has had to regret that he served Christ. You know the words so often quoted of him who regretted that he had not served his God with half the zeal that he had served his kind; but I never remember, nor do any of you ever remember having heard of one who, in life's latest hour, bemoaned his allegiance to God, or bewailed the ardor with which he followed Christ. Surely, if remorse had ever begotten such a thought, some one would have been bold to utter it. And, verily, verily, if such an incident had ever occurred, there would have been no lack of historians to record it.

Another thing I think tells strongly in favor of this yoke of Christ. The servants of Christ are always anxious to get their children into the same service. Often do I hear men say, "I don't want to bring my boy up to my trade; the work is dirty, the hours long, and the pay small." I have heard them say, "I should not like to see my boy in our office; there are so many temptations," and so on. Did you ever hear a pious man say, "I should not like my boy to be a Christian"? Did you ever hear a godly matron say, "I should deeply regret to see my daughter become a follower of Christ"? No, but what they have possessed for themselves they have longed to have for their children. I remember well hearing my grandfather's earnest prayer for all his household. It always lay near his heart that his children and his children's children might fear the Lord. I have lively recollections of his devotions. My father, whose prayer you heard just now—how often have I heard him pray for his children; and I can truly say the prayer that is nearest to my heart is for my sons, that they

may serve the Lord. There is nothing I desire so much beneath the skies. Now if Christ's yoke were hard, we could not wish to bring our children under it. We have natural affections and common sense as well as you, and having tried Christ so long ourselves, that is our desire for our posterity. I have tried him now (what shall I say?) these twenty years. Had I found him a hard master I would not beguile you or belie my own conscience. I speak the truth, there is no lord like Christ, and no service like Christ's. I would that every young man and every young woman here believed in his name and submitted to his authority, and that they would take upon themselves, through his grace, his easy peace-giving yoke.

III. If not, what then? **THOSE WHO REFUSE TO WEAR THE EASY YOKE OF CHRIST WILL HAVE TO WEAR A WORSE ONE.** "Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron."

Observe! Adam wore an easy yoke in Paradise: he broke it. Himself and his posterity have had to wear yokes of iron ever since. Death has come into the world with all its train of woes. I need not enlarge enough that it is a case in point. Whenever a child of God, a true child of God, under pressure of temptation, turns aside from the right path, he is always made to feel that after he has broken the yoke of wood, he must wear a yoke of iron. John Bunyan's illustration will serve me well here. The two pilgrims, Christian and Hopeful, when they went on their way, came to a place where the road was full of flints that cut their feet, and there were thorns and briars in the way; and by-and-by one of them said, "Here is a meadow on the other side of the hedge, and if we were just to pass through the gap we might save a corner: it would be sure to come out in the way again, and so we should be certain to avoid the rough places." Bunyan well describes how, when they got into By-path Meadow the night overtook them and the flood, and they wished to find the road again—longing for it, rough as it had been. But Giant Despair laid hold of them, took them to his dungeon, and beat them within an inch or their lives, and it was only by mighty grace that they escaped. Take care, Christian, take care, though you shall not utterly perish, you may often have to go with broken bones through a sin. David—ah, you recollect his sin, his repentance, and his life of sorrow—how he went to his grave halting still, as a consequence, an entail of his crimes. Do not, therefore, shrink from Christian duty because it is onerous. Never, O Christian, turn aside from the straight road, the highway of rectitude, because it threatens you with shame or loss. That first loss will be vastly less than the after-losses you will incur by seeking to avoid it. Jonah would resist the word of the Lord that came to him, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh," but he had to endure the perils of a voyage, to encounter the fury of the tempest, and at length to sink to the bottom of the sea, and yet to Nineveh after all he must go. If you shirk a duty you will be brought up to it yet, but it will be with bitter pain. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

The principle of our text is very applicable to all backsliders. We have known men that set out apparently on the road to heaven—made a profession of being Christians, but after awhile they tired and fainted, and walked no more with us. Christianity was to them a yoke, and they put it off. I wonder whether they have improved their condition. I believe not. I will single out a person here—may his conscience single him out. When you lived in the country, every Sabbath you went with your wife and family to the house of God. Were you a Methodist then? Never mind: you were very earnest, whatever place it was you attended. And you and your little family were very happy too. But you came to London, and after awhile the general idle habits of our London people in the morning came over you. You were content with one service a day. You did not seek

Church-membership, nor cast yourself in the way of God's people. By-and-by it was not one service a day you attended, it was none at all; or else you called it religion to go and hear the music and see the religious theatricals in certain great houses in London. I know not if you called that worshipping God when you were only whiling away the hour with sensual gratifications. And at last you gave up all presence of being a Christian or of frequenting places of worship. Now I will ask you a question. You have got rid of the yoke of wood: how about your shoulders now? Your Sundays, are they very pleasant? Your family, is it very happy? Your mind, is it very much at ease? Oh, no! I know while I am talking to you you wish yourself back in the little village again listening to the minister's voice once more; for your Sundays are distasteful and comfortless, and your week days, when you think about your condition, are wretched and reproachful, and your children are not growing up in the way you could wish. Ah, sir! I pray God to make that yoke of iron very heavy to you. Do you long to get rid of that and come back and take the yoke of wood again? God of his infinite mercy, bring you back if you are his child, or if you are not of his family may he put you among his children and teach you to walk worthily.

We have known those who have backslidden in another way. Here you are now. Perhaps you used to be a professor of religion, but the little shop was situated in a neighborhood where a good deal of trade was done on Sunday; you heard it said by the neighbors: "I do not know how it is you can shut up as you do." The wife did not like it, nor the husband either: it was, however, done by slow degrees, and now it is always done, and you cannot both come together: there is only one can come, and the other must stop at home. Well, you have given up Christ's yoke; and Sabbath keeping seems to be too hard a thing for you. Are you better off? Are you really better off? Are you happier? Are you really happier? Something in your soul answers my question; you know you have a yoke of iron now, instead of a yoke of wood. May God help you to break away from your present slavery; and may you become a true heir of heaven.

It may be, I have here before me, one who was led into backsliding by a very common occurrence. Young woman, knew you once, when your face was radiant with happiness, while we preached Christ, and sung the hymns of Zion, but you married, and your marriage was not in the Lord. An unbelieving husband was your choice. You thought the yoke of Christ was hard when we reminded you of the precept, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." You rejected the yoke of Christ. How have you found it since? I have seen a great many such marriages, and I have only seen one—I have seen one, it is fair to say that, but I assert I never saw but one—in which I could get anything like an acknowledgement of happiness from the ill assorted pair. Here and there it has happened perhaps, that God has forgiven the fault, but not seldom it leads to alienation of heart, and to utter departure from the living God, and often too, to disappointment and heart-breaking, and to wretchedness such as I shall not attempt to describe. Those that break Christ's yoke and become backsliders, shall find an iron yoke given in its stead.

To take another class of illustrations. There are those in the world who will not have the yoke of Christ in the matter of religion—they prefer another. For instance, there are superstitious persons who are not satisfied with the Bible, they want tradition. They are not content with the teaching of the ancient church of Christ, as we find it in the Acts of the Apostles, but they hanker after those modern upstart churches, that call themselves catholic and apostolic, and amuse themselves by raking up the grotesque fashions of the middle ages. What is the consequence? Do these perverts, who cast off the yoke of the true Christian religion, get an easier yoke? Ask them. Their penances and their mortifications; their fast days and their festivals; their comminations, and their

celebrations—oh, what do they get for them all? Is there one of them who can say he is saved? It is usually one of their cardinal doctrines, that no man can know he is saved, so that the only position they get in this life, is to slave on with a dim hope and to die with a grim rite, and according to one faith to go—even if it were the best man in the church—to go to purgatory. Ah, cheerless prospect! If I were a Roman Catholic, I should turn a heretic, in sheer desperation, because I would rather go to heaven than go to purgatory. I cannot see any advantage that is offered to a man: if he gets all he can get, it is not worth having. Who among you would slave his life away in voluntary humiliations, buoyed up with the cheering faith of purgatorial fires at the goal of your days? Where is the gain of it? And there is no church under heaven, except the true church of Christ, that says to men, “Believe, and live: lay hold on Christ, and you are saved.” We present to you in Christ’s name the greatest boon beneath the sky, and other churches dare not pretend to offer it. They will only tell you that you may get into a state in which you may be saved perhaps, but they do not know quite certainly: it may be you shall fall away and perish after all, but as to an absolute certain salvation in perpetuity, received by an act of faith, they know not what it is. They put upon a yoke of iron grievous to their necks.

And look at self-righteous men and women who try to work their own way to heaven. The Pharisees of old—what a slavery their life was! Any man who is seeking to be saved by his good works makes himself a slave. He must know in his conscience that his good works are imperfect, and therefore he has no title, no sure, clear title to heaven. Only the man who takes Christ to be his wisdom, his righteousness, his justification, his redemption, his all and in all—knows that he is saved; but he that getteth Christ hath all that God asks of him, he hath his sins punished in his Savior, he hath had the law fulfilled by his Savior, and he is thus saved. Those who will not have Christ, put upon their necks a horrible yoke. Oh, beware of superstition; beware of self-righteousness! These are iron yokes indeed.

But what remonstrance shall I address to the unbeliever, who says: “I shall believe nothing: I am a skeptic. I will not bow my neck to revelation”? Well, sir, you will be sure before long to bow your neck to some tremendous absurdity. If you can once get a skeptic to tell you what he does believe, you will generally find that his credulity is on a par with his infidelity. What he relishes he feeds on without question; what he dislikes he rejects, because somebody shrugged his shoulders at it. I have sometimes tried to muddle my way through chapters of German neology. Thank God I have felt this is not the way of life, or else certainly I should never find it, though I had a doctor of divinity on either side to assist me. It is too hard and difficult for any intellects, except they happen to be of the German type, to be able to find a way through its labyrinths, and they miss it I am afraid. The men who do not believe in God, believe that this world was not made at all, but grew. If you were to sow some mustard and cress in your garden, in the form of the initials of your boy, and it came up as A or B, and you took him into the garden and said: “Now, nobody ever sowed that seed; it grew there in that way,” you could not make him believe it. But these philosophical speculators believe that this big world, and sun, and moon, and stars, came forth without a creator. They can believe anything. You cannot convince the simplest boy in the street that somehow or other he was developed from an oyster, or some creature inferior to that, and yet these profound thinkers bow themselves down to such a belief as this. Verily, it is fulfilled in these days as of old, professing themselves to be wise, they become fools. He that will not believe the simple revelation of God, will presently find himself committed to systematic misbeliefs which

distract reason, oppress the heart, and trammel the conscience. He wears a yoke of iron instead of a yoke of wood.

Still giving but a word to each case, we have hearers who, when they listen to the word, are haunted with reproach, but never softened with repentance, because of their sins. They go on hardening their necks and persevering in their iniquities. Impenitent sinner, mark this word. The day will come when inasmuch as thou hast rejected the easy yoke of repentance, thou wilt have to bear the iron yoke of remorse. A man under remorse in this world is a dreadful sight. Horrified with the past and alarmed with the future, yet having knees so stubborn that they will not bow, and blood-shot eyes that will not weep; because, alas! his heart is like to adamant that cannot feel. Of all the pangs convinced and repentant sinners bear, there are none so dreadful as the gloomy torment of remorse. I could unfold scenes that I have witnessed with my own eyes, paint the visage, and repeat the expressions of men dying in fell despair, but I will spare you. God grant that you may never have to endure that foretaste of hell upon earth, for such it is.

And what shall I say to the lover of pleasure? There are those who say, "I shall not bear the yoke of Christ: I shall live in pleasure." Pleasure in some instances means lust, and gaiety means crime. Have you never seen the young man who was respectably brought up in his youth, after leading a life of pleasure shivering at your door in rags? One I knew whom I had often clothed; I supposed that he was dead. But I saw him return loathsome in his filthiness, squalid and tremulous, he came begging yet again, stranger still to virtue and to shame. The poor soul still lives—a life more like death than life—a prodigal whom none can help because he does not return unto himself, nor desire to return unto his Father. London dens have in them many hapless profligates that are terrible warnings that men who seek their own pleasure put upon themselves a yoke of iron.

Oh, what revelations the infirmaries of our hospitals, and the wards of our lunatic asylums might disclose of men who have played the wanton and rioted in sin, and have worse than a yoke of iron upon their necks now! Oh, if there should have come into this house some fallen woman, about whose neck there is that yoke of iron, that she rejected a mother's precepts and disdained a father's counsel—sister, that yoke of iron from thy neck may yet be taken; but beware lest it grow heavier still! There are those who would help thee escape from thy sin in the Christian church. Arise, and flee from this evil that hath made thee captive, for there is hope yet. The Christ of God is willing to receive the foulest of the foul. Persevere not in your criminal course, or that yoke of iron will grow heavier and heavier and heavier, and be riveted to thee, till at last thou shalt perish in it—perish, and that for ever.

All unholy persons who break the law of God, and break away From the gospel's holiness, in the long run get a yoke of iron about their necks. There are those in this place, perhaps, who once used to sit with us at the Lord's table, having made a profession of religion, but they gave way to drink. I know that if they could break away from that habit now they would. If it could be done with a resolution they would do it at once, for somehow they love this house, and slink in still; and when they pass me in the streets, half-ashamed, they still remember him for whom they yet retain a love, and who retains a love for them, and would fain see them back again. But ah! ye drunkards, when ye once fall into this sin, how seldom are ye restored! May God help you! May the eternal God deliver you; for this, this iron yoke, is often hard to break. Resolve now, and pray also in God's name that you may be free. Have done with the accursed thing. God can enable you to come clear of it. May he do so now!

Another form of the same evil not often spoken of, but quite as bad, is that of avarice. We have known those who professed to be Christians, who succeeded in business and from that time they grew greedy. The gold they had stuck to their fingers burned into their flesh, yea, into their very souls and turned their hearts to steel. They have no pity now for the poor, and little care for the church of God. Ah, sirs; what an iron yoke avarice puts upon a man's neck! You see a man grown old still keep scraping, yearning still for more, afraid that he shall lose what he has, trembling in the night lest the burglars should make a forcible entrance, and fearing we know not what. His heart is in his iron safe, and is as hard as the iron of which it is made. O God, forgive! for the covetous man can no more enter heaven than the drunkard. The covetous have no place in the kingdom of God. There is a mark set upon the covetous man. Covetousness is idolatry. It is a heavy burden—the burden of avarice. Happy they who wear the yoke of Christ, for all their givings are a delight, and what they sacrifice is no loss to them, but becomes true storing—the laying up of treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt.

Enough of this. The general principle running through every case is, that he who rejects the yoke of Christ bows his neck to something worse by far. Mark ye! The day cometh—I know not how soon—perhaps as here I stand and rudely talk of these mysterious things. Soon may this hand be stretched? and dumb the mouth that lisps this faltering strain. Ere this service is over, the sight of the Son of Man may be seen in the clouds of heaven, and the trumpet may ring out loud as that of Sinai of old, “Awake, ye dead, and come to judgment. And ye living sinners, come ye also; for the great white throne is set.” And in that day the yoke of Christ will be a chain of gold about each believer's neck. To have served Christ will be our honor and our delight; but ah? the sin that once was pleasure—how it will turn to misery? How the rod of your joy will become a serpent and seek to devour you! How will you flee away from yourselves, and that which ye courted and ye loved, to ask the hills to hide you, and the rocks to engulf you, that you may not see the face of the Redeemer. Come to him now, ere yet that last tremendous day dawns. I lift him up to you now. Whosoever looks to Christ shall live Jesus the Son of God has died, and he that trusts him shall not die. There is life in a look at the crucified One. Pardon and peace come at once to the soul that trusts the Savior. May ye now trust him, ere ye leave this house, and God shall have the glory of it, both now and evermore. Amen.

Faith's Dawn and Its Clouds

A Sermon

(No. 1033)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, January 28th, 1872, by

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At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”—Mark 9:24.

LAST SABBATH MORNING we treated upon the way by which faith comes to the soul. “Faith cometh by hearing.” It is our joyful persuasion that on the past Sabbath faith actually came to many, and they were enabled to rest themselves upon the Lord Jesus Christ to their soul's salvation. Now, every good shepherd knows that he ought to look very carefully after the newborn lambs, and, therefore, it seemed to me that it would be most expedient this morning to search after those who have just believed in Christ, and to endeavor to strengthen and help them against the very serious trials which are incident to their present weak condition. When a man first lays hold upon Jesus he is very apt to be in distress, if his joy be not always at its full height; he is untrained in spiritual conflict, and easily dismayed; the tremor of his former conviction is upon him, and he is prone to relapse into it. The light which he has received fills him with intense delight, but it is not very clear and abiding; he sees men as trees walking, and is ready to conjure up a thousand fears. The weakness of newborn faith, therefore, calls for the compassion of all who love the souls of men. In addition to their own weakness they are liable to special dangers, for at such times Satan is frequently very active. No king will willingly lose his subjects, and the Prince of Darkness labors to bring back those who have just escaped over the confines of his dominion. If souls are never tried afterwards, they are pretty sure to be assailed on their outset from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Bunyan very wisely placed the Slough of Despond at the very commencement of the spiritual journey. The cowardly fiend of hell assails the weak, because he would put an end to them before they get strong enough to do mischief to his kingdom. Like Pharaoh, he would destroy the little ones. He seeks, if possible, to beat out of them every comfortable hope, so that their trembling faith may utterly perish. Perhaps, the text of this morning will be suitable to many here. I trust it may, and that the Spirit of God will give us reflections upon it which shall come home comfortably to all troubled souls. “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

In the text there are three things very clearly. Here is *true faith*; here is *grievous unbelief*; here is *a battle between the two*.

I. Very clearly in the text there is TRUE FAITH. “Lord, I believe,” says the anxious father. When our Lord tells him that, if he can believe, all things are possible to him, he makes no demur, asks for no pause, wishes to hear no more evidence, but cries at once, “Lord, I believe.” Now, observe we have called this faith true faith, and we will prove it to have been so. First, it was faith *in the person of Christ*. It is a great mistake to fancy that to endorse sound doctrine is the same thing as possessing saving faith, for while saving faith accepts the truth of God, it mainly concerns itself with the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and its essence lies in reliance upon Jesus himself. I am not saved because I believe the Scriptures, or because I believe the doctrines of grace,

but I am saved if I believe Christ; or, in other words, trust in him. Jesus is my creed. He is the truth. In the highest sense the Lord Jesus is the Word of God. To know him is life eternal. By his knowledge he justifies many. I do not know that the father in the narrative before us had heard many sermons. I am not sure that he had very clear notions about everything that concerned the Savior's kingdom: it was not essential that he should have in order to obtain a cure for his son. It was a very desirable thing that he should be an instructed disciple, but in the emergency before us the main thing was that he should believe Christ to be both able and willing to cast the devil out of his son. Up to that point he did believe; and, though his faith may have been deficient as well in breadth as in depth, yet it enabled him to realize that the Messiah who stood before him was the Lord, and it led him to place all his reliance upon him. He did not believe in the disciples; he had once trusted them and failed. He did not believe in himself; he knew his own impotence to drive out the evil spirit from his child. He believed no longer in any medicines or men, for doubtless he had spent much on physicians; but he believed the man of the shining countenance who had just come down from the mountain. When he heard him say, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth," he at once said, "Lord, I believe." Beloved hearer, I hope that thou hast come, at some time or other—perhaps it is since last Sabbath day—to put thy trust in Jesus in the same way, believing him to be able and willing to save thee. This is the faith that will effectually save thee. Dost thou rest in him, in him thy God, thy brother, thy Savior; in him as living among the sons of men; in him as bleeding and suffering, as a substitutionary sacrifice, in thy stead; in him as risen from the dead no more to die; in him as sitting at the right hand of the Father, clothed with power to save? Dost thou trust him? If not, whatever thou believest, and however orthodox thy creed, thou art short of eternal life; but, if all thy trust is stayed in him, if thou bringest all thy help from him, if his wounds are thine only shelter, his blood thine only plea, himself thine only confidence, then art thou a saved man, thy transgressions are forgiven thee for his name's sake, thou art accepted in the Beloved. Rejoice with fullness of joy, for thou hast a right so to do, since every gladsome thing is thine.

The faith of this good man was true and saving for another reason. It was personal faith *about the matter in hand*, faith about the case which he was pleading. Have you never found it to be wonderfully easy to believe for other people? I know when I was seeking the Savior, I had no doubt about his receiving any other penitent. I felt certain that if the vilest sinner out of hell had come to him, he was able to save him: and though I had no faith in him on my own account, yet had I met with another distressed soul in a similar condition to myself, I believe I should have encouraged him to put his trust in Jesus, though I was afraid to do so myself. To believe for others is an easy matter, but when it comes to your own case, to believe that sins like yours can be blotted out, that you, who have so badly played the prodigal, may be received by your loving Father, that your spiritual diseases can be cured, and that the devil can be cast out of you;—here is the labor, here is the difficulty. But, beloved, we must believe this or else we have not saving faith. O my Savior, shall I trifle in faith by believing or pretending to believe that thou canst heal a case parallel to mine, and yet cannot heal mine? Shall I draw a line and limit thee, thou Holy One of Israel, and say, "Thou canst save up to me, but not so far as I have gone?" Shall I dream that thy precious blood has some power, but not power enough to blot out my sins? Shall I dare, in the arrogance of my despair, to set a boundary to the merits of thy plea, and to the virtue of thine atoning sacrifice? God forbid. Jesus is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him,—he is able to save *me*. Him that cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out; I come to him, and he will not,

cannot cast me out. Hast thou a personal faith, a faith about thyself, about thine own sins, and thine own condition before God? Dost thou believe that Christ can save *thee*? Sink or swim, dost thou cast thyself upon him, thine own proper self? He, his own self, bore our sins in his own body on the tree; and we, our own selves, must cast ourselves upon him. If we have so done, then we, like the man in the narrative, have the real faith, the faith of God's elect.

Lest any, however, should think this a very small thing, let me go on to show you that this man's faith was real, because it was *faith which triumphed over difficulties*, difficulties which typify our own, and hence it was clearly the work of the Spirit of God, for no other will endure the trial. I shall ask thee, dear hearer, whether faith has triumphed over difficulties in thy case. For observe, his child was grievously tormented, and the malady was of *long standing*. When the Savior said to him, "How long hath this happened unto him?" he said, "Of a child." Must it not have seemed, now that his son had grown older, a very unlikely thing that he should be recovered. We expect our children to outgrow some of their complaints; but here was one who, after many years, was none the better. Years had only increased but not diminished his pains. Yet in the teeth of that the man believed that Christ could cast that long-established demon out of his son. Dear friend, thy case of sin is similar. The sins of thy youth rise up before thee now: are they not in thy bones? The sins of thine early manhood, and the sins of thy riper years, and, mayhap, the sins of thy decaying years; all these come up before thee. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? If so, then he that is accustomed to do evil may learn to do well. Can I, after lying asoak in the scarlet dye till it is ingrained in my very nature,—can I be washed and made whiter than snow? Crimes so long continued, evil habits so deeply rooted, can all these be overcome? O soul, if thou hast true faith, thou wilt say, "Yes," I believe that since Christ is God he can deliver me from all evil, and forgive me all sin. Even if I had lived as long as Methuselah, and had continued all that while in the vilest of transgression, yet Jesus is so mighty to save that he could deliver me in a moment. His word is, "All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Looking to those dear wounds, those fountains of love and blood, I do believe, and will believe, that all my years of sin are gone as in a moment, and like thick clouds before a mighty wind are blown away never to return. Oh, this is faith, poor soul. I pray God enable thee to exercise it.

This man had for a long time considered his son's case to be *hopeless*. Well he might. In addition to the fact that the child was subject to attacks of epilepsy and to extreme fits of fury, he was deaf and dumb, so that no intelligent expression of feeling could come from him: if at any time he felt stronger and better, he could not give his father a word of hope, he could not utter his gratitude for the sympathetic care that watched over him, neither could he hear any word of consolation which his father addressed to him. The ear was closed and the tongue was bound. Painful affliction, exceedingly painful to the parent, and to be continued year after year! At last the father must have felt there was no use in making any further effort. The child must be controlled, but he could not be restored; he was a hopeless maniac. Peradventure, there is one here, this morning, who had grown hopeless of salvation; he has felt as if his case was one out of the catalogue of mercy; he has written bitter things against himself, and supposed that God has sealed those bitter things and made them true; but you see the father in the presence of Christ believed over the head of his despair, "in hope believing against hope," and I pray that you may do the same. In the presence of Christ the man's confidence came back to him. Hast thou, my hearer, a hope that can do the same? I never could have believed it was possible for me to be delivered from my sins till now I see that he who came to save me is my Maker; he who came to redeem me is he who bears the earth's huge pillars

on his shoulders and sustaineth all things by the word of his power. With him nothing can be impossible. I see his pierced hands and feet, and feel that if he stooped to suffer in the sinner's stead, the merit of his sacrifice must be beyond conception great. In Jesus the hopeless one hath hope, he who had despaired else now bids his heart be of good cheer. Oh, that is true faith which will not suffer itself to be any longer the slave of doubt and despondency now that it sees Jesus the Lord drawing near. It is a mighty faith which refuses to sit any longer in the valley of the shadow of death, but arises and shakes itself from the dust, and puts on its beautiful garments.

The father had another trial for his faith in the fact that he had just then *tried the disciples*. He brought his child to Christ, and Christ being absent, he asked the apostles who were in the valley what they could do. They tried their best, but having lost their Master's power they utterly failed; and this must have been a very violent trial to the father's confidence. He knew that on other occasions Christ's power had passed through the apostles, and he had wrought his miracles by them; but here was a complete cessation of their healing energy. If Jesus did not choose to work by them on this occasion, the suggestion would arise in the man's heart, "Perhaps his own power also has become lessened." But he put the thought aside, and believed notwithstanding all. And, O soul, hast thou tried ministers and tried God's people, and hoped to get comfort, and hast thou found none? Hast thou gone to the ordinances and found them like dry wells? Hast thou resorted to the hearing of the gospel and found even it to be barrenness to thy spirit? Yes, yet suffer no shadow of suspicion to cross thy mind as to the Lord's ability or willingness to save thee. Come to the feet of Jesus and still believe in him. Whatever reason may say in thy soul to excite thee to despondency on account of past defeats, believe thou firmly that his power is still invincible; his arm is not shortened that he cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear. It was meet that thou shouldst see the failure of man that thou mightest glorify the grace of God; it was meet that the servants should be unable that the Master's ability might be the more conspicuous. May the Lord help thee to believe that though no man can do thee good, though all the pastors and bishops of the church, and all the martyrs and confessors of past ages, and all the apostles, and all the prophets, are unable to find a balm in Gilead that can meet thy case, yet there is a hand, a pierced hand, which can heal thy wounds and bleed a balm into thy soul which shall effectually restore thee. Yes, true faith believes over even such a discouragement as this.

I would have you notice, also, once more, while we are upon this point, that this father believed in Christ and his power to save, though *the child was at that very moment passing through a horrible stage of pain and misery*. The spirit which possessed this poor child was accustomed to throw him sometimes into the fire, and sometimes into the water. Just our condition; for our spirit has sometimes been thrown into the very fire of presumption, and at another season into the floods of despair. We have alternated between the cold of melancholy and the heat of self-conceit. We have at one time cried, "I love pleasure, and after it I will go;" and at another time we have said, "My soul chooseth strangling rather than life; I would not live always." When Satan is in a man, and he is full of despair, he goes to all extremes, and resteth nowhere, walking like the unclean spirit himself through dry places, seeking rest and finding none. At the moment while the father was speaking, the poor boy was on the ground wallowing in dreadful paroxysms of his disorder, foaming at the mouth, and gnashing with his teeth. Satan had great wrath, because he knew that his time was short. When the Savior spoke, and bade the devil come out of him, the fiercest struggle of all took place; for the unclean spirit rent the child, and the most terrible cries were heard. Still the father said, "Lord, I believe." Now, it may be, dear hearer, you are this morning yourself full of great trouble, vexed

and tormented with innumerable fears of wrath to come; a little hell burns within your soul, anguish unutterable has taken hold upon you, your heart is like a battle field torn by contending hosts, which rush hither and thither, destroying on every side. You are yourself an embodied agony; you are like David when he said, "The pains of hell get hold upon me, I found trouble and sorrow." Can you now believe? Will you now accept the word of the Most High? If thou canst, thou wilt greatly glorify God, and thou wilt bring to thyself much blessedness. Happy is that man who can not only believe when the waves softly ripple to the music of peace, but continues to trust in him who is almighty to save when the hurricane is let loose in its fury, and the Atlantic breakers follow each other, eager to swallow up the barque of the mariner. Surely Christ Jesus is fit to be believed at all times, for, like the pole star, he abides in his faithfulness, let storms rage as they may. He is always divine, always omnipotent to succor, always overflowing with lovingkindness, ready and willing to receive sinners, even the very chief of them. Sorrowful one, do not add to thy sorrows by unbelief, that is a bitterness which it is superfluous to mingle with thy cup. Better far is it to say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him."

There must be power unbounded in him who deigned to die upon the cross. Come ye to Calvary and see! Can you look to that head crowned with thorns, and mark the ruby drops standing on his brow, and yet be doubtful of his power to save? Can you mark that sacred face, more marred than that of any man—marred with our griefs and stained with our sins, can you gaze on it and remain an unbeliever? Survey that precious body tortured in every part for our transgressions, and can you yet distrust him upon whom the chastisement of our peace was laid? Can you behold those hands and feet fastened to the ignominious wood for the guilty? Can you look upon that spectacle of woe, and know that Christ is divine, and yet harbour doubts as to his power to save you? As for myself, I am constrained to cry, "Lord, I believe, I must believe; thou hast thyself compelled my faith." Let all things reel beneath my feet, but the cross of my Lord stands fast. If the Son of God has died for sinners, it is certain that the believing sinner cannot die, but must be saved, since Jesus bled for him. May God grant to every one of us to stand just there where the poor father did as to his faith, and say as he did, "Lord, I believe."

I am forced to leave this head incomplete, for the hour commands me to hasten on. The faith before us was earnest, it led the man to tears of repentance, it taught him to pray, it led him to open confession; in all these points may your faith be of a like character.

II. But, now, we must turn to the second part of the subject, for **HERE IS UNBELIEF**. "Help thou mine unbelief," said he. He had doubted the power of Christ, he had said, "If thou canst do anything for us, have compassion on us and heal us;" but yet he had faith and he had avowed it; he had not kept it secret within himself as though he were ashamed of it; before the scoffing scribes he had confessed, "Lord, I believe." He avowed it, too, with remarkable earnestness, for he said it with tears, as though his heart saturated his confession, running over at his eyes to bedew the words, "Lord, I do believe; do not doubt it, I lie not; I do believe in thee." But, then, he went on to make the confession at the same time there was an unbelief lingering in his soul. "Help thou," said he, "mine unbelief." Albeit that his faith had triumphed over the considerations which I just now mentioned, which appeared enough to damp, if not to quench it, yet these considerations may have had some effect upon his mind: they did not prevent his believing, but they hampered his faith with many questions. Some unbelief lingered, though faith was supreme. Learn from this that a measure of doubt is consistent with saving faith; that weak faith is true faith, and a trembling faith will save

the soul. If thou believest, even though thou be compelled to say, "Help thou mine unbelief," yet that faith makes thee whole, and thou art justified before God.

I thought I would, under this second head, mention some reflections which often cause unbelief to trouble the heart which, nevertheless, has been enabled by the Holy Spirit to believe.

First, there are many true believers who at the first are tried with unbelief, because they have now, more than ever they had before, *a sense of their past sins*. Many a man receives a far deeper sense of sin after he is forgiven than he ever had before. The light of the law is but moonlight compared with the light of the gospel, which is the light of the sun. Love makes sin to become exceeding sinful.

"My Sins, my Sins, my Savior!
How sad on thee they fall;
Seen through thy gentle patience,
I tenfold feel them all.
I know they are forgiven,
But still their pain to me
Is all the grief and anguish
They laid, my Lord, on thee."

The light of the promise gleaming in the soul reveals the infinite abyss of horror which lies in indwelling sin. In the light of God's countenance we discover the filthiness, the abomination, the detestable ingratitude of our past conduct. We loathe ourselves in our own sight. While we bless God that sin is pardoned, we are staggered to think it should have been such sin as it is, and the natural feeling resulting from our discovery is a fear that we cannot be pardoned. We ask ourselves, can it be that such sins are forgiven? Possibly the memory of certain peculiarly heinous sins becomes very vivid to our conscience: we had half forgotten them, but they start up with dreadful energy, and cast suspicions into our mind as to whether forgiveness is possible. Oh, that we could blot out those evil days! We have said, "Cursed be the sun that it rose on such a day as that in which I so defiled myself with iniquity." Thus, under a sense of sin, though there is the belief that we are pardoned, there may also arise the unbelief against which we need the Lord to help us.

Some have been staggered, at times, by *a consciousness of their present feebleness*. "Yes," saith one, "I trust the past is blotted out, but then how can I hope that I am saved? What a poor creature I am. I try to pray, but it is not worth calling prayer. I go up to God's house vowing that I will praise his name, and I get talking on the way and forget all about it, and I am dull all through the service. Then I was tempted yesterday, and I spoke unadvisably with my lips, or I did not defend the cause of my Lord and Master against that skeptic as I ought to have done. Only, just lately, I hoped that I had found peace with God, and yet I am behaving like this. Why I must be a hypocrite, it cannot be that I am a saved soul. Surely if my sins were forgiven me I should act very differently from this." Now that is often the cause of unbelief. The soul still hopes in Jesus and rests in him, and she has nowhere else to go; but for all that the old monster unbelief gives her a desperate twitch, and she trembles while she hopes.

Some others have been made to shiver with unbelief on account of *fears for the future*. "I am afraid I shall not hold on," says one. "Why, to be a Christian you must persevere to the end. With such a heart as mine, how can I hope to be steadfast: and in such a position as mine, surrounded by so many ungodly associates, how can I hope to persevere? I see so-and-so made a profession, and he is gone back; and I know such an one who said he was a Christian, and he is a worse man

than he used to be. Suppose the last end of me should be worse than the first; suppose I should put my hand to the plough and should look back and prove unworthy of the kingdom." Poor heart, it forgets that word, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" and remembers not that other word, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Rightly filled with a holy anxiety to hold on to the end, it gives way to improper unbelief, for it ought to rest confident that Jesus changeth not; and, where he has begun the good work, he will carry it on and perfect it unto the day of Christ.

I have known some, again, whose unbelief has been excited by *a consideration of the freeness and greatness of the mercy bestowed*. I recollect how this staggered me once. I had believed in Jesus, and rejoiced in his salvation, but in meditating upon divine grace I was overcome with fear. What, pardoned, justified, a child of God, an heir of heaven, a joint heir with Christ, one of God's elect, secure of heaven, with a crown waiting for me at the last, and power to win that crown daily secured to me;—why, it seemed altogether too good to be true. Unbelief whispered, "it cannot be." If such great grace had been shown to others I should not have marvelled. If men of great abilities, at high station, and of eminent character, had received such grace, I could have believed it; or even if that holy woman, who had so long been a patient sufferer, had been so blessed, it would have appeared an ordinary circumstance; but for such a sinner as I was to be thus favored appeared to be too strange a miracle of love. I do remember how the very grandeur of the divine mercy threatened to crush me down and bury me under its own mass of goodness. I could believe that the Lord would give me a little mercy, but that he should give me such mercy, such unexpected favor, almost exceeded belief. And yet, what fully is there in such ideas, for were we not told beforehand that "as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts?" Do we not know that we are dealing with a great God, of whom the prophet asks, "Who is a God like unto thee, passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin?" Do we think that God will only give according to our stunted measure? Is God to take man for his model? Remember ye that word, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or even think." Instead of the greatness of the divine mercy staggering us, it ought to console us and assist us to believe, seeing that it is so congruous with his nature. Yet, oftentimes, on this sea of love poor leaky vessels have begun to sink.

I have known, too, not a few, whose unbelief has arisen through *a sacred anxiety to be right*—a most proper anxiety if not pushed beyond its sphere. The idea has been suggested to them: "Suppose I should be after all presumptuous, and should deceive myself, by thinking I am saved, whereas I am not? What if I should film the wound, when it ought to be lanced, before there can be effectual healing." How I wish that all hypocrites would be troubled with this sort of fear. It would be a great mercy for many boastful professors if they had grace enough to doubt. I think Cowper was right when he said—

"He that never doubted of his state,
He may, perhaps he may too late."

But yet, this anxiety may be carried too far, and the soul may slide into despondency through it. I ought to be afraid of presumption, but it cannot be presumptuous to believe God's word. I ought to be afraid of saying, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace;" but if peace comes to me through the word of Christ, I need never be suspicious of it, let it be as profound as it may. I may doubt myself; I may go further, I may despair of self, but I must not doubt the Lord. If he has said, "Trust in me, believe in me, and thou shalt be saved;" if I believe in him, it is no presumption to know

that I am saved. If he has declared that he that believeth in him is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses; if I have believed in him, I am justified from all my sins. There is far more presumption in doubting the Lord than there ever can be in trusting him. Faith is no more than God's due, it ought never to be looked at as too daring. If I believe in Jesus I have no right to say, "I hope I am saved," for that implies a doubt of God's declaration that the believer is saved. I have no right to say, "I sometimes think I am safe." I *am* so undoubtedly if I believe in Jesus. It is no matter of opinion, but a matter of certainty. There is nothing in this world about which a man may be so sure as about his own salvation, because other things come to us by the evidence of our own fallible senses, or by the testimony of men who may be mistaken; but the fact that the believer is saved is sealed to us by the testimony of God himself, who cannot lie. When the Scripture says plainly, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," I, having believed, and having been baptized, ought not to question the divine declaration, but should be as sure that, if I have believed, I am saved, as I am sure that I exist. This assurance is attainable, and should be the common condition of the believer. Yet has it often happened, I say, that an anxiety, which was commendable in its outset, has ended in a censurable unbelief.

Once more, I have known unbelief arise in some souls through *a most proper reverence for Christ, and a high esteem for all that belongs to him*. You remember our text a few Sabbath mornings ago told us of John, who when he saw his Master in all his glory fell at his feet as dead. Ah, when the soul gets near to Jesus it perceives his perfection, and becomes conscious of its own imperfection; it sees his glory, and becomes aware of its own nothingness; it sees his love, and blushes at its own unloveliness; and then it is very, very apt to be tortured with mistrust, though it ought not so to be.

And I have even known when children of God just converted have come into the church, they have had such a high esteem for their brethren and sisters, that they have feared to be numbered with them. When they have heard some earnest brother pray they have said, "Oh, what a prayer, I shall never be like that man;" and, perhaps, they have listened to the preachings of some servant of God and said, "Ah, I cannot come up to that standard; the very existence of such a man as that condemns me." It is beautiful so see the little children loving the elder sons of the family, and admiring what they see of the father in them; but even this holy modesty may be turned into unbelief, though it ought not so to be; for, O child of God, if Christ be so lovely, thou art on the way to be made like him; and if there be anything beautiful in any of his people, that same shall be given unto thee, for they also are as thou art, men of like passions with thyself; and God who has done great things for them will do the like for thee, for he loves thee with the self-same love.

I have thus set before you the unbelief which often will exist side by side with faith.

III. Now, let us notice very briefly THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO.

It is observable that this poor man did not say, "Lord, I believe, but have some doubts," and mention it as if it were a mere matter of common intelligence which did not grieve him. Oh, no; he said it with tears; he made a sorrowful confession of it. It was not the mere statement of a fact, but it was the acknowledgment of a fault. With tears he said, "Lord, I believe," and then acknowledged his unbelief. Learn then, dear hearer, always to look at unbelief in Christ in the light of a fault. Never say, "This is my infirmity," but say, "This is my sin." There has been too much in the Church of God of regarding unbelief as though it were a calamity commanding sympathy, rather than a fault demanding censure as well. I am not to say to myself, "I am unbelieving, and therefore I am to be pitied." No, "I am unbelieving, and therefore I must blame myself for it." Why should I disbelieve my God? How dare I doubt him who cannot lie? How can I mistrust the faithful

promiser who has added to his promise his oath, and over and above his promise and his oath has given his own blood as a seal, that by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for God to die, we might have strong consolation. Chide yourselves, ye doubters. Doubts are among the worst enemies of your souls. Do not entertain them. Do not treat them as though they were poor forlorn travelers to be hospitably entertained, but as rogues and vagabonds to be chased from thy door. Fight them, slay them, and pray God to help thee to kill them, and bury them, and not even to leave a bone or a piece of a bone of a doubt above ground. Doubting and unbelief are to be abhorred, and to be confessed with tears as sins before God. We need pardon for doubting as much as for blasphemy. We ought no more to excuse doubting than lying, for doubting slanders God and makes him a liar.

Then, again, having made a confession of his unbelief as you observe, the father, in the narrative, prayed against it, and an earnest prayer it was. It was, "Help thou mine unbelief." It is very noticeable that he does not say, "Lord, I believe; help thou my child." No, nor does he say, "Lord, I believe; now cast the devil out of my boy:" not at all; he perceives that his own unbelief was harder to overcome than the devil, and that to heal him of his spiritual disease was a more needful work, than even to heal his child of the sad malady under which he labored. This is the point to arrive at, to feel that there is no deficiency in the merit of Christ; no lack of power in his precious blood; no unwillingness in Christ's heart to save me; but all the hindrance lies in my unbelief. There is the point. O God, bring thy power to bear where it is wanted. It is not because the blood will not cleanse me, it is because I will not believe; it is not because Christ's plea is not heard, but because I do not trust that plea. If I am not in the possession of full salvation, it is not because Christ is not mighty to save, but because I do not lean on him fully and entirely. O God, thou seest this is the center of the difficulty, bring, thy power to bear on that difficulty. I ask only this. No more do I cry, "Help me here, or help me there;" but, "Help mine unbelief." That is the Slough of Despond; I carry that in my heart; that is the weak point. "Lord, strengthen me just there." It is well when, in addition to confession, we bring up all the great guns of fervent prayer to bear upon that position which needs to be carried by storm.

And, lastly, this man did well in looking for the help against his unbelief to the right quarter. He did not say, "Lord, I believe; and now I will try to overcome my belief." No; but "*Lord help,*" as if he felt that the Lord alone could do it. No physician can cure unbelief but Christ. He is the physic for it, and he is the physician too. If thou hast any unbelief, take thou the blood of Christ to cure it with. Think of him,—God in the glory of his person, tabernacling among men, working out a perfect righteousness, dying a felon's death upon the cross in the sinner's stead; think of him as rising from the dead, no more to die: think of him as ascending into heaven amidst the shouts of angels: think of him as standing at the right hand of God with the keys of death and hell at his girdle: think of him as always pleading the merit of his blood before the Father's throne; and, as thou considerest concerning him, in the power of the Spirit, thine unbelief will die, for thou wilt say, "Lord, the thought of thee has helped mine unbelief; while I have been studying thee, and feeding my soul on thee, and making thee to be as bread and wine to my soul, my unbelief has gone. I do believe in thee, and I will; for thou hast helped mine unbelief." Go, any of you who are in trouble about this matter, go where you gained your first faith, go there to get more. If you first obtained your faith at the cross foot, go there again to end your unbelief. View the flowing of his soul-redeeming blood, and continue viewing it till thou shalt by divine assurance know; that he has made thy peace with God. God bless thee in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark 9:1-37.

“THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL.” Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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The Only Atoning Priest

A Sermon

(No. 1034)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, February 4th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God: From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”—Hebrews 10:11-14.

WE SHALL HAVE this morning to repeat a truth which has sounded forth from this pulpit many hundreds of times; but we shall offer no apology for our repetitions, seeing that the truth to be preached is one which cannot too often be proclaimed. If you lift up your eyes at night to the stars what a wonderful variety of celestial scenery is there! The astronomer can turn his telescope first to one quarter of the heavens, and then to another, and find an endless change in the sublimities which meet his gaze. Such are the doctrines of the gospel; they are full of variety and beauty, and glory: but yet in the heavens one or two conspicuous constellations are more often regarded by the human eye than all the rest put together. The mariner looks for the Great Bear, the pointers, and the pole star; or, if he should cross the equator, he gazes on the southern cross. Though these stars have been often looked upon, it is never thought to be superfluous that practical men should still observe them. Night by night they have their watchers; for by them ten thousand sails are steered. I should suppose that in those days, now happily past, when slavery reigned in the Southern States of America, the Negro if he desired liberty for his boy would be sure, whatever else of the stars he did not teach him, to point out to him the star of liberty. “Know well, my child, those friendly stars which point to the lone star of liberty. Follow that light till it leads you to a land. There fetters no longer clank on human limbs.” Even so it seems to me that certain doctrines, and especially the doctrines of atonement and justification by faith, are like these guiding stars; and we ought frequently to point them out, make sure that our children know them, and that all who listen to us, whatever else they may be mistaken about, are clear about these, the guides of men to the haven of freedom and eternal rest. I believe if I should preach to you the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ every Sabbath-day and that twice, and nothing else, my ministry would not be unprofitable, perhaps it might be more profitable than it is; so we are coming to the same truth which we handled last Sabbath evening. Many dishes are put upon the table at intervals, but bread and salt are always placed there; and so we will have the atonement again, and again, and again; for this is the bread and salt of the gospel feast.

I purpose, this morning, to handle the text thus. First, we will *read, mark, and learn it*; and then, secondly, we will ask God's grace that we may *inwardly digest it*.

I. Come, then, first of all to THE READING, MARKING, AND LEARNING OF IT; and you will observe that in it there are three things very clearly stated. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus, our great High Priest, is set forth first by way of *contrast*; then its *character* is described; and, then, thirdly, its *consequences* are mentioned. Briefly upon each.

First, it is set forth by way of *contrast*—contrast with that ancient dispensation which was of divine origin, which conveyed much blessing to Israel, and which had the divine approval resting upon it. In that old dispensation, the first point mentioned in the text is, that there were many priests. “For every priest standeth”—implying that there were several. There were many priests at the same time—the sacrifices of the temple were too numerous to have been all of them performed by one man: all the descendants of Aaron were set apart to this work, and even then they required the aid of the Levites in certain inferior duties. And as there were many priests at one time, so there were many in succession. As a priest died, he was succeeded by his sons. By reason of infirmity, they were not able to continue in their office even through the whole of their lifetime; there was a certain period at which they were commanded to surrender their office to younger men. By reason of mortality the priesthood was perpetually changing; one high priest died, and was succeeded by another. Now the reason for the existence of many priests was this, that no one priest had accomplished the work of expiation. The good man has gone to his fathers and offered up the last of the morning lambs—but the morning lambs must still be offered. The high priest is dead, and there shall be no more opportunity for him to enter into that which is within the veil, but there must be a new high priest appointed, for the work is not finished. There were many priests, and as one generation passed away, another inherited the mitre. Now, herein is the glory of Christ that he is but one, and to this our attention is called by the apostle; that whereas there were many priests, and the sacrifices were hereby proved to be incomplete, since others had to take up the work; here is but one priest for ever, and he has finished his work, and therefore sits down at the right hand of God.

In further contrast, we observe that as there were many priests, so there were many sacrifices for sins. The sacrifice was offered once, but sin was not put away, and therefore had to be offered again. The great day of atonement came every year, wherein sin was afresh brought to remembrance. There was a day of atonement last year, but the people are unforgiven, and there must be a day of atonement this year; and when that day is over and the priest has come forth in his holy and beautiful apparel, with the breastplate gleaming in the light of God, Israel may rejoice for awhile, but there is one thought that will sadden her; there must be an atonement day next year, for sin still remaineth upon Israel, notwithstanding all that the house of Aaron can do by all their sacrifices. Yea, and moreover, remembrance of sin was of necessity made every day. There was the lamb for the morning, the innocent victim was slaughtered and burned; but the morning sacrifice did not put away the day’s sin, for as the sun began to descend in the west another victim must be brought, and so on each morning and each night, victim, victim, victim, sacrifice, sacrifice, sacrifice, because the expiation was always incomplete. But our blessed Lord, “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world,” was sacrificed but once, and that one sacrifice hath completed his expiatory work. In very truth his was a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than theirs.

Follow the contrast a little further, and observe the Apostle’s assertion that the repeated sacrifices of the law could never take away sin. Those must have been strangely blind who thought they could. How could the blood of bulls and of goats put away sin? What conceivable connection can there be, except in symbol, between the death pangs of a beast and the sin of a man before God? The principle of substitution was by the legal sacrifices clearly set forth, but that was all; those offerings did not and could not provide the actual substitute. The principle of vicarious sacrifice they plainly unfolded, but they provided no real sin-offering. How could they? Where but in the

Christ of God could a propitiation be found? Where else is there one who could in our nature make recompense to the injured law of God?

You will observe, dear brethren, that the words used in the text are these, "Can never take away sin." The word is, "Can never strip off sin." As if our sins were like filthy garments—the vestures of our disgrace—these could not be taken from us by the daily ministering of priests. There was no power in their sacrifices to remove the polluted coverings. Yet the priests were very diligent, for "every priest standeth" in the posture of activity, and they were persevering too, for "every priest standeth daily." They were obedient too, for they did not offer sacrifices according to their own devices, but, as the text saith, "the same sacrifices"—that is to say, such as were ordained of God. The priests were both diligent, constant, and obedient, and the principle of the truth was in their offerings—viz., the doctrine of substitution; yet sin still remained upon the consciences of the offerers, and none of them were made perfect.

Mark well one inference from this. If the sacrifices which were presented reverently and perpetually, according to God's own command, and were presented by men about whose priesthood there could be no manner of question—for they had received it indisputably of the Lord—if these offerings were of no service to the taking away of sin, it is clear enough that the offerings of so-called priests in these modern times cannot have any efficacy. Here is a priesthood, certainly appointed of God, offering victims ordained by divine order, and yet their service does not put away sin. How much less, then, can it be wise to trust in doubtful priests, who present sacrifices unwarranted by the word of God. Their descent cannot be proved, their title their pretensions of one sect are ridiculed by another, they are all alike deceivers; have done with them and rest alone in Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our profession.

If Jerusalem has no sacrifice in all her flocks, what use can it be to look to Rome? If Aaron's seed cannot put away sin, to what end shall we look to the shavelings of Antichrist?

Following the apostle's words, we come to *the character* of our Lord's sacrifice, and we perceive, in reading, that his priesthood was personal, and entirely within himself. There is but one true atoning priest. The twelfth verse says, "this man." The word "man" is not in the original; it is "this," "this priest," if you will; "this man," if you please; but its vagueness may make us think that the apostle scarcely knew what to say. You see the stars and the moon in their brightness, but suddenly they are all eclipsed and lost in a superior light. What can this glory be which has paled their fires? It is the sun rising in his strength. So, while we are beholding the priesthood of Aaron with all its excellence, it suddenly ceases to shine, because of the glory which excelleth, the radiant presence of one, for whom, like heaven's manna, it is not easy to find one fully descriptive name. Shall we call him "man?" Blessed be his name; he is so, our near kinsman, the "Son of Man." Shall we call him "priest?" He is so. Blessed be his name; he is the true Melchisedec. Shall we call him "God?" Well may we do so, for he counts it not robbery to be equal with God. But this one divinely mysterious person—this unique and solitary high-priest, accomplishes what the many priests of Aaron's race could not compass. They were weak, but he is allsufficient. He has wrought out eternal redemption, and made an end of sin.

Note well, that none stand with him at the altar; none is appointed to aid him, neither before him nor after him is there one to share his office. He is without father, without mother, without predecessor, and without successor. He stands alone and by himself, this glorious one who looked and there was no man, and therefore his own arm brought salvation; he trod the wine-press alone,

and of the people there was none with him. Jesus, the sole sacrificing priest of our profession, has completed what the long line of the Levitical priesthood must have left for ever incomplete.

And we are told further, by the apostle, that as there was but one priest, so there was only one sacrifice. He “offered one sacrifice for sins.” He himself was the sacrifice; his body the altar, himself the priest, himself also the victim. On Calvary’s tree he presented himself a substitute for human guilt, and there he bore the crushing weight of Jehovah’s wrath in his own body, on the behalf of all his people. On him their sins were laid, and he was numbered with the transgressors; and there he, in their stead, suffered what was due to the righteousness of God, and made atonement to divine justice for the sins of his people. This was done, not by many offerings, but by one sacrifice, and that one alone. Jesus offered no other sacrifice: he had never made one before, nor since, nor will he present another sacrifice in the future. His sin offering is one.

The text adds further that, as there was but one sacrifice, so it was but once offered for ever, or, as puts it, “Once for all.” “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” There is in the Scriptures no such idea as that of Christ perpetually offering himself; it is a childish invention of superstition. We are expressly told that he offered himself “*once*.” Under the law the lamb was offered many times, the same sacrifices were repeated; but our Lord exclaimed, “It is finished,” and concluded all his sacrificing works. He “offered one sacrifice for sins for ever.” I do not know how your Bibles happen to be marked as to the comma in the passage; mine, now before me, reads thus:—“After he had offered one sacrifice for sin for ever sat down;” but that which I use at home is marked in the other way—“After he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down.” We do not quite know where the comma should be; some of the best scholars maintain that it should be joined to the preceding words, others that it belongs to the succeeding. It does not involve any point of doctrine; and it may be read whichever way you please, without error. I think, however, the preponderating testimony is in favor of its being read, “he offered one sacrifice for sins for ever;” at any rate those words express a great and precious truth. Look back as far as you can, there was no sacrifice for sins, except the “lamb slain from before the foundation of the world;” look on as far as you will, till this present dispensation shall have completed its circle, and men shall have passed the judgment-seat, and you shall find no atonement for sin except this one—it stands alone, shining as a lone star, or a solitary rock in the midst of a raging sea. The propitiation which God has set forth was and ever must be one. The Lord Jesus offered himself once, once only, once only for ever: there is no other atoning priest, no other sacrifice, and there is no repetition of that one sacrifice.

Now we go on to notice *the results* of Christ’s one offering, which are, in the text, described as threefold—towards *himself*, his *enemies*, and his *people*.

Towards *himself*: After he had offered one sacrifice for sins he for ever sat down at the right hand of God. Every priest, under the old dispensation, stood; but this man sat down, and the posture is very instructive. The typical priests stood because there was work to do; still must they present their sacrifices; but our Lord sits down because there is no more sacrificial work to do; atonement is complete, he has finished his task. There were no seats in the tabernacle. Observe the Levitical descriptions and you will see that there were no resting-places for the priests in the holy place. Not only were none allowed to sit, but there was nothing whatever to sit upon. According to the rabbis, the king might sit in the holy places, and, perhaps, David did sit there; if so, he was a striking type of Christ sitting as king. A priest never sat in the tabernacle, he was under a dispensation which

did not afford rest, and was not intended to give it, a covenant of works which gives the soul no repose. Jesus sits in the holy of holies, and herein we see that his work is finished.

There is more teaching in the passage. He “sat down;” this shows that he took possession of the holy place. Under the law, when the priest had done his work, what did he do? He went home. Neither the temple nor the tabernacle was his home. If you had asked a priest, “Where dwellest thou?” he would have said, “amongst the tribe of Levi yonder I have my abode.” But this man, when he had finished his work, sat down in the holy place, because he was at home, not a servant only but a son, yea, and Lord of the whole house; and, therefore, he took his own seat therein by right. It is a joyful truth that he did this representatively, to show us that while the law gave no permanent possession, and could not establish the seed of Israel in possession of sacred privileges, the gospel gives us an abiding place amongst the children of God, who dwell in his house for ever.

The apostle tells us where this seat of Christ was. He says, he “sat down at the right hand of God.” This indicates the highest glory possible; our poet calls it

“The highest place that heaven affords.”

There was no nobler position, or Jesus should have had it. Note the remark of this same apostle in the first chapter of this epistle: “Unto which of the angels said he at any time, sit thou at my right hand?” Angels do not sit at the right hand of God; they are constantly in the place of service, and therefore they stand ready to fly on their Master’s commands; but Jesus sits in the highest seat as Lord over his own house, clothed with honor and dignity, enthroned in the place of favor at the right hand of God. Sitting there he is to be viewed as clothed with everlasting power, “able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him.” “Exalted to be a Prince and a Savior to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins;” no more the “despised and rejected, the Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” no more in weakness and dishonor taken out to die; he sits as a king upon his throne, distributing royal bounties, coequal with Jehovah himself. As King of kings, Jesus Christ is exalted at the right hand of the Father. So much with regard to the result of the Redeemer’s passion in reference to himself.

Now, observe carefully the result of his offering with regard to *his enemies*. He sits there “expecting till they be made his footstool.” They are crushed already; sin which is the sting of death has been removed, and the law which was the strength of sin has been satisfied. Sin being put away by Christ’s death, he has effectually broken the jawteeth of all his enemies. When Jesus Christ offered himself unto God he fulfilled that ancient promise, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” Christ has set his foot upon the old dragon’s head, and crushed out his power. Still, however, a feeble fight is kept up; feeble, I say, for so it is to Christ, though to us it seems vigorous. Sin and Satan within us, and all Christ’s enemies without us, including death itself, are vainly raging against the Christ of God, for every day they are being put beneath his feet; every day as the battle rages the victory turns unto the enthroned Christ. In us I trust sin has been put beneath Christ’s feet; in thousands of others it shall yet be so. Jesus upon the throne expects the growth of that victory till all his enemies shall be utterly and ignominiously beaten. “O long expected day, begin!” Father, fulfill thy Son’s expectations, for thy saints expect it in him. Let the time come when every enemy shall be beneath his feet.

We will not tarry, however, on that, but close this exposition of the words of the text by noticing the effect of Christ’s death upon *his own people*. We are informed that he hath “perfected” them. What a glorious word! Those for whom Christ has died were perfected by his death. It does not mean that he made them perfect in characters so that they are no longer sinners, but that he made

those for whom he died perfectly free from the guilt of sin. When Christ took their sins upon himself, sin remained no longer upon them, for it could not be in two places at one and the same time; if it was on Christ it was not upon them; they were acquitted at the bar of God when Christ was, on their behalf, “numbered with the transgressors.” When Jesus suffered the penalty due to his people’s sins to the last jot and tittle, then their sins ceased to be, and the covenant was fulfilled: “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more for ever.” There was a clean sweep made of sin: “He hath finished transgression, and made an end of sin;” and that for all his people. They want no other washing, no further purging, as far as pardon of sin and acceptance with God in the matter of justification are concerned, for they are all perfected by his sacrifice.

His people are described in the text as “them that are sanctified,” and you must beware of misunderstanding that word as though it meant those who are made perfectly holy in character. The word implies an inward work of grace, but it means a great deal more. The passage should be read “He hath perfected for ever them that are being sanctified,” for it is in the present in the Greek. The text is not to be made to say that those who are perfectly sanctified are perfected, that would be a common-place, self-evident truth; but the great high priest perfected for ever those who are being sanctified. Now, sanctification means, primarily, the setting apart of a people by God to be holy to himself. Election is sanctification virtually; all God’s people were sanctified—set apart and made holy to the Lord—in the eternal purpose and sovereign decree or ever the earth was. Christ has by his death perfected all who were sanctified or set apart in election. This purpose of sanctification is carried out further when those set apart are called out by grace. When effectual grace separates men from the world by conversion and regeneration, then they become, in another sense, the sanctified; they are set apart even as Christ set apart himself, dedicated to God’s service, and separated from sinners. As the work which began at regeneration is continued and carried on in them, they are in another aspect sanctified; they are realising in themselves that sanctification or dedication to God, which was theirs from before the foundation of the world. The text relates not only to those in heaven who are perfectly sanctified, but it relates to all who were set apart in the purposes of grace, that as far as their pardon and justification are concerned, Christ perfected them for ever when he offered up himself without spot unto God.

II. We have thus studied the interpretation of the words, reading, marking, and learning them. Now, I ask your earnest attention while we try to DIGEST THESE TRUTHS. It is in the digestion that the real nutriment shall come to our hearts.

All ye who desire eternal life lend me your ears, for this matter concerns you—observe that the whole business of this passage concerns sinners. The verse speaks about the Jewish priests who offered sacrifices for sins, and then it further speaks concerning Christ Jesus who has put away sin. O ye guilty, the gospel is meant for you. If there be any of you who are innocent and pure, and without spot, for you I have no words of consolation; but oh, ye sinners, the gospel is for you, for you the priesthood and the substitution of Jesus, for you his death on earth, for you his reign and power in heaven. This fact ought to encourage every trembling conscience. Are any of you saying, “Ah, I shall never be saved, I am so guilty?” Believe not that lie of Satan. “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” The gospel has for its special aim and intent the putting away of sin, and therefore it is suitable to your case.

Hearken then further to me. See in the text the position out of which you should labor to escape. It is the position of those who stand daily ministering and daily offering sacrifices which can never put away sin. You are seeking mercy and I know what you are doing; you are going about to

establish a righteousness of your own. You thought, "I will pray very regularly,"—you have done so for months, but prayers can never put away sin. What is there in prayer itself that can have merit in it to make atonement for sin? You have read the Scriptures regularly, for which I am most glad, but this you always ought to have done, and if you now do it most commendably, in what way will that put away sin? "Ah, but I have been a regular attendant at a place of worship." It is well you should, for "faith cometh by hearing;" but I see no connection between the mere fact of your sitting in a place of worship and the putting away of sin; you know it has not eased your conscience yet, but has even increased your sense of sin. Perhaps some of you have for years been trying to save yourselves, and you have got no further; you feel as if you were further off than ever you were. "Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which profiteth not?" Why stand you daily at the altar offering that which can never put away sin? It would be infinitely wiser to flee to the sacrifice which can atone.

Now, follow on the text, and, oh, may it come into your very soul, for its practical teaching is that the one sole object of faith for the pardon of sin, is the man, the priest, Christ Jesus. "This man," says the Apostle, "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever." If thou wouldst have peace of heart, thou must get it only from this one glorious person, the Christ of God. I tell thee solemnly, thou wilt damn thyself by thy prayers, and thy tears, and thy repentings, and thy church goings, and thy chapel goings, as easily as by blasphemy and fornication, if thou trustest in them; for if thou makest a Savior and an idol of thy best works, they are accursed. Though thine idol be of purest gold, it is as much an abomination unto the living God as if thou hadst made it of filth. There must be no looking anywhere but to Jesus, not in any measure or degree. He who looks partly to Jesus, and partly to himself, looks not to Christ at all. If a man shall put one foot upon the land and the other on the sea—the foot that is on the land will not avail him, he must certainly fall, because his other standing place is weak. If a chain be made strong enough to bear huge weights in every portion except one link, yet as we all know its strength is not to be measured by the stronger portions, but by the weak link; and if you have one weak link in your hope, if you are resting in anything you are or hope to be, or can do or feel, that one weak link will snap and ruin you for ever.

"None but Jesus, none but Jesus,
Can do helpless sinners good."

From top to bottom, from foundation to pinnacle, our hopes must be in the work of Jesus, and we must trust in him alone, or else we shall build in vain. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid." Other hope beneath the skies there is none. O soul, learn the uselessness of looking to anything but Christ; but, be thou assured of this, if thou wilt look to him, and to him alone, he will put away thy sin, nay, he has done it by the sacrifice of himself.

Furthermore, here is another thought—I would that you would drink it in as Gideon's fleece drank in the dew—it is this: the efficacy of the atonement of Christ for sin is as great to-day as ever it was. He "offered one sacrifice for sins," for what? for a thousand years? No! But the text says "*for ever!*"—for ever!

"The dying thief rejoiced to see,
That fountain in his day,
Anal there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.
Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood,
Shall never loose its power;

Till all the ransomed church of God,
Be saved to sin no more.”

“One sacrifice for sins for ever.” The devil tells you it is of no use for you to believe in Christ, there is not efficacy for you, you have sinned away your day of grace; tell him he is a liar, Christ has offered one sacrifice for sins *for ever*; and while a man lives beneath the covenant of mercy, where the gospel is sounded in his ears, there is efficacy in the atonement for ever. The atoning sacrifice has no limit in its merit, the salvation of some has not drained it of even the smallest degree of its power. As the sunlight, though it be seen by millions of eyes, is as bright as ever it was, so is it with Jesus. Perhaps the Sun’s fires may grow dull, and become dimmed in the course of ages, but it is certain that the eternal fount of mercy, the Sun of Righteousness, will never fail. He will continue to flood his people with the golden sunlight of his forgiving grace. He has made one sacrifice for sins for ever. I will come to him then. He is able to save me—he is able to save me even though I were a sinner of seventy years of age. I will come to him, I will rest in him—in him alone. Oh, believe me, if you do this you have eternal life abiding in you.

A further thought. The text leads me to say to you that it is utterly hopeless, if you desire salvation, for you to expect Jesus Christ to do anything more than he has already done. Many are waiting for a something, and they scarce know what. Now Jesus, when he died and went to heaven, perfected for ever all his work; and if you do not believe to-day in what he has done, there will be no surer grounds for belief to-morrow. If faith be difficult to me to-day, I must not expect that I shall have any more evidence, or that there will be any more truth for me to rely upon, if I live another twenty years. God has set forth Christ for you as guilty sinners to rest on; and if that is not enough for you, what more would you have? Christ has offered himself, and died and suffered in our stead, and gone into his glory; and, if you cannot depend upon him, what more would you have him do? Shall he come and die again? You have rejected him once; you would reject him though he died twice. But that cannot be done; there is enough in his sacrifice to answer all the purposes of mercy, and if you sin wilfully by rejecting him, “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation.” This is the point; all the atonement that could save me in ten years time is here now; all that I can ever rely upon if I postpone all thoughts of faith, all is here already. There will be no improvement in Christ. He has perfected his work. Oh, poor troubled soul, rest thou on him now. While I put these words, as it were, into your mouths, how I wish I could put them into your hearts! How foolish you are who are looking for signs and wonders or else you will not believe. May the Spirit of God show you that Jesus is now able and willing to save you, and that all you have to do is to take what he has done, and simply trust him, and you shall be saved this morning, completely saved, perfected through his one sacrifice. There remaineth no more to be done by the Redeemer. He sits down, and he will not rise for any further sacrifice. He has finished his atonement and perfected those he means to save; and if you believe not in him, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.

Yet, again, I want you, dearly beloved brethren, to gather from the text before us the true posture of every believer in Christ. “This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down.” If I am a believer that is my posture, if you are a believer that is yours,—you are to sit down. Under the law there was no sitting down. Even at the Passover the Israelites stood with their loins girt and their staves in their hands. There was no sitting down. It is only at the gospel supper that our proper posture is that of recumbency, reclining, or sitting down, because our warfare is accomplished. They that have believed have entered into rest. Jesus hath given us rest, we are not traversing the

wilderness, we are come unto mount Zion, unto the glorious assembly of the church of the first born whose names are written in heaven. Our justifying work is finished, finished by Christ. Sit down Christian, sit down and rest in thy Lord. There is much to be done as to fighting your sins, much to be done for Christ in the world, but so far as justification and forgiveness are concerned, rest is your proper place, peace in Christ Jesus your lawful portion.

Your position is also to be one of expectancy. Christ, when he sits down, expects his enemies to be made his footstool. Expect, O believer, the time when you shall be rid of all sin. Fight manfully against your inbred corruptions, struggle against sin as you see it in the outside world, and expect every day with holy faith that you shall get the victory. As Christ sits there expecting, he hath raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in himself; and we will sit there and look down upon this erring world, and expect the time when all evil shall be beneath our feet as it is beneath his.

Meanwhile, our posture is, once again, that of those who are perfected in Christ Jesus. How I wish that we could all realize this, and live in the power of it. If I am, indeed, a believer, I have nothing whatever to do in order to put away the guilt of my sins. I have much to do by faith to overcome the power of sin in me, and to seek after holiness; but so far as the guilt of transgression is concerned, Jesus Christ's one offering hath perfected all his people, there is not a sin remaining upon them, nor a trace of sin; they are "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;" before God's sight they are perfectly lovely; they are not somewhat beautiful, but they are altogether lovely in Christ; they are accepted not in part but altogether, "accepted in the Beloved." When I get upon this strain, words are quite inadequate to express the emotions of my soul. This truth might well make David dance before the ark of the Lord—to think that though black in ourselves, we are comely in Christ; though like the smokedried tents of Kedar we are foul, yet clothed in our Savior's beauties we are like the curtains of Solomon for glory. The glory of the text is that we are perfected *for ever*; not for to-morrow, and then suffered to fall from grace; not for the next twenty years, and then turned out of the covenant; but he hath perfected "*for ever*" those that are set apart. It is a work which abides like the worker himself, and while Christ sits on the throne his people cannot die; while his work remains for ever perfect, they are also for ever perfect in him.

Now, brethren, another practical point is this, that it becomes us to make the evidence of our interest in this gracious work more and more clear to others. The text says, "Hath perfected them that are sanctified," or set apart as holy unto God. We must be more and more set apart every day, we must labor after holiness; this must be our object, not in order that we may be saved, for we are saved already, but in order that by others it may be clearly seen that we are saved, and they seeing our good works may glorify our Father which is in heaven. If I have in myself no measure of holiness, how shall I be recognized as belonging to Christ? Is it not foolish presumption to say "I am perfect in Christ," if still my soul lives in sin, and loves it? May the Lord, by his Spirit, lead us in the ways of holiness, and then, walking in the light as he is in the light, we shall have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son shall cleanse us from all sin.

Finally, brethren, it remains for us to recollect that Christ will be one of two things to every one of us here present: either we shall see him at the right hand of God and rejoice that he is lifted so high, or else we shall behold him there with horror as we writhe beneath his feet. For his people, perfected for ever, it is their heaven to think that Christ is highly exalted. Oh, would we not exalt him if we could! Is there anything in this world that we would keep back from him? Is there any suffering from which we would shrink if we could lift him high? I hope I can speak for all of God's

people and say, the dearest object of our life is to honor him. Oh for high thrones for Jesus and bright crowns for Jesus!

“Let him be crowned with majesty
Who bowed his head to death!
And be his honors sounded high
By all things that have breath!”

Let him have the highest place that heaven can yield him.

But, if we will not believe his Godhead, if we will not trust him as the Mediator, if we have no part in his sacrifice, if we oppose his gospel, if we reject his claims to our obedience, there is another position we shall have to take up, and that is, beneath his feet. Those feet will be heavy indeed! They were pierced once; but if ever those pierced feet come upon you, they will crush you to powder. Nothing is so terrible as love when once it is turned to anger. Oil is soft, but how it burns. In flame love into jealousy and it is cruel as the grave. Beware, ye that reject the Savior, for in the day when he cometh he will smite you with a rod of iron, and even his face, which is full of tenderness to-day, shall then be full of terror, and this shall be your cry, “Hide us ye mountains, ye rocks conceal us, from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” What a wonderful mixture of words, “The wrath of the Lamb.” It is one of the most dreadful expressions in Scripture. The Lord grant we may never feel its terrible meaning. May his blood cleanse us. Amen.

The Real Presence, the Great Want of the Church

A Sermon

(No. 1035)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, February 11th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.”—Song of Solomon 3:4-5.

IS IT NECESSARY to say that the Lord Jesus Christ is no longer corporeally present in his church? It ought not to be needful to assert so evident a truth; and yet it is important to do so, since there are some who teach that in what they are pleased to call “the Holy Sacrament.” Christ is actually present in his flesh and blood. Such persons unwittingly deny the real humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, for if he has indeed assumed our humanity, and is in all points made like unto his brethren, his flesh and blood cannot be in two places at one time. Our bodily humanity could not be present in more places than one at one time, and if Christ's humanity be like ours it cannot be in an unlimited number of places at once; in fact, it can only be in one place. Where that place is we know from Scripture, for he sitteth at the right hand of God, expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. Unless you are to suppose that the humanity of Christ is something altogether different from ours, it cannot be here and there and everywhere; but to suppose that it is a different humanity from ours is to deny that he is Incarnate in our nature. Our Lord Jesus told his disciples that he would go away, and he has gone away. He ascended into heaven, bearing humanity up to the throne of God. “He is not here, for he is risen.”

Remember, also, that because the Lord Jesus is absent corporeally, the Holy Spirit the Comforter is with us, for he especially said, “If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” Those who believe that Christ's flesh and blood are or can be present on earth, deny the presence of the Holy Spirit; for the Scripture is plain enough upon that point—that the bodily absence of our Lord is the cause and condition of the presence of the Comforter. If Jesus dwells still corporeally upon the earth, then the Spirit of God is not upon the earth. Many other most serious errors follow from the supposition that the humanity of the Redeemer is present anywhere except at the right hand of God, even the Father; yet it is an imagination which lies at the basis of the sacramental system, and thousands are greatly enamoured of it.

No word of mine this morning is intended to have the remotest connection with any sacramental presence of the corporeal nature of our Lord; our mind has a far other matter before it. Let us, therefore, having guarded ourselves so as not to be misunderstood, proceed to speak of another presence of our blessed Lord. The fact is, that Christ Jesus, the Lord, is present in his church by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is this day the representative of Christ in the midst of the church, and it is in the power and the energy of the Holy Ghost that Christ is with us always, and will be even to the end of the world. As God, Jesus is everywhere; as man, he is only in heaven; as God and man in one person, Mediator and Head of the Church, he is present with us by the Holy Ghost,

the Comforter, whom the Father has sent in his name. It is by the working of the Spirit of God that Christ's presence in the church is manifested; and we are to expect no other presence than that: we have the spiritual divine presence of the second person of the blessed Trinity, and the presence of Christ Jesus also in the power of his representative on earth, the Holy Ghost. This presence, not a bodily but a spiritual presence, is the glory of the church of God. When she is without it she is shorn of her strength; when she possesses it all good things ensue. Brethren, if a church be without the Spirit of God in it, it may have a name to live, but it is dead, and, you know, that after death there follows corruption, corruption which breeds foulness and disease. Hence, those churches which have turned aside unto error, have not only lost all power to do good, but they have become obnoxious and the causes of great evil in the midst of the world. If any professing church abides not in Christ it is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and while it is decaying, it is injurious, and there is need for the world's welfare that it be utterly destroyed. We must have Christ in the church, or the body which was meant to be the medium of the greatest good becomes the source of the grossest evil. Let the Spirit of God be in the church, then there is power given to all her ministries; whether they be ministries of public testimony in the preaching of the word, or ministries of holy love amongst the brethren, or ministries of individual earnestness to the outside world, they will all be clothed with energy, in the fullness of the power of the Lord Jesus. Then her ordinances become truly profitable, then baptism is burial with the Lord, and the sacred supper is a feast of love; then the communion of the brethren in their solemn prayer and praise becomes deep and joyful, and their whole life and walk are bright with the glow of heaven. In the presence of the Lord the graces of the saints are developed; the church grows rich in all spiritual gifts; her warfare becomes victorious, and her continual worship sweet as the incense of the golden censor. What the moon is to the night, or the sun to the day, or the Nile to Egypt, or the dew to the tender herb, or the soul to the human frame, that is the presence of Jesus to his church. Give us the Spirit of God and we will ask no endowments from the State, nor sigh for the prestige of princely patronage. Endow us, O God, with the Holy Ghost, and we have all we need. The poverty of the members, their want of learning, their want of rank, all these shall be as nothing. The Holy Ghost can make amends for all deficiencies, and clothe his poor and obscure people with an energy at which the world shall tremble. This made the apostolic church mighty, she had the Holy Ghost outpoured upon her: the lack of this made the medieval ages dark as midnight, for men contended about words and letters, but forgot the Spirit: the return of this inestimable blessing has given us every true revival: the working of the eternal Spirit, the presence of Christ in the midst of his people is the Sun of Righteousness arising with healing beneath his wings. This has been our confidence, as a church, these eighteen years, and if we are yet to see greater and better things, we must still rely on this same strength, the divine presence of Jesus Christ by the wonder-working Spirit. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

It becomes then the great desire of every earnest Christian who loves the church of God, that Christ should be in the church, and that by his Spirit he should work wonders there, and I have selected this text with the view of stirring up the spiritual-minded among you to seek so great a blessing. Let me endeavor, in opening up this blessed text, to show the means and the course of action necessary if we would see the church revived by her Lord's presence.

I. And first, we learn from the text that before ever we can bring the Well-Beloved into our mother's house, the church, **WE MUST FIND HIM PERSONALLY FOR OURSELVES.**

We begin with that. "It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth." How can we bring into the chamber of the church him whom we have not yet met with ourselves? How can we communicate grace to others instrumentally, unless, first of all, we have received it into our own hearts? I am not now about to speak of the need of conversion; we all know that no spiritual act can be performed until we become spiritual men; but I am now speaking about something higher than bare conversion. If we would bless the church, we must ourselves occupy a higher platform than that of being merely saved; we must be believers, walking in fellowship with Christ, and having, in that respect, found him whom our soul loveth. There are many believers who have only just enough grace to enable us to hope that they are alive; they have no strength with which to work for God's cause, they have not an arm to lend to the help of others, neither can they even see that which would comfort others, for they are blind, and cannot see afar off, they want all their sight, and all their strength, for themselves. Those who are to bring the Well-Beloved into our mother's house, must be of another kind. They must get beyond the feebleness which is full of doubting and fearing, into the assurance which grasps the Savior, and the fellowship which lives in daily communion with him. I know there are some such in this church, and I would single them out, and speak to them thus: "Brother, if thou wouldst bring Christ into the church which thou lovest, then, first of all, *thine inmost soul must so love Christ, that thou canst not live without his company.* This must be thy cry: "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" and this must be the goal of thine aspirations: "I have found him whom my soul loveth." It must not be talk, it must be soul-love; it must not be a profession of affection for Jesus, but the inmost bowels of our being must be moved by his name. The words are very strong, "him whom my soul loveth;" as if though the spouse might love the daughters of Jerusalem, might love the watchmen of the city, might love them all in their place, yet her soul's love, the essence of her love, her deepest, fondest, purest, and most real love, was all for him. Are there not such hearts here, virgin minds in whom Christ is first, last, midst, chief, and all in all? Oh, if there be, ye are the men, ye are the women, who, finding your Beloved, can bring him into the church. May God multiply your number, and may each of you have compassion on the languishing church of this chill age, and labor to restore to her the glory which has faded from her brow. Pray ye for Laodicea in her lukewarmness, and Sardis in her spiritual death; but you will only prevail in proportion as your inmost soul loves the Redeemer and abides in his love.

These ardent lovers of Jesus *must diligently seek him.* The chapter before us says that the spouse sought him, sought him on her bed, sought him in the streets, sought him in the broadways, sought him at last at the lips of the watchmen, sought him everywhere where he was likely to be found. We *must* enjoy the perpetual fellowship of Jesus. We who love him in our souls cannot rest until we know that he is with us. I fear that with some of us our sins have grieved him, and he has betaken himself to the far-off "mountains of myrrh and hills of frankincense." It may be our lax living, our neglect of prayer, or some other fault, has taken from us the light of his countenance. Let us resolve this morning that there shall be no rest unto our souls until once again he has returned unto us in the fullness of his manifested love, to abide in our hearts. Seek him, brother, seek him, sister. He is not far from any of you, but do seek him with an intense longing for him, for until thou dost thou art not the man to bring him into the assembly of the brethren. Labor to bring Jesus into the chambers of the church, but first be sure that thou hast him thyself, or thy zeal will be hypocrisy.

In seeking our Lord we must *use all ministries.* The spouse enquired of the watchmen. We are not to despise God's servants, for he is usually pleased to bless us through them, and it would be

ungrateful both to him and to them to pass them by as useless. But, while we use the ministries, *we must go beyond them*. The spouse did not find her Lord through the watchmen; but she says, “it was but a little that I passed from them, that I found him whom my soul loveth.” I charge you, my dear hearers, never rest content with listening to me. Do not imagine that hearing the truth preached simply and earnestly will of itself be a blessing to your souls. Far, far beyond the servant, pass to the Master. Be this the longing of each heart, each Sabbath-day, “Lord, give me fellowship with thyself.” True, we are led to see Jesus sometimes, and I hope often, through listening to the truth proclaimed, but, O Lord, it is no outer court worship that will satisfy us we want to come into the holy of holies and stand at the mercy-seat itself. It is no seeing thee afar off and hearing about thee that will content our spirits, we must draw nigh unto thee, and behold thee as the world cannot. Like Simeon, we must take thee into our arms or we cannot say that we have seen God’s salvation: like John, we must lean our heads upon the bosom or we cannot rest. Thine apostles are well enough, thy prophets well enough, thy evangelists well enough; but oh, we feel constrained to go beyond them all, for we thirst after fellowship with thee, our Savior. Those who feel thus will bless the church, but only such.

Note, that we must *search to the very utmost* till we find our Beloved. The Christian must leave no stone unturned till he gets back his fellowship with Christ. If any sin obstructs the way, it must be rigorously given up; if there be any neglected duty, it must be earnestly discharged; if there be any higher walk of grace, which is necessary to continuous fellowship, we must ascend it, fearing no hill of difficulty. We must not say, “there is a lion in the way”—if there be lions we must slay them; if the way be rough we must tread it; we must go on hands and knees if we cannot run; but we must reach to fellowship with Jesus; we must have Christ or pine till we do. Sacrifices we must make and penalties we must endure, but to Christ we must come, for we are feeble when we are absent from him, and quite incapable of rendering any great service to the church, till once for all we can say, “I found him, I held him, and I would not let him go.” O dear brethren and sisters, I know there are some of you who can enter into what I mean; but I would to God there were many more to whom the first thought of life was Christ Jesus. Oh, for more Enochs, men who walk with God, whose habitual spirit is that of close communion with Jesus, meditating upon him, yea, more than that, sympathizing with him, drinking into his spirit, changed into his likeness, living over again his life, because he is in them the monarch of their souls. O that we had a chosen band of elect spirits of this race, for surely the whole church would be revived through their influence; God, even our own God, would bless us; and we should see bright, halcyon days dawning for the bride of Christ. Here, then, is the first point: we must find the Lord Jesus for ourselves, or we cannot bring him into our mother’s house.

I would beg every believer here to ask himself a few questions, such as these: “Am I walking in constant fellowship with Christ? If I am not, why not? Is it that I am worldly? Is it that I am proud, or indolent, or envious, or careless? Am I indulging myself in any sin? Is there anything whatever that divides me from Christ my Lord?” Let this be the resolution of every one of the Lord’s people: “From this time forth I will seek unto the Lord my Savior, and I will not be satisfied until I can say, ‘I am coming up from the wilderness leaning upon the Beloved.’”

II. This brings us to the second point of the subject. If we would be a blessing to the church, and have already found Christ, **WE MUST TAKE CARE TO RETAIN HIM**. “I found him whom my soul loveth; I held him, and I would not let him go.” From this I learn that in order to be of great use to the church of God, it is needful for those who commune with Christ to continue in that

communion. How comparatively easy it is to climb to the top of Pisgah! It needs but a little effort; many bold and gracious spirits are fully equal to it. But to keep there, to abide in that mountain, this is the difficulty. To come to Christ, and to sit down at his feet, is a simple thing enough for believers, and many of us have attained to it; but to sit day after day at the Master's feet is quite another matter. Oh, could I always be as I sometimes am! Could I not only rise above but remain there! But, alas, our spiritual nature is too much like this weather—it is balmy to-day; one would think that spring or summer had come; but, perhaps, to-night we may be chilled with frost and tomorrow drenched with rain. Ah, how fickle are our spirits. We are walking with Christ, rejoicing, leaping for joy; and anon the cold frosts of worldliness come over us, and we depart from him. Ye will never be strong to impart great blessings to others till you cease to wander, and learn the meaning of that text: "Abide in me." Note well, it is not "Look at me;" nor "Come near to me, and then go away from me," but "Abide in me." The branch does not leave the vine and then leap back again to the stock; you never saw a living branch of the vine roaming into the corners of the vineyard, or rambling over the wall; it abides in connection with the parent stem at all times, and even so should it be with the Christian.

Mark, that according to the text, it is very apparent that *Jesus will go away if he is not held*. "I held him and I would not let him go;" as if he would have gone if he had not been firmly retained. When he met with Jacob that night at the Jabbok, he said, "Let me go." He would not go without Jacob's letting him, but he would have gone if Jacob had loosed his hold. The patriarch replied, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." This is one of Christ's ways and manners; it is one of the peculiarities of his character. When he walked to Emmaus with the two disciples, "he made as if he would have gone further:" they might have known it was none other than the Angel of the Covenant by that very habit. He would have gone further, but they constrained him, saying, "Abide with us for the day is far spent." If you are willing to lose Christ's company he is never intrusive, he will go away from you, and leave you till you know his value and begin to pine for him. "I will go," says he, "and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." He will go unless you hold him.

But note, next, *he is very willing to be held*. Who could hold him if he were not? He is the omnipotent Savior, and if he willed to withdraw he could do so: let us hold him as we might. But, mark his condescension. When his spouse said, "I held him, and I would not let him go," he did not go, he could not go, for his love held him as well as her hands. Christ is willing to be held. He loves that sacred violence which takes him by force, that holy diligence which leaves not a gap open by which he may escape, but shuts every door, bars every bolt, and saith, "I have thee now and I will take care that if I lose thee it shall be through no fault of mine." Jesus is willing enough to be retained by hearts which are full of his love.

And, brethren, whenever you have Christ, please to remember that *you are able to hold him*. She who held him in the Song was no stronger than you are; she was but a feeble woman, poorly fed under the Old Testament dispensation; you have drunk the new wine of the new covenant, and you are stronger than she. You can hold him, and he will not be able to go from you. "How," say you, "shall I be able to hold him?" Oh, have you grasped him? Is he with you? Now, then, hold him fast by your faith; trust him implicitly, rest in him for every day's cares, for every moments. Walk by faith and he will walk with you. Hold him also with the grasp of love. Let your whole heart go out towards him. Embrace him with the arms of mighty affection, enchain him with ardent admiration. Lay hold upon him by faith, and clasp him with love. Be also much in prayer. Prayer

casts a chain about him. He never leaves the heart that prays. There is a sweet perfume about prayer that always attracts the Lord; wherever he perceives it rising up to heaven there will he be. Hold him, too, by your obedience to him. Never quarrel with him. Let him have his way. He will stop in any house where he can be master; he will stay nowhere where some other will lords it over his. Watch his words; be careful to obey them all. Be very tender in your conduct, so that nothing grieves him. Show to him that you are ready to suffer for his sake. I believe that where there is a prayerful, careful, holy, loving, believing walk towards Jesus, the fellowship of the saint with his Lord will not be broken, but it may continue for months and years. There is no reason, except in ourselves, why fellowship with Jesus should not continue throughout an entire life and oh, if it did, it would make earth into heaven, and lift us up to the condition of angels, if not beyond them, and we should be the men who would bring Christ into the church, and through the church into the world. The church would be blest, and God would be glorified, and souls would be saved, if there were some among us who thus held him, and would not let him go.

I want to call your attention to one thought before I leave this, and that is, the spouse says, "I held *him*." Now, a great many persons in the world are holding their creed, and if it is a correct one I hope they will hold it; but that is the main business of their religious life; they do nothing else but hold this doctrine or that. Hold it, brother, hold it: it would be a pity you should let it go if it be the truth, but still it is more important to hold your Lord. Certain others are engrossed in holding scriptural ordinances, and saying, "I hold this and I hold that." Well, hold it brother; if it is God's ordinance do not let it go. But, after all, if there be anything I hold above all else, I hold *him*. Is not that the best grip a soul ever gets, when she lays hold of Christ? "I held *him* and I would not let him go." Ah, Lord, I may be mistaken about doctrine, but I am not mistaken about thee. I may, perhaps, be staggered in my belief of some dogma which I thought was truth, but I am not staggered about *thee*. Thou Son of God made flesh for me, thou art all my salvation and all my desire: I rest on thee only, without a shadow of mixture of any other hope, and I love thee supremely, desiring to honor thee and to obey thee in life and until death. I hold thee, thou Covenant Angel, and I will not let thee go.

Dear friends! make this the mark of your life, that you hold him and will not let him go. You will be the kind of men to bless the church by leading the Well-Beloved into her chambers, if you know how to abide in him yourselves.

III. It appears from the text that, after the spouse had thus found Christ for herself and held him, SHE BROUGHT HIM INTO THE CHURCH—"I brought him to my mother's house." We ought lovingly to remember the church of God. By the Holy Spirit we were begotten unto newness of life, but it was in the church, and through the preaching of the word there that we were brought into the light of life. We owe our conversion, the most of us, to some earnest teacher of the truth in the church of God, or to some of those godly works which were written by Christian men. Through the church's instrumentality the Bible itself has been preserved to us, and by her the gospel has been preached to every age. She is our mother and we love her. I know that many of you, dear friends, the members of this church, love the church, and you can say, "If I forget thee, let my right hand forget her cunning." When you are away from this place, and cannot mix in our solemn assemblies, your heart mourns like one in banishment. Have not I heard you cry, "Ziona, Ziona, our holy and beautiful house, wherein we have worshipped our God, the house which is built of living stones, among whom Christ himself is the corner-stone, even thy church, O Jesus: would God I were in her midst again, and could once more unite my praises with those that dwell within

her." Yes, and because we love our mother's house and the chamber of her that conceived us, we desire to bring Christ into the church more and more. Did I hear a harsh but honest voice exclaim, "But, I find much fault with the church?" Brother, if thou lovest her, thou wilt go backward and cast a mantle over all. But, suppose thy candour is compelled to see faults in her; then there is so much the more need of her Lord's presence in her to cure those faults. The more sickly she is, the more she wants him to be her strength and her physician. I say, therefore, to thee, dear friend, above all things, seek to bring Christ into an imperfect church, and a weak church, and an erring church, that she may become strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

I have shown you by whom it must be—by those who have found him, and who hold him; and now we will mention the methods by which our blessed Lord can be brought into his church. The saints can bring him in by their *testimony*. I hope that often Christ is here when I have borne testimony to you of his power to save, of his atoning blood, of his exaltation in heaven, of the perfection of his character, and of his willingness to save. Many a Sabbath day his name has been like ointment poured forth in this place. Is there any subject that so delights you as that which touches upon Christ? Is not that the rarest string in all the harp of scriptural truth? Well, every true minister, by bearing witness for Christ, helps to bring him into the church.

But, others can do it by their *prayers*. There is a mysterious efficacy in the prayers of men who dwell near to God. Even if they were compelled to keep their beds, and do nothing but pray, they would pour benedictions upon the church. We want our dear sick friends to get well and come among us at once in full health; but I do not know, I do not know; they may be of more service to the church where they are. "Ye that make mention of the Lord keep not silence, and give him no rest day nor night, till he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." Now, there were not some saints kept awake at night by sickness to pray, we should not so fully realize that word, "Give him no rest day nor night." Some of those dear ones, whose faces we miss from among us, keep up the perpetual ministry of intercession. Their incense of prayer goes up at all hours; when the most of us are rightly enough at sleep they are compelled to wake, and therefore are led still to pray. How many blessings come down upon the church of God through the prayers of his feeble saints it is not possible for us to tell; but I believe if all of us were to set apart a special time for praying and pleading with Christ that he would come into his church, we should not be long before we saw a wonderful effect resulting from those pleadings. Wrestling prayers bring Christ into the innermost chambers of the church of God. Let us try the power of prayer.

And, there is no doubt, dear brethren, that Christ is often brought into the church by the *example* of those eminent saints who abide in Christ. You know what I mean. There is a very manner and air about some Christian men which honors Christ, and benefits his people. They may not be gifted in speech, but their very spirit speaks, they are so gentle, loving, tender, earnest, truthful, upright, gracious. Their paths, like the paths of God himself, drop fatness. They are the anointed of the Lord, and you perceive it. Perhaps you could not say that this virtue or that is very prominent, but it is the altogether; it is their life at home, their life in public, their church life, their private life, their entire conduct makes you see that the Holy Ghost is in them, and when they come into the church they bring the Spirit of God with them, and are thus a great means of blessing to all with whom they associate. I do pray, brethren, that in some way or other, each one of us may try to bring Jesus Christ into the midst of his own people. I am afraid there are some who on the contrary are driving him away—church members that, instead of blessing the church, are a curse to it. I see a great heap before me—a vast heap that God has gathered through my instrumentality; but the

winnowing fan is going, and the chaff is flying. Are you, dear friends, among the chaff or the wheat? Are you seed for the sower, or fuel for the flame unquenchable? Oh! live near to Christ; live in Christ; may Christ live in you; then will you enrich the church of God; but if you do not, but only make a profession of love with your lips, what shall I say unto you? I mourn over you. Take heed of living a weak life—a life without God in it—a life without Christ in it—a life which a Pharisee might live. Seek to live the life of a trueborn child of God, lest you hinder the church's usefulness, and deprive her of her Lord's presence.

IV. This leads me to the last point, which is this, to CHARGE THE CHURCH THAT SHE BE CAREFUL NOT TO DISTURB THE LORD'S REPOSE, if we have been enabled by divine grace to bring the Lord into the chambers of our mother's house. "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please." Observe, then, that *the Lord Jesus in his church is not indifferent to the conduct of his people*. We are not to suppose that because the sin of all God's elect is pardoned, therefore it is of small consequence how they live. By no manner of means. The Master of this great house is not blind nor deaf, neither is he a person who is utterly careless as to how the house is managed; on the contrary, as God is a jealous God, so is Christ a jealous husband to his church. He will not tolerate in her what he would tolerate in the world. She lies near his heart, and she must be chaste to him. What a solemn work the Lord did in the early church. That story of Ananias and Sapphira—it is often used most properly to illustrate the danger of lying; but that is not the point of the narrative. Ananias and Sapphira were members of the church at Jerusalem, and they lied not unto men, which would have been sin enough, but in lying to the church officers they lied unto God, and the result was their sudden death. Now, you are not to suppose that this was a solitary case. Wherever there is a true church of God, the judgments of God are always going on in it. I speak now not only what I have read, but what I have known and seen with mine eyes; what I am as sure of as I am sure of any fact in history. The apostle Paul, speaking of the same in his day, said that in a certain church there was so much sin that many were weak and sickly among them, and many slept; that is to say, there was great sickness in the church, and many died. Judgments are begun in the house of God and are always going on there. I have seen men in the church who have walked at a distance from God, who have been visited with severe chastisements; others who have been of hot and proud spirit, have been terribly humbled; and some who have arrogantly touched God's ark, and the doom of Uzzah has befallen them. I have seen it and do know it. And so it always will be. The Lord Jesus Christ looking around his church, if he sees anything evil in it, will do one of two things; either he will go right away from his church because the evil is tolerated there, and he will leave that church to be like Laodicea, to go on from bad to worse, till it becomes no church at all; or else he will come and he will trim the lamp, or to use the figure of the fifteenth of John, he will prune the vinebranch and with his knife will cut off this member, and the other, and cast them into the fire; while, as for the rest, he will cut them till they bleed again, because they are fruit-bearing members, but they have too much wood, and he wants them to bring forth more fruit. It is not a trifling matter to be in the church of God. God's fire is in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem. "His fan is in his hand, and he shall thoroughly purge"—what? The world. O no, "his floor," the church. And then, again, "he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify"—what? The heathen nations. No, "the sons of Levi"—his own people. So that Christ is not indifferent to what is going on in the church, and it is needful that when he comes to the church to take his repose, and solace himself there, we should not stir him up nor awake him till he please.

But many things will drive our Lord away, and these shall have our closing words. Dear fellow members of this church, may we each one be more watchful lest the Bridegroom should withdraw from us. He will go away if we grow proud. If we are boastful, and say, "There is some reason why God should bless us," and should begin to speak hectoringly towards weaker brethren, the Lord will let us know that "not unto us, not unto us, but unto his name shall be all the glory."

Again, if there be a want of love among us, the Lord of love will be offended. The holy dove loves not scenes of strife; he frequents the calm still waters of brotherly love. There the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore, where brethren dwelt together in unity. If any of you have half a hard thought towards another, get rid of it; if there be the beginnings of anything like jealousy, quench the sparks. "Leave off strife," says Solomon, "before it be meddled with," as if he said, "End it before you begin it," which, though it seems strangely paradoxical, is most wise advice. "Little children love one another." "Walk in love as Christ also has loved us." May discord be far from us.

Notice the beautiful imagery of the text. "I charge you by the roes and the hinds of the field." In ancient times gazelles were often tamed, and were the favourite companions of Eastern ladies: the gazelle might be standing near its mistress, fixing its loving eyes upon her, but if a stranger clapped his hands it would hasten away. The roes and hinds "*of the field*" are even yet more jealous things, a sound will startle them, even the breath of the hunter tainting the gale puts them to speedy flight. Even thus is it with Jesus. A little thing, a very little thing, will drive him from us, and it may be many a day before our repentance shall be able to find him again. He has suffered so much from sin that he cannot endure the approach of it. His pure and holy soul abhors the least taint of iniquity.

Let us gather from the text that there are some things in the true church which give our Lord rest. He is represented here as though he slept in the church, "That ye stir not up nor awake my love till he please." Wherever he sees true repentance, real faith, holy consecration, purity of life, chastity of love, there Christ rests. I believe he finds no sweeter happiness even in heaven than the happiness of accepting his people's prayers and praises. Our love is very sweet to him; our deeds of gratitude are very precious, the broken alabaster boxes of self-sacrifices done for him are very fair in his esteem. He finds no rest in the world, he never did; but he finds sweet rest on the bosoms of his faithful ones. He loves to come into a pure church, and there to say, "I am at home. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."

Let us be very watchful, too, against all impurity. Anything like uncleanness in a Christian will soon send the Master away from the church. You know what it was that brought the evil upon the house of Eli. It was because his sons made themselves vile even at the tabernacle door. The young people in that case were the immediate cause of the mischief, but it was the fault of the elder ones that they restrained them not. Watch against all evil passions and corrupt desires. Be ye holy even as your Father which is in heaven is holy.

And then, again, a want of prayer will send him away. There are members of some churches who never come to the prayer-meetings, and I should be afraid that their private prayers cannot be any too earnest. Of course we speak not of those who have good excuse; but there are some who habitually and wilfully neglect the assembling of themselves together; these are worthy of condemnation. Oh, let us continue a prayerful church as we have hitherto been, otherwise the Master may say, "They do not value the blessing, for they will not even ask for it; they evidently do not

care about my Spirit, for they will not meet together and cry for him.” Do not grieve him by any such negligence of prayer.

So, too, we may grieve the Spirit by worldliness. If any of you who are rich get to imitate the fashions of the world and act as worldlings do, you cannot expect the Lord to bless us. You are Achans in the camp, if such is the case. And if you who are poor get to be envious of others and speak harshly of others to whom God has given more substance than to you, that again will grieve the Lord. You know how the children of Israel in the wilderness provoked him, and their provocation mostly took the form of murmuring; they complained of this and of that: if they had the manna they wanted flesh, and if they had water gushing from the rock they must needs have more. I pray you by the bowels of mercies that are in Christ Jesus, by all the compassion he has manifested towards us, by the high love he deserves of us, since he laid down his life for us, by your allegiance to him as your King, by your trust in him as your Savior, by your love to him as the Bridegroom of your souls, “stir not up nor awake my love till he please.”

Let me ask you to be more in prayer; let me pray you to live nearer to him; let me entreat you for the church’s sake, and for the world’s sake, to be more thoroughly Christ’s than you ever have been and may the power of the Holy Spirit enable you in this. I do not fear lest I should lose that which I have wrought, for God will establish the work of our hands upon us, but yet I do put up to him daily the prayer that this church may not be found in years to come to be a building of wood, and hay, and stubble, that shall be consumed in the fire of heresy or discord, or some other testing flame which God may suffer to come upon it; but oh, may you, my beloved brethren and sisters, be gold, and silver, and precious stones, that the workman at the last, saved himself, may not have to suffer loss, nor the Master be dishonored in the eyes of men. May you stand as a sparkling pile of precious gems, inhabited by the eternal Spirit, to the praise and the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 15; Solomon’s Song 3.

Precious Deaths

A Sermon

(No. 1036)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, February 18th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”—Psalm 116:15.

DAVID SOUGHT DELIVERANCE from imminent peril, and he felt sure of obtaining it; for being a servant of the Lord he knew that his life was too precious in the sight of God for it to be lightly brought to an end. It should be a source of consolation to all tried saints that God will not deliver them over to the hands of their enemies; it is not the will of their Father who is in heaven that one of his little ones should perish. A shepherd who did not care for his sheep might suffer the wolf to devour it, but he who prizes it highly will put his own life in jeopardy to pluck the defenseless one from between the monster's jaws.

The text informs us that the deaths of God's saints are precious to him. How different, then, is the estimate of human life which God forms from that which has ruled the minds of great warriors and mighty conquerors. Had Napoleon spoken forth his mind about the lives of men in the day of battle, he would have likened them to so much water spilt upon the ground. To win a victory, or subdue a province, it mattered not though he strewed the ground with corpses thick as autumn leaves, nor did it signify though in every village orphans and widows wailed the loss of sires and husbands. What were the deaths of conscript peasants when compared with the fame of the Emperor? So long as Austria was humbled, or Russia invaded, little cared the imperial Corsican though half the race had perished. Not thus is it with the King of kings; he spares the poor and needy, and saves the souls of the needy, and precious shall their blood be in his sight. Our glorious Leader never squanders the lives of his soldiers; he values the church militant beyond all price; and though he permits his saints to lay down their lives for his sake, yet is not one life spent in vain, or unnecessarily expended.

How different also is the Lord's estimate from that of persecutors! They have hounded the saints to death, considering that they did God service. They have thought no more of burning martyrs than destroying noxious insects, and massacres of believers have been to them as the slaying of wild beasts. Did they not strike a medal to celebrate the massacre of the Huguenots in France? and did not the infallible Pope himself consider it to be a business for which to offer *Te Deums* to God? What if murder made the streets of Paris run with blood, the slaughtered ones were only Protestants, and the world thought itself well rid of them. Foxes and wolves, and Protestants were best exterminated. As for so-called Anabaptists they were counted worse than vipers, and to crush them utterly was reckoned to be salutary Christian discipline. The enemies of the church of God have hunted the saints as if they were beasts of the chase. They have let loose upon them the dogs of war, and the hell-hounds of the Inquisition, as if they were not fit to live. “Away with such a fellow from the earth” has been the general cry of persecutors against the men of whom the world was not worthy. But, precious is their blood in his sight. Though they have been cast to the beasts in the amphitheatre, or dragged to death by wild horses, or murdered in dungeons, or slaughtered

amongst the snows of the Alps, or made to fatten Smithfield with their gore, precious has their blood been, and still is it in his sight, who will avenge his own elect when the day shall come for his patience to have had her perfect work, and for his justice to begin her dread assize.

The text, also, corrects another estimate, namely, our own. We love the people of God, they are exceedingly precious to us, and, therefore, we are too apt to look upon their deaths as a very grievous loss. We would never let them die at all if we could help it. If it were in our power to confer immortality upon our beloved Christian brethren and sisters, we should surely do it, and to their injury we should detain them here, in this wilderness, depriving them of a speedy entrance into their inheritance on the other side the river. It would be cruel to them, but I fear we should often be guilty of it. We should hold them here a little longer, and a little longer yet, finding it hard to relinquish our grasp. The departures of the saints cause us many a pang. We fret, alas! also, we even repine and murmur. We count that we are the poorer because of the eternal enriching of those beloved ones who have gone over to the majority, and entered into their rest. Be it known that while *we* are sorrowing *Christ* is rejoicing. His prayer is, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am," and in the advent of every one of his own people to the skies he sees an answer to that prayer, and is, therefore, glad. He beholds in every perfected one another portion of the reward for the travail of his soul, and he is satisfied in it. We are grieving here, but he is rejoicing there. Dolorous are their deaths in *our* sight, but precious are their deaths in *his* sight. We hang up the mournful escutcheon, and sit us down to mourn our full, and yet, meanwhile, the bells of heaven are ringing for "the bridal feast above," the streamers are floating joyously in every heavenly street, and the celestial world keeps holiday because another heir of heaven has entered upon his heritage. May this correct our grief. Tears are permitted to us, but they must glisten in the light of faith and hope. Jesus wept, but Jesus never repined. We, too, may weep, but not as those who are without hope, nor yet as though forgetful that there is greater cause for joy than for sorrow in the departure of our brethren.

I. Coming now to the instructive text before us, we shall remark, in the first place, that THE STATEMENT HERE MADE IMPLIES A VIEW OF DEATH OF A PECULIAR KIND. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Death in itself cannot be precious; it is terrible. It cannot be a precious thing to God to see the noblest works of his hand torn in pieces, his skillful embroidery in the human body rent, defiled, and given over to decay. Death in itself cannot be a theme for rejoicing with God. But death in the case of believers is another matter. To them, it is not death to die; it is a departure out of this world unto the Father, a being unclothed that we may be clothed upon, a falling asleep, an entrance into the Kingdom. To the saint death is by no means such a thing as happeneth unto the unregenerate.

And, observe wherein this change lies. It lies mainly in the fact that death is no more the indiction of a penalty for sin upon the believer. One great cardinal truth of the gospel is that the sins of believers were laid upon Christ, and were punished upon Christ, and that, consequently, no sin is imputed to the believer, neither can any be penally visited upon him. His sin was punished in his substitute. The righteous wrath of God has altogether ceased towards those for whom Christ died. It could not be consistent with justice that the death penalty should be executed upon Christ, and then should be again visited upon those for whom Christ was a substitute. Death, then, does not come to me as a believer because I deserve it and must be punished by it: it comes so to the ungodly, it is upon them a fit visitation for their iniquities, the beginning of an unending death, which shall be their perpetual portion. To the saints the sting of death is gone, and the victory of the grave is

removed; it is no more a penalty but a privilege to die. What if I say it is a covenant blessing: so Paul esteemed it, for when he said "All things are yours, things present or things to come," he added, "or life, or death, all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's:" as if the believer's death came to him amongst other good and precious things by the way of his being Christ's; and Christ's being God's. To fall asleep in Jesus is a blessing of the covenant; it is a grace to be asked for, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word." I would not miss it; if I might make my choice between living till Christ comes, so as to be changed only, and not to die, or of actually sleeping in the dust, I would prefer to die, for in this the believer who shall fall asleep will be the more closely conformed to Christ Jesus. He will have passed into the sepulcher and slept in the tomb as his master did; he will know, as Jesus knows, what death pangs mean, and what it is to gaze upon the invisible, while the visible retreats into the distance. Nay, let us die. The Head has traversed the valley of death-shade, and let the members rejoice to follow.

"As the Lord their Savior rose,
So all his followers must."

And, therefore, as the Lord the Savior slept, so let us sleep. When we think of our Master in the tomb, our hearts say, "Let us go that we may die with him." We would not be divided from him in life or in death. We are so wedded to him that we say, "Where thou goest I will go, where thou diest I will die, and with thee would I be buried, that with thee in the resurrection morning I may be partaker of the resurrection." Death, then, is so far changed in its aspect as it respects the saints, that it is no longer a legal infliction, but it comes to us as a covenant blessing conforming us to Christ.

The statement of the text refutes the gloomy thought that death is a ceasing to be. It is not the annihilation of a man, nor ought it ever to be regarded as such. In all ages there has fingered upon mankind the fear that to die may involve ceasing to be; and of all thoughts this is one of the most gloomy. But, when God says that the death of a believer is precious to him, it is clear that no tinge of annihilation is in the idea, for where would be the preciousness of a believer ceasing to exist? Oh, no, the thought is gone from us. We know that to die is not to renounce existence; we understand that death is but a passage into a higher and a nobler existence. The soul emancipated from all sinfulness passes the Jordan, and is presented without fault before the throne of God. No purgatorial fires are needed to cleanse her; the self-same day she leaves the body she is with Christ in paradise, because fit to be there. The body in death, it is true, undergoes decay, but even for that meaner part of our manhood there is no destruction. Let us not malign the grave, it is no more a prison, but an inn, a halting place upon the road to resurrection. As Esther bathed herself in spices that she might be fit for the embraces of the king, so is the body purged from its corruption that it may rise immortal.

"Corruption, earth, and worms
Shall but refine this flesh
Till my triumphant spirit comes
To put it on afresh."

The body could not rise if it had not first died; it could not spring up like a fair flower unless it had first been sown. If a grain of wheat fall not into the ground and die, how springeth it up again? but the body is sown in dishonor that it may be raised in glory; it is sown in weakness that it may be raised in power; it is laid in the grave as a natural body, that it may arise therefrom by the infinite power of the almighty a spiritual body, full of life, and glory, and majesty. Let this mortal body die, aye, let it moulder into dust! What more fit than earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Let

the gold go into the fining pot, it will lose none of its preciousness, it will only be delivered from its dross. Let the gem go to the lapidary's house, for it shall glitter the more brightly in the royal crown, in the day when the Lord shall make up his jewels.

Death, too, we may be sure from this statement cannot be any serious detriment to the believer after all; it cannot be any serious loss to a saint to die. Looking upon the poor corpse, it does seem to be a catastrophe for death to have passed his cold hand across the brow, but it is not so, for the very death is precious; therefore, it is no calamity. Death if rightly viewed is a blessing from the Lord's hand. A child once found a bird's nest in which were eggs, which it looked upon as a great treasure. It left them, and by-and-by, when a week or so had passed, went back again. It returned to its mother grieving: "Mother," said the child, "I had some beautiful eggs in this nest, and now they are destroyed; nothing is left but a few pieces of broken shell. Pity me, mother, for my treasure is gone." But the mother said, "Child, here is no destruction; there were little birds within those eggs, and they have flown away, and are singing now among the branches of the trees; the eggs are not wasted, child, but have answered their purpose. It is better far as it is." So, when we look at our departed ones, we are apt to say, "And is this all thou hast left us? Ruthless spoiler, are these ashes all?" But, faith whispers "No, the shell is broken, but amongst the birds of paradise, singing amid unwithering bowers, you shall find the spirits of your beloved ones; their true manhood is not here, but has ascended to its Father, God." It is not a loss to die, it is a gain, a lasting, a perpetual, an illimitable gain. The man is at one moment weak, and cannot stir a finger; in an instant he is clothed with power. Call ye not this a gain? That brow is aching; it shall wear a crown within the next few tickings of the clock. Is that no gain? That hand is palsied; it shall at once wave the palm branch. Is that a loss? The man is sick beyond physician's power; but he shall be where the inhabitant is never sick. Is that a loss? When Baxter lay a dying, and his friends came to see him, almost the last word he said was in answer to the question, "Dear Mr. Baxter, how are you?" "Almost well," said he, and so it is. Death cures; it is the best medicine, for they who die are not only almost well, but healed for ever. You will see, then, that the statement of our text implies that the aspect of death is altogether altered from that appearance in which men commonly behold it. Death to the saints is not a penalty, it is not destruction, it is not even a loss.

II. But now, secondly, I want your earnest thought to a further consideration of the text. **THE STATEMENT HERE MADE IS OF A MOST UNLIMITED KIND.**

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." It is a broad statement, wide and comprehensive, and I want you to observe that there is no limit here as to *whom*. Provided that the dying one be a saint, his death is precious. He may be the greatest in the church, he may be the least: he may be the boldest confessor, he may be the most timid trembler; but if a saint, his death is precious in God's sight. I can well conceive the truth of this in respect to martyrs; to see a man enduring torments, but refusing to deny his Lord; to behold him offered life and wealth if he will recant, but to hear him say, "I cannot and I will not draw back by the help of God;" to mark every nerve throbbing with anguish, and every single member of his body torn with torment, and yet to see the man faithful to his God even to the close,—why, this is a spectacle which God himself might well count precious. The church embalms the memories of her martyrs wherever they die—precious in God's sight must their deaths be. The deaths too of those who work for Christ, until at last weary nature gives out, when body and brain are both exhausted, and the man can no longer continue in his beloved labor, but lays down his body and his charge together, never putting off harness until he puts off his flesh—methinks the deaths of such men must be precious in God's

sight. But, not more so, mark that not more so than the departure of the patient sufferer, scarcely able to say a word, solitary and unknown, only able to serve God by submissively enduring pains which make night weary and day intolerable. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the consumptive girl who gradually melts into heaven; the death of the pauper in the workhouse, without a friend, but uncomplainingly bearing God's will, is as precious (not perhaps under some aspects), but as truly precious in the sight of the Lord as that of the most useful preacher of the word. Precious to Jehovah is the death of the least in the ranks, as the death of those who rush to the front and bear the brunt of the battle well. There are no distinctions in the text; if you be a saint no one may know you, you may be too poor and too illiterate to be of much account in the world, you may die and pass away, and no record may be among the sons of men, no stone set up over your lonely grave, but precious in the sight of the Lord in every case is the death of his saints. There is no limit as to whom.

And, mark you, there is no limit at all as to *when*. It matters not at what age the saint dies, his death is precious to God. Very delightful to those who observe them are the deathbed scenes of young children who have early been converted to God. There is a peculiar charm about the pious prattler's departing utterances. He can hardly pronounce his words aright, but he seems illuminated from above, and to talk of Jesus and his angels, and the harps of gold, and the better land, as if he had been there. Some of you have had the privilege to carry in your bosoms some of those nurselings for the skies, unfledged angels sent here but for a little while, and then caught away to heaven, that their mothers' hearts might follow them, and their fathers' aspirations might pursue them. I confess to a great liking for such books as "Janeway's Token for Children," where the deaths of many pious boys and girls are recorded with the holy sayings which they used. The Lord sets a high value on his little ones, and, therefore, frequently gathers them while they are like flowers in the bud. When these favored children die, Jesus stands at their little cots, and, while he calls them away, he whispers, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Equally precious, however, are the deaths of those who depart in middle life. These we usually regret most of all, because of the terrible blanks which they leave behind them. What, shall the hero fall when the battle wants him most? Shall the reaper be sent home and made to lay down his sickle just when the harvest is heaviest, and the day requires every worker? To us it seemeth strange, but to God it is precious. Oh, could we lift the veil, could we understand what now we see not, we should perceive that it was better for the saints to die when they died, than it would have been for them to have lived longer lives. Though the widow mourns, and the orphans are left penniless, it was good that the father fell asleep. Though a loving church gathered round the hearse and mourned that their minister had been taken away in the fullness of his vigor, it was best that God should take him to himself. Let us be persuaded of this, that no believer dies an untimely death. In every consistent Christian's case that promise is true, "With long life also will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation;" for long life is not to be reckoned by years as men count them. He lives longest who lives best. Many a man has crowded half a century into a single year. God gives his people life, not as the clock ticks, but as he helps them to serve him; and he can make them to live much in a short space of time. There are no untimely figs gathered into God's basket; the great Master of the vineyard plucks the grapes when they are ripe and ready to be taken, and not before. Saintry deaths are precious in his sight.

And, dear brethren, if the Lord's providence permits the saint to live to a good old age, then is his death precious too. The decease which has lately occurred among us will abide in my memory as one of my choice treasures. I say but little of it to-day, for on another Sabbath morning I may

be able to tell you some of those choice things which our dear brother and venerated elder uttered which charmed and gladdened us all as we lingered about his bed. You knew him; you knew what a man he was in life; he was just such a man in death. But a day or so before he died, while he could scarcely draw his breath, he told me with a smile that it was the happiest day of his life. As he was always wont to rejoice in God while he was here among us, so he was kept in the same blessed spirit even to the end. "See," said he, "what a blessed thing it is to be here." "Here!" I said. "What, on a dying bed?" "Yes," said he, "for I am Christ's, and Christ is mine; I am in him, and He is in me; what more would I have? It is the happiest day of my life," and again he smiled serenely. It was all joy with him, all bliss with him. Pain might rack him, or weakness might prostrate him, but ever did his spirit magnify the Lord, and rejoice in God his Savior. Yes, these ripe ones, like the fruits of autumn, fall willingly from off the tree of life when but a gentle breeze stirs the branches. The deaths of these are precious unto God. There is no limitation as to when.

And, again, there is no limitation as to *where*. Precious shall their deaths be in his sight, let them happen where they may. Up in the lonely garret where there are none of the appliances of comfort, but all the marks of the deepest penury, up there where the dying workgirl or the crossing sweeper dies—there is a sight most precious unto God; or yonder, in the long corridor of the hospital, where many are too engrossed in their own griefs to be able to shed a tear of sympathy, there passes away a triumphant spirit, and precious is that death in God's sight. Alone, utterly alone in the dead of night, surprised, unable to call in a helper, saintly life often has passed away; but in that form also precious is the death in God's sight. Far away from home and kindred, wandering in the backwoods or on the prairie, the believer has died where there was none to call him brother; but it mattered not, his death was precious in the sight of the Lord. Or, a bullet has brought the missive from the throne which said, "Return and be with God," and falling in the ditch to die amongst the wounded and the dead, with no onlooker but the silent stars and blushing moon, amidst the carnage the death of the believing soldier has been precious in the sight of Jehovah. Ah, and run over in the street, or crushed, and bruised, and mangled in the railway accident, or stifled in the pit by the coal damp, or sinking amidst the gurgling waters of the ocean, or falling beneath the assassin's knife, precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. They are everywhere in the sight of God when they die, and he looks upon them with a smile, for their death is precious to his heart.

There is no limit as to where, and, dear brethren, there is no limit as to *how*. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Their deaths may happen suddenly; they may be alive, and active, and in a moment fall down dead, but their death is precious. I could never understand that prayer which is put into the prayer-book, that God would deliver us from sudden death. Why, methinks, it is the most desirable death that a person could die, not to know you die at all, to have no fears, no shiverings on the brink, but to be busy in your Master's service here, and suddenly to stand in the white robe before his throne in heaven, shutting the eye to the scenes below, and opening it the scenes above. I know, if I might ask such a favor, I would covet to die as a dear brother in Christ died, who gave out this hymn from his pulpit:—

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

Just as he finished that line in the pulpit he bowed his head, and his prayer was answered, he was immediately before the throne of God. Is there anything in that to pray against? It seems to us

much to be desired; but at any rate, such a death as that is precious in God's sight. But if we linger long, if the tabernacle be taken down piece by piece, and the curtains be slowly folded up, and the tent pins gently put away, precious in the sight of the Lord is such a death as that. Should we die by fierce disease, which shakes the strong man, or by gentle decline, which slowly saps and undermines, it matters not. Should a sudden stroke take us, and men call it a judgment, it is no judgment to the believer, for from him all judgments are past, and the true light of love shineth on him. Die how he may, and where he may, and when he may, and let him be in what position he will when he dies, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

III. And now, thirdly, coming to the very soul and marrow of the text, we notice that THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT MAY BE FULLY SUSTAINED AND ACCOUNTED FOR, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," is a most sober and truthful declaration.

First, because their persons were, and always will be, precious unto God. His saints! Why, these are his elect; these are they upon whom his love was set before the mountains lifted their heads into the clouds; these are they whom he bought with precious blood, cheerfully laying down his life for their sakes; these are they whose names are borne on Jesus' breast, and engraved upon the palms of his hands; these are his children; these are members of his body; these are his bride, his spouse; he is married unto them: therefore, everything that concerns them must be precious. Do I not look with interest upon the history of my child? Do I not carefully observe everything that happens to my beloved spouse? Where there is love the little becometh great, and what would seem a matter of no concern in a stranger is gilded with great importance. The Lord loves his people so intensely that the very hairs of their heads are numbered: his angels bear them up in their hands lest they dash their foot against a stone, and because they are the precious sons of Zion, comparable unto fine gold, therefore their deaths are precious unto the Lord.

Precious are the deaths of God's saints next, because precious graces are in death very frequently tested, and as frequently revealed and perfected. How could I know faith to be true faith if it would not stand a trial? The precious faith of God's elect is proved to be such when it can bear the last ordeal of all; when the man can look grim death in the face, and yet not be staggered through unbelief, when he can gaze across the gulf, so often veiled in cloud, and yet not fear that he shall be able to overleap it, and land in the Savior's arms. Believe me, the faith which only plays with earthly joys, and cannot endure the common trials of life, will soon be dissipated by the solemn trial of death; but that which a man can die with, that is faith indeed. Faith, moreover, brings with it, as its companions, an innumerable company of graces, amongst which chiefly are hope and love. Blessed is the man who can hope in God when heart and flesh are failing him, and can love the Lord even though he smite him with many pains, yea, even though he slay him. The death of the body is a crucible for our graces, and much that we thought to be true grace disappears in the furnace heat; but God counts the trial of our faith much more precious than that of gold, and therefore he counts deathbeds precious in his sight. Besides, how many graces are revealed in dying hours. I have known plants of God's right hand planting that had always been in the shade before, and yet they have enjoyed sunlight at last; silent spirits that have laid their finger on their lips throughout their lives but have taken them down, and have declared their love to Jesus just when they were departing. Like the swan, of whom the fable hath it, that it singeth never till it comes to its end, so many a child of God has begun to sing in his last hours; because he has done with the glooms of earth, he begins to sing here his swan song, intending to sing on for ever and ever. You cannot tell what is in a man to the fullness of him till he is tried to the full, and therefore the last trial, inasmuch

as it strippeth off earth-born imperfections and developes in us that which is of God, and brings to the front the real and the true, and throws to the back the superficial and the pretentious, is precious in God's sight.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," for a third reason, because precious attributes are in dying moments gloriously illustrated. I refer now to the *divine* attributes. In life and in death we prove the attribute of God's righteousness, we find that he does not lie but is faithful to his word. We learn the attribute of mercy, he is gentle and pitiful to us in the time of our weakness. We prove the attribute of his immutability, we find him "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." There is scarcely a single characteristic of the divine being which is not set out delightfully to the child of God and onlookers when the saint is departing. And the same is true of the promises as well as the attributes. Precious promises are illustrated upon dying beds. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Who would have known the meaning of that to the full, if he had not found that the Lord did not leave him when all else was gone? "When thou passeth through the river I will be with thee." Who could have known the depth of truth in that word, if saints did not pass through the last cold stream. "As thy days so shall thy strength be." Who could have known to the full that word, if he had not seen the believer triumphant on his dying day? "Yea, though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me." You may read commentaries upon that psalm, but you will never value it so well as when you are in the valley yourself. My dear departed friend said to me, ere I came away on one of my last visits, "Read me a psalm, dear pastor," and I said, "which one?" "There are many precious ones," said he, "but as I get nearer to the time of my departure, I love the 23rd best, let us have that again." "Why," I said, "you know that by heart." "Yes," said he, "it is *in* my heart too, it is most true and precious to me." And is it not so? Yet you had not seen the 23rd Psalm to be a diamond of the purest water, if you had not beheld its value to saints in their departing moments.

"Precious," again, "in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," because the precious blood is glorified. It is memorable how saints turn to the cross when they die. Not very often do you hear them speak of Christ in his glory then, it is of Christ the sufferer, Christ the substitute that they then speak. And how they delight to roll under their tongue as a sweet morsel, such texts as that one, "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." With what delight do they speak about having trusted in him years ago, and how gladly will they tell you that they have not been confounded. All their hope and all their confidence lie in the crucified one alone, and they are persuaded that he is able to keep that which they have committed to him. It ought to be the object of our lives to magnify the blood of Jesus, and to speak well of it, and to recommend it to others. But oh, dear soul, if thou hast no faith in Christ's blood, one argument that ought to convince thee of the sin of unbelief above all others, is this,—that blood has afforded comfort when pains have been bitter, and consolation when death has been imminent, not in one case or a thousand, but in countless cases. Saints by myriads have died singing, for they have overcome the last enemy by the blood of the Lamb. Oh, you that were never washed in Jesus' blood, I dread to think of your dying. What will you do without the Savior? Oh, how will you pass the terrors of that tremendous hour, with no advocate on high pleading for you there, and no blood of Christ upon you pleading for you here. Oh, fly to that cross, rest in that cross, then will you live well and die well; but, without the blood, you shall live uneasily and die wretchedly. God prevent it, for his name's sake!

Again, the deaths of believers are precious to God, because oftentimes precious utterances are given forth in the last moments. There are little volumes extant of the death bed sayings of saints,

and if ever I have mistaken the utterances of man for inspiration, it has been when I have read some of these dying speeches. No one ever mistook the brilliant utterances of Shakespeare, or the wise sayings of Bacon, or the profound thoughts of Socrates, for Scripture—everyone could see that they were earthy and of the earth; but have you never caught yourself imagining that the saying of a dying man must have been borrowed from the Scriptures, and if you have searched for it you have not found it in Cruden, nor have you discovered it anywhere in the sacred page; the voice has been so near akin to inspiration, and so true, that if it had been permitted, you would have written it in your Bibles, and made a new chapter there. Oh, what brave things do they tell of the heavenly world! What glorious speeches do they make! To some of them the veil has been thrown back, and they have spoken of things not seen as yet. They have almost declared things which it were not lawful for men to utter, and, therefore, their speech has been broken, and mysterious, like dark sayings upon a harp. We could hardly make out all they said, but we gathered that they were overwhelmed with glory, that they were confounded with unutterable bliss, that they had seen and fain would tell but must not, they had heard and fain would repeat but could not. “Did you not see the glory?” they have said, and you have replied, “The sun shines upon you through yonder window;” they have shaken their heads, for they have seen a brightness not begotten of the sun. Then have they cried, “Do you not hear it?” and we should have supposed that a sound in the street attracted them, but all was the stillness of night; silent all, except to their ear, which was ravished with the voice of harpers, harping with their harps. I shall never forget hearing a brother, with whom I had often walked to preach the gospel, say,—

“And when ye hear my eyestrings break,
How sweet my minutes roll;
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
But glory in my soul.”

It must have been a grand thing to hear good Harrington Evans say to his deacons, “Tell my people, tell them I am accepted in the Beloved;” or, to hear John Rees say, “Christ in the glory of his person, Christ in the love of his heart, Christ in the power of his arm, this is the rock I stand on, and now death strike.” Departing saints have uttered brave things and rare things, which have made us wish that we had been going away with them, so have they made us long to see what they have seen, and to sit down and feast at their banquet.

The last reason I shall give why the death of a saint is precious is this—because it is a precious sheep folded, a precious sheaf harvested, precious vessel which had been long at sea brought into harbour, a precious child which had been long at school to finish his training brought home to dwell in the Father’s house for ever. God the Father sees the fruit of his eternal love at last ingathered: Jesus sees the purchase of his passion at last secured: the Holy Spirit sees the object of his continual workmanship at last perfected: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rejoice that now the bloodbought ones are free from all inbred sin, and delivered from all temptation. The battle’s fought, the battle’s fought, and the victory is won for ever.

The commander’s eagle eye, as he surveys the plain, watches joyously the shock of battle as he sees that his victory is sure; but when at the last the fight culminates in one last assault, when the brave guards advance for the last attack, when the enemy gathers up all the shattered relics of his strength to make a last defense, when the army marches with sure and steady tramp to the last onslaught, then feels the warrior’s heart a stern o’erflowing joy, and as his veterans sweep their foes before them like chaff before the winnowers’ fan, and the adversaries melt away, even as the

altar fat consumes away in smoke, I see the commander exulting with beaming eye, and hear him rejoicing in that last shock of battle, for in another moment there shall be the shout of victory, and the campaign shall be over, and the adversary shall be trampled for ever beneath his feet. King Jesus looks upon the death of his saints as the last struggle of their life-conflict; and when that is over, it shall be said on earth, and sung in heaven, "Thy warfare is accomplished, thy sin is pardoned, thou hast received of the Lord's hand double for all thy sins."

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Sirs, are you his saints? Preacher, thou speakest to others, hast *thou* been sanctified unto God? Answer this in the silence of thy soul. Officers of this church, are you saints or mere professors? Members of this church, are you truly saints, or are you hypocrites? You who sit in this congregation Sabbath after Sabbath, have you been washed in the blood of Jesus? are you made saints, or are you still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity? Casual visitors to this house of prayer, the same question would I press on you, are you saints of God? If not, earth and hell combined, though they are both full of anguish, could not utter a shriek that should be shrill enough to set forth the woe unutterable of the death that shall surely come upon you. Oh I ere that death overtakes you, fly to Jesus. Trust Him, trust Him now! Ere this day's sun goes down cast yourself at the feet of the crucified Redeemer, and live! The Lord grant it, for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 116; Revelation 7:9-17.

* Rev. W. Dransfield, a beloved elder of the church at the Tabernacle, died February 15th, full of years.

The Poor Man's Friend

A Sermon

(No. 1037)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.”—Psalm 72:12.

THIS IS A ROYAL PSALM. In it you see predictions of Christ, not upon the cross, but upon the throne. In reference to his manhood as well as to his godhead, he is exalted and extolled and very high. He is the king—the king's son, truly with absolute sway, stretching his scepter from sea to sea, and “from the river even unto the ends of the earth.” It is remarkable that in this psalm which so fully celebrates the extent of his realm and the sovereignty of his government, there is so much attention drawn to the minuteness of his care for the lowly, his personal sympathy with the poor, and the large benefits they are to enjoy from his kingdom. Where Christ is highest and we are lowest, and the two meet, there is “glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men.” I might almost raise the question whether this psalm is more a tribute of homage to the Messiah, or a treasury of comfort for his poor subjects. We will compound the controversy by saying that as Christ here is highly exalted, so his poor needy ones are highly blessed, and while it is a blessing to them that he is exalted, it is an exaltation to him that they are blessed.

Turning to our text without further preface, we shall note in it *the special objects of great grace*. “He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper;” then, *the special blessings which are allotted to them*. Here it is said that he shall deliver them, but all through the psalms there are scattered promises full of instruction and consolation all meant for them. And, lastly, *the special season which God has appointed for the dispensing of these favors*. “He shall deliver the needy when he crieth.” That shall be God's time. When it is our time to cry, it shall be God's time to deliver.

I. First, then, notice THE SPECIAL OBJECTS OF GREAT GRACE. There is a three-fold description—they are needy, they are poor, they have no helper.

They are *needy*. In this they are like all the sons of men. We begin life in a needy state. We are full of needs in our infancy, and cannot help ourselves. We continue throughout life in a needy state. The very breath in our nostrils hath to be the gift of God's goodness. In him we live, and move, and have our being. And, as we grow old our needs become even more apparent. The staff on which we lean reveals to us our needs, and our infirmities all tell us what needy creatures we are. We need temporal things and we need spiritual things. Our body needs, our soul needs, our spirit needs. We need to be kept from evil; we need to be led into the paths of righteousness; we need on the outset that grace should be implanted; when implanted, we need that it be nurtured; when nurtured, we need that it be perfected and made to bring forth fruit. We are never a moment without need. We wake up, and our first glance might reveal our needs to us, and when we fall asleep it is upon a poor man's pillow, for we need that God should preserve us through the night. We have needs when we are on our knees, else where would be the energy of our prayers? We have

needs when we try to sing, else how should our uncircumcised lips praise him aright? We have needs when we are relieving the needs of others, lest we become proud of our almsgiving. We have need in preaching, need in hearing; we have need in working, need in suffering, need in resting. What is our life but one long need? All men are full of needs. But God's peculiar people *feel* this need—they not only confess it is so, but they know it experimentally. They are full of needs. Once they thought that they were rich and increased in goods, and had need of nothing, but now, through the enlightenment of God's Spirit, they feel themselves to be naked, and poor, and miserable. Their needs were great before, but they appear now to be incalculable, more in number than the hairs of their heads. They have need of a covering for the sin of the past; they have need of help against the temptation of the present; they have need of perseverance as to the entire future. If there are any people under heaven who could claim the title of "needy," above all others, it is not the pauper in the workhouse, nor the mendicant who asks alms in the streets, but it is the child of God, for he feels himself to be so dependent that the more he gets from his great Benefactor the more he requires, and the more he must have to satisfy the enlarged desires of a heart that begins to know the will of God concerning us. Our needs are great and constant.

The second description given is that he is *poor*—"the poor also." A man might be needy, and be able to supply his own need. As fast as his needs arose, he might have sufficient wealth to be able to procure what he wanted. I speak merely of his temporal wants. But, with regard to us in spiritual things, we are not only needy, but we are poor to utter destitution—there is nothing within our reach that we can help ourselves with. We have need of water for our thirst, but nature's buckets are empty, and her cisterns are broken. We have need of bread, but nature's granary is bare. Like the prodigal son in a far off country, there is a famine, a mighty famine, in that land, and we are in want. We have need of clothing; we have found that we are naked, and we are ashamed, but our fig leaves will not serve us, and we are too poor to buy a garment for ourselves. We are so poor that when a want comes it only shows us how empty the treasury is; and every want while it draws upon us meets with no fitting response; there is nothing, nothing, nothing, in human nature at its very best, that can keep pace with its own needs. Speak of self-reliance!—'tis well enough in matters of the world, but self-reliance is absolutely madness in the things of God. We have heard of self-made men, but if any man would enter heaven, he must be a God-made man from first to last, for all that can come out of human nature will still be defiled. The stream shall never mount higher than the fountain-head, and the fountain-head of human nature is pollution, total depravity. It cannot rise higher than that, let it do its best. We are very needy, and very poor. If there be any poor in all the world, who have tasted the bitter ingredients of this cup of sorrow, it is God's people. We are very needy and very poor, though we did not always think so. When the discovery was first made to us, we felt the smart as those do "who have seen better days." Once we fancied ourselves able to do our work and sure to get our wages; we did hope to merit a reward for our good conduct; and we thought it was only for us to add a little piety to our decent morals in order to be well pleasing to God and our own conscience. Ah, sirs! when we woke from these foolish dreams, and faced our own abject poverty, how ashamed we were; how we shunned the light; how we sat alone and avoided company; how fear preyed on our heart; with what anguish we chattered to ourselves, saying, "What shall I do? What shall I do?" Poor indeed we are and we know it.

Moreover, it is said they have *no helper*. Now, until God enlightens us, we seem to have a great many helpers. We fancy—perhaps we once fancied—that a priest could save us. If we have a grain of grace we have given up that idea. Perhaps we imagined that our parents would help us, that our

godly ancestry might stand us in some stead:—but we have long ago been brought to the conviction that we must each stand personally before God, for only personal religion is of any value. At one time we placed some dependence upon the ministry we attended, and hoped that in some favored hour that ministry might be of use to us; but, if God has awakened us, we look higher than pulpits and preachers now. Our eyes are up towards the hills whence cometh our help, and as to all earthly things, we see no help in them. “Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.” “He shall be like the heath in the desert—he shall not see when good cometh.” The Lord grant us all to be reduced to this—that we have no helper, because when we have no helper here, he will become our helper and our salvation. Put the three words together and you have a very correct description of the awakened people of God—needy, poor, and having no helper.

We have felt this, beloved, very keenly some of us just before we looked to Christ. Oh! we can remember now when we wanted to have our sins forgiven us, we would have given all we had if we could but have found mercy;—we were full of needs. We turned all our good works over, but they had all become mouldy and worm-eaten, and they stank in our nostrils. We tried our prayers. We used to fancy if we began to pray earnestly it would all be well with us, but alas! alas! we found our prayers to be poor comforts—broken reeds. We looked all around us, and we could get no consolation. Even Scripture did not seem to cheer us; the very promises seemed to shut their doors against us. We had no helper. Oh, do you remember then when you cried to God in your trouble, and he delivered you? I know you verified the truth of the promise in our text, “He shall deliver the needy when he crieth.”

Since that time, we have been equally needy; we have been making fresh proof of our indigence; and getting into straits from which we could by no means extricate ourselves. Indeed, when a Christian is richest in grace he is poorest in himself. The way to grow rich in grace is to feel your poverty. Whenever you think you have stored up a little strength, a little comfort, a little provision against a rainy day, you are pretty sure to have the trouble you bargained for, and to miss the resources you counted on. Estimate your true wealth before God by your entire dependence on him. The more you have, the less you have, and the less you have, the more you have. When you have nothing at all in yourself, then Christ is all in all to you. The perpetual condition of every child of God in himself is that of a needy and a poor and a helpless one—on the high mountains with his Lord, rejoicing in his love, yet is he even there in himself less than nothing and vanity—still poor and needy.

There have been times when we felt this very powerfully, perhaps, very painfully. Has Satan ever beset you, my brethren, with his fierce temptations? No doubt many of you have had to feel the ferocity of his attacks. Perhaps, blasphemous thoughts have been injected into your mind—dark forebodings, such as these, “God has forsaken me.” Perhaps, he has said, “He has sinned himself out of the covenant—he is a castaway,” and your poor little faith has tried to hold on to Christ, but it seemed as if she must be driven from her hold. While others found it as you thought easy to get to heaven, you realised the truth of the text—“The righteous scarcely are saved.” You have had to fight for every inch of ground, and it seemed to you often as though you had not a spark of grace in you, not a ray of hope, and not so much as a single grain of the grace of God within your heart. Ah! and at such times you have been poor and needy, and you have had no helper. And, perhaps, at such seasons, too, temporal trouble may have come in. Whoever may go through the world without trouble, God’s people never do.

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,

Leads to the place where sorrow is unknown.”

“In the world ye shall have tribulation” is as sure a promise as that other, “In me ye shall have peace.” The trials of God’s servants are sometimes extremely severe. Not a few are literally as well as spiritually poor. Hunger, privation, and embarrassment haunt their steps. And when you once come to be poor, how often does it happen that you have no helper. In the summer of prosperity your friends and acquaintances are numerous as the leaves of the forest, but in the winter of your losses and distresses, your friends are few indeed; your neighbors stand aloof, your old mates desert you, for like the wind your trials have borne them all away as sere leaves, and you cannot find them.

But, do not think that the Lord has cast you off, because he is thus chastening you with the rod of men; take it as an exercise of your faith, and go to him and plead this promise, “He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.”

Thus I have set before you the character of God’s especial objects of sovereign grace; they are poor and needy spiritually. Do you ask why is it that God selects these? Our first answer is, he giveth no account of his matters; he doeth as he will. He is a sovereign; who shall say unto him, “What doest thou?” And, in order that he may make that sovereignty clear to the sons of men, he is pleased to select those whom naturally we might expect him to pass by. Did not Jesus lift his eyes to heaven full of gratitude and say, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are chosen, but God hath chosen the poor of this world, he hath chosen the things that are despised, (and as the Apostle puts it) “Things that are not hath God chosen to bring to nought the things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence.” When the chariot of the Eternal comes from above, he bids it roll far downward from the skies; he passes by the towers of haughty kings; he leaves the palaces of princes and the halls of senates, and down to the hovels of cottagers the chariot of his grace descends, for there he sees with joy and delight the objects of his everlasting love. “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,” is the word of divine sovereignty, and God makes it true by taking the poor and the needy, and them that have no helper.

Still, if we may enquire into the reason, we see in the poor, and the needy, and the helpless, a reason for God’s grace. They are the persons who are most willing to accept it, for they are the persons who most require it. Your generosity will not stand to be dictated to, but, at the same time, you usually prefer to give to those who want most. Wise mercy seeks out chief misery, and God therefore delights to give his blessings to those who need them most, not to those who fancy they deserve them—*they* shall have none of them, but those who need them, they shall have all of them.

When a soul is made to feel its own poverty, it does not set itself up in rivalry with Christ; it does not pretend to be able to help itself; it has no disputing about the terms of the gospel. A sinner, when he is thoroughly famished, has such an appetite that he eats such things as God’s mercy sets before him, and he raises no question. A proud Pharisee will say, “I will not submit to this, to be saved by faith alone—I will not have it. To accept mercy as the absolute gift of heaven, irrespective of my character, I cannot endure it.” The high soul of a Pharisee, I say, kicks at it. But when God has brought a man low, till like the publican he cries, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” he is glad to be saved in God’s way, and no matter however humbling the plan of grace, nor how the sinner is debased and Christ exalted, the poor sinner loves to have it so. It is a way suitable to his own

wants, a way which he accepts for the very reason that God has adapted it to his position. Hence, if there be reasons they lie here, not in man's merit but on the Lord's mercy. The fact that bare misery, when touched and guided by the Spirit of God, makes the soul to open its mouth like the hard chapped soil to drink in the rain, as soon as the rain descends from above, is an argument why grace so commonly flows in this course.

In choosing to bless the poor and needy by his grace, the Lord finds for himself warm friends, those who will give him much praise, contend earnestly for his reign and for his sovereignty, and endure much obloquy for very love to his dear name. Why if the Lord were to save the Pharisees, they would hardly say, "thank you," they are so good themselves. They reckon themselves to be so excellent, that if they had salvation they would take it as a matter of course, and, like the lepers, they would never return to thank him that healed them. But when the Lord saves a great sinner, a man that feels there is nothing good in him; oh, how that man talks of it and tells it to others. He cannot take any praise to himself, he knows that he had nothing to do with it, that it is all of the grace of God. And, oh, see that man how he will stand up for the doctrines of grace! He is as the valiant men in Solomon's song, "each man with a sword on his thigh because of fear in the night;" for the doctrines of grace are not to him matters of opinion, but matters of experience. They are dear to him as his own life. "What," says he, "is not God the giver of salvation? Is not salvation all of God, from first to last? I know it is," saith he. "Don't tell me. Whatever your arguments, however smooth may be the form and fashion of your theology, it does not tally with what I have tasted and handled and felt; for unless it is grace from first to last, I am a lost man; and, if I be indeed a child of God, then can I contend for the doctrines of grace, and will do till I die." I know I felt myself last Sunday night, after I had talked to you about the difficulties of salvation, that if ever I got to heaven, I would praise and bless God with all my soul. I felt like that good old woman who said, that if the Lord ever saved her he should never hear the last of it, for she would tell it everywhere, and publish it abroad throughout all eternity, that the Lord had done it, that he was a good and gracious God to have mercy on such a soul as she was. Now, since one object of God in bestowing his mercy is to glorify himself, he does wisely in bestowing his mercy upon the poor and the needy, and such as have no helper. The Lord give to you, my dear hearer, to be brought down to this tonight. I know many of you have been brought there and are there now. Let my text encourage and cheer you. Dear objects of Almighty love, he finds you on the dunghill, but he lifts you from it. He finds you in the dust, but is not this the song of Hannah and the song of Mary too—"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and he hath exalted them of low degree: he hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he hath sent empty away?" It is God's way of dealing with the poor and lost; rejoice at it, it is full of encouragement to you. But I say to any of you that have never been humbled, good people, who have always been good people, you that have always kept the law from your youth up, and gone to church regularly, or to chapel regularly, very people—The Lord have mercy upon you, and let you see that your goodness is filthiness, that your righteousness is unrighteousness, and that the best that is in you is bad, and that the bad that is in you that you have never seen as yet will be your ruin, your eternal destruction, unless God set it before your eyes, and bring you down to loathe yourself, and feel yourself to be abominable in his sight, and abominable also in your own sight, when his law comes with power home to your souls. Thus I have spoken upon the special objects of divine grace.

II. Now, a few words upon THE SPECIAL BLESSING WHICH THE GREAT KING HAS STORED UP FOR THESE PEOPLE. Kindly look at the second verse. "He shall judge thy people

with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment;" so that one of the special blessings for God's poor is that they shall be judged with judgment. Alas! they are often judged with harshness; or they are judged in ignorance; or they are judged by malice—not judged by righteousness, nor by judgment. When their enemies see them, they say, "These are a broken-spirited people; they are moping and melancholy, wretched and sad." Thus hard things are spoken against them, and unkind stories are told of them. Sometimes they say they are out of their minds, and then they will insinuate that they are only hypocrites and pretenders. Slander is very busy with the children of God. God had a Son that had no fault; but he never had a son that was not found fault with. Ay, God himself was slandered in paradise by Satan: let us not expect, therefore, to escape from the venomous tongue.

One blessing, however, that will always come to God's needy ones is this—Christ will right them, he will judge them with judgment. Are you harshly spoken of at home? Don't be angry, don't provoke in return, don't answer railing with railing. "He shall judge his poor with righteousness." Leave it to him. Wait, wait, till the judgment sits, for who are these that they should judge you? Their opinion, though it is bitter as gall to your spirit, does not really affect your character or your destiny. If you are right before the Lord, through faith in Christ, they cannot make you wrong by anything they say. God judges and God knows. "He searcheth the heart and tries the reins." You remember how David, among his brethren, was much despised. He had not the appearance and the carriage that his elder brethren had, and even Samuel, the Lord's prophet, thought the others to be better than David, and said of them, "Surely the Lord hath chosen these." David was therefore despised of his brethren, but what mattered it? The Lord looked not as man looks, for man looked upon the outward appearance, but God looketh at the heart. Bide your time you that are one of a family and alone. Or, if for Christ's sake you have been despised, have courage to-night and let not your spirit be bowed down. "Rejoice ye in this day and leap for joy, for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you." The King will speedily come, and when he cometh then will this word be verified. "He shall judge his people with righteousness and his poor with judgment." There is one mercy for you—to have your wrongs righted and your character cleared.

God's poor and needy ones, you will perceive, if you turn a little further down, shall be saved from oppression. Fourth verse: "He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." The Lord's people are like sheep among wolves, the wolves treat them injuriously. Christ himself was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. His people may expect to be oppressed too; but they have this for their comfort, that Christ will surely deliver them, and he will break their oppressors in pieces. Are you to-night oppressed by Satan? Have you things laid to your charge by him that you know not of, and doth conscience oppress you with the remembrance of sins which have been forgiven? Have you ever believed concerning them in the atonement of Christ? Well, bow your head meekly, and go to the mercy-seat once again, pleading the precious blood, and he shall break in pieces the oppressor. There is no answer for Satan like the blood! and there is no answer for conscience but the blood. Plead it before God, plead it in your own soul, and you shall find that the great and glorious King in Zion shall, in your hearts, break in pieces the oppressor. There is another special mercy, then—help against the oppressor.

The third blessing is that of our text: "He shall deliver the needy." Deliver them! You are brought into great troubles; you shall be delivered out of them. You are just now the subject of many fears: you shall be delivered from your fears. It seems as though the enemy would soon exult over you, and put his foot upon your neck, and make an end of you; you shall be delivered. You are like a

bird taken in the fowler's net, and he is ready to wring your neck and take the breath out of you; but you shall be delivered out of the hand of the fowler, and brought safely through the perils that threaten you. Oh, that we all had faith! Oh, that we all could exercise faith when in deep waters. It is a fine thing to talk about faith on land, but we want faith to swim with when we are thrown into the flood. May you, tonight, get such a grip of this precious word that you may take it before the Lord and say, "I am poor and needy, and have no helper. O God, deliver my soul now."

But, we have not exhausted the string of blessings. A little further down in the psalm, at the thirteenth verse, you will notice it is said of the King: "He shall spare the poor and needy." If he lays heavily upon them apparently, yet will he by-and-by stay his hand; if he bids one of his rough winds blow, he will save the other. As he is said to temper the wind to the shorn lamb, so will he certainly temper it to his people; they shall be afflicted, but it shall be in measure; he shall spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him: the rod shall make them smart, but shall not make them bleed; they shall be made to suffer, but they shall not be called to die. Perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; there shall always be a gracious limit put to the blows that come from Jehovah's hand for his own people. Oh, what a mercy to be amongst his poor ones, and to feel that he will spare us; he spared not his own Son, but he will spare us, the poor and needy; he smote him with the blows of avenging justice, but concerning us it is written, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but the covenant of my love shall not depart. As I have sworn that the waters shall no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." He will spare his people; he will bring them safely through, and, meanwhile, he will not let the waters be deep enough to overwhelm them.

There is one other blessing which sums up all the rest; you find it in the fourteenth verse: "He shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence." Redemption belongs to the Lord's poor people. He bought with a price his poor ones, and as the ransom has all been paid, they belong to Christ, and none shall take them out of his hand. He that redeemed them by price will redeem them by power. He will, if it be needful, divide the Red Sea again to redeem his people; and, if by no usual means his servants can be preserved, he will bring unusual means into the field. There are no miracles now, we say, but if they are ever wanted for the safety of God's people, there shall be miracles as timely and as plentiful as of yore. "Heaven and earth may pass away, but his word shall never pass away." He would sooner shake the heavens themselves than suffer one of his children to famish, or utterly to perish, rest assured of that. Oh, what glorious comfort there is in all this! We shall be spared, we shall be redeemed, we shall be delivered, we shall be saved, we shall be revenged and cleared before the judgment-bar of God; and, all because the great King has made the poor and needy the special objects of his love. Oh! my soul revels in this. I cannot speak out the thoughts I feel, much less the joy that arises out of them; but what a mercy it really is, that the great King, the King who rules from the river to the ends of the earth, is the poor man's friend. I am very poor and needy and helpless to-night, but the king has made me his favourite, counts me one of his courtiers: it is the same with you, dear brother, if you too are poor and needy, he rules, and he rules on the throne for us; he is great and hath dominion, but he uses all his greatness and his dominion for us. As Joseph in Egypt was invested with power for the good of his brethren, or at least such sovereignty as he held of Pharaoh he laid out for the welfare of his father's house, so Jesus has all power and authority in heaven and earth; all might, majesty, and dominion for the good of his people. He has the king's signet ring upon his finger, but he uses it for his own beloved ones that he may enrich, and honor, and cheer, and perfect them. His glory is concerned in every

one of us. If one of the least of his people should perish, his crown would suffer damage. He is the shepherd and surety of the flock, and at his hand will the Father require all those who are committed to him. He cannot, therefore, let us perish, for then he would not be able to say at the last, "Of all that thou hast given me I have lost none." He must and will preserve us. We are wrapped up in his honor. His power, I say, his crown, his glory, his very name, as the Christ of God anointed to save sinners, all are wrapped up and intertwined in the salvation of every poor and needy soul that is brought to rest in him.

III. And, now, our closing word is, THE SPECIAL SEASON WHEN ALL THIS SHALL BE TRUE. He shall deliver the needy *when he crieth*.

Ah! while I have been preaching there may have been some poor child of God here who has said, "I am poor and needy, and I am in great distress, but I have not been delivered." And there may be some sinner here who has said, "God has taught me my poverty and need, and I know I have no helper, but I cannot find I have been delivered." Perhaps, dear friends, you have been praying for months, praying very bitterly too, after a sort, and you have been desirous that you might find mercy. God's time, when will it come? Well, it will come when you cry. That is something more, I take it, than a mere ordinary prayer. A child asks you for something, and you may perhaps deny it; but you know there is a difference between asking for a thing and crying for a thing. Oh, when you get so that you must have it, and your heart breaks for it, when your needs are so extreme that you cannot stand up under them—well, now, it comes to this, that you must have Christ or perish. "Give me Christ or else I die," when it seems as if you could not put your prayer into words any more, that you could only fall at the foot of the cross, and say, "O God, I cannot pray, but my very soul groans after thee, to have mercy upon me," then is the time, then is the time, but not till then, when God will deliver you. The Lord loves to hear the prayers of his people, and he sometimes keeps them waiting at the posts of his door, that they may pray more. It is always a blessing for us to pray as well as to get the answer to prayer. Prayer is in itself a blessing. When the Lord hears us knock faintly at the door, he does not open; we may knock and knock again—he likes us to knock; it does us good to knock. But when it comes to this, that it is all knocking with us, and our very soul and body seem to knock, and our heart and flesh cry after God, the living God: when we shall thus come to appear before God, and open our mouth and pant vehemently for the mercy he has promised, then it will come. When thou canst not take a denial, thou shalt not have a denial. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. There is none so violent as the man who is in desperate need. There is a person who has been without bread many hours, and he asks you for charity in the street. You would pass him by, but he is famished, and he says, "Oh give me bread! I die." He compels you to it. And such is the prayer that prevails with God. When the soul cannot wait, dare not wait, fears lest it should shut its eyes and open them in hell. Oh! God will not keep such a soul long waiting. I am always glad when I hear of convinced souls saying, "I went up into my chamber with the resolution that I would never come down again till I had found the Savior." I always delight to hear of men and women who say, "I went upon my knees and cried to him, saying, I will not let thee go except thou bless me." He will bless thee. If thou wilt let him go, he will go, but if thou wilt not let him go, thou shalt have thy request of him. "But who am I," saith one, "that I should plead thus? I have no right to hold him thus." 'Tis true, but when a man is hungry, when a man is dying, he does not think of rights. He holds you right or wrong. His need is his right. Poor soul, go and plead your need before God. Plead your sin, tell him you are wretched and undone without his sovereign grace. Use the strange argument which David used, the strangest

in all the world, "For thy name's sake, O Lord! pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." Plead the very greatness of your sin as a reason for mercy; the damnable character of your sin; the certainty that you will soon be cast into hell, the fact that he might justly drive you from his presence for ever; plead all that before him; and say, "Lord, if ever the heights and depths of thy grace might be seen in saving an undeserving soul, I am just that one. If thy mercy wants to honor itself by saving the most undeserving, ill deserving, hell deserving sinner that ever lived, Lord, I am the man. If thou wantest a platform on which to erect a monument of infinite grace, that men shall stand and wonder, and angels shall gaze on it with astonishment, Lord, here am I. If thou wantest emptiness, here is one who is all emptiness. If thou as the good physician wantest a bad case, a glaring case, a desperate case, to operate on, thou wilt never have a worse case than mine. O God, turn aside and have pity upon me, and show thy mighty power." This is the way to plead. Not your merits—they will never get a hearing, but your misery, your sin, your guiltiness before God—these are the arguments. And then if faith can come in and plead the blood, and say, "Didst thou not send thy Son to save sinners?" has he not said he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance? Is it not written that the Son of Man is come to seek and to save not the good, but that which was lost? Oh! if you can plead the blood in that fashion, you will not fail. His name is the Savior—he came to save his people from their sins. He died for the ungodly, he justifieth the ungodly—the unrighteous he makes righteous through his own merits. If you can plead this, oh, then, you shall not long wait, for though God does not deliver till we cry, yet he does deliver when we cry. "He will deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper." Oh, what a mercy it is when the tide is ebbed right out, and there is nothing left. It will turn now, it will turn now. The streams of grace will turn now. When you are empty, when you are overwhelmed, when you are like a dish wiped out, and there is not anything good left in you—now will God come to you. The darkest part of the night is that which precedes the dawn of the day. When God has killed you, he will make you live. When he has wounded you through and through, he will come to your healing.

"'Tis perfect poverty alone,
That sets the soul at large;
While we can call one mite our own,
We get no *full* discharge.
But let our debts be what they may,
However great or small;
As soon as we have nought to pay,
Our God forgives us all."
May it be so now, for his name's sake. Amen.

Another Royal Procession

A Sermon

(No. 1038)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, 3rd, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.”—Matthew 21:5.

IT IS NOT OUR INTENTION to preach alone from this verse, but from the combined narrative of our Savior's triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem, as contained in the four evangelists.

When our Lord was here on earth, he was a humble man before his foes, a weary man and full of woes, and only now and then did some glimpses of his native royalty burst forth from him; he had now and then a day in which his regal rights were assumed and his royal position was claimed. He is gone from us now as to his actual presence, but he is with us spiritually, and his spiritual presence here is not unlike what his bodily presence was in the days of his flesh. For the most part, the glory of his gospel presence is unobserved, except among his own disciples, and when perceived by others he is still despised and rejected of men. He moves up and down among our assemblies, hearing our prayers and accepting our praises, but still his honor as a prince lies concealed from the eyes of the many who know him not as king by right divine. Yet, as in those days, he had his times of clearer display and his hours of partial manifestation, even so he has now. He gives to his church her glory periods, her days of thanksgiving, her court days, and her times of exultation; and I pray God that he may grant such times as these to his church now, that in the midst of these dull years he may gird his sword upon his thigh, and ride forth gloriously in his majesty. Oh, that the streets of his Jerusalem could be gladdened by the holy pomp and sacred splendor of his gracious and triumphal presence, beloved, the world doth well to salute righteous kings with all homage; our nation doth well to honor their well-beloved queen, whom may God long preserve! but shall Christ the King of kings be without his homage? I must confess I am jealous for him, jealous with a burning jealousy that the streets should blaze with splendor for the Queen of Britain, and that so little should be done in honor of the King immortal, eternal. Lo, the shouts of the multitude rend the skies for earthly princes, and I grudge them not; but, should there be no upliftings of joyful voices for the Prince of Peace? Why this lethargy in his church? Why such slender zeal for the Chief among, ten thousand? Why should not earth and heaven ring with His praises? If I might say so much as a sentence to-day that should lead the tribes to speak a word to bring the King back again to his own; if I might excite in any soul a fervent desire that Christ's kingdom should more speedily come, and his throne should be exalted more on high in the midst of his people, I should be thrice happy. To that end shall I endeavor to speak this day. Oh, for the anointing of the Holy Ghost to aid me therein.

Our points of consideration this morning will be, first, that *Christ hath even now his glorious days among men*; and secondly, that *when those glorious days come honors are paid to him similar to those described by the evangelists on the occasion of his entrance into Jerusalem*. In the third place I shall remind you that *he is wont on such occasions to perform the same mighty deeds*; and

in the close of our discourse we shall have to observe that *even on those brilliant occasions, "all is not gold that glitters."*

I. First, then, here is a very pleasant consideration, that THE LORD JESUS HAS, EVEN NOW, BRIGHT AND GLORIOUS DAYS OF SPECIAL MANIFESTATION IN HIS CHURCH. He has ridden into his Jerusalem again and again in the history of the gospel. We call these times revivals; and in yet more scriptural language they are known as "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." They usually occur—and I shall try to follow the narrative in all the remarks I make), they usually occur *after the Lord has visited his beloved and quickened them*. He came into Jerusalem after he had raised Lazarus from the dead. His omnipotent voice had said, "Lazarus, come forth!" and Lazarus came forth, and the grave clothes were loosed from him; then and for that cause did the people come to meet our Lord with palm branches. First doth the Lord speak to his Church and he saith to her, "Come forth out of the grave of thy sloth and thine indifference." He saith, "Loose her, take away the bands of her sloth and her conventionalism, and set her free," and then when he hath restored among his church a people whom he loves, and granted to them renewed vigor of spiritual life in the power of his resurrection, then it is that the sign of the glory of the Son of Man is revealed. I despair, beloved, of any revival being of the slightest value which does not begin with the church of God. It never can originate outside and work into the interior, this is not the rule of spiritual life; it must commence with the spiritual in the midst of the church, it must next quicken the mass of the discipleship, and then it shall spread to those who are without, and in ever widening circles its power shall be felt. But, revival must begin at home. Hear ye this ye professors, and take heed lest ye hinder Christ of his glory. Hear this ye who profess to be members of his church, and beware lest ye be like the damp wood which will not kindle, and therefore no fire burneth among the sons of men. Oh, let not the Well-beloved find his worst hindrances in his own household; let not the glory of Christ be obscured most by those who stand nearest to him, and ought therefore to be most jealous for his holy name. Yet so I fear full often it is; the children Ephraim being armed and carrying bows turn back in the day of battle, and so Israel's God is dishonored. Lazarus must arise; our death must be shaken off, and then shall the Lord Jesus greatly triumph.

The Lord was pleased to ride in state *when his disciples were obedient to him*. Note well their implicit obedience, for it is a sure prophecy of glorious displays in the church. He said to two of his disciples, "Go," and they went; and others of them having his commission performed their errands without hesitation. Alas! I fear the disobedience of the church often hinders the advance of the gospel. The disciples do not at this day, as they did then, the things which Jesus commanded them. One of them saith, "I will follow Paul, another I will follow Cephas"—would God we laid aside all party leadership, and were only led by the master himself! One saith, "This institution is venerable if it be not scriptural," and another saith, "I believe this ritual to be impressive and instructive, even if it be not ordained of God;" and so men excuse their will-worship. Oh, that we could lay all these things aside, and recognize that the law of the house is the law which the Master makes, and not the law which the servant may invent. It is time that we laid our perverse likes and our dislikes, our whims and our fancies, our opinions and even our more sober judgments, at the foot of him who is the only King of Zion; for be assured of this, his sacred majesty will not manifest its glory to disobedient disciples, except it be in a way of terror. Take heed, then, O ye who stand in his courts by your profession, and are his servants in name, that ye labor to do his will on earth as it is done in heaven, cheerfully, speedily, exactly, and with reverence to his every word, for otherwise he will veil his glory, and do but few mighty works among you.

Another indication of our Lord giving us glory days will be found in *the prompt and cheerful sacrifice which his disciples will make*. On the day of his entrance into Jerusalem, the owner of the ass and its colt cheerfully surrendered them when he heard that the Lord had need of them: the disciples who brought the ass did not spare their own contributions, for they took their garments and piled them on the ass; and others would not be debarred from their share of homage, for they spread their garments in the way, counting it their greatest honor to be bare-backed for Christ. All hands contributed, for all hearts were warm. The willing offerings of the people carpeted the road for the Son of David when he went through his metropolis to his cathedral. None appeared before him empty; there was no withholding on that day. A generous spirit had seized upon all his followers, and mark this word, for there is more of solemn truth in it than some will think, Christ Jesus hath often taken away the power of his Spirit from the church because of the covetousness of many professors, who have grudged the cause of God what they ought spontaneously and cheerfully to have offered. They have said of sacrifice to the Lord, "what a weariness it is!" They have robbed God in tithes and in offerings. They have counted the free-will offering to be a tax, when they ought to have considered it to be an honor and a privilege to be allowed to give to the Lord's cause. God has been insulted by miserly gifts and penurious contributions. What they would have been ashamed to offer to the meanest among princes they have presented to the Lord. How often have I blushed as I have heard in prayer that text, "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Why have you blushed? say you. Because seldom or never do I hear that text quoted correctly, its point is dexterously turned aside. What is the proof which the Lord puts before his people in that text? How doth he say, "Prove me now?" By your prayers? No. By your good works? No. But the text is, "Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts," and so on. That is the peculiar test to which God brings his people, and in that test, alas, how many fail therein. They buy him no sweet cane with money, neither is he filled with their sacrifices. They will give their words in plenty, their lip homage in floods, but if it, comes to their substance they will have none of it. How few Christians have ever read this text and understood it, "Sell what thou hast and give alms." Their almsgiving has never come to that; they have given but the cheese parings and the candle ends to Christ; they never knew they had given them, they made no sacrifice to do so. Many do not give to Jesus so much in a year as it costs to clean their shoes. Christ's cause costs them not half the hire of the most menial servant in their kitchens. Is not this a crying evil, to be answered for by those who are guilty of it? How can we expect the kingdom to come and the cause of Christ to grow while in these days of unreal profession Christ's followers deny him his due, and straiten the exchequer of his church. If no garments strew the road, and no man gives up his colt, how shall the prince celebrate a triumph?

But we must pass on from that; those three things are, however, very significant signs of Christ's glory days; a quickened people, an obedient discipleship, and a general self-sacrifice. Let us see these, and we shall be sure that one of Christ's glory days has come.

Furthermore, the glory of Christ is seen *when Jesus Christ is publicly proclaimed as King*. Evermore, beyond doubt, we acknowledge Christ to be King in the church; I hope all believers are sound upon that point: but in what holes and corners doth the church whisper out the truth, which he hath told us in the closet. Years ago, many of the churches were quite content to hide their light under any bushel, meeting in the queerest courts, and lanes, and alleys, where nobody but an angel

and themselves could ever find them out. This content with obscurity is contrary to the genius of the gospel; let moles and bats seek out the hidden places and dwell therein; the children of light are not ashamed, but make it their glory that these things are not done in a corner. It is a grand day for the kingdom of Christ when the King is proclaimed in the streets, when the great trumpet is sounded, when the disciples stand in the highways, and the voice of wisdom is lifted up in the chief places of concourse, at the going in of the gates. Then are things well ordered when Zion lifts up her voice, yea, lifts it up with strength, and saith unto the cities of Judah, "Behold your God." Our commission as preachers is to every creature, and, therefore, the more public the teaching of the gospel the better. Truly, there was grace in the earth when in popish times God was loved by men in quiet, and when Christ was worshipped by little knots in secret; but that was a grander day when Luther stood out in the open air and said that Christ was King, and salvation was by his blood. Then, when all over Europe the crowds began to gather in the fields, or beneath the gospel oak, or in the public squares, to listen to the men who not in a corner, not with bated breath, but aloud and boldly, before them all declared that antichrist must come to an end and that the Lord Jesus Christ must be exalted, and faith in him must be declared to be the salvation of the sons of men, oh, it was then that Christ and his church behests a glorious day. Blessed be God for the Reformation, but we must not rest in faded laurels, we need new victories. We desire the blessings of the gospel to be extended; and we ought to pray that the gospel may have free course and be glorified, that every street may ring with its charming music, that every alley and court may brighten with salvation, ay, and that not a house in London may be left without knowing that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." It is a notable day when in the great gatherings of the people the Lord Jesus is declared to be the Lord of all.

On such days, one part of the glory consists in *many going forth to meet Christ*. I wish I might live to see the facts of the gospel narrative fulfilled spiritually before our eyes. The people in Jerusalem took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet Jesus, glad that he was coming into the city, willing to swell the pomp of his entrance; and even thus God moves often on bright days upon the mass of the people making them willing to receive the gospel. There are times when the preacher feels that he is sowing on stony ground, but on other days when God's Spirit is abroad, the soil seems broken up, friable, ready to receive the grain, and the seed suddenly springs up, and a speedy harvest is produced. Pray, my brethren, that God would move our fellow countrymen to go forth to meet King Jesus. Pray that there may come a great cave of religious thought over the minds of the people. God can cause it; he has the keys of human hearts, and can secretly guide them according to his will. Pray that there may be a great religious movement among the people, for then we may look for one of the days of the Son of Man, as the days of heaven upon earth.

Then, too, as another sign, we shall see *enthusiasm prevailing on all sides*. When Christ rode through Jerusalem, it was not possible for men to be cold at the sight of his majesty. Those who hated burned with malignity, but those who loved him were full of flaming affection towards him. It is one speciality of Christ's character that men can scarcely be indifferent in his presence; he that is not with him is against him. What enthusiasm there was in the crowd that day when the city rang again. The children climbed the trees and threw down the branches; their parents waved them in triumph and then cast them in the roadway that the Savior might ride over them. The shouts were loud and long, the day was full of gladness to the many. Ah, and it is a mark of Christ's presence when the church becomes enthusiastic. We sometimes hear complaints about revivals being too exciting, perhaps the censure is deserved, but I would like to see a little of the fault. This age does

not generally sin in the direction of being too excited concerning divine things. We have erred so long on the other side that, perhaps, a little excess in the direction of fervor might not be the worst of all calamities; at any rate, I would not fear to try it. Doubtless our Lord's presence, like the rising of the sun scatters heat as well as light on all sides. Oh to be scorched by that sun, to be parched with that heat. Blessed would they be who should be guilty of too great a love for him, convicted of too consuming a zeal for the glory. I would gladly die of that heavenly malady.

On that triumphal day, beloved brethren, where there was no enthusiasm, *there was inquiry*, for all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" When our Lord grants revivals to his church, the congregations and the multitude outside begin to ask, "Wherefore this stir? what meaneth all this? Who is this Christ, and what is his salvation?" This spirit of inquiry is eminently desirable. It is just now a matter to be sought for by importunate prayer. Would God that all this vast metropolis were stirred by the inquiry, "Who is this?" and that everywhere men said, "What is this gospel about which so much noise is made?" May the Lord in his mercy move men's hearts as the trees of the wood are shaken with the wind. This is that shaking which the prophet saw in the valley of vision when bone came together to its bone, before the breath of the Spirit made the slain to live. Be instant day and night O ye chosen men of God, and pray that like Nineveh in the days of Jonah this whole city may be moved by the preaching of the word.

The strange thing about the matter was that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, *all his enemies were quiet*. He rode publicly through the streets where Herod and Pilate held their courts, yet they did not attempt to molest him. The Romans were very jealous of their authority, they were always prompt to seize upon any person who pretended to be a king, and yet not a solitary pretorian guard laid his rough hand upon the King of the Jews, neither did Herod's men of war appear upon the scene. It does not appear that any information was carried to head quarters concerning this singular procession, neither was it laid to the Lord's charge by his enemies on his trial. As for the scribes and Pharisees, they did no more than bark a little, but bite they could not, for they feared the people. That day every foeman cowered down before the Lord, like dogs when a lion roareth. When he entered the temple he was unattended by armed followers, he took with him no sword, but simply a scourge made of small curds, and yet with that slight weapon he chased out the buyers and sellers, overturning their tables, and overthrowing the seats of them that sold doves; and yet it does not appear that any resistance was made to him; he was Lord of the hour. Against him durst not a dog move his tongue; in the presence of the King of Zion the enemy was as still as a stone till he and his people had passed through the city, and the day of the royal pomp was over. In like manner it is remarkable that, in times when the Lord is blessing his church, he restrains the wrath of his enemies or causes it to praise him. He hath power to make the proudest humble themselves, and the most stout-hearted bow their necks, and he uses that power to the glory of his name.

While I am thus describing what the glorious days of Christ are when they dawn upon us, surely you, my dear fellow members, are all pleading with God and earnestly praying, "O king of grace, Grant us one of these royal days in this church;" and you, the members of other churches, are crying, "would God that Jesus would come to our town in that fashion, and that he would rule in our church, after that manner." Let us pray for it unanimously and continually, and let us be of good cheer, for Jesus loves his church and he will give her what her heart is set upon. Let us plead with him for it, and we shall yet see the day in which the many shall cry, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

II. But, time could fail us if we lingered here, and therefore we pass to the second head, which is this, that **ON THESE GLORY DAYS OF JESUS CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH, LIKE HONORS ARE PAID TO HIM NOW AS THEN.**

And first, *he is at this time as loudly praised and as greatly rejoiced in among his people as he was then.* They clapped their hands and called him "Blessed;" and the whole multitude of his disciples rejoiced with an exceeding loud voice, and cried, "Hosanna, Hosanna." Oh, beloved, we are dull enough when Christ is away; how can the children of the bridechamber rejoice when the bridegroom is gone from them; but when his Spirit comes with power into our midst how can we fast? Oh, then our hearts rejoice, and leap along in glee like the long frozen brooks when the soft breath of spring hath set them free. Send us but a revival, O God, and Ready-to-halt shall leap upon his crutches, and Much-afraid, and Fearing, and Despondency, shall sing with holy mirth. No joy is like the joy of Christ's presence with his people. Oh, that we might have it! Bickerings soon cease, murmurings come to an end, complaints of one another, and of God's providence are all hushed; the sense that Jesus Christ is with his people drowns every note of sorrow, and every heart is tuned to loudest notes of thankfulness. O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is be stirred up, his holy name to magnify and bless, on that auspicious day, when the power of Jesus Christ is revealed in the city of his choice. It is a gladsome time, a time of singing, a time of shouting, a time of exultation, and of intense delight when we go forth to meet our King Solomon to crown him anew. I need not say to you, should he favor us with such a delightful period, let us rejoice and be glad in him, for you would be sure to do it. When the Lord turns again the captivity of Sion, then is our mouth filled with singing and our tongue with laughter.

The point that I shall dwell upon here would be that Christ's peculiar honor lay not only in the joy and rejoicing which flowed around him, but in *the multitude who felt the contagion of that joy.* It was said by those who saw the pageant of last week that the great sight of all was the multitude; the thing to look at and to wonder at was the crowd the dense, far-reaching, eager, surging crowd. And, surely, in Christ's glory days the thing which brings him much honor is the crowd, the multitude; for when he makes bare his arm, and his gospel is preached with power, the multitude are sure to listen to his gospel, and men say, "Behold the whole world is gone after him." It may seem strange and unaccountable, but so it is, that the very gospel which is opposed by men has a strange attraction for their ears, they cannot help hearing it; and though to this day there is an opposition in the human heart to the truth as it is in Jesus, yet is it a remarkable fact that men love to hearken to it. The numerical strength of Christ's church lies still in the multitude; the common people hear him gladly. Though it was known that Christ was coming, the princes did not go to meet him, the priests did not go to meet him; there were no long files of Jewish nobility to greet their King; but the people went in their thousands, the masses cheered him. I dare say the Pharisees called them the mob, the rabble, the unwashed. Yes, and let it stand for fact, "this man receiveth sinners;" he is the people's King, the helper of the poor and needy. The poor of this world have been rich in faith in him. In the old days of persecution, and of burning, who were the men that played the man most nobly at the stake? Here and there a bishop and a noble did so, but the rank and file of the heroes were from the poor or the middle class. There was one great man, with an unworthy right hand that recanted, and yet did well at the last; but the poor weavers of Colchester, and the cobblers of Bow, never recanted at all, but gloried in being made a burnt-offering for the truth. Wherever the gospel has been mainly upheld by the great ones of the earth it has had little success. Take, for instance, Spain and Italy, the converts of the Reformation there nearly all belonged

to the higher ranks, and ere long its doctrines became extinct, but it lived among German peasants and British artisans. The valiant of Israel still come from the loom, the smithy, the plough, and the bench. Wherever the gospel entrenches itself among the common people, the devil himself cannot destroy it: it is then like a lion in its own forest, and none can drive it forth. The priests and the mighty ones may uphold what cause they will, but if the people are for King Jesus, his advocates have no need to blush. It is this day the glory of Christ that he doth save the poor and the needy, and that he is the prince of the multitude. "I have exalted," saith the Lord, "one chosen out of the people"—Jesus is the people's Christ, the people's man. He still hath honor out of the mouth of those whom others despise, for he hath chosen the base things of the world and the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are. Here was a part of Christ's glory.

And then, observe, that, on that day it was Christ's glory that *he received all sorts of homage from all kinds of people*. As I have already said, he who had a beast that Christ might ride upon cheerfully surrendered it: he who had no beast had at least a garment, and he gave it; and he who was so poorly clad, that his best garment when spread in the way might seem rather to insult than to honor the king, gave a branch from the tree. He who could brought a palm, which probably he had to purchase with money; but those who could not buy palm branches, climbed the trees that were common and grew by the highway, and threw the branches down. I suppose these were branches of olives, for they were hard by the Mount of Olives: let the fatness of the earth honor him! There were also branches of the figtree, for Bethphage was the house of figs: let the sweetness of the earth honor him! Doubtless there were branches of the cedars: let the honor and strength of the earth adore him! There were branches of the myrtle: let all earth's honor and victory glorify him! I do not read that Christ rejected so much as one attempt to do him honor. He rebuked no disciple and silenced no child. Oh, in the day when Christ is glorious all his people try to serve him, each one brings his portion; the prince brings much, but the peasant brings his share, and the Lord accepts them all. No Christian when the Lord is abroad shirks his duty or forgets to bring his sacrifice, nor doth the Lord reject so much as one honest gift of a sincere heart.

And, on that day, oh, it was a sweet thing to notice and delightful to remember, it will always be so when Christ is glorious, *the little ones were conspicuous*. Did not the boys in the Temple cry "Hosanna! Hosanna!" and their throats here not hoarse half so soon as their fathers' were. They kept up the mirth of that gladsome day—a joyful holiday was it for them. Even thus where there is true grace working powerfully in a church I always expect to see young converts, boys and girls will be brought to Christ in any true revival, and where they are not, methinks we have good reason to suspect that the movement is not genuine, for had it been the work of the Spirit of God, the little ones would have been suffered to come unto him as well as those of older growth. Oh, may such honors be heaped on Christ in this Tabernacle! Would God I could hear the little ones say, "Hosanna!" while their fathers and their mothers join the song. The Lord grant that the Sabbath-school may send up a noble regiment for the King's army. Oh, that on all sides, you men with wealth, and you men with none, you with great gifts, and you with few, you with much time and leisure, and you with scarce an hour to call your own, you aged men and you youngsters, would unite in magnifying the Redeemer. Oh, that I could see you all strewing somewhat in the way of Christ to glorify him in the midst of his church.

III. But, I must not dwell there, though the theme is very tempting, but notice that when Christ comes into the church **HE EXECUTES THE SAME DEEDS AS HE DID THEN.**

What was the first thing he did that we observe? He was seated on the colt, and as he rode along and heard the shouts of the people, I have no doubt that a smile was over his face, and when he saw the little ones in all their ardor, he looked at them with love; but, on a sudden, just as he came where he could see Jerusalem, though it was the day of his triumph he stopped, and all around could see that some mighty emotion was swelling his heart to bursting, and at last the tears coursed adown those cheeks, and he burst into this lament, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day." I know that everywhere Christ is in the church in the power of his Spirit, *compassion for souls becomes very prominent*. Christ weeps through his people's eyes, and yearns through his children's hearts. He makes them pitiful and full of compassion. They cannot bear it that men should be damned, it grieves them that the day of a gracious visitation should come, and yet so many should reject Christ. Oh, my brethren, you who live near to Christ, and feel a sympathy with him, ask the Lord to give you heart-ache over dying souls; ask him to make you feel an anguish because men will not come unto him that they might have life, but will persist in committing spiritual suicide, by putting far from them life eternal. Oh, that we might see a holy passion for souls in the church. For that would be a blessed sign of rich grace.

At the same time, on that very same occasion, there was conspicuous *the judgments of Christ*, for his compassion did not permit him to keep back the tidings of future punishment. He said, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side. And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." I have noted that in genuine revivals, the preachers of Gods truth are not backward in preaching the threatenings, as well as the promises. We are told that men are drawn to Christ by love, and the statement is true; but, at the same time, "knowing the terrors of the Lord," we are to persuade men, and not to keep back from them the evil tidings. Even Christ with weeping eyes and tender heart does not hesitate to tell Jerusalem of its coming destruction, and I believe it is a token that Christ is in the church when those terrible things of his are not kept back to please the popular taste; when there is no trying to cut them down and moderate them, in order to make the wrath to come look less terrible than it is. It must be thundered out again and again, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." It must be told the sinner that if he goeth on in his iniquity, he shall be driven away from hope and salvation, "where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." Christ is not present in an unfaithful church, and this is a point upon which some churches are very apt to grow unfaithful. We must deliver the whole truth, even the dark side of it as well as that which smiles with mercy and Christ is not present unless it be so. The sympathy of Jesus led him, as it should lead us, to be lovingly honest with the sons of men.

But, you notice in the reading that our Lord, when he rode through the streets of his metropolis, went straight away to the cathedral gate, and when he entered there *he began to purge the temple*. With the scourge in his hand he smote right and left, and he overthrew the tables of those that were changing the shekels, and he cast out the cages of doves that were stored there for merchandise. Even thus doth Christ do. No church can remain long impure with Jesus in her midst; his presence brings reformation, things tolerated before become intolerable where he is. While a church is without the Spirit of God it will keep in its old way, it will plead precedent, it will endure grievous abuses, it will make excuses for this, and excuses for that; but, let the Lord once come, and out the hawkers

and hucksters must go, tables, money-bags, doves, and all. He will not have them in his house of prayer; bag and baggage they must go when he comes in, and he only in his truth and power must reign in the midst of his own church. I do not believe we shall thoroughly purify any church by Acts of Parliament, nor by reformation associations, nor by agitation, nor by any merely human agency. No hand can grasp the scourge that can drive out the buyers and sellers, but that hand which once was fastened to the cross. Let the Lord do it and the work will be done, for it is not of man, nor shall man accomplish it.

Then, when Christ had purged the church, the next thing was *to heal the sick* who came to him in the temple. The place which might not be a mart was allowed to be an hospital. So the glory days of Christ are always notable for the great cures that he works; the sons of men receive lasting benefits, and are relieved of grievous maladies. Eyes are opened, understandings are enlightened. Infirmities are removed, the lame walk. Wills are subdued; hearts are cleansed; and natures are changed. Where Jesus comes, salvation follows with all the train of blessings which it includes.

And, then, we find that that day *his foes were all confounded*. They came to meet him with their questions, but he soon answered them; and what did they say the one to the other? "Perceive ye how we prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him." O master, give us to see such times as these: our soul now longeth for them. Cause thou our enemies to lament, and say, "We thought we had put down these old doctrines, but we have prevailed nothing, behold the multitude is moved by them." The devil thought in England years ago that the gospel light was put out; he had lulled the Church of England and Dissenters too into a deep sleep, and Arianism and all sorts of errors had spread all over the land: but the Lord touched the heart of Whitefield, and Wesley, and the godly ones; the Spirit of God came down, the multitude heard the Gospel gladly, and many an enemy of Christ as he stood at his window and saw the streets thronged to hear those men as they never had been thronged before, and heard the song borne on the distant breezes of the wide open spaces outside the towns and villages, said, "Why, after all, no have not put this thing down: though we fancied we had destroyed it." There is hope of this celestial tree; if it be cut down it will sprout again; at the scent of water it will bud. This child is not dead, but sleepeth. A certain vainglorious party of Pretenders to intellect and culture tell us now that the old Puritanic faith is nearly extinct; there are only a few of us ignorant people who now hold the same truths as John Owen, John Bunyan, Goodwin, and Charnock; but all the elite of the world, those who have all the "sweetness and light" to themselves, the thinkers, the mental gentility have all been sensible enough to give their votes for something more suitable to the times. In the name of God, we shall show them the difference yet, and by his Spirit He will din their ears with the gospel ram's horn till they and their Jericho come down in a common ruin. The evangelical doctrine which shook Europe will shake it yet again, and England shall yet know that the self-same truth, for which her martyrs died and for which her Puritans fought on many a wellcontested field, shall break the rationalism and ritualism of this land in pieces yet, and all else that standeth in the way of the true gospel of the living God. We are not afraid nor discouraged, but we cry mightily unto the King that we may once more lift up a shout because of his presence, for then human philosophy shall be ashamed, and old Rome shall know, and all the cubs of the beast of Rome shall know, that the Lord liveth, and his invincible truth shall win the day.

IV. Now lastly, I said that even on the occasion, when Christ came into Jerusalem, **ALL WAS NOT GOLD THAT GLITTERED**, and so we must not expect it to be in any revival of religion. They said, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!" till the heavens rang again, but there was an undercurrent,

there were Pharisees and men of other classes with them, grizzling and snarling, trying there and then to devise a plan by which to destroy the Lord, and there was Judas at that very time plotting, planning, ready to sell his Master. However, what did that signify? The worst thing of all was this, that those same tongues which were that day crying "Hosanna!"—oh, shame to our humanity that we should have to mention it!—those same tongues which cried "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," within that self-same week said, "crucify him! crucify him!" I say not all, but some. It was the mob of Jerusalem that brought him in as their King, but when they found that he would not assume the throne, and that he spoke of a spiritual kingdom, and not an earthly one, then they were instant with loud voices, saying, "Let him be crucified! let him be crucified!" Expect not, therefore, when many hearts are impressed with the gospel, that all will be steadfast towards Christ. Do not reckon that every pious feeling will end in genuine conversion. The florist does not expect all his slips to become shrubs. Look ye at the trees which, in a few short days, will be smothered with blossoms and glorious with beauty; do you expect those blossoms all to become fruit? No gardener thinks that such a thing can be. He understands that full many of those flowers will wither, will be blown off in the March gales, or smitten by the evening's frost. He looks for fruit proportionate to the blossoming, but not to a fruit that shall be equal to the full promise of the bloom. And so, think not ill of Christ's great days, because they seem to inexperienced eyes greater on the surface than they are. Thank God there is a residuum of reality, be thankful for that; but, do not be disappointed, much less scoff, because it is not all that you had hoped it was. If some be saved we are glad; if I had a thousand professed converts, and only a hundred of them turned out to be genuine, I would be more grateful than if all my converts were genuine, and there was only half a dozen of them. Large dealers look for some losses and bad debts, and yet hope to gain much in the long run. So long as I do but get the number of real converts, I will forget, and my heart shall outlive, the disappointment of having expected more. Go on; brethren, go on praying, hoping, working, for the Lord will bless his people, the Lord will bless his people with peace. Amen and amen.

As a very large number of friends from a distance desire occasionally to attend the Tabernacle, but do not like to encounter the crowds at the doors, the deacons have resolved to issue early admission tickets, which will admit the holder before the general public, during the month of issue. They will be purchasable at the price of one shilling, and can be had by letter, enclosing twelve penny stamps, and one half-penny stamp for postage, of Mr. C. Blackshaw, Tabernacle, Newington Butts.

“Pray Without Ceasing”

A Sermon

(No. 1039)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, March 10th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Pray without ceasing.”—1 Thessalonians 5:17.

THE POSITION OF OUR TEXT is very suggestive. Observe what it follows. It comes immediately after the precept, “Rejoice evermore;” as if that command had somewhat staggered the reader, and made him ask “How can I always rejoice?” and, therefore, the apostle appended as answer, “Always pray.” The more praying the more rejoicing. Prayer gives a channel to the pent-up sorrows of the soul, they flow away, and in their stead streams of sacred delight pour into the heart. At the same time the more rejoicing the more praying; when the heart is in a quiet condition, and full of joy in the Lord, then also will it be sure to draw nigh unto the Lord in worship. Holy joy and prayer act and react upon each other.

Observe, however, what immediately follows the text: “In everything give thanks.” When joy and prayer are married their first born child is gratitude. When we joy in God for what we have, and believingly pray to him for more, then our souls thank him both in the enjoyment of what we have, and in the prospect of what is yet to come. Those three texts are three companion pictures, representing the life of a true Christian, the central sketch is the connecting link between those on either side. These three precepts are an ornament of grace to every believer's neck, wear them every one of you, for glory and for beauty; “Rejoice evermore;” “Pray without ceasing;” “in everything give thanks.”

But we cannot spare any time for the consideration of the context, but must advance to the precept in hand. Our text though exceedingly short is marvellously full, and we will discuss it under the following heads. We shall ask and answer four questions. *What do these words imply?* Secondly, *What do they actually mean?* Thirdly, *How shall we obey them?* And, fourthly, *Why should WE especially obey them?*

I. WHAT DO THESE WORDS IMPLY? “Pray without ceasing.” Do they not imply that *the use of the voice is not an essential element in prayer?* It would be most unseemly even if it were possible for us to continue unceasingly to pray aloud. There would of course be no opportunity for preaching and hearing, for the exchange of friendly intercourse, for business, or for any other of the duties of life; while the din of so many voices would remind our neighbors rather of the worship of Baal than that of Zion. It was never the design of the Lord Jesus that our throats, lungs, and tongues should be for ever at work. Since we are to pray without ceasing, and yet could not pray with the voice without ceasing, it is clear that audible language is not essential to prayer. We may speak a thousand words which seem to be prayer, and yet never pray; on the other hand, we may cry into God's ear most effectually, and yet never say a word. In the book of Exodus God is represented as saying to Moses, “Why criest thou unto me?” And yet it is not recorded that Moses had uttered so much as a single syllable at that time. It is true that the use of the voice often helps prayer. I find, personally, that I can pray best when alone if I can hear my own voice; at the same

time it is not essential, it does not enter at all into the acceptability, reality, or prevalence of prayer. Silence is as fit a garment for devotion as any that language can fashion.

It is equally clear that *the posture of prayer is of no great importance*, for if it were necessary that we should pray on our knees we could not pray without ceasing, the posture would become painful and injurious. To what end has our Creator given us feet, if he desires us never to stand upon them? If he had meant us to be on our knees without ceasing, he would have fashioned the body differently, and would not have endowed us with such unnecessary length of limb. It is well to pray on one's knees; it is a most fitting posture; it is one which expresses humility, and when humility is truly felt, kneeling is a natural and beautiful token of it, but, at the same time, good men have prayed flat upon their faces, have prayed sitting, have prayed standing, have prayed in any posture, and the posture does not enter into the essence of prayer. Consent not to be placed in bondage by those to whom the bended knee is reckoned of more importance than the contrite heart.

It is clear, too, from the text, that *the place is not essential to prayer*, for if there were only certain holy places where prayer was acceptable, and we had to pray without ceasing, our churches ought to be extremely large, that we might always live in them, and they would have to comprise all the arrangements necessary for human habitations. If it be true that there is some sanctity this side of a brick-wall more than there is on the other side of it, if it be true that the fresh air blows away grace, and that for the highest acceptance we need groined arches, pillars, aisle, chancel, and transept, then farewell, ye green lanes, and fair gardens, and lovely woods, for henceforth we must, without ceasing, dwell where your fragrance and freshness can never reach us. But this is ridiculous; wherefore I gather that the frequenting of some one particular place has little or nothing to do with prayer; and such a conclusion is consistent with the saying of Paul upon Mars' Hill, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

"Pray without ceasing." That precept at one stroke *overthrows the idea of particular times* wherein prayer is more acceptable or more proper than at others. If I am to pray without ceasing, then every second must be suitable for prayer, and there is not one unholy moment in the hour, nor one unaccepted hour in the day, nor one unhallowed day in the year. The Lord has not appointed a certain week for prayer, but all weeks should be weeks of prayer: neither has he said that one hour of the day is more acceptable than another. All time is equally legitimate for supplication, equally holy, equally accepted with God, or else we should not have been told to pray without ceasing. It is good to have your times of prayer; it is good to set apart seasons for special supplication—we have no doubt of that; but we must never allow this to gender the superstition that there is a certain holy hour for prayer in the morning, a specially acceptable hour for prayer in the evening, and a sacred time for prayer at certain seasons of the year. Wherever we seek the Lord with true hearts he is found of us; whenever we cry unto him he heareth us. Every place is hallowed ground to a hallowed heart, and every day is a holy day to a holy man. From January to December the calendar has not one date in which prayer is forbidden. All the days are red-letter days, whether Sabbaths or week days they are all accepted times for prayer. Clear, then, is it from the text, that the voice, the posture, the place, the time—none of them enter into the essence of prayer, or else, in this case, we should be commanded to perform an impossibility, which we are quite certain is not after the manner of the Lord our God.

There is one other thing implied in the text, namely, that *a Christian has no right to go into any place where he could not continue to pray*. Pray without ceasing? Then I am never to be in a place

where I could not pray without ceasing. Hence, many worldly amusements without being particularized may be judged and condemned at once. Certain people believe in ready-made prayers, cut and dried for all occasions, and, at the same time, they believe persons to be regenerated in baptism though their lives are any thing but Christian; ought they not to provide prayers for all circumstances in which these, the dear regenerated but graceless sons and daughters of their church, are found? As, for instance, a pious collect for a young prince or nobleman, who is about to go to a shooting-match, that he may be forgiven for his cruelty towards those poor pigeons who are only badly wounded and made to linger in misery, as also a prayer for a religious and regenerated gentleman who is going to a horserace, and a collect for young persons who have received the grace of confirmation, upon their going to the theater to attend a very questionable play. Could not such special collects be made to order? You revolt at the idea. Well, then, have nothing to do with that which you cannot ask God's blessing upon, have nothing to do with it, for if God cannot bless it, you may depend upon it the devil has cursed it. Anything that is right for you to do you may consecrate with prayer, and let this be a sure gauge and test to you, if you feel that it would be an insult to the majesty of heaven for you to ask the Lord's blessing upon what is proposed to you, then stand clear of the unholy thing. If God doth not approve, neither must you have fellowship therewith.

These matters are clearly implied in the precept, "Pray without ceasing."

II. But now, WHAT DOES THIS ACTUALLY MEAN? If it does not mean we are to be always on our knees, nor always saying prayers nor always in church or in meeting and does not mean that we are to consider any day as unfit for praying what then? The words mean, first, *a privilege*; secondly, *a precept*—"Pray without ceasing." Our Lord Jesus Christ in these words assures you that you may pray without ceasing. There is no time when we may not pray. You have here permission given to come to the mercy-seat when you will, for the veil of the Most Holy place is rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and our access to the mercy-seat is undisputed and indisputable. Kings hold their levees upon certain appointed days, and then their courtiers are admitted; but the King of Kings holds a constant levee. The monarch whose palace was in Shushan would have none approach him unless he sent for them, but the King of kings has called for all his people, and they may come at all times. They were slain who went in unto the king Ahasuerus, unless he stretched out his scepter to them; but our King never withdraws his scepter, it is always stretched out, and whosoever desires to come to him may come now, and come at any time. Among the Persians there were some few of the nobility who had the peculiar and special right of an audience with the king at any time they chose. Now, that which was the peculiar right of a very few and of the very great is the privilege of every child of God. He may come in unto the King at all times. The dead of night is not too late for God; the breaking of the morning, when the first grey light is seen, is not too early for the Most High; at midday he is not too busy; and when the evening gathers he is not weary with his children's prayers. "Pray without ceasing," is, if I read it aright, a most sweet and precious permit to the believer to pour out his heart at all times before the Lord. I hear its still small voice saying, "Come to the mercy seat, O my child, whenever thou wilt; come to the treasury of grace whenever thou desirest—

"The happy gates of gospel grace
Stand open night and day."

The doors of the temple of divine love shall not be shut. Nothing, can set a barrier between a praying soul and its God. The road of angels and of prayers is ever open. Let us but send out the

dove of prayer and we may be certain that she will return unto us with an olive branch of peace in her mouth. Evermore the Lord hath regard unto the pleadings of his servants, and waiteth to be gracious unto them.

Still, however, it is *a precept*, "Pray without ceasing." And what does it mean? It means a great truth which I cannot very well convey to you in a few words, and, therefore, must try and bring out under four or five points.

It means, first, *never abandon prayer*. Never for any cause or reason cease to pray. Imagine not that you must pray until you are saved, and may then leave off. For those whose sins are pardoned prayer is quite as needful as for those mourning under a sense of sin. "Pray without ceasing," for in order that you may persevere in grace you must persevere in prayer. Should you become experienced in grace and enriched with much spiritual knowledge, you must not dream of restraining prayer because of your gifts and graces. "Pray without ceasing," or else your flower will fade and your spiritual fruit will never ripen. Continue in prayer until the-last moment of your life.

"Long as they live must Christians pray,
For only while they pray they live."

As we breathe without ceasing, so must we pray without ceasing. As there is no attainment in life, of health, or of strength, or of muscular vigor which can place a man beyond the necessity of breathing, so no condition of spiritual growth or advance in grace will allow a man to dispense with prayer.

"Let us pray! our life is praying;
Prayer with time alone may cease:
Then in heaven, God's will obeying,
Life is praise and perfect peace."

Never give up praying, not even though Satan should suggest to you that it is in vain for you to cry unto God. Pray in his teeth; "pray without ceasing." If for awhile the heavens are as brass and your prayer only echoes in thunder above your head, pray on; if month after month your prayer appears to have miscarried, and no reply has been vouchsafed to you, yet still continue to draw nigh unto the Lord. Do not abandon the mercy-seat for any reason whatever. If it be a good thing that you have been asking for, and you are sure it is according to the divine will, if the vision tarry wait for it, pray, weep, entreat, wrestle, agonise till you get that which you are praying for. If your heart be cold in prayer, do not restrain prayer until your heart warms, but pray your soul unto heat by the help of the everblessed Spirit who helpeth our infirmities. If the iron be hot then hammer it, and if it be cold hammer it till you heat it. Never cease prayer for any sort of reason or argument. If the philosopher should tell you that every event is fixed, and, therefore, prayer cannot possibly change anything, and, consequently, must be folly; still, if you cannot answer him and are somewhat puzzled, go on with your supplications notwithstanding all. No difficult problem concerning digestion would prevent your eating, for the result justifies the practice, and so no quibble should make us cease prayer, for the assured success of it commends it to us. You know what your God has told you, and if you cannot reply to every difficulty which man can suggest, resolve to be obedient to the divine will, and still "Pray without ceasing." Never, never, never renounce the habit of prayer, or your confidence in its power.

A second meaning is this. *Never suspend the regular offering of prayer*. You will, if you are a watchful Christian, have your times of daily devotion, fixed not by superstition, but for your convenience and remembrance; just as David, three times a day, and as another saint, seven times

a day, sought the Lord: now be sure to keep up this daily prayer without intermission. This advice will not comprehend the whole range of the text, I am not pretending that it does; I am only mentioning it now as supplementary to other thoughts. "Pray without ceasing;" that is, never give up the morning prayer, nor the evening prayer, nor the prayer at midday if such has grown to be your habit. If you change hours and times, as you may, yet keep up the practice of regularly recurring retirement, meditation, and prayer. You may be said to continue in prayer if your habitual devotions be maintained. It would be quite correct for me to say that I know a man who has been always begging ever since I have been in London. I do not think that I ever passed the spot where he stands without seeing him there. He is a blind person, and stands near a church. As long as my recollection serves me he has been begging without ceasing; of course he has not begged when he has been asleep, he has not begged when he has gone home to his meals, nor did you understand me to have asserted anything so absurd when I said he had begged without ceasing for years. And so, if at those times when it is proper for you to separate yourself from your ordinary labors, you continue perseveringly begging at mercy's throne, it may be with comparative correctness said of you that you pray without ceasing. Through all hours are alike to me, I find it profitable to meet with God at set periods, for these seem to me to be like the winding up of the clock. The clock is to go all day, but there is a time for winding it up; and the little special season that we set apart and hedge round about for communion with our God, seems to wind us up for the rest of the day. Therefore, if you would pray without ceasing, continue in the offering of the morning and the evening sacrifice, and let it be perpetually an ordinance with you, that your times of prayer are not broken in upon.

That, however, is only a help, for I must add, thirdly, *between these times of devotion, labor to be much in ejaculatory prayer*. While your hands are busy with the world, let your hearts still talk with God; not in twenty sentences at a time, for such an interval might be inconsistent with your calling, but in broken sentences and interjections. It is always wrong to present one duty to God stained with the blood of another, and that we should do if we spoiled study or labor by running away to pray at all hours; but we may, without this, let short sentences go up to heaven, ay, and we may shoot upwards cries, and single words, such as an "Ah," an "Oh," an "O that;" or, without words we may pray in the upward glancing of the eye or the sigh of the heart. He who prays without ceasing uses many little darts and hand-grenades of godly desire, which he casts forth at every available interval. Sometimes he will blow the furnace of his desires to a great heat in regular prayer, and as a consequence at other times, the sparks will continue to rise up to heaven in the form of brief words, and looks, and desires.

Fourthly, if we would pray without ceasing, *we must be always in the spirit of prayer*. Our heart, renewed by the Holy Ghost, must be like the magnetized needle, which always has an inclination towards the pole. It does not always point to that pole, you can turn it aside if you will; in an iron ship it exhibits serious deflections, under all circumstances it is not exactly true; but if you put your finger to that needle and force it round to the east, you have only to take away the pressure, and immediately it returns to its beloved pole again. So let your heart be magnetized with prayer, so that if the finger of duty turns it away from the immediate act of prayer, there may still be the longing desire for prayer in your soul, and the moment you can do so, your heart reverts to its beloved work. As perfume lies in flowers even when they do not shed their fragrance upon the gale, so let prayer lie in your hearts.

But, perhaps, the last meaning that I shall give has the most of the truth of the text in it, namely this: *Let all your actions be consistent with your prayers, and be in fact a continuation of your*

prayers. If I am to pray without ceasing, it cannot mean that I am always to be in the act of direct devotion; for the human mind, as at present constituted, needs variety of occupation, and it could not without producing madness or imbecility continue always in the exercise of one function. We must, therefore, change the *modus* or the manner of operation if we are ceaselessly to continue in prayer. We must pursue our prayers, but do it in another manner. Take an instance. This morning I prayed to God to arouse his people to prayerfulness; very well; as I came to this house my soul continued to ejaculate, "O Lord, awaken thy children to prayerfulness.": Now, while I am preaching to you and driving at the same point, am I not praying? Is not my sermon the continuation of my prayer, for I am desiring and aiming at the same thing? Is it not a continuing to pray when we use the best means towards the obtaining of that which we pray for? Do you not see my point? He who prays for his fellow creatures, and then seeks their good, is praying still. In this sense there is truth in that old distich.

"He prayeth best that loveth best
Both man, and bird, and beast."

Loving is praying. If I seek in prayer the good of my fellow creature, and then go and try to promote it, I am practically praying for his good in my actions. If I seek, as I should do, God's glory above everything, then if all my actions are meant to tend to God's glory, I am continuing to pray, though I may not be praying with my thoughts or with my lips. Oh, that our whole life might be a prayer. It can be. There can be a praying without ceasing before the Lord, though there be many pausings in what the most of men would call prayer. Pray then without ceasing, my brother. Let thy whole life be praying. If thou changest the method, yet change not the pursuit; but continue still to worship, still to adore. This I think to be the meaning of our text,—never altogether abandon prayer; do not suspend the regular offering of prayer; be much in earnest ejaculations, be always in the spirit of prayer, and let the whole of your life be consistent with your prayer, and become a part of it.

III. HOW CAN WE OBEY THESE WORDS? First, let us labor as much as we can to prevent all *sinful* interruptions. "Pray without ceasing." Then if it be impossible to be in the act of prayer always, at least let us be as much as possible in that act; and let us prevent those interruptions which I mentioned in the early part of my discourse, the interruptions occasioned by our own sin. Let us endeavor to keep clear, as far as we can, of anything and everything in ourselves, or round about us, that would prevent our abounding in supplication. And let us also keep clear of interruptions from the sins of others. Do others forbid us to pray? Let us not be afraid of their wrath. Remember Daniel, who while he was under the penalty of being cast into a den of lions, yet opened his window towards Jerusalem, and prayed seven times a day as he had done aforetime. Under no threats: and for no bribes, let us ever cease to pray. In private let us always pray, and if duty calls us to do so where others observe us, let us so much fear the eye of God that we shall not dare to fear the eye of man.

Let us next avoid all *unnecessary* interruptions of every sort to our prayer. If we know that any matter, from which we can escape, has a tendency to disturb the spirit of prayer within us, let us avoid it earnestly. Let us try, as much as possible, not to be put off the scent in prayer. Satan's object will be to distract the mind, to throw it off the rails, to divert its aim, but let us resolve before God, we will not turn aside from following hard after him. Sir Thomas Abney had for many years practiced family prayer regularly; he was elected Lord Mayor of London, and on the night of his election he must be present at a banquet, but when the time came for him to call his family together

in prayer, having no wish either to be a Pharisee or to give up his practice, he excused himself to the guests in this way,—he said he had an important engagement with a very dear friend, and they must excuse him for a few minutes. It was most true, his dearest friend was the Lord Jesus, and family prayer was an important engagement; and so he withdrew for awhile to the family altar, and in that respect prayed without ceasing. We sometimes allow good things to interrupt our prayer, and thus make them evil. Mrs. Rowe observes in one of her letters, that if the twelve apostles were preaching in the town where she lived and she could never hear them again, if it were her time for private devotion, she would not be bribed out of her closet by the hope of hearing them. I am not sure but what she might have taken another time for her private devotions, and so have enjoyed both privileges, but at the same time, supposing she must; have lost the prayer and have only got the preaching in exchange, I agree with her, it would have been exchanging gold for silver. She would be more profited in praying than she would be in hearing, for praying is the end of preachings. Preaching is but the wheat-stalk, but praying is the golden grain itself, and he hath the best who gets it.

Sometimes we think we are too busy to pray. That also is a great mistake, for praying is a saving of time. You remember Luther's remark, "I have so much to do to-day that I shall never get through it with less than three hours' prayer." He had not been accustomed to take so much time for pray on ordinary days, but since that was a busy day, he must needs have more communion with his God. But, perhaps, our occupations begin early, and we therefore say, "How can I get alone with God in prayer?" It is said of Sir Henry Havelock that every morning when the march began at six, he always rose at four, that he might not miss his time for the reading of the Scripture and communion with his God. If we have no time we must make time, for if God has given us time for secondary duties, he must have given us time for primary ones, and to draw near to him is a primary duty, and we must let nothing set it on one side. There is no real need to sacrifice any duty, we have time enough for all if we are not idle; and, indeed, the one will help the other instead of clashing with it. When Edward Payson was a student at College, he found he had so much to do to attend his classes and prepare for examinations, that he could not spend as much time as he should in private prayer; but, at last, waking up to the feeling that he was going back in divine things through his habits, he took due time for devotion and he asserts in his diary that he did more in his studies in a single week after he had spent time with God in prayer, than he had accomplished in twelve months before. God can multiply our ability to make use of time. If we give the Lord his due, we shall have enough for all necessary purposes. In this matter seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Your other engagements will run smoothly if you do not forget your engagement with God.

We must, dear friends, in order to pray without ceasing, strive against *indolence* in prayer. I believe that no man loves prayer until the Holy Spirit has taught him the sweetness and value of it. If you have ever prayed without ceasing you will pray without ceasing. The men who do not love to pray must be strangers to its secret joy. When prayer is a mechanical act, and there is no soul in it, it is a slavery and a weariness; but when it is really living prayer, and when the man prays because he is a Christian and cannot help praying, when he prays along the street, prays in his business, prays in the house, prays in the field, when his whole soul is full of prayer, then he cannot have too much of it. He will not be backward in prayer who meets Jesus in it, but he who knows not the Well-beloved will count it a drudgery.

Let us avoid, above all things, *lethargy and indifference in prayer*. Oh, it is a dreadful thing that ever we should insult the majesty of heaven by words from which our heart has gone. I must, my spirit, I must school thee to this, that thou must have communion with God, and if in thy prayer thou dost not talk with God, thou shalt keep on praying till thou dost. Come not away from the mercy-seat till thou hast prayed.

Beloved brother, say unto thy soul, thus—"here have I come to the throne of grace to worship God and seek his blessing, and I am not going away till I have done this; I will not rise from my knees, because I have spent my customary minutes, but here will I pray till I find the blessing." Satan will often leave off tempting when he finds you thus resolute in prayer. Brethren, we need waking up. Routine grows upon us. We get into the mill-horse way—round, and round, and round the mill. From this may God save us. It is deadly. A man may pray twenty years with regularity, as far as the time goes, and the form goes, and never have prayed a single grain of prayer in the whole period. One real groan fetched from the heart is worth a million litanies, one living breath from a gracious soul is worth ten thousand collects. May we be kept awake by God's grace, praying without ceasing.

And we must take care, dear brethren, again, if we would perform this duty, that we fight against anything like *despair* of being heard. If we have not been heard after six times we must, as Elijah, go again seven times; if our Peter is in prison, and the church has prayed God to liberate him, and he still is in fetters bound in the inner prison, let us pray on, for one of these days Peter will knock at the gate. Be importunate, heaven's gate does not open to every runaway knock. Knock, and knock, and knock again; and add to thy knocking and to thy asking seeking, and be not satisfied till thou gettest a real answer.

Never cease from prayer through *presumption*; guard against that. Feel, O Christian, that you always need to pray. Say not, "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." Thou art by nature still naked, and poor, and miserable; therefore, persevere in prayer, and buy of the Lord fine gold, and clean raiment, that thou mayst be rich, and fitly clothed.

Thus I have tried to set before you, beloved, how by resisting presumption and despair, indolence and lethargy, and trying to put aside all sinful and other interruptions, we may pray without ceasing.

IV. Now, very briefly, in the last place, WHY SHOULD WE OBEY THIS PRECEPT? Of course we should obey it because it is of divine authority; but, moreover, we should attend to it because *the Lord always deserves to be worshipped*. Prayer is a method of worship; continue, therefore, always to render to your Creator, your Preserver, your Redeemer, your Father, the homage of your prayers. With such a King let us not be slack in homage. Let us pay him the revenue of praise continually. Evermore may we magnify and bless his name. His enemies curse him; let us bless him without ceasing. Moreover, brethren, the spirit of love within us surely prompts us to draw near to God without ceasing. Christ is our husband. Is the bride true to her marriage vows if she cares not for her beloved's company? God is our Father. What sort of a child is that which does not desire to climb its father's knee and receive a smile from its father's face? If you and I can live day after day and week after week without anything like communion with God, how dwelleth the love of God in us? "Pray without ceasing," because the Lord never ceases to love you, never ceases to bless you, and never ceases to regard you as his child.

"Pray without ceasing," for you *want a blessing* on all the work you are doing. Is it common work? "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Is it business? It is vain to rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, for without God you cannot prosper.

You are taught to say, "Give us this day our daily bread,"—an inspired prayer for secular things. Oh, consecrate your seculars by prayer. And, if you are engaged in God's service, what work is there in which you can hope for success without his blessing? To teach the young, to preach the gospel, to distribute tracts, to instruct the ignorant, do not all these want his blessing? What are they if that favor be denied? Pray, therefore, as long as you work.

You are always in *danger of being tempted*; there is no position in life in which you may not be assaulted by the enemy. "Pray without ceasing," therefore. A man who is going along a dark road where he knows that there are enemies, if he must be alone and has a sword with him, he carries it drawn in his hand, to let the robbers know that he is ready for them. So Christian, pray without ceasing; carry your sword in your hand, wave that mighty weapon of all-prayer of which Bunyan speaks. Never sheathe it; it will cut through coats of mail. You need fear no foe if you can but pray. As you are tempted without ceasing, so pray without ceasing.

You need always to pray, for you *always want* something. In no condition are you so rich as not to need something from your God. It is not possible for you to say, "I have all things," or, if you can, you have them only in Christ, and from Christ you must continue to seek them. As you are always in need, so beg always at mercy's gate. Moreover, blessings are always waiting for you. Angels are ready with favors that you know not of, and you have but to ask and have. Oh, could you see what might be had for the asking you would not be so slack. The priceless benisons of heaven which lie on one side as yet, oh, did you but perceive that they are only waiting for you to pray, you would not hesitate a moment. The man who knows that his farming is profitable, and that his land brings forth abundantly, will be glad to sow a broader stretch of land another year; and he who knows that God answers prayer, and is ready still to answer it, will open his mouth yet wider that God may fill it.

Continue to pray, brethren, for even if you should not want prayer yourself there are *others who do*—there are the dying, the sick, the poor, the ignorant, the backsliding, the blaspheming, the heathen at home, and the heathen abroad. "Pray without ceasing," for the enemy works incessantly, and as yet the kingdom has not come unto Zion. You shall never be able to say, "I left off praying, for I had nothing to pray for." This side heaven objects for prayer are as multitudinous as the stars of the sky.

And, now, I said I would say a word as to why WE ought to pray especially, and that shall close the sermon. Beloved friends, this church ought to pray without ceasing. We have been in years past notable for prayer. If ever a church has prayed it has been this church. I might find many faults with some who hinder prayer, but yet I must say in God's sight I know and feel that there has been living prayer in this church for many years, and hence it is we have had many years of peace and prosperity. We have lacked nothing because we have not lacked prayer. I do not doubt we might have had much more if we had prayed more; still prayer has been very mighty here. Now, brethren, suppose you had no pastor, suppose the preacher was gone from you, and that the black cloth upon this pulpit was not for a deceased elder of the church but for the preacher himself, you would pray, would you not? Will you not pray for me then while I live? If you would pray for another to come, will you not pray for me while I am here? I desire to discharge my office before you in God's sight with all earnestness, but I cannot without your prayers, and as being gone from you, you would lift up many sighs, and you would with prayers ask for a successor, pray for me while I am yet with you. Beloved, you have prayed very earnestly for the pastor when he has been sick, your prayers have been his consolation and his restoration; will you not pray for him now that he is able to preach

the gospel, that his health may be sanctified to God's service, and the ministry of the truth may be mighty in the winning of souls. I ask it of you, I think I might claim it of you. I do beseech you, brethren, pray for us.

Suppose again, dear brethren, there were no conversions in our midst, would not you pray? And since there are a great many conversions, should that be a reason for leaving off? Shall we worship God the less because he gives us moor? Instead of one prayer which would go up were there no conversions, there should be ten now that he continues to work salvation among us.

Suppose we were divided, and had many schisms, and jealousies, and bickerings, would not the faithful ones pray in bitterness of spirit? Will you not pray since there are no divisions, and much Christian love? Surely, I say again, you will not treat God the worse because he treats you the better. That were foolish indeed.

Suppose we were surrounded to-day with hosts of persecutors, and that error everywhere crept into our midst and did us damage, would you not pray, you who love the Lord? And now that we live in days of peace, and error, though it prowls around, is kept out of our fold, will you not commune with the Lord all the more? I will say yet a third time, shall we pray the less because God gives the more? Oh no, but the better he is to us the more let us adore and magnify his name.

Just now we need to pray, for some are growing cold, and turning to their old sins. We need to pray, for we are doing much for Christ. Every agency is in full work. We want a *great* blessing upon *great* efforts. We have had such results from prayer as might make a man's ears to tingle who should hear of them for the first time: our history as a church has not been second even to apostolic history itself: we have seen God's arm made bare in the eyes of all the people, and to the ends of the earth the testimony of this pulpit has gone forth, and thousands have found the Savior,—all in answer to many prayers. Pray, then, without ceasing. O church in the Tabernacle, hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Oh, continue to be a praying church that we together; when we shall stand before the judgement-seat of Christ, pastor and people, may not be accused of being prayerless, nor of being slack in the work of the Lord. I earnestly hope all this will tend to make to-morrow's day of prayer more earnest and intense; but yet more do I pray that at all times all of us may be fervent, frequent, instant, and constant in prayer; praying in the Holy Ghost, in the name of Jesus.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 5.

What and Whence Are These?

A Sermon

(No. 1040)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, February 25th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”—Revelation 7:13-14.

TOWARDS SOME SUBJECTS even the best of men need that their attention should be drawn. Certain themes need an introduction to our contemplations. We often see and yet do not see: we see that which upon the surface attracts the eye, but we fail to penetrate into the inner and more precious truth. Even in heaven, it would seem that the mind needs directing, and wants a friend to suggest inquiry; he who sees the whiterobed host may yet need to be led to the consideration of who and what they are. It is very gracious on the part of our heavenly Father that he condescends to send us messengers of different kinds to awaken our attention, to guide our inquiry, and to lead us to search deeper than we might otherwise have done. John looked at the long ranks of triumphant spirits and admired their glory, but his thoughts had not penetrated deep enough, and therefore an elder was sent to speak with him. That personage asked him a question, and this he did that John might confess his ignorance, might feel a desire to know more, and might be led to inquire upon the point which it was most needful for him to consider. While we are dwellers here below our minds are very apt to be engrossed with the things which surround us, and we want some one to direct our thoughts to the upper world; and in the same way the mind of a person dwelling above would naturally be most occupied with the things around it in the glory land, and it might be needful to bid him remember facts concerning the lower world. We generally take that view of a matter which is most consistent with our own present circumstances, whereas to see a thing completely we need to view it from many angles. Hence the elder suggests to John that he should see these glorified spirits from another point than that which naturally suggested itself to him. He was led to consider them, not as they then were, but as they had been. The question was therefore suggested him, “Who are these, whence came they? What was their earthly character? What manner of men were they in the days of their pilgrimage? Were they cherubim, or children of men? Did they come hither on wings of fire, or came they hither as do the sons of Adam? Who are these that now have attained to such dignity and bliss, as to be now wearing the white robe of innocence, and waving the palm of victory?” To that enquiry I hope to lead your attention this morning; may it be as profitable to you as doubtless it was to John.

We are frequently tempted to think that our Lord Jesus was not in very truth a man like ourselves. His actual and proper humanity is believed among us, but not fully realized. We are apt to fancy that his was another flesh and another manhood from our own, whereas he was in all things made like unto his brethren, and was tempted in all points like as we are, though without sin. It is, therefore, needful again and again and again to set out the true brotherhood and kinship of Christ. The same

spirit of error leads us into the feeling that those holy men who have attained to felicity must have been something different from ourselves. We set the apostles up in twelve niches, and look upon them as very superior beings. We can hardly imagine that they were partakers of our flesh and blood; and, as we see the whole white-robed host, we imagine in our hearts that they must have been far different from ourselves. They did well and valiantly we admit, and we rejoice that they have attained to a blessed reward; but we dream that we ourselves cannot do as well, nor win as great a recompense. Without exactly defining the feeling, we in some way persuade ourselves that something in their persons or in their circumstances entirely separated the glorified saints from us, and gave them an advantage over us, and therefore we despair of ever achieving their triumphs. Now, this error must be overcome, because it furnishes convenient excuses for indolence, and represses those holy ardours which are the life of elevated piety. Brethren, the point to which the elder drew John's attention is the one we are now driving at; he would have him note that those were glorified in heaven who were once tried and tempted as we are; they were, in fact, men of like passions with us. I grant you it would be very delightful for us to contemplate the present condition of joy and immortality possessed by yonder bright spirits, but for the moment it will be more practically useful for us to consider what they were and how they came to be what they now are, so that finding that they were of old what we now are, we may follow in their track, and may obtain to the same blessed rank as that which they now enjoy.

Our sermon on this occasion will consist of an answer to these two questions,—“*Whence come they?*” for though that was the second question asked, it was the first answered; and, secondly, “*Who are these?*” Our third point shall be, “*What of all this?*”

I. Concerning the bright spirits in heaven—WHENCE CAME THEY? These bearing the palms—whence came they? Reason itself suggests that they came from battle. It is not according to the wont of God to use emblems without a meaning. The palm, the ensign of triumph, indicates most certainly a conflict and conquest. As on earth palm would not be given if not won, we may conclude that the Lord would not have distributed the prize unless there had been a preceding warfare and victory. A conflict for a temporal crown is severe; how much more for an unfading palm in heaven. The winners of these palms must have passed through a battle of battles, an agony of agonies, a great tribulation. Palms which may be waved even before the throne of the august majesty of heaven are not easily come by. From the very fact that the glorified carry palms, we may infer that they did not come from beds of sloth, or gardens of pleasure, or palaces of peace, but that they endured hardness, and were men trained for war. The inference is well warranted, for it is even so; and the answer to the question, “Whence came they?” is this: “These are they which came out of great tribulation.”

1. They were then like ourselves, for, in the first place, *they were tried like others*. They came out of great tribulation. Note, then, that *the saints now glorified were not screened from sorrow*. I saw to-day a number of lovely flowers they were as delightful in this month of February as they would have been in the midst of summer; but I did not ask, “Whence came they?” I know very well that they were the products of the conservatory; they had not been raised amid the frosts of this chill season, else they had not bloomed as yet. But when I look upon God's flowers blooming in heaven, I understand from the voice of inspiration that they enjoyed no immunity from the chill breath of grief; they were made to bloom by the master hand of the Chief Husbandman, in all their glory, amid the afflictions, and adversities, and catastrophes which are common to men. God's elect are not pampered like spoiled children, neither are they like “the tender and delicate woman

who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness." They are, it is true, secured from all fatal injury, but they are not protected from the rough winds and rolling billows which toss every barque which bears a son of Adam. Turn over the roll of the worthies of the Lord from the first hero of faith to the last, and you shall not meet with a sorrowless name. Great are their privileges, but immunity from trouble is not among them. Was Adam God's elect? We hope he was, but certainly in the sweat of his face he ate his bread, and through his tears he saw the mangled body of his second son. Did God honor Abraham, and call him his friend? He was not without family afflictions, among the chief of which was the call to take his son, his only son, and offer him up for a sacrifice. Moses was king in Jeshurun, but his yoke, as a servant of the Lord, was a very heavy one; for all the day long was he vexed with the rebellions of a wayward people. Was David, the man after God's own heart? You know how deep called unto deep, while all God's waves and billows went over him. Speak ye of the prophets; which of them escaped without trial? Come ye to the apostles; which of these enjoyed a life of ease? Did they not all of them but one pass through the gates of death, wearing the martyr's crown? And he who died of old age, had not he been an exile in Patmos? Where, from their day down to this, among the elect of heaven do you find a single child of God unchastened, a solitary branch of the heavenly vine unpruned, or one ingot of precious gold untried with fire? Through flood, and through the fire, lies the pathway of the chosen. Through troops we must cut our way, and over walls we must leap, for to none is there a luxurious path to heaven. We must fight if we would reign.

True, God's people have been found in all ranks, but; in every position they have had their sorrows. You find Esther, a queen beloved of God, but what were the tremblings of her heart when, with her life in her hand, she went in unto the king to plead against that wicked Haman? Lazarus was in the opposite stage of human circumstance, but he lay suffering at the gate of his ungenerous neighbor, and the dogs came and licked his sores. In palace or in cottage the rod is the sure portion of all the heirs of salvation. Each state to the believer produces bitter herbs peculiar to itself, he shall never need to search far for the appointed accompaniments to the paschal lamb. I have heard that a great statesman once stopped his horse on a plain to speak with a shepherd who was resting in the midst of his flock. Thinking of his own heavy anxieties, he expressed his envy of the shepherd, because his life was so free from vexation. "Sir," said the shepherd, "I may not be troubled exactly as you are, but I have my own worries; do you see that black ewe there?" "Yes." "If she were dead," continued the shepherd, "I might be a perfectly happy man; but she is a plague to me, for every now and then she takes to going astray, and all the rest are sure to follow her." Rest assured, that there is a black ewe in every flock. Man is born to trouble. All the sons of God in heaven passed by "weeping-cross." Such burdens as we are now carrying on earth once pressed the shoulders of those now in glory. Our crosses are reproductions of the old yoke of Christ. Under our personal and relative griefs the glorified have smarted, and our sinkings of heart and fears of soul they have experienced. "Through much tribulation" they have inherited the kingdom.

Note, next, that they were *not even screened from temptation*. To the child of God, temptation to sin is a greater grievance than the suffering of pain. The saint has often said, "I could endure adversity, but it is misery to be day after day solicited to evil, to have the bait perpetually dangling before me, and to feel something in my soul which half consents to sin, and would altogether surrender were it not for watchful grace." Brethren, temptation to the pure mind is very grievous; to be sifted in Satan's sieve is a sore trial. Storms on any sea are to be dreaded; but a whirlwind raised by Satan on the black sea of corruption is horrible beyond conception. Yet do not say you

cannot enter heaven because you are tempted, for all those snowwhite bands attained their glorious standing through much temptation, as well as through much affliction. They, like their Master, were tempted in all points as you are. Let me take you again to the old records, and ask you whether you find a single saint untempted? Oh, ye young men, who lament that you are so often allured to evil, have ye forgotten Joseph in Potiphar's house? Ye who dread the persecutor's frown, have ye forgotten Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego? Ye of riper years, who feel your feet almost gone, do ye not remember David, and how he was tempted; ay, and worse, how he fell, and with broken bones had to limp his way to heaven? Which of the saints has been unassailed by the fiery darts of the wicked one? Has not the fowler spread his nets to entangle every one of them? Has he not laid snares for every faithful soul? Review all the ranks of the white-robed squadrons, and enquire of every glorified spirit. Say to each one, "And thou? wert thou also tempted? Did the world seek alternately to fascinate and frighten *thee*? Hadst thou a body of sin and death to drag thee down? Hadst thou foes among thine own household? Didst thou also cry, 'Woe is me, for I dwell in Meshech?'" To such questions each one of the perfected saints would reply that their perils were such as ours, and had it not been for Almighty grace, they would have utterly perished from the way. The shields of the mighty, which are now so highly exalted, were once battered by the blows of temptation, even as ours are at this hour.

We may add to all this, again, that *they were men who as keenly felt trial and temptation as we do*. Too frequently, when we are forced to admit that the trials of the saints were similar to our own, we persuade ourselves that their natures were less tender, their feelings less sensitive, their spirits less vulnerable than our own. We imagine that these ancient heroes wore some secret armor, or had their hearts steeled within, or wore a charmed life; and yet we know right well that all flesh of man has the same power to suffer, that a wound in another man's body bleeds even as it would in our own, and that reproach is as bitter to one spirit as to another. As face answereth to face in water, so the heart of man to man. Good men, because they are good, are not the less sorrowful when their beloved ones are taken from them: gracious men are not by grace petrified so as to despise the chastening, of the Lord. Jacob mourned for Rachel, and David for Jonathan. You do not find the saints less troubled than other men when friendship turned to treachery, and love to hate. Tears flowed as readily from holy eyes as from the eyes of the ungodly. They were sons of men, born of women as we are, and subject to the same passions and emotions. Oh, no, they were not Stoics, nor men of iron, but, made of the same earth as ourselves, their hearts palpitated to the same tune. Daughter of grief, dost thou say, "I wish I were as the holy women of old, that in my trouble I might not be so cast down?" Read thou the history of Hannah, and mark how her adversary "vexed her sore to make her fret." She, too, was a woman of a sorrowful spirit. That story in the commencement of the First Book of Samuel I am sure must often have cheered the daughters of affliction when they have prayed in the bitterness of their souls, for they have said, here was a woman, tempted like as we are and smarting as we do under unkind remarks and slanderous reports and ungenerous treatment, and yet she rejoiced in God's salvation. If your spirit is constitutionally sorrowful, and its wounds are often wantonly opened by those about you, read the story of Jeremiah, and his plaintive notes in the Lamentations will both help you to express your woes and furnish you with sympathy in them. Read, too, the sorrowful bemoanings of Job. That grand old patriarch of Uz is very stout, and plays the man right gloriously; he is no puling child, whining and wincing, at a gentle touch of the rod; but patient as he is and a very king, among men, yet how bitterly he curses the day of his birth, and how heavily he complains. Nor were New Testament saints less

tender, for Mary and Martha wept, Magdalene was bowed down with sorrow at her Lord's death, and the heart of the Virgin was pierced as with a sword. Peter wept bitterly, and Paul had continued heaviness. Tribulations abounded and afflictions were multiplied to the first disciples, and we wrong both themselves and us if we dream that it was easier for them to suffer than for us. I grant you that they possessed a secret something which enabled them to endure, but that something was not homeborn in their nature any more than it is in ours. They were fortified by a secret strength which they found at the throne of God in prayer, a patience which the Holy Ghost wrought in them, and which he is equally ready to work in us.

But, perhaps, it may be thought by some that those holy men who now wave the palm-branch were spared some of the keener and more refined tribulations; to which I reply, it certainly was not so. David especially appears to have compassed the whole round of affliction. He could say, "all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." From all quarters his trials arose; and from his youth to his death they assailed him. Let me remind you of that special grief which came upon him when his darling son excited rebellion against him, and his own chosen friend and counsellor, Ahithophel, betrayed him, and to this add the scene when that same darling son was slain in red-handed rebellion against his father, and David cried aloud, "O Absalom, my son, my son! would God I had died for thee! O Absalom, my son, my son!" I should not feel that I had ventured too far if I said that there is no trouble known to any person in this audience which would not find its parallel in the case of the afflicted writer of the Psalms. But, perhaps, you tell me that yours is a spiritual grief, and that such a wound is the deepest of all. Turn, then, to the life of the apostle Paul, and, as far as he unveils his experience, you shall find him to be the subject of internal strifes and spiritual contentions of the sharpest kind. Remember, especially, when with the thorn in his flesh he prayed thrice to God to have it taken away, but it was not removed; sufficient grace was given him, but he had to bear the inward smart; for, through much tribulation even of that kind must the chief of the apostles follow his Lord. What need of multiplying words? It is plain to every man that understandeth, that the children of God have been tried like others, and they who have won the victory fought a real battle, armed only as we may be, and assailed neither more nor less as we are, by the same enemies and the same weapons. As the church militant we claim indisputable kinship with the church triumphant. We are their companions in tribulation.

2. Next, we believe that *the saints who are not in heaven needed trial like others*. The word used in our translation is "tribulation," and you know that the word *tribulatio* is used by the Romans to signify a threshing instrument. When they beat out the corn from the straw, they called it tribulatio; and so tribulation is sent to us to separate our chaff from our wheat. Since the same tribulation happened to those who are now in heaven, we infer that they needed it as much as ourselves. To what end do men need tribulation? We reply, they often require it to arouse them; and yonder saints who serve God day and night in his temple, once slept as do others, and needed to be bestirred. Were they not apostles who slept Gethsemane? Yea, were they not three of the chief of the apostles who slumbered within a stone's cast of their Master in his agony? The best of men are prone to slumber, and need to be awakened by the buffetings of sorrow. They needed trial to chasten them. What son has God ever had, save his firstborn and well-beloved, that did not need chastening? Inasmuch as we are all sinners, we have need in our Father's house to suffer from the rod. They wanted tribulation as we do to loosen them from the earth, else they would have struck their roots into this poor soil, and tried to live as if this world were their portion. Affliction was also necessary to develope their graces; even as spices need bruising to bring forth their smell, and rose leaves

require distilling to draw forth their sweetest perfume. They required adversity to educate them into complete manhood, for they too were once babes in grace. It is in the gymnasium of affliction that men are modelled and fashioned in the beauty of holiness, and all their spiritual powers are trained for harmonious action. It was meet also that they should suffer, in order to complete their service. Like their Lord, they had to be made perfect through suffering; and if they had not suffered they had not finished the work which he had given them to do. They needed tribulation, moreover, that they might be made like their Savior; for a saint untroubled, how can he be like the man who wore the thorn crown? Never smitten, never slandered, never despised, never mocked at, never crucified, then how could we be like our Head? Shall the servant be above his Master, or the disciple above his Lord? They who are in heaven passed through tribulation, and they needed it as much as we do. Let us think of all this, for it may encourage us to press forward. They were knights of the same order as ourselves, and by the self-same methods obtained the honors which they wear.

3. Again, the children of God who are in heaven in their trials *had no other support than that which is still afforded to all the saints*. A miracle was here and there wrought I grant you; but then there are other things to be said on our side, for the Spirit of God was not given then as fully as we possess him now, and Christ had not then brought life and immortality to light through the gospel so that what little advantage they had in miracle is far outweighed by the advantage we have in the gospel dispensation. What was it that upheld the saints of old who are now before the throne? Their faith was sustained by the promise of God, but we have the promise too. They rested on God's faithful word; that word is faithful still. We have more promises by far than most of them had received. They had but here and there a word of inspiration, we have the whole volume of consolation; yea, we have a double portion, for we have two books full of choice and gracious words. We have, therefore, more to cheer us than they had. They had the Spirit of God, you say; but, I reply, so have we. They had him *with* them, we have him *in* us. He visited them occasionally; he dwelleth in us; he never removeth from his people but abideth in them for ever. You will tell me that God worked with them: God works with us. Providence was on their side; and is not providence on our side also? All things worked together for their good; they work together for our good in the same manner. The Lord who was at the helm of their vessel when storms assaulted it, still stands at the helm for us and holds the tiller with a strong hand. He who walked the waves of Gennesaret, and came to the rescue of the storm-tossed disciples, still saith to us, "It is I; be not afraid." I see no point in which they had superior resorts to those which are open to ourselves, for the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Their rest lay where our rest still lies; their peace and comfort were the same as our own. The Prince of Wurtemberg on one occasion in the midst of certain kings and great men heard them boasting, one of the mines which enriched his dominions, another of his forests, another of his vineyards. Now the Prince of Wurtemberg was poor, but he said, "I have a jewel in my country which I would not exchange for all your wealth," and, when they questioned him, he said, "If I were lost in any forest of my territory, or could not find my way along a lonesome road, if I said to the first peasant that I met that I was his king, I could lean my head upon him and lie down to sleep, and sleep securely there, feeling certain that he would watch over his king as he would over his child." So we feel, and so the saints of old felt a delightful security any where beneath the blue heavens of God. If we have not riches, if we have not honor, if we have nothing that flesh could desire, we can lie down anywhere and feel that we are perfectly safe in the divine keeping. The angels watch over us and protect us, for we are the children of God: all things work for our good; the beasts of the field are our friends, and stones of

the field are in league for our defense. This was the portion of those who are now above; it is our portion still.

4. Very hurriedly I must notice, before I leave this first point, that *if there was any difference between those saints and our selves, it lay in their enduring superior tribulations*, for “these are they that came out of *great tribulation*.” If, I say, we must distinguish them from ourselves at all, it lies in this, that some of them were martyred as we are not, resisted unto blood as we have not, and were put to death by cruel torments as probably we shall not be. Theirs was the battle’s brunt. For them the furnace was heated seven times hotter. My brethren, if their faith sustained them and won them the palm branch, why should not ours do the like for us? The text says, “These are they that come out of *the great tribulation*,” for so it is in the original. It may mean some peculiarly severe tribulation which has befallen, or is about to befall the church; and, if so, it is consoling to observe that the saints shall come out of it unscathed: but I rather take it to mean the one long tribulation of God’s Saints in all ages. It is all one; it is all a part of the sufferings of the body of Christ; the saints in glory have had their share in the great tribulation, and, if anything, a greater share than we. We feel persuaded then, that as they were men like ourselves, who suffered as we suffer, and were supported as we are supported, we shall, through the same grace, win the same victory.

II. I will not detain you longer on that point, though there is much to be said, but I must take you to the second, and that is, **WHAT ARE THESE?** John beheld them all in white robes; and the question to be answered was, “Who are these,—these in heaven?” The reply was “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;” from which we gather, first, that *all those in heaven were sinners*, for they all needed to wash their robes. No superfluity would have been written down in this book; but had the robes been perfectly white, there had been no necessity to cleanse them, certainly not to cleanse them in, Jesus’ blood. They were sinners then, those glorious ones were sinners like ourselves. Look up at them now! Observe their ravishing beauty! See how guiltless they are! And then, remember what they were. Oh, ye trembling sinners, whose bruised hearts dare not indulge a hope of the divine favor, those fair ones were once like you, and you are to-day what they were once. They were all shapen in iniquity as you were: they were everyone of them of woman born, and, therefore, conceived in sin. They were all placed in circumstances which allured them to sin; they had their temptations, as we have shown, and they lived in the midst of an ungodly generation, even as you do. What is more, they all sinned, for mere temptation would not have soiled their robes, but actual sin defiled them. There were thoughts of sin, there were words of sin, there were acts of sin in all of them. Did you observe that bright one who sang most sweetly of them all? Shall I tell you a part of his earthly history? He was one of the chief of sinners; he takes rank now amongst the chief of choristers, because he has most to sing about, since he had most forgiven and loved most. He will not tell you that he was naturally a saintly spirit, and that by mortification, and self-denial, and diligent perseverance he won his place in heaven. No, he will confess that his salvation was all of grace, for he was like others a sinner, and had transgressed above many. You will say, perhaps, that none of the saints had committed sins like yours, but there I must flatly contradict you. Amongst that illustrious company there are those who were once sinners of the deepest dye—the adulterer, the thief, the harlot, the murderer; some who were such are now glorified, for we have such characters mentioned in infallible Scripture as having been forgiven, sanctified, and at length glorified. Whatever your sin may be, and I will not mention it, for the mention of sin does not help to purify us from it; whatever it is, all manner of

sin and blasphemy have been forgiven unto men, and the precious blood of Jesus has brought into eternal glory men stained with every form of sin. Jesus has cleansed crimson sinners, deep ingrained with iniquity, and scarlet sinners, whose crimes were of the most glaring hue. They all in heaven were sinners, such as we are.

Secondly, they *all who are in heaven needed an atonement*, and the same atonement as we rely upon. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Not one of them became white through his tears of repentance, not one through the shedding of the blood of bulls or of goats. They all wanted a vicarious sacrifice, and for none of them was any sacrifice effectual, except the death of Jesus Christ the Lord. They washed their robes nowhere but in the blood of the Lamb. O sinner, that blood of the Lamb is available now. The fountain filled with blood, drunk from Immanuel's veins, is not closed, nor is its efficacy diminished. Every child of Adam now in heaven came there through the blood of the great substitute. This was the key that opened heaven's door,—the blood, the blood of the Lamb, it was the one purification of them all, without one exception. If I were in thy case, O sinner, God helping me, I would in the blood as they did, and enter heaven as they have done.

You will further notice that *the saints in haven realised the atonement in the same way as we must do*. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The act which gave them the virtue which lies in the atonement was the act of faith. They did not bring anything to the blood, any merit, or feeling, or preparation; they only brought their filthy garments to the blood, and nothing else. They washed and were clean. That was all. They did not give, they took; they did not impart, but they received. In this same way I have realised the merit of my Savior's passion, and I know that every believer here will confess that this is his hope, he has washed and he is clean. There is nothing to do, and nothing to feel, and nothing to be, in order to forgiveness; we have but to wash and the filth is gone. Every child of God in heaven whether he were king or prophet, or seer, or priest, came there through simply relying and depending upon the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb, and that is all,—all. You must not dare to add to it, or you will sin against the all-sufficient sacrifice.

The text tells that the sole reason for the saints being in heaven at all was because they washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb: "Therefore are they before the throne of God." But, is not one of them there because he had not sinned? There is no answer from all the shining hosts. Is not one of them glorified because a long life of consecration wiped out the small offenses of his youth? No response comes to the enquiry. But, *if you ask* whether they were there because they have washed in the blood, the "Yes" which comes from them all is like the voice of many waters, and like great thunders.

III. Now, beloved, WHAT OF ALL THIS? Why, first of all, we must not draw the conclusion that trouble and temptation are any argument that a man will get to heaven. Perhaps I may be misunderstood this morning and therefore I add a caution. There is a groundless notion abroad, that those who are badly off in this world will certainly have it made up to them in the world to come; and I have heard the parable of Lazarus and Dives quoted as though it taught that those who are poor here will be rich hereafter. There is not a shadow of reason for any such belief. You may go through much tribulation to hell as well as to heaven; and as a man may have two heavens, here and hereafter, by living near to God, so may a man have two hells, the hell which he bringeth upon himself in this life by his extravagances, his wickedness, and his lust, and the hell that shall be his punishment for ever in the world to come. Believe me, many a ragged, loathsome beggar has been

damned; he was as poor as Lazarus, but not as gracious as he, and therefore no angels carried him to Abraham's bosom. There is no efficacy in the tongues of dogs to lick away sin, neither can a hungry belly atone for a guilty soul. Many a soul has begged for crumbs on earth, and has afterwards craved in vain for water in hell. You must take care not to suck poisonous error out of the flowers of truth.

I would, however, have you learn that no amount of trial which we have to suffer here, if we are believers in Jesus, should lead us to anything like despair, for however trouble may encompass us to-day, those in heaven came through as great a tribulation, and why may not we? If messengers should come one after the other with swift feet to bring us heavy tidings, if all our property should melt, and our children should die, and even the partner of our bosom should tempt us to curse God, we must still hold fast our confidence. Our faith's motto should be, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." God may smite his children, but he never can cast off his children. He must love them, and he will love them for ever and for ever. Let us also understand that no amount of sin of which we may have been guilty ought to lead us to despair of pardon, salvation, and ultimate entrance into heaven, if we also wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb. Those who are in heaven have washed their robes white by faith in Jesus, and so may we. I may be addressing some one who has written his own death warrant. I thank God that the Lord has never written it. You may have said, "I know that I never shall have mercy." Who told thee that God had set a limit to his grace? Who has been up to heaven and found that thy name is not written among his chosen? Oh, do God the justice to believe that he delighteth in mercy, and that it is one of his greatest joys to pass by iniquity, transgression, and sin. And, suppose this day you should have in your own person trouble and sorrow united; suppose you should be going through the great tribulation, and at the same time you should have committed sin which has defiled your garment most conspicuously; though the gall and the wormwood be both in your cup and both be bitterest of the bitter, yet do not despair, for the saints whom John saw had the double blessing of deliverance and cleansing, and why should not you? I make bold to tell you that if your troubles were tenfold what they are, and your sins also were multiplied ten times, yet there is power in the eternal arm to bear you up under the tribulation, and there is efficacy in the precious blood to remove your sinful stains. By an act of faith cast yourselves upon God in Christ Jesus. If you do so, you shall take your place amongst the white-robed bands when this life ends.

I was led to these reflections this morning by the remembrance of the few short days ago since our beloved brother, Mr. Dransfield, whose mortal remains we committed to the tomb last Monday, was among us. You remember his accustomed seat, just here, at the prayer meeting; you remember how there was never an empty seat just over yonder at any of our public services. He was always among us, and he was just like ourselves. I am sure we all felt at home in his presence. He did not walk among us at all as a stilted personage or a supernatural being; he was a father among us; we loved him, esteemed him, revered him, but he was a man of men among us. I have tried to realize the same spirit before the throne of God, and I think I have been able to grasp the thought. I know he was like ourselves; I am equally certain that he is yonder, and that he is rejoicing in Christ; none of us doubt that. Now let us make a practical, common sense use of that fact and feel, I, too, resting, where he rested—for, oh, how sweetly did he rest in his dying Lord—I, too, hoping as he hoped, shall bear up under troubles as he did during his painful illness, and I, too, shall have a joyful death as he did, for his soul triumphed in his God beyond measure. Why should not all of us, his brethren, enter where he is gone? Dear sister, why should not you? You who are consumptive, you who know

that death is drawing near to you, because you carry a disease about you which will take you home? Just realize the fact now before us. Our dear and well-known friend is really gone to the better land. You shook hands with that dear brother a few days ago, and now he is with God, and is waving the palm and wearing the white robe. It is not a dream, a fiction, or a fancy. It is not the delusion of high-blown fanaticism. It is not a wondrous attainment for some few special and renowned saints. Oh, no, it is for every one of us who believe in Jesus. They in heaven are those who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is not said, "These are they that were emperors," not "These are they who were reared in marble halls," not "these are they who were great scholars," not "These are they who were mighty preachers," not "These are they who were great apostles," not "These are they who lived spotless lives;" no, but these are they who came through the tribulation of life, and were cleansed from their sins, as others must be, in the precious blood of Jesus; therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.

Dear brother Dransfield, thou wast bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and yet thou art perfected before the throne. We thy brethren are on the way and shall be with thee soon. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Revelation 14.

As a very large number of friends from a distance desire occasionally to attend the Tabernacle, but do not like to encounter the crowds at the doors, the deacons have resolved to issue early admission tickets, which will admit the holder before the general public, during the month of issue. They will be purchasable at the price of one shilling, and can be had by letter, enclosing twelve penny stamps, and one half-penny stamp for postage, of Mr. C. Blackshaw, Tabernacle, Newington Butts.

Mercy's Master Motive

A Sermon

(No. 1041)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, March 17th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.”—Isaiah 48:9-11.

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL in all their generations were full of evil. Those who came out of Egypt were a rebellious people, and for forty years multiplied their provocations of the Lord in the wilderness, till at last they all found a grave in the desert. The generation following were stiff-necked and rebellious like their fathers, and they continually went astray after false gods. Though by the good hand of the Lord they were settled in a goodly land which flowed with milk and honey, yet they forgot the covenant and sinned grievously. Though they were smitten and bruised for their idolatries, yet their successors did the same: whether they were ruled by the high priest, or governed by the judges, or presided over by a king, it little mattered, they started aside still, they were never to be depended upon. Idolatry and rebellion against God were ingrained in their nature; this sin was in their bone, and it would come out in their flesh. At last the Lord, whose glory tabernacled in Zion, appeared to grow weary of keeping house with such ungracious children and unfaithful servants, and he broke up the house altogether: he gave up his temple to be destroyed, the whole land to be ravaged, and the inhabitants to be carried away captive into Babylon. The Lord was wroth with his heritage, and therefore he gave his holy and beautiful house to the fire, and the carved work thereof to be broken down with hammers, while the whole Jewish state was utterly shattered, and of the kingdom not one stone was left upon another that was not cast down. Yet such is the immutability of God in his affection, that he had not long sent his people into captivity before his bowels yearned towards them again. He cast his eye over to Babylon, and saw his chosen sitting in sadness by the far-off rivers, hanging their silent harps upon the willows, and weeping at the remembrance of Zion; and he said unto himself, “I have chosen this people of old, and I have loved their fathers, and I have made them to be people unto me above all the people that are upon the face of the earth, therefore again I will have mercy upon them.” Then the Lord looked to find a reason for mercy in their past conduct, but could see none. He looked at their present character for a plea, and found none, for even while they were under the rod they exhibited hardness of heart, so that even the eyes of mercy could see no reason for favor in them. What should the Lord do? He would not act without a reason: there must be something to justify his mercy, and show the wisdom of his way. Since there is none in the offender, where shall mercy find her plea? Behold the inventiveness of eternal love! The Lord falls back upon himself; and within himself finds a reason for his grace. “For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.” Finding a motive in his

own glory which was bound up in the existence of Israel, and would have been compromised by their destruction, he turned unto them in love and kindness; Cyrus wrote the decree of emancipation, the Israelites came back to the land, and once again they sat every man under his own vine and fig tree, and ate the good of the land. So far we give the historical meaning of the passage.

We shall now use the text as an illustration of divine love in other cases, for from one deed of grace we may learn all. As God dealt with his people Israel after the flesh, in the same manner he dealth with his people Israel after the spirit; and his mercies towards his saints are to be seen as in a mirror in his wondrous lovingkindness towards the seed of Abraham.

I shall take the text to illustrate—first, *the conversion of the sinner*; and secondly, *the reclaiming of the backslider*; and I pray, dear friends, most earnestly, that while I speak God may move with his Spirit upon your hearts, so that many of you may follow me, sincerely feeling that which I describe. While I am speaking may your souls be silently saying, “Yes, we know what that means, we have felt it; we gladly yield assent thereto, for we know it to be even so.”

I. First, then, in reference to THE CONVERSION OF THE SINNER.

Let us suppose a case. It is God’s will to save yonder sinner; he has ordained him to eternal life, and predestinated him to be conformed to the image of his dear Son. In due time the Lord begins to deal with the man in a way of grace, and where does he find him? This shall be our first point this morning. He finds him so utterly ruined and depraved, that *in him there is no argument for mercy, no plea for grace*. I will suppose that such a soul is here this morning, awakened into a perception of his true condition, and craving for pardon. Soul, canst thou upon calm reflection find in thyself some good thing which may be pleaded in extenuation of guilt, or as a reason for forgiveness? What has been thy past conduct? Are there redeeming features in it? Alas, no! You must at once confess that your neck has been an iron sinew and your brow brass. You have been *obstinate* in sin; against many warnings, entreaties, and chastisements, you have persisted in it. Neither law nor gospel, providence nor conscience, has sufficed to turn you from your perverse ways. Your neck would not bend before either the terrors or the mercies of God. You have heard sermons which seemed enough to melt the heart of a stone, but you have been unmoved. You have seen others bowing themselves before the Lord Jesus Christ with holy joy, and yet you have done no such thing, but have been exceeding stout against the Lord of Hosts. Looking back upon the past also, you have to confess great *impudence* in your dealing with God; your brow has been brass. You have gone direct from his house to sin. He claims but one day in a week to himself but you have robbed him of that. It may be you have used his name in common jests, if not worse; you have dared to employ it profanely; you have scoffed at his people; you have derided everything that has been good, and in looking back you are obliged to confess that there are ten thousand reasons why God should not refrain from his anger, and overwhelming reasons why he should cut you off; but you cannot find so much as one single argument why he should be pleased to spare and save you. Every man who is really brought to Christ is first stripped of all on which he placed reliance as a ground of hope, and made to see that in himself there is guilt deserving condemnation, and rebellion demanding, punishment, but there is no quality which can enlist divine sympathy or secure, by its own excellence, divine regard. In us, by nature, there are no beauties of character, no charms of virtue, or loveliness of conduct to win the Almighty heart. We were called “transgressors from the womb,” and rightly were we named.

O awakened soul, where art thou this morning? I wish I could speak with thee face to face, and hear thee say, “How can I expect divine goodness to spare such a one as I am, for, in addition to

all other sins, I have behaved very *treacherously* towards the Lord my God. Not long ago I was laid upon a sick bed, and then I repented, or thought I did, and I sought God very vehemently, and I vowed unto the Lord, that if I was raised up again, I would not rest till I had sought his face. But I left my couch and my repentance died on my sick bed. No sooner had I recovered than I returned to my sin, as a dog to his vomit, and as the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. After this, how can I have the face to go to God again? I lied unto him, I flattered him with my tongue, and my heart was not sound in his ways. My goodness was gone as the dew from the grass, or the meteor from the sky." Yes, poor soul, this confession is true, and it proves, beyond all question, that no reason for mercy can be drawn from your past conduct when you have been under the rod. Why should you be stricken any more? you will revolt more and more. Chastisement is lost upon you; your nature is hopeless; do what he may with you, you will not turn unto the Lord.

Ah, and I think I hear you say, "neither can I promise to God anything as to the future. I dare not say to him to-day, have mercy upon me, and then I will be very different from what I have been. No, my heart is too treacherous for me to trust it. I might sooner promise what the sea will be to-morrow, than pledge my future character. Changeful as the winds that blow from every quarter of the sky is my nature a fickle and false am I. I seem to-day resolved for good, to-morrow I may be resolved evil, and what I vowed to do most vehemently will never become fact. I dare not say that in the future I can see any reason why God should have mercy upon me." Oh, how glad my heart is when I can meet with a person who confesses this to be his case. It is a very sad difficulty to be in, a very painful one, when the soul at last abandons all arguments, extenuations, and apologies, and says, "Lord, I am guilty, I stand at thy judgment-seat and I can say nothing but guilty. Thou art clear when thou judgest, thou art just when thou condemnest, and if thou shouldst put on the black cap, and say, 'Prisoner at the bar, hast thou anything to say why sentence should not be speedily executed upon thee?' I could not even stammer out an apology, but must stand speechless before my judge."

My lips, with shame, my sins confess
 Against thy law, against thy grace:
 Lord, should thy judgment grow severe,
 I am condemn'd, but thou art clear.
 Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
 I must pronounce thee just in death;
 And, if my soul were sent to hell,
 Thy righteous law approves it well."

In the text I beg you specially to remark our second thought, namely, that *God himself finds the reason for his mercy*, and, O ye heavens hear it, and be astonished O earth, he finds it in himself. "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off." Here is the drift of the thought—the Lord is a patient God, and determines to make his *patience* glorious. When all was darkness the Lord said, "Let there be light!" and light was;—thus he glorified his power. When all was chaos Jehovah brought fair order out of grim confusion, and so glorified his wisdom. So in the sinner's case the Lord sees a wretch who has provoked him to his face for thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, perhaps seventy or eighty years, and as the Lord desires an opportunity to glorify his patience, he finds it ready to his hand. Having permitted that sinner to live when he scoffed at the gospel, scorned the atonement, and rejected the Redeemer, the Lord at length crowns his longsuffering by blotting out his sins, and forgiving all his misdeeds, whereat

all creatures stand amazed, and men, and angels, and devils in astonishment cry out, "Who is a God like unto thee, passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin?" Who but the God of boundless grace could have borne with such a provoking sinner, and then after all have taken him into his own bosom as his child.

God also would illustrate in the salvation of a sinner not only his patience, but his sovereign and abundant *mercy* towards sinners. If the Lord were to select this morning as the object of his grace some soul possessing merit, if such were the case, if he were to choose some soul in whom there was a claim for pity (of course I am supposing an impossibility), then there would be little glory to his grace; but when, casting his divine eyes of compassion all round this assembly, he selects a soul that is bad throughout, black without and black within, a soul that has laid soaking in sin like the wool in the scarlet dye, till the color is ingrain, then he magnifies the glory of his grace. When he looks upon a wretch who confesses either by his silence or by his tearful speech, that he deserves his wrath, and says, "Thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee: I have laid them on the Savior's head, go and sin no more, thy transgressions are blotted out, I have purchased thee unto myself by the death of my Son," oh, then, how the sinner's heart melts with gratitude, love, and wonder in the presence of such a God. The Lord is loved much in that heart which feels that much has been forgiven; thus God's glory begins to be known, and soon it spreads abroad; The neighbors and friends and kinsfolk of the pardoned penitent say unto one another, "Was it ever done after this sort before? Have you ever heard the like of this? Here is this man saved—this man who lay at hell's dark door, and seemed only fit to be cast into the pit!" Oh, how the shouts go up to high heaven from the watchful angels who joy over penitents, "Glory be unto almighty grace."

Now, look thee, man, once more, God can, by saving such a one as thou art, not only glorify his patience and grace but display his *power*. It is evident that it is not an easy task to conquer thee. Thou hast been like Leviathan whose heart is hard as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone. "The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon; the arrow cannot make him see; he laugheth at the shaking of a spear." Thou hast laughed at all men who would convince thee, and even the thunders of God's providence have not solaced to alarm thee; yet now the Lord intends to show what his Almighty grace can do. Now will he by a miracle of gracious power turn the lion to a lamb, the raven to a dove. The conversion of little sinners, if such there be, would but little honor him; but if they be desperately set on mischief there is room for the eternal and ever blessed God to display the glory of his name. For his name's sake will he do it; even for his own sake will he do it, that men may see what his patience, grace, and power can accomplish. Truly the Lord's love does accomplish great moral wonders. Forgiveness even among men is often more potent than punishment. I have heard it related of a soldier at Woolwich, that he had frequently been drunk and disorderly; and, though he had been very frequently imprisoned, and otherwise punished for his offenses, he was incorrigible. On one occasion he had incurred the severe penalty of the lash, and expected to receive it. He had no excuse to offer, and did not pretend to make any. He was sullen and obdurate. At last the commanding officer said to him, "We cannot do anything with you; we have imprisoned you; we have dogged you; yet we cannot improve you. There is only one thing we have never done with you, and that we are going to try; we forgive you." The culprit broke down at once. Hard as he was, this new treatment overcame him. That word, "You are fully forgiven," broke him down far more than the nine-thonged cat; he was never an offender again. Many a soul that has been very obstinate against God, even to persecuting the followers of the Lord Jesus, when the Lord has by the Holy Spirit said in his heart,

“I have loved thee with an everlasting love, I gave my Son to die for thee; I laid thy sins on him, and now I freely forgive thee, and take thee to be my child, my well-beloved.” Oh, the heart dissolves and the rebellious will surrenders.

“I yield—by mighty love subdued,
Who can resist its charms?
And throw myself, by wrath pursued,
Into my Savior’s arises.”

God grant that in many and many a case this may be true at this moment.

But, now, it may be that a soul here present is saying, “Well, I can see that God can thus find a motive for mercy in himself, when there is none in the sinner, but why is it that the Lord is chastening me as he is?” Possibly you are sickly in body, have been brought low in estate, and are grievously depressed in mind. God now, in our text, goes on to *explain his dealings with you*, that you may not have one hard thought of him. It is true he has been smiting you, but it has been with a purpose and in measure. “I have refined thee, but not with silver.” You have been put into the furnace of affliction, but not,—note the “but,”—“*but* not with silver.” Now, when silver is refined it requires the most vehement heat of all metals. God has not brought upon you the severest troubles. You have been chastised, but not as you might have been, nor as you deserved to have been. You have been made to suffer, but his strokes have been fewer than your crimes and lighter than your guilt. You are now bowed down and depressed, but you are not quite without some rays of hope, especially now that you have heard the glad sound of a free-grace gospel. You have been “refined,” that was God’s object, but the process has been slight, it is “not with silver.” The Lord has not dealt with you as men do with silver. What do they do with it? They put it into a fire that the dross may be consumed, and the silver may be made pure. Now, if you, poor sinner, had been put into such a fire as that, you would have been utterly destroyed, for in you there was no silver at all. As you are by nature you are not at all like silver, and the heat of a silver furnace would quite consume you. True it is that now his grace has created a vein of silver in your heart, but he does not yet intend to put you to extreme tests, for your weak graces would fail in the process. What he has sent to you has been with a view to awaken and to quicken, to take away your self-confidence and false peace, and so in a measure to refine you; but he does not depend for the refinement of either you or his people upon the furnace of affliction, he has other and more effectual modes of purification. The furnace of trouble is often used as a mode of refining, but after all it is only a means; the real refining fire is the Holy Ghost, the true purification lies in the blood of him who sits as a refiner. Remember it is not said that trouble will purify the sons of Levi; but “HE is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s sope,” and “he,” not with trouble but by himself, “shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver.” Here suffering would only make a man more drossy; apart from divine grace affliction has no good effect. If we are not sanctified by the Eternal Spirit when in the furnace of affliction, and if the precious blood of Jesus be not applied to our soul, all the distress and grief in the world will not purify us. And so, poor soul, God has wrought in your trouble, but he does not mean to continue to vex you until your soul is perfectly refined, for that would be more than you could bear, even could it be possible. No, no, he will put away your sin by better means. Behold the precious blood! You have not to suffer for your sins, for Christ has suffered for them in thy stead. You are to be refined, but not by processes of a fiery character. Behold the sacred water from the river side of your Redeemer, for that will take your filthiness away. Behold the Eternal Spirit waiting to renew your soul—that will effectually remove your dross. The Spirit has

refined you, in a measure, by what you have suffered, by awakening and convincing you; but the true refining shall come to you in another way, therefore be of good courage, thank God for what you have felt, but be not bowed down with abject terror as though your trials would quite consume you. They shall be both mitigated in degree, and useful in result.

And now, notice the next thing: the Lord declares that *the time of trial is the chosen season for revealing his love to you*: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." This verse does not teach that God's choice of any man begins in time, or begins when he is under affliction. Oh, no, the choice of God is without beginning, it is eternal. God seeth the things that shall be as though they were; everything is *now* with him. But it often happens that the time in which God reveals his choice and manifests his electing love to a soul is when that soul is almost consumed with trouble. And now, dear hearer, I must again picture thee, for my object is not to preach to the winds, but to preach right into thy soul; thou hast been brought very low of late, thou hast been like a field ploughed, harrowed, cross-ploughed, scarified; there is no rest to thee; and thou canst plead no reason why God should give thee rest. Thou art brought into abject distress of spirit. Now is the time when the Lord reveals his love to such as thou art. I never knew his love when I strutted abroad in the bravery of my selfrighteousness, and I never should have known it. I never heard him say "I have chosen thee," when I fared sumptuously every day at the table of my own self-sufficiency. I never heard him say, "My son that was dead is alive again, he that was lost is found," when I had still the gold in my purse and was spending my living riotously. But, I will tell you when I heard him say, "I have chosen thee": it was when I came fresh from the swine-trough with my belly aching because I could not fill it with husks, with my filthy rags about me, and my soul all sinking in despair; with no argument upon my lip except this: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Then for the first time I heard him say, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." It is when we are down to the very lowest, when we are brought to bankruptcy and beggary spiritually, when we lie at Christ's feet as though we were dead, it is then he puts his hand upon us, and says, "Fear not, I am the first and the last": it is then he anoints us with the oil of joy, it is then he clothes us with the garments of salvation, it is then we hear the voice of eternal love, saying, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

But note, once more, before I leave the sinner's case, that lest the soul should forget it, *the Lord repeats again the point he began with*, and unveils the motives of his grace once more. What is the eleventh verse but the echo of the ninth: "For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it; for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another." God cannot save you, sinner, for your own sake, you are not worth the saving. If you are cast away upon the dunghill of oblivion for ever, it is as much as you deserve; you are not worthy of God's notice, you are a mere speck in his great universe, and having dared to sin against him, it is as fit that he should destroy you, as it is fit that a venomous reptile should be crushed beneath your foot. Yet the Lord declares that he will refrain from wrath. He will have mercy upon you, oh, broken heart, for his own sake; do you observe why it is "for his own sake," namely, that his name "may not be polluted." Now, suppose a sinner shall come to him and cry, "Lord, I am a guilty soul, I have no merit to plead, but I appeal to thy mercy, I trust in thy love. Thou hast said that through Christ Jesus, thou wilt forgive sinners. Lord, I trust in thy dear Son. Save me for his sake. Now if he does not save you, we speak with reverence and bated breath, but we use his own words, his name will be "polluted," because then it will be said, "Here is a soul that came to the Lord, and he cast it out,

and yet he said, 'him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.' Here is a poor sinner that rested on the love and mercy of God in Christ Jesus and yet was confounded, whereas, he promised that they that trust in the Lord should never be confounded, nor ashamed, world without end." I know this morning that my hope is fixed on Christ Jesus alone. If I am ever lost I shall be a soul in hell resting upon Christ, and do you think that can ever be? Will they not publish it in the streets of Tophet; here is a soul that dared believe in Jesus, but Jesus repelled him as presumptuous. Here is a poor soul who cried

"If I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there;"

and yet this soul is damned." Why, surely such an one would be carried in triumph through the blazing streets of hell, and held up as an insult to the God of mercy, as a proof that he had not kept his word. O soul, he will save you, for his own sake, lest his name should be "polluted," for he is jealous of his name. He will never permit it to be truthfully said, even by a devil, that he ever broke a promise, even to a devil. If you will go to him in Christ Jesus, though you be all but damned already, and feel that your death warrant is signed; he will not, he cannot, reject you. Throw yourself at the cross-foot, and say, "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief;" and God will never tarnish his name by thy destruction.

And then, he adds, "And I will not give my glory unto another." But if a soul should perish while trusting in the blood of Christ, the glory of God would go over to Satan. It would be proved that Satan had overcome the truthfulness of God, or the power of God, or the mercy of God; that at last evil had proved more mighty than good, and sin had abounded over grace. Can it ever be that goodness shall find a difficulty which it cannot overcome, a Red Sea it cannot divide, or a Lebanon which it cannot climb? No, never, while God is God. Oh, that I had before me the biggest sinner that ever lived! I would like to look this morning into the face of a criminal who has piled up mountains on mountains of sins, defied his God, and derided the laws of his country; a ruffian red-handed with murder, and dripping with lust; for I would glory in saying to him, "All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. Come but to God's arms through Jesus Christ his Son, and *you* shall find him a God ready to forgive, and abounding in lovingkindness. He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy."

I do not know how to preach the gospel more fully than I am now doing. I am laboring to set before downcast sinners an open door, and to show them how effectually grace has removed every hinderance out of the way, by basing its arguments of love upon the name of God, and not upon the merit of the creature.

II. Thus much to the sinner; we shall now speak OF THE RECLAIMING OF THE BACKSLIDER.

Backsliding professor, your case is more evidently meant in the text even than that of the sinner, for God was speaking to his own people Israel in these remarkable words. Now your crime, if any thing, is a more censurable one than that of the sinner. I can see no more reason why God should have mercy upon you than upon the ungodly, indeed, I see more reason for punishing you, for you have made a profession and belied it. "Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, which swear by the name of Jehovah, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or in righteousness." That is your character, you have taken Christ's name upon you, I cannot say altogether that you have been deceived and a deceiver, but your actions look as if you have been, for you have gone aside from the faith, and turned aside from your Lord. You did know

something of his love; and, unless awfully deceived, you once rested on the Lord Jesus. Shall I publish abroad your guilt? How hath the much fine gold become dim! How hath the blazing sun of your profession been altogether eclipsed? You have transgressed in opposition to light and knowledge; you knew more than the sinner, and yet you have sinned as he did; you knew something of the sweets of Christ's table, but you have joined yourself to the table of devils. And you have been very perverse about it too, for providence has dealt sharply with you, but you would not come back to your God. Your neck has been an iron sinew, and your brow has been brass! Alas, how treacherously have you dealt with the Lord your God! No sin is so destructive to married love as that of adultery, yet the Lord puts the backslider's case on the same footing, in the third chapter of the book of Jeremiah. "They say, if a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord." Cavil not at the imagery for its coarseness, but rejoice in its matchless grace. Read on in that same chapter, from the twelfth verse to the end, and note the verse, "Turn unto me, O backsliding children; for I am married unto you, saith the Lord." But why should the Lord bid his chosen nation come back? Not because she deserved to be received again, not because in heaven, or earth, or hell, there could be found any reason why she should for her own sake be restored. Her sins said, "Put her away, put her away; shall the holy God have anything to do with such an one as this?" Justice said, "Put her away, the law demands it." Holiness said, "Put her away, how shall she come into God's house?" But, his infinite love replied, "The Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away." He will not hear of a divorce; and again he cries, "Return, ye backsliding children, I am married unto you, saith the Lord." Backslider, you see there is no reason for God's grace that can be found in your person or in your character, but it is found in the divine heart. I must go over the same ground again. "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off."

The Lord has a reason for not cutting off backsliders, and it is this—first, his many promises must be kept in which he has declared that his chosen shall not perish, neither shall they utterly depart from him. Is not this the very tenor of the covenant? "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." His gifts and calling are without repentance, irrevocable. It shall not be said that his promise was ever revoked or broken; he has made a covenant with our Lord Jesus, and that covenant is sealed with blood; know ye not the sum and substance of it? "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Thus the faithfulness of God to his promises would be questioned if any of his people finally apostatised.

God's grace is also interested in it; for if after all your provocations God were to say, "I have given thee up, I will never deal with thee in grace again," then it would be said that God's grace had a limit, that it could not abound over sin, and after all was a mutable thing. Can it be that forgiving grace should punish the forgiven? That adopting grace could unchild the child? That wrath should dismember the body of Christ, and mangle the Redeemer, to be avenged upon the backslider? Oh, no, such is Jehovah's truth, that he will keep every promise to the letter; such is his grace, that his people shall never sin to such an extent but what his grace will overtop it all; and

such is his immutability, that though we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself. Hath he said, and will he not do it; hath he commanded, and shall it not come to pass? Come back, backslider, God has not changed towards you; return at once to him. His heart is still full of love to you. Return unto him, for still doth he say, "How can I set thee as Admah, how can I make thee as Zeboim? My repentings are kindled; I will not destroy him, for I am God and not man." There is a free course for mercy to those who have wandered furthest, when God finds a motive for grace in his own name and in his own praise. Why, do you not see, poor trembling backslider, that if God forgives you, and you once get to heaven, you will be among the heartiest of heaven's choristers? I mean to sing the loudest of any if I ever enter the celestial seats, for I shall owe so much to the sweet love and grace of God; but David and other great backsliders will also love most intensely. It is amazing grace which not only saves at first, but restores the wandering sheep after it has gone astray. Oh, you Christians who are kept by divine grace walking with God, you have much to praise him for, you ought to bless him every day you live; but you who have fallen and gone aside, if the Lord brings you back you must henceforth render double diligence and sevenfold love. Henceforth you must be like the woman who broke the alabaster box over Christ's head, you must feel that you cannot do enough for that dear Lord and Savior who saw you in all your rebellions, and yet loved you. Loving you because he would love you; not because you were lovely, but because he would love you; not because you were deserving, but because he would love you. This ought to make you the very choicest of Christians, this should place you in the front of the champions of the Lord in the day of battle.

Please to observe, that God having thus declared the reason of his love to the backslider goes on to tell him, that the present sufferings which he is now enduring as the result of his backslidings should be mitigated. "I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have put thee into the fire, but I have not blown the heat to such an extreme degree that thy sin should be melted from thee: that would be a greater heat than any soul could bear. I have refined thee, that was needful, but not as silver; that would have been destructive to thee." Thou sayest, "All that waves and billows have gone over me." Not so; you know not what all God's waves and billows might be, for there is a depth infinitely lower than any you have ever seen. The deeps of hell are far more horrible than anything you can imagine. If you are in the furnace to-day do not repine, do not say like Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear," but rather say, "I will kiss the rod, and bless my Father's name that he allows me to live at all, and now bids me to return to him. I will thank him for the rod; it is the token of the Father's love to his child."

Then comes his next word: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction;" that is, as if he said, "I will renew my election of you." It was never revoked, but now it shall be more manifestly declared. God has looked at you in prosperity and he has seen you treacherously forgetting him. You prospered in business and you grew very worldly, God could see no beauty in your face. You had your children about you, and your wife made you glad, and you lived almost without prayer, without reading the scriptures; God therefore hid his face from you. Now, however, your affairs are at a low ebb and you begin again to pray; the neglected Bible is brought down again; now the seat that could be left unoccupied half the Sabbath-day is always filled by you; now you begin saying, "My God, my God, have mercy on me." Hear this for your comfort,—the Lord never thinks his children's faces more lovely than when they are slobbered with tears; when repentance defiles the face before men it beautifies it before God; when the eyes grow red with sorrow they are lovely unto the Lord. Do you beat upon your breast, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," then know,

that no sound of tabor is so sweet to God as the sound of beaten breasts, no music hath more melody in it than the sigh of a broken heart.

Brethren, all of you, though you are not open backsliders, perhaps you may be worse than those who are. I know in my own soul, I never feel safe except when I stand as a sinner at the cross foot; and though I desire to grow in grace, and to be a saint, and would use language suitable to a child of God, and would not keep my hands off a single covenant privilege that belongs to me as one with Christ; yet, for all that, while I am in this flesh, I feel my happiest moments are those lowly times when I feel that I am nothing, and that Jesus is my all in all. God chooses his people over again when he sees them contrite in the furnace of soul affliction. When he sees them how he loves them; when he sees them down he lifts them up; when he sees them withered in themselves then he makes them flourish; when they are nothing his love is everything. When they are swollen with pride and self-reliant, he turns his face away from them; but to his dear brokenhearted children, he is all kindness; and this is his reason, "How shall my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another." If one poor believer who is pining after Jesus' face were forgotten by him, his name would be polluted—where would be his immutability? And then again, Satan would glory over that child of God and say, "I have dragged a child of God down to hell!" Christ's blood would suffer dishonor, for it would be said that a soul was punished though Christ was punished in its stead, and that were to obliterate the atonement, and to make the substitution of Christ to be of none effect. If it could once be said, "Here is a spirit that God justified, and yet condemned it," where were God's immutability? There were no God at all. He were a changeable being, and not Jehovah. If it could be said, "Here is one that was espoused unto Christ in righteousness, a soul that was one with Jesus in vital union, yet he suffered this sheep of his flock to perish, this jewel of his crown to be cast away, this member of his body to rot into corruption, God's glory could be given to another, and he would not be what he now is. Oh, beloved, let us to one and all, whether we be unsaved sinners or backsliders, or may suspect ourselves to be either the one or the other, let us go to the dear fountain of his blood, whose open veins are the gates of healing to us; let us go again and touch the hem of his garment and be made whole, and together let us rejoice that he for his mercy's sake can save us, and magnify himself by the deed of mercy.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah 48 and 49:1-12.

A Persuasive to Steadfastness

A Sermon

(No. 1042)

Delivered on Thursday Evening, February 29th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.”—Hebrews 3:14.

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE for the preacher to say too much about faith, or to extol this grace too highly! It is of vital importance, not at one stage of the Christian's history only, but throughout the whole of his career, from his setting out even till he reaches the goal where faith is turned to sight. By faith we begin the life of obedience to Christ, and by faith we continue to lead the life of holiness, for “the just *shall* live by faith.” This is the point of honor and of safety with all the just—the justified ones. The whole compass of their well-being, though it take in the sternest sense of duty and the highest grant of privilege, is to believe simply, to rely implicitly, and to confide cheerfully, in their covenant God. The beginning of their confidence is a hopeful sign. Time will test its value. The result of that profession has yet to be shown. Hence it is necessary that the beginning of their confidence should be held fast, steadfast even unto the end. When we begin in the spirit we do not proceed with a hope to be made perfect in the flesh. We do not start with justification by faith, and then look for perfection by works. We do not lean upon Christ when we are little children, and then expect to run alone when we are men; but we live by drawing all our stores from him, while as yet we are naked, and poor, and miserable. When most enriched by his grace, we still have to say and delight to say it, “all my springs are in thee.” Faith at the beginning and faith at the close; faith all the way through is the one important matter. A failure in this, as we observed in our reading, shut Israel out of the promised land. “They could not enter in because of unbelief.” Unbelief is always the greatest mischief to the saints; hence they have need earnestly to watch against it. Faith is always the channel of innumerable blessings to them: they ought, therefore, most watchfully to maintain it.

We shall have to show the value of faith while we try to open up the text before us, in which I see, first, *a high privilege*: “we are made partakers of Christ;” and secondly, *by implication, a serious question*—the question whether or no we have been made partakers of Christ and, then, in the third place, *an unerring test*. “We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.”

I. First, then, here is A VERY HIGH PRIVILEGE. “We are made partakers of Christ.”

Observe that the text does *not* say, “we are made partakers *with* Christ.” That would be true, a very precious truth too, for we are joint-heirs with Christ, and because all things are his, all things are ours. Christ holds for us the entire heritage of the faithful as our representative, and as we are made partakers with him in the Father's favor, and in the world's hatred, so we shall be partakers with him in the glory to be revealed, and in the bliss which endures for ever and ever. But here we have to do with our being partakers *of* Christ, rather than our being partakers *with* Christ.

Neither does it say we are made partakers of rich spiritual benefits. That is a fact which we may greet with thorough trust and hearty welcome. But, dear brethren, there is more than that here. To be partakers of pardoning mercy, to be partakers of renewing grace; to be partakers of the adoption, to be partakers of sanctification, preservation, and of all the other covenant blessings, is to possess an endowment of unspeakable value; but to be made “partakers of *Christ*,” is to have all in one. You have all the flowers in one posy, all the gems in one necklace, all the sweet spices in one delicious compound. “We are made partakers of *Christ*”—of himself. “It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell,” and we are made partakers with him of all that he is ordained to be of God unto us—“wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” We are partakers of him; this is a privilege that no tongue can ever utter, no thought of finite mortal can ever grasp. But ah, it would need more time than we can afford, and far more spiritual teaching than we profess to have attained, to dive into this great and profound utterance, “We are made partakers of *Christ*.” Still, as we stand spell-bound on the margin, let us venture to sail out just a little upon the surface of this ocean of goodness and of grandeur.

We are made partakers of *Christ*, beloved, when first of all by faith in him we procure a share in his merits. Sinful and sad, covered with transgressions and conscious of our shame, we come to the fountain filled with his blood, we washed in it, and were made white as snow. In that hour we became partakers of *Christ*. *Christ* is the substitute for sin. He suffered the penalty due from the unjust, for whom he died, to the violated law of God. When we believe in him we become partakers of those sufferings, or rather of the blessed fruit of them. The fact of his having borne what we ought to have borne becomes available to us. We present the memorial thereof at the altar of God, the throne of the heavenly grace, in prayers and professions, and in spiritual worship. The blood pleads our cause. The blood of *Jesus*, which speaketh better things than that of *Abel*, intercedes for mercy, not for vengeance. By its rich virtue, its real value, its vital merit, it puts our sins for ever to death and lays our fears for ever to rest. Oh, how blessed to be a partaker of *Christ*, the sin-atonement sacrifice—to stand before God as a sinner that deserves nothing but damnation in himself, and yet knows by precious faith, that

“Covered is my unrighteousness,
From condemnation I am free—”

—that I am a partaker of the meritorious sacrifice of the great high Priest, who, having once offered one sacrifice for ever, now sits down, his work being done, at the right hand of God. What a privilege is this!

Moreover, we are partakers of *Christ*, inasmuch as his righteousness also becomes ours by imputation. We are not only freed from sin through his atonement, but we are rendered acceptable to God through his obedience as our responsible surety. We are “accepted in the beloved,” we are justified through his righteousness. God seeth not us marred in the likeness of the first *Adam* who sinned, but he seeth us in *Christ*, the second *Adam*, remade, redeemed, restored, arrayed in garments of glory and beauty, with the Savior’s vesture on, as holy as the Holy One. He seeth “no sin in *Jacob* nor iniquity in *Israel*.” When *Jacob* learns to trust in the Messiah, and *Israel* hides behind his representative, the Lord our Righteousness, *Jacob* ceases to wrestle, for he prevails, and *Israel* stands in honor, for he is a prince with God. Blessed, thrice blessed, are they who are partakers of *Christ* in his righteousness.

After we are thus saved from sin, and righteousness is imputed to us by faith, we further become partakers of *Christ* by living upon him, feeding on him. The sacramental table represents our

fellowship. Though it does no more than represent it, it represents it well. At that table we eat bread, and we drink wine, and the body is thus fed, typifying that through meditation upon the incarnate Christ our soul is sustained, and by remembering the passion of the Lord, as the wine cup sets forth his blood, our spirits are comforted and revived, and our hearts are nourished. It is not that the bread is anything or the wine anything, but it is that Christ is everything to us. He is our daily bread, his atonement makes glad our heart—makes us “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” Brethren, you know what it is to feed upon Jesus, and what satisfying food it is! When nothing else can give your soul rest and peace, remembering the incarnate God will do it, a study of the suffering Savior will bring the refreshment and consolation you want. Jesus Christ when he is our food makes us to be partakers of himself.

But, is there not a doctrine concealed here of deeper significance? The union of believers with himself was among the latest of all the revelations which our blessed Lord when on earth made known to his disciples. With a parable he showed it, and without a parable he declared it plainly. Every true child of God is one with Christ. This union is set forth in Scripture by several images, to which we will just refer, but upon none of which can we just now enlarge. We are one with Christ and partakers of him as the stone is cemented to the foundation. It is built upon it, rests upon it, and, together with the foundation, goes to make up the structure. So we are built into Christ by coherence and adhesion, joined to him, and made a spiritual house for the habitation of God by the Holy Ghost. We are made partakers with Christ by a union in which we lean and depend upon him. This union is further set forth by the vine and the branches. The branches are participators with the stem, the sap of the stem is for the branches. It treasures it up only to distribute it to them. It has no sap for itself alone, all its store of sap is for the branch. In like manner we are vitally one with Christ, and the grace that is in him is for us. It was given to him that he might distribute it to all his people. Furthermore, it is as the union of the husband with the wife, they are participators the one with the other. All that belongs to the husband the wife enjoys and shares with him. Meanwhile she shares himself, nay, he is all her own. Thus it is with Christ. We are married unto him—betrothed unto him for ever in righteousness and in judgment, and all that he has is ours, and he himself is ours. All his heart belongs to each one of us. And then, too, as the members of the body are one with the head, as they derive their guidance, their happiness, their existence from the head, so are we made partakers of Christ. Oh, matchless participation! It is “a great mystery” saith the apostle; and, indeed, such a mystery it is as they only know who experience it. Even they cannot understand it fully; far less can they hope to set it forth so that carnal minds shall comprehend its spiritual meaning. The day cometh when we shall be partakers of Christ to the highest and uttermost degree that symbols can suggest, prophecy forestal, faith anticipate, or actual accomplishment bring to pass; for, albeit, though of all that our Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven we have a reversionary interest to-day by faith, we shall have a share in it by actual participation ere long.

Partakers of Christ! Yes, and therefore with him partakers in destiny. When he shall come his holy ones shall come with him. That he has risen from the dead is the earnest of their resurrection. At the day of his appearing they shall rise and participate in the fruition of his mediatorial work. Then, in the judging of the world, in the destruction of all his spiritual foes, in the great marriage-day when the bride shall have made herself ready, and he shall drink of the new wine in the kingdom of his Father, and in all else that is to come, too glorious to be described except by symbols like those of the Apocalypse, his people shall participate with him, for this honor have all his saints. All right and all might, all that can extol or delight, all that for ever and for ever shall contribute to

the glory of Christ, shall be shared by all the faithful, for we are partakers not only with him, but *of* him—*of* Christ—therefore of all the surroundings of glory and honor that shall belong to him.

The language of the text reminds us that none of us have any title to this privilege by nature. “We are *made* partakers of Christ.” From our first parentage He derived a very different entail. We all of woman born became partakers of the ruin of the first Adam, of the corruption of humanity, of the condemnation common to the entire race. Oh, to be *made* partakers! This is a work of grace, of sovereign omnipotent grace—a work which a man cannot sufficiently admire, and for which he can never be sufficiently grateful. “We are made partakers of Christ.” This is the Holy Ghost’s work in us, to rend us away from the old wild olive, and to graft us into the good olive,—to dissolve the union between us and sin, and to cement a union between our souls and Christ,—to take us out of the Egyptian bondage and the Egyptian night in which we willingly sat, and to bring us into the liberty and the light wherewith Christ makes his people free and glad. This is work as grand and godlike as to create a world. For it let the Lord’s name be magnified by each one of us if, indeed, we *have* been made partakers of Christ. *If*—I say; and that “if” leads me to the second point I proposed to consider.

II. The privilege of which we have spoken suggests A SOLEMN SEARCHING QUESTION. Are we made partakers of Christ? O beloved, many think they are who are not. There is nothing more to be dreaded than a supposititious righteousness, a counterfeit justification, a spurious hope. Better, I sometimes think, to have no religion than to have a false religion. I am quite certain that the man is much more likely to be saved who knows that he is naked, and poor, and miserable, than the man who says, “I am rich and increased in goods.” It were infinitely better to take the road to heaven doubting than to go in another direction presuming. I am far better pleased with the soul that is always questioning, “Am I right?” than with him who has drunk the cup of arrogance till he is intoxicated with selfconceit and says, “I know my lot; the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; there is no need for self-examination in my case.” Brethren, be assured of this; all men are not partakers of Christ: all baptised men are not partakers of Christ: all churchmen are not partakers of Christ: all dissenters are not made partakers of Christ: all members of this church are not made partakers of Christ: all ministers, all elders, all bishops, are not made partakers of Christ. Yea, all apostles were not made partakers of Christ. One of them, Christ’s familiar friend, who kept the little purse which held all the Master’s earthly store, lifted up his heel against him, betrayed him with a tender treacherous kiss, and became the son of perdition. He was a companion of Christ not a partaker of him?

Am *I* made a partaker of Christ? Multiply the question till each individual among you makes it his own. In this congregation there are various classes. There are probably some here who are only hearers—hearers about Christ, not partakers of Christ. It is one thing to hear about a banquet, it is quite another thing to be fed at it. It is one thing in the wilderness to hear of rippling streams, and quite another to stoop down and drink the cooling draught—one thing for the prisoner by night to dream of liberty, or by day to read of roaming free through his native country, another thing to get rid of the chain—one thing to hear of pardon, another thing to be pardoned—one thing to hear of heaven, another thing to go there. O my dear hearers! some of you are as familiar with the gospel as you are with the house you live in; yet, though you live in the house, you never live in the gospel, and I fear you never will. You hear it, and hear it, that is all. God grant you may not have to hear of your hearing in another world, where it shall be laid down among the chief of your sins that you

were of those who, when they heard did provoke—provoke because they rejected what they ought to have received.

Others go farther than hearing. They become professors. May I remind you—and I would not judge anyone harshly—certainly no man more harshly than I would myself—it is one thing to profess to be a partaker of Christ, and another thing to be made a partaker of Christ. I may profess that I am rich and be all the while a bankrupt, a dishonest bankrupt for having made the profession. I may protest that I am in health, while a deadly cancer may lurk within. I may declare that I am honest, but it will not clear me before the judge if I am proved a thief. I may avow that I am loyal, but it would not save my life if I were convicted of high treason. Professions; ah, I fear they are in many cases but a painted pageantry that makes the road to hell attractive. Professions there are not unfrequently upon which we may gaze with a vacant wonder and turn away with a cold shudder, as from the sombre gaudiness of a funeral, wherein prancing steeds, stately mutes, nodding plumes, and velvet palls adorn the obsequies of the dead. God save us from a lifeless profession! May we never be like certain trees, of which Bunyan said, that they were green outside, but inwardly they were so rotten that they were only fit to be tinder for the devil's tinder-box. Many professors are too fair not to be false; too comely outside not to be loathsome within; for there is an over-doing of the sepulchre's whitewash. You feel convinced that there would not be so much whitewashing without if there were not a good deal of rottenness inside to be concealed. Essence of roses or of lavender is sweet, but much scent excites much suspicion. Oh, let us, each one who professes to-night, say to himself, "I was baptised on a profession of my faith, but was I ever baptised into Christ? When the Sacred name of the triune God was named on me, did I then enter into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost? I have come often to the communion table; but have I communed with Christ there? My name is on the church-book, but is it written in heaven? I have said to others I am a Christian, but am I in very deed known unto Christ? Or will he say unto me in that day, 'I never knew you: depart from me ye workers of iniquity?'"

These are solemn questionings. Many persons are temporary followers of Christ, and outwardly, as far as the human eye can follow, they appear to be real followers of Christ. I believe in the final perseverance of the saints; but I do not know, nor can any man know, how near a man may approach to the likeness of a saint and yet after all apostatise. Nor is any one of us able to say of himself, or of his fellow members, "We never shall fall away." I remember one whose voice I, and many of your heard in prayer, and we enjoyed the exercise of his gifts. The man had been reclaimed from the lowest class of society, and he distinguished himself by his devotion in such a way that he was accepted as a church officer among us. I remember, when the first charge of sin was brought against him, and of very grievous sin, one among us said, "If that man is not a child of God I am not a child of God." The expression seemed to me too strong, but in my heart I almost joined in it. I was ready to pronounce him innocent before I investigated the charges. I felt certain that there could not be in such a man as that the impurity laid at his door; yet it was there, it was all there, and worse than tongue can tell. He repented and though not received into the church because the profession of repentance did not seem to be all we could wish it to be, yet there was a turning aside from sin for awhile. But he went into it again, and he wallowed in it. He died in it. As far as we could any of us judge, he perished in it. He went from bad to worse. I feel I might say without uncharitableness this man carried his iniquity, as far as human judgment could track him. Therefore, without prejudice to the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, which I implicitly believe, I will not venture to say of any among you—much less will I venture to say it of myself, that I am sure I am so made

a partaker of Christ that I shall hold fast my confidence to the end. I hope so. I rest in Christ, trusting in him. The possibility is that I am deceiving myself; the possibility is that you may be self-deceivers. At any rate, it is so far a possibility that I would beseech you to have no confidence but such as the Holy Ghost gives you; to put no reliance as to the future anywhere but in the eternal arms; have no assurance but that assurance which is based upon the word of God and the witness of the Spirit within your soul. That can give you infallible assurance. Apart from that, I repeat it again, I will say neither of you nor of myself, that I can be sure with all the profession that is made, that you are partakers of Christ. Some go even farther than being temporary followers of Christ, and yet after all perish. They maintain a consistent profession before the eye of men throughout the whole of their lives, as vessels that navigate the whole of the sea and go down in the harbour. There are soldiers that have held out and fought valiantly up to the very moment of victory, and then have run away. And there are professors that have been unexceptional in their lives, whose character has been apparently without a blemish, and even those who knew them in private could not detect any serious flaw in their conduct; yet, for all that, there was a worm at the root; a fly in the pot of ointment; a failure as to the sincerity of their grace. They had not, after all, the true faith which hangs upon Christ, and they did not persevere in heart, though they appeared to persevere in life. The difference between the Christian and the professor is sometimes such as only God can discern. There is a path which the eagle's eye hath not seen, and the lion's whelp hath not traversed—a path of life into which God can bring us, end of which it may be said that he knows all who are in it. But, there is a something like it, a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. There is a counterfeit of the true metal of grace so well manufactured, that only omniscience itself can tell which is the reprobate silver and which is the pure shekel of the sanctuary. Grave reason have we, then, for raising the question as to whether we are made partakers of Christ or not.

III. Now we come to THE UNERRING TEST. Patience comes to the aid of faith here. Evidences accumulate till the issue is conclusive. "We are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."

This passage may be read in two ways, neither of which violates the literal meaning of the original, either of which may express to us the mind of the Spirit—as we have it in our version, "the beginning of our confidence," or, as I would rather translate it, "the foundation of our confidence," the basis on which our confidence rests.

Take your choice. We will expound and vindicate both. That man is a partaker of Christ who holds fast that he had at first, having received it, not as an education, but as an intuition of his spirit life; not as an argument, but as an axiom he could not challenge, or rather as an oracle he received joyfully and bowed to submissively. The confidence which is based upon the true foundation, even Christ Jesus, is simple and clear as one's own consciousness. It asks no proof because it admits no doubt. In vain the sceptic comes to me now and says, "Sir, you are asleep, and dreaming." I answer, "No, sir, I am speaking to these thousands, and they are listening to me." Even so, when I first believed the Gospel story it was with a childlike feeling that it was so and I knew it. The man who is not a partaker of Christ hears the gospel, professes to believe it, and in some measure acts accordingly; but he perishes because this pure, unwavering faith does not abide in him. He has not the faith of God's elect which never can be destroyed. He has only a notion, a creed of his own making, and not a faith of the Spirit's giving.

Now, beloved, what was the beginning of our confidence? Well, the beginning of my confidence was, "I am a sinner, Christ is a Savior; and I rest on him to save me." Long before I began with Christ he had begun with me; but when I began with him it was, as the law writers say, "*In formâ pauperis*," after the style of a wretched mendicant—a pauper who had nothing of his own, and looked to Christ for everything. I know when I first cast my eye to his dear cross and rested in him, I had not any merit of my own, it was all demerit. I was not deserving, except that I felt I was hell-deserving: I had not even a shade of virtue that I could confide in. It was all over with me. I had come to an extremity. I could not have found a farthing's worth of goodness in myself if I had been melted down. I seemed to be all rottenness, a dunghill of corruption, nothing better, but something a great deal worse. I could truly join with Paul at that time, and say that my own righteousnesses were dung. A strong expression he used; but I do not suppose he felt it to be strong enough. He says, "I count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him." Well, that is how we began with Christ. We were nothing at all, and Jesus Christ was all in all. Now, brethren, we are not made partakers of Christ unless we hold this fast to the end. Have you got beyond that? Are you something creditable in your own estimation? I am afraid of you. Are you richer now in yourselves that you were then? I am afraid of you, brethren. Do you mind the place you used to stand in? you dared not lift your eyes, to heaven, but cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." How in Christ you have a far nobler place than that, for you are made to sit with him in the heavenly places. But, I ask you, apart from Christ, have you any different place from that of deep selfabasement? If you have, you have not held the beginning of your confidence fast even until now. Begin to suspect yourself. This is the position always to take "having nothing and yet possessing all things."

"I the chief of sinners am
But Jesus died for me."

Such is the beginning of our confidence. Brethren, where else was the beginning of your confidence? May we not say of it that it was only and wholly, entirely and exclusively, in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ? In the beginning of your confidence you did not rely upon any ceremonies, nor upon priests, nor upon your Bible readings, nor upon your prayings, nor upon your feelings, nor your experiences, nor your orthodoxy, nor your knowledge of doctrine, nor upon your works, nor your preachings, your sanctifications or your mortifications. No, in the beginning of your confidence the one foundation was *Jesus only*. Nothing save Jesus would I know. Oh, if on that day, I had met with a man who had any trust in his own righteousness, I know I should have quarrelled with him. If he had told me that he hoped that Jesus Christ would help him to save himself I could have wept over him to think he should be such a fool. Why, Christ is all or nothing. He must save us from top to bottom, or we never shall be saved at all. If our foundation is partly on the rock of his finished work, and partly on the sand of our own unworthy doing, the whole house totters and it must come down.

Well, brethren, is there any correspondence between the beginning of your confidence and your present look-out? Had you anything except Christ to depend upon in the hour you first believed? Is there ought now added to that one foundation that God has laid, or hath your trust been supplemented by any fresh conceit of your own? Are you faithless? God is faithful. With you, it may be yea and nay; with him it is yea and amen. Some of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt depended upon God. They saw that he had divided the Red Sea, and rained down the manna, and refreshed them with streams in the desert, and so they believed, but their faith did not hold out.

While they could see miracles of mercy, they relied on God, with nothing else to rely on; but when they got into a little difficulty they did not hold fast the beginning of their confidence unto the end, for they began to lose faith in Moses, or to confide in a golden calf. So there are some that begin, in a time of weakness, calamity, or despondence, by saying, "I trust in Christ, as a sinner." They get beyond that when they recover from their temporary depression. Then they qualify their confessions after their altered circumstances, and elect their religion after their own deliberate choice. But the God of Israel will not allow it. He will not have us put any trust but in his dear Son. We must be stripped naked of everything but that which Christ spins. We must have all our bread mouldy til we cast it out because we loathe it, and we must feed on nothing but the bread of heaven. If we get beyond that and feed on anything else, we are not made partakers of him, for we have not held fast the beginning of our confidence.

Let me call back your thoughts again, beloved, to the love of your espousals, when you acknowledged the Lord and went after him into the wilderness. Did you not then have confidence in Christ of a very humble character? Oh, at that time you did not want to be among the first of God's people to play the part of Diotrephes. When you were at the foot of the cross, and looked up as a poor sinner, you had no notion about being a distinguished man in the church. I know it did not come into my head that day that I should be a leader in God's Israel. Ah no, if I might but sit in the corner of his house, or be a door keeper it had been enough for me. If, like the dog under the table, I might get a crumb of his mercy, were it but flavoured by his hand, because he had broken it off that is all I wanted. That is just how we ought always to live—lowly, humbly, gentle, and broken-spirited, and ready to be anything, so that Christ may be glorified. It shows the risings of the old nature when we get to be such consequential people that if anybody should say a hard word, we wonder, or if anybody slanders us, instead of saying, "Ah, if he knew us he could say something a good deal worse," we are in a high and mighty temper because our brilliant character is injured.

Verily, I think, that when I was first converted to God if the Lord had said, "I have taken you into my house" and I am going to make use of you, and you shall be a door-mat for the saints to wipe their feet on," I should have said, "Ah, happy shall I be if I but take the filth off their blessed feet, for I love God's people; and may I minister to them in the slightest degree, it shall be my delight." But when we get away from that position we are in danger. If we are made partakers of Christ, the proof will be in our continuing to be of a meek and lowly spirit—willing to serve him in any capacity—in our becoming like little children, for "except we become as little children, we shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." Little children we were in the beginning of our confidence; little children we must continue to be, or else we may gravely question whether we have been made partakers of Christ.

When we were first made partakers of Christ, we received him very gratefully. How thankful we were for one look from Jesus' eye. Half a promise seemed precious in those days. The sermon, though it was uncouth perhaps, if full of Christ, fed us to the full. Now, alas, how many professors despise precious truth if it does not happen to be clothed in the most polished phrases; they run hither and thither where there is no food for them: not hungering and thirsting after righteousness as of yore, they admire the banquet spread out with all flowers and no fruit: they look after gaudy periods, where pure silver and polished sham do sparkle, though there be no food for the soul to feed on. Did they hold fast the beginning of their confidence they would prize the truth and love the truth, and account that if it were but the truth, it did not matter in what shape it came to them, so long as they could get hold of a promise, have a smile from Christ's face or enjoy one ray of the

blessed Spirit's consolation in their souls. But now the starving beggars have become dainty epicures; those who once were glad enough to come and feast on broken crusts from the Master's table, become connoisseurs of their Master's food; their soul "loatheth this light bread," though it is the bread of angels, and drops from the granaries of God. We should suspect ourselves, when we get into that squeamish condition. Such a proud captious state of heart does not evidence that we have been made partakers of Christ at all.

When we first received our confidence, we were obedient in word and deed. I wish all disciples of Christ had the like scrupulous conscience. I speak my own experience. The first week after I was converted to God, I felt afraid to put one foot before another for fear I should do wrong; when I thought over the day if there had been a failure in my temper, or if there had been a frothy work spoken, or something done amiss, I did chasten myself sorely, and had I known at that time anything to be my Lord's will, I think I should not have hesitated to do it; to me it would not have mattered whether it was a fashionable thing or an unfashionable thing, if it was according to his word. Oh, to do his will! to follow him whithersoever he would have me go! Why, then it seemed as though I should never, never, never be slack in keeping his commandments. Dear brethren, have you held fast the beginning of your confidence? I smite upon my own breast when I remember that, in that respect, I have not held fast the beginning of my confidence. To the cross again! Beloved, if any of you have doubts aroused in your mind by such bitter reflections upon yourselves, do not dispute with your doubts; go to the cross again. Never dispute with the devil. He can always beat you. Go straight to the cross. If he says, "Thou art no saint," say then "Very likely I am not, but there is one thing even *thou* canst not deny thou canst not say I am *not a sinner*; a sinner I am. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and if I never trusted him before, I will begin now. If I never yet did know the life of God, I will look to his death forthwith. Oh, if I never was healed of the disease of sin, there is healing in those dear wounds, and I, by faith, will have it while yet it is called to-day." Jesus, I trust thee; I trust thee wholly, and thee alone. I have heard that some years ago there was a coal-pit in work, the shaft of which by some means got blocked up, and the men could not get out of it. They were very nearly perishing. One of them had heard that there was an old working which led to another mine, and though he was afraid it might be blocked up, yet the best thing they could do would be to go along, if, perhaps, they might come to the mouth of another shaft. This old working had not been traversed for some time; it never was very lofty. They had to go along on their hands and knees, and generally needed to crawl lying flat on the ground. At length they came to the mouth of that old shaft, were soon extricated, and they gladly found their way to the upper air again. Peradventure, some of you have been living heretofore by frames and feelings; that experience has been the shaft by which you have been coming and going; and this shaft has been blocked up to-night. Well, I am not sorry for it. Come, now, brethren, let us all go along on our hands and knees where the sinners go. Let us crawl to the old shaft: let us prostrate ourselves, confessing, "Lord, I am vile, conceived in sin. Lord, I am unworthy: Lord, I am earthly, selfish, devilish. Lord, I am a mass of wounds and a mass of loathsomeness. I am unworthy of thy favor and thy love." Let us just creep along in that fashion till we come to Christ, and say,

"Just as I am, without one plea,
Save that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come."

You will find that old shaft is not shut up. There is light. Look up! There is the cross above you. Jesus is still willing to receive sinners, still able to save sinners, for he is “exalted” on high “to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins.” O come to him just that way; and, brother, when you get back to Christ in that way by which you went years ago, the advice of the text, with which I will sum up all, is keep on coming to him in that same way always. Keep on coming always. Keep on coming always. Perhaps you have been on the top of a mountain such as the Rigi or as Snowden. You know these mountains do not move. They are good solid rock under your feet. But people erect platforms on the top of them to see the sun rise a little sooner, or something of that sort. From the top of one of those platforms a man may come down with a crash and break his limbs. That is something like our erections which we put up over our simple faith in Christ. Our beautiful frames and feelings and experiences—they will come down with a crash some day, for they are rotten stuff; but, when a man stands upon this—“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and I am resting upon him: he is all my salvation and all my desire: his precious blood is all my confidence. The love of his heart, the power of his arm, the merit of his plea,—here I rest myself,”—O beloved, there is no fear of that confidence ever giving way beneath your feet. There may you stand and serenely rejoice when worlds shall melt and the pillars of the earth shall reel. God bless you, and keep you ever holding the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end. So shall it be proved beyond question that you are partakers of Christ.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews 3.

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Glorious Predestination

A Sermon

(No. 1043)

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, March 24th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”—Romans 8:29.

YOU WILL HAVE NOTICED that in this chapter, Paul has been expounding a very deep inward, spiritual experience. He has written concerning the spirit of bondage, and the spirit of adoption, the infirmities of the flesh, and the helpings of the spirit; the waiting for the redemption of the body, and the groanings which cannot be uttered. It was most natural, therefore, that a deep spiritual experience should bring him to a clear perception of the doctrines of grace, for such an experience is a school in which alone those great truths are effectually learned. A lack of depth in the inner life accounts for most of the doctrinal error in the church. Sound conviction of sin, deep humiliation on account of it, and a sense of utter weakness and unworthiness naturally conduct the mind to the belief of the doctrines of grace, while shallowness in these matters leaves a man content with a superficial creed. Those teachings which are commonly called Calvinistic doctrines are usually most beloved and best received by those who have had much conflict of soul, and so have learned the strength of corruption and the necessity of grace.

Note, also, that Paul in this chapter has been treating of the sufferings of this present time; and though by faith he speaks of them as very inconsiderable compared with the glory to be revealed, yet we know that they were not inconsiderable in his case. He was a man of many trials; he went from one tribulation to another for Christ's sake; he swam through many seas of affliction to serve the church. I do not wonder, therefore, that in his epistles he often discourses upon the doctrines of foreknowledge, and predestination, and eternal love, because these are a rich cordial for a fainting spirit. To be cheered under many things, which otherwise would depress him, the believer may betake himself to the matchless mysteries of the grace of God, which are wines on the lees well refined. Sustained by distinguishing grace, a man learns to glory in tribulations also; and strengthened by electing love, he defies the hatred of the world and the trials of life. Suffering is the college of orthodoxy. Many a Jonah, who now rejects the doctrines of the grace of God, only needs to be put into the whale's belly and he will cry out with the soundest free-grace man, “Salvation is of the Lord.” Prosperous professors, who do no business amid David's billows and waterspouts, may set small store by the blessed anchorage of eternal purpose and everlasting love but those who are “tossed with tempest, and not comforted, are of another mind.” Let these few sentences suffice for a preface. I utter them not in the spirit of controversy, but the reverse.

Our text begins by the expression, “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate,” and many senses have been given to this word “foreknow” though in this case one commends itself beyond every other. Some have thought that it simply, means that God predestinated men whose future history he foreknow. The text before us cannot be so understood, because the Lord foreknows the history of every man, and angel, and devil. So far as mere prescience goes, every man is

foreknown, and yet no one will assert that all men are predestinated to be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. But, it is further asserted that the Lord foreknow who would exercise repentance, who would believe in Jesus, and who would persevere in a consistent life to the end. This is readily granted, but a reader must wear very powerful magnifying spectacles before he will be able to discover that sense in the text. Upon looking carefully at my Bible again I do not perceive such a statement. Where are those words which you have added, "Whom he did foreknow to repent, to believe, and to persevere in grace?" I do not find them either in the English version or in the Greek original. If I could so read them the passage would certainly be very easy, and would very greatly alter my doctrinal views; but, as I do not find those words there, begging your pardon, I do not believe in them. However wise and advisable a human interpolation may be, it has no authority with us; we bow to holy Scripture, but not to glosses which theologians may choose to put upon it. No hint is given in the text of foreseen virtue any more than of foreseen sin, and, therefore, we are driven to find another meaning for the word. We find that the word "know" is frequently used in Scripture, not only for knowledge, but also for favor, love, and complacency. Our Lord Jesus Christ will say, in the judgment, concerning certain persons, "I never knew you," yet in a sense he knew them, for he knows every man; he knows the wicked as well as the righteous; but there the meaning is, "I never knew you in such a respect as to feel any complacency in you or any favor towards you." See also John 10:14-15, and 2 Timothy 2:19. In Romans 11:2, we read, "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknow," where the sense evidently has the idea of fore-love; and it is so to be understood here. Those whom the Lord looked upon with favor as he foresaw them, he has predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. They are, as Paul puts it in his letter to the Ephesians, "predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will."

I am anxious not to tarry over controverted matters, but to reach the subject of my sermon this morning. Here we have in the text *conformity to Christ spoken of as the aim of predestination*; we have, secondly, *predestination as the impelling force by which this conformity is to be achieved*; and we have, thirdly, *the firstborn himself set before us as the ultimate end of the predestinations and of the conformity*.—"that HE might be the first-born among many brethren."

I. Mark then, with care, that OUR CONFORMITY TO CHRIST IS THE SACRED OBJECT OF PREDESTINATION. Into predestination itself I will not now pry. The deeper things shall be left with God. I think it was Bishop Hall who once said, "I thank God I am not of his counsels, but I am of his court." If I cannot understand I will not question, for I am not his counsellor, but I will adore and obey, for I am his servant. Now, to-day, seeing we are here taught the object of his predestination, it will be our business to labor after it, to bless God that he has set such an object before him, and pray that we may be partakers in it. Here stands the case. Man was originally made in the image of God, but by sin he has defaced that image, and now we who are born into this world are fashioned, not in the heavenly image of God, but in the earthy image of the fallen Adam. "We have borne," says the Apostle, in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, "the image of the earthy." The Lord in boundless grace has resolved that a company whom no man can number, called here "many brethren," shall be restored to his image, in the particular form in which his Eternal Son displays it. To this end Jesus Christ came into the world and bore our image, that we, through his grace, might bear his image. He became a partaker of our infirmities and sicknesses that we might be partakers of the divine nature in all its excellence and purity. Now, therefore, the one thing to which the Lord is working us through his Spirit, both by providence and by grace, is the likeness of the

Lord from heaven. He is evermore transforming the chosen, removing that defilement of sin, and moulding them after the perfect model of his Son, Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who is the firstborn amongst the “many brethren.”

Now, observe, that this conformity to Christ lies in several things. First, we are to be conformed to him as to our *nature*. What was the nature of Christ, then, as divine? We must not pry into it, but we know that he was verily of the nature of God. “Begotten not made,” says the Athanasian Creed, and it says truly too, “being of one substance with the Father.” Now, we also, though we at our conversion are new creatures, are also said to be “*begotten* again into a lively hope.” To be begotten is something more than to be made: this is a more personal work of God; and that which is begotten is in closer affinity to himself than that which is only created. As Christ was, as the only-begotten of the Father, far above mere creatures; so also to be begotten of God, in our case, means far more than even the first and perfect creation could imply. As to his humanity our blessed Lord, when he came into this world, underwent a birth which was a remarkable type of our second birth. He was born into this world in a very humble place, amidst the oxen, and in the manger; but yet he lacked not the songs of angels, and the adoration of the heavenly hosts. Even so we also were born of the Spirit without human observation; men of this world saw no glory whatsoever in our regeneration, for it was not performed by mystic rites, or with sacerdotal pomp. The Spirit of God found us in our low estate, and quickened us without outward display. Yet at that selfsame moment, where human eyes saw nothing seraphic eyes beheld marvels of grace, and angels in heaven rejoiced over one sinner that repented, singing once again “glory to God in the highest.” When Lord was born a few choice spirits welcomed his birth; an Anna and a Simeon were ready to take the new-born child into their arms and bless God for him: and even so there were some that hailed our new birth with much thanksgiving; friends and well-wishers who had watched for our salvation were glad when they beheld in us the true heavenly life, and gladly did they take us up into the arms of Christian nurture. Perhaps, also, there was one who had travailed in birth till Christ was formed in us the hope of glory, and how happy was that spirit to see us born unto God; how did our spiritual parent ponder each gracious word which we uttered, and thank God for the good signs of grace which could be found in our conversation. Then, too, a worse than Herod sought to kill us. Satan was eager that the new-born child of grace should be put to death, and, therefore, sent forth fierce temptations to slay us; but the Lord found a shelter for our infant spiritual life, and preserved the young child alive. In us the living and incorruptible seed abode and grew. As many of you as have been born again have been conformed to the image of Christ in the matter of his birth, and you are now partakers of his nature. It is not possible for us to be divine, yet it is written that we are made “partakers of the divine nature.” We cannot be precisely as God is, yet as we have borne the image of the earthy we shall also bear the image of the heavenly, whatever that image may be. The new birth as surely stands us with the image of Christ as our first birth impressed us with a resemblance to the fathers of our flesh. Our first birth gave us humanity; our second birth allies us with Deity. As we were conceived in sin at the first, and shapen in iniquity, even so in regeneration our new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created us. He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.

Furthermore, this conformity to Christ lies in *relationship* as well as in nature. Our Lord is the Son of the Highest,—the Son of God; and truly, beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for

we shall see him as he is. Jehovah has declared that he will be a father unto us, and that we shall be his sons and his daughters. As surely as Jesus is a son, so surely are we, for the same Spirit bears witness to both, as it is written "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." When Jesus came into the world as God's Son, he was not left without attesting proofs. His first public appearance, when he came to the waters of baptism, was signalled by a voice out of the excellent glory, which said, "this is my beloved Son," and the descending Spirit, like a dove, rested upon him. So is it also with us. The voice of God in the word has testified to us our Heavenly Father's dove; and the Holy Spirit has borne witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. When first we dared to come forward and say "we are on the Lord's side," some of us had sacred tokens of sonship which have never been forgotten by us, and oftentimes since then we have received renewed seals of our adoption from the Great Father of our spirits. "He that believeth on the Son hath the witness in himself," so that he can with his brethren say plainly "we know that we have passed from death unto life." God has given us full assurance, and infallible testimony, and in all this we rejoice. We have believed in Jesus, and it is written, "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on his name."

Our Lord was declared to be the Son of God by the actions which he performed, both towards God and towards man. As a Son he served his Father, you could see the nature of God in him, in his deep sympathy with God and in his exact imitation of God. Whatever God would have done under the circumstances, that Jesus did. You perceive at once, by his deeds, that his nature was godlike. His works bore witness of him. It was evermore most clear that he acted towards God as a son towards a father. Now in proportion as God's determination has been carried out in us, we also act to God as children towards a loving father, and whereas the children of darkness speak of their own, and like their father, who is a liar, speak the lie; and like their father, who is a murderer, act out wrath and bitterness, even so the children of God speak the truth, for God is true, and they are full of love, for God is love; and their life is light, for their God is light. They feel that they must act, under the circumstances in which they are placed, as they would suppose Jesus would have acted, who is the Son of the ever blessed Father. Moreover, Christ wrought miracles of mercy towards men, which proved him to be the Son of God. It is true we can work no miracles, yet can we do works which mark God's children. We cannot break the bread and multiply it, we can, however, generously distribute what we have, and thus in feeding the hungry we shall prove ourselves children of our Father who is in heaven; we cannot heal the diseased with our touch, still we can care for the sick, and so in love towards the suffering we can prove ourselves to be children of the tender and ever-pitiful God. But our Lord has told us that greater works than his own shall we do, because he is gone to his Father; and these greater works we do. We can work spiritual miracles. Today, can we not stand at the grave of the dead sinner, and say, "Lazarus, come forth?" And has not God often made the dead to rise at our word, by the power of his Spirit! Today, also, we can preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, casting it about us as it were as our garment, and he that toucheth the hem thereof shall he not also be made whole to-day, even as when Jesus was among men? This day, if we do not break fish and barley loaves, we bring you better food; this day, if we cannot give to men opened eyes and unstopped ears, yet in the teaching of the gospel of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, the mental eye is cleansed, and the soul's ear also is purged; so that in every child of God, in proportion as he labors in the power of the Spirit for Christ, the works which he does bear witness of him that he is the son of God. His zeal in doing them proves that he has the

spirit of a child of God, and the result of those works proves that God works in him as he will never do in any but his own children. Thus, in relationship, as well as in nature, we are conformed to the image of Christ.

Thirdly, we are to be conformed to the image of Christ in our *experience*. This is the part of the subject from which our craven spirit often shrinks, but if we were wise it would not be so. What was the experience of Christ in this world? for that ours will be. We may sum it up as referring to God, to men, to the devil, and to all evil.

His experience with regard to God, what was that? "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." Though without sin, he was not without suffering. The firstborn of the divine family was more sorely chastened than any other of the household; he was smitten of God and afflicted till, as the climax of all, he cried *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*. Oh, the bitterness of that cry—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It was the father bruising the firstborn son; and, if you and I, brethren, are to be conformed to the image of the firstborn, though we may expect from God much fatherly love, we may also reckon that it will show itself in parental discipline. If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons; but, if ye be true sons, like to the firstborn, the rod will make you smart, and sometimes you will have to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" If we are predestinated to be conformed to the image of his son, the Lord has predestinated us to much tribulation, and through it shall we inherit the kingdom.

Next survey our dear covenant Head in his experience in relation to men. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." "He was despised and rejected of men." He said, "Reproach hath broken mine heart, and I am full of heaviness." Now, brethren, in the very proportion in which we are conformed to the image of Christ we shall have to "go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach:" for the disciple, if he be a true disciple, is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they call them of his household by some yet more opprobrious title, if they can invent it. The saints of God must not expect crowns where Christ found a cross; they must not reckon to ride in triumph through those streets which saw the Savior hurried to a malefactor's death. We must suffer with him if we would be glorified with him. Fellowship in his sufferings is needful to communion with his glory.

Then, consider our Lord's experience with regard to the prince of the power of the air. Satan was no friend to Christ, but finding him in the desert he came to him with this accursed "if"—"If thou be the Son of God." With that attack upon his Sonship the fiend commenced the battle. "If thou be the Son of God." You know how thrice he assailed him with those temptations which are most likely to be attractive to poor humanity, but Jesus overcame them all. The arch enemy, the old dragon, was always nibbling at the heel of our great Michael, who has for ever crushed his head. We are predestinated to be conformed to Christ in that respect; the serpent's subtlety and cruelty will assail us also. A tempted head involves tempted members. Satan desires to have us and to sift us as wheat. He attacked the Shepherd, and he will never cease to worry the sheep. Inasmuch as we are of the seed of the woman, there must be enmity between us and the seed of the serpent.

And, as to all evil, our Lord's entire life was one perpetual battle. He was fighting evil in the high places and evil in the low, evil among the priests and evil among the people, evil in a religious

dress, in Pharisaism, and evil in the dress of philosophy amongst the Sadducees; he fought it everywhere: he was the foe of everything that was wrong, false, selfish, unholy or impure. And you and I must be conformed to Christ in this respect. We are to be holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. Ye are of God, little children, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one. We are chosen out of the world to be a peculiar people, adversaries to all evil, never sheathing our sword till we enter into our rest. We are to be like him then in nature, in relation, in experience.

Fourthly. We are to be conformed to Christ Jesus as to *character*. Time and ability alike fail us to speak of this. I only pray that God's Spirit may make our lives to speak of it. He was consecrated to God; so are we to be. The zeal of God's house ate him up; so should it consume us also. He went about his Father's business; so should we ever be occupied. Towards man he was all love; it becomes us to be the same. He was gentle and kind and tender; as he was, so are we to be in this world. He did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; neither should we. Yet was he stern in the denunciation of all evil; so should we be. Purity, holiness, unselfishness, all the virtues, should glow in us as they shone in him. Ah, and blessed be God they will too, by the work of the Spirit. Our text speaks not only of what we ought to be, but of what we shall be, for we are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son. My brethren, what a glorious model! Behold it, wonder at it, and bless God for it. You are not to be conformed to the mightiest of the apostles, you will one day be purer than were Paul or John while here below; you are not to be conformed to the sublimest of the prophets, you shall be like the prophets' Master; you are not to be content with your own conception of that which is beautiful and lovely, but God's perfect conception incarnated in his own Son is that to which you shall certainly be brought by the predestination of God.

Just a sentence upon another point. We are to be conformed to the image of his Son, fifthly, as to our *inheritance* for he is heir of all things, and what less are we heirs of, since all things are ours? He is heir of this world. "Thou madest him to have dominion over all the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, yea, and the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea." We see not yet all things put under man, but we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor; and in the person of Christ Jesus this day we, the men who are made in his image, have dominion over all things, being all made kings and priests unto God, and in Christ Jesus ordained to reign with him forever and ever. "If children then heirs," says the apostle; therefore, whatever Christ has we have, and though we may be very poor and unknown, yet whatever belongs to Christ to us. "The good of all the land of Egypt is yours," said Joseph to his brethren, and Jesus saith this to all his people, "All are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

I must close this point—time goes much too swiftly this morning when descanting upon this delightful theme—by observing that we are to be conformed to Christ in his *glory*. We will think of our bodies, for that is a point surrounded with consolation, since he shall change our vile body and make it like unto his glorious body. We are like Adam now in weakness and pain, and we shall soon be like him in death, returning to the ground whence we were taken; but we shall rise again to a better life, and then shall we wear in glory and incorruption the image of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. Conceive the beauties of the risen Redeemer. Let your faith and your imagination work together to portray the unutterable glories of Immanuel, God with us, as he sits at the right hand of the Father. Such and so bright shall our glories be in the day of the redemption of the body. We shall behold his glory, we shall be with him where he is, and we shall be ourselves

glorious in his glory. Is he exalted? you also shall be lifted up. Is he a King? you shall not be uncrowned. Is he a victor? you also shall bear a palm. Is he full of joy and rejoicing? so also shall your soul be filled to the brim with delights. Where he is every saint shall be ere long.

Thus much upon the sacred end of predestination.

II. Now, observe that PREDESTINATION IS THE IMPELLING FORCE TOWARDS THIS CONFORMITY. This truth divides itself thus: it is the *will* of God that conforms us to Christ's image rather than our own will. It is our will now, but it was God's will when it was not our will, and it only became according to our will when we were converted, because God's grace had made us willing in the day of its power. We cannot be made like Christ unwillingly; a consenting will is essential to the likeness of Christ; unwilling obedience would be disobedience. Naturally we never will towards good without God, but God works in us to will and to do. God treats us as men responsible and intelligent, and not as stone or metal; he made us free agents, and he treats us as such. We are willing now to be conformed to the image of Jesus, yea, we are more than willing, we are anxious and desirous for it; but still the main and first motive power lay not in our will, but in his will, and to-day the immutable force which is best to be depended upon does not lie in our fickle, feeble will, but in the unchanging and omnipotent will of God. The force that is conforming us to Christ is the will of God in predestination.

And so, too, it is rather God's *work* than our work. We are to work with God in the matter of our becoming like to Christ. We are not to be passive like wood or marble; we are to be prayerful, watchful, fervent, diligent, obedient, earnest, and believing, but still the work is God's. Sanctification is the Lord's work in us. "Thou hast wrought all our works in us." From the first, and now, and to the last, "he that hath wrought us to the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given to us the earnest of the Spirit." There is no holiness in us of our own creating; no good thing in us of our own fashioning. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be praise." Still, true as it is that we are free agents, yet the Lord is the potter and we are the clay upon the wheel, and it is his work, and not ours, that makes us like to Christ. It there be a touch of our finger anywhere upon the vessel, it mars and does not beautify. It is only where God's hand has been that the vessel begins to assume the form of the model.

Therefore, beloved, all the *glory* must be unto God and not to us. It is a great honor to any man to be like Christ; God does not intend that his children should have no honor, for he puts honor upon his own people; but, still, the true glory lies with him, since he has made us and not we ourselves. Cannot we say this morning with thankful hearts, "By the grace of God I am what I am?" and do we not feel that we shall lay all our honors, whatever they may be, at his dear feet, who hath according to his abundant mercy predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son?

III. Now I must come to the third point, upon which with brevity. It sweetly appears that the ULTIMATE END OF ALL THIS IS CHRIST. "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, that HE,"—"that HE"—God is always driving at something for him, his well-beloved Son. He aims at his own glory in the glory of his dear Son; if he blesses us the text of last Sabbath is still true, "not for your sakes do I this;" it is for the sake of a higher, a better one than we are, it is "that *he* might be the first-born." Now, if I understand the passage before us, it means this. First, God predestinates us to be like Jesus that his dear Son might be the first of a new order of beings, elevated above all other creatures, and nearer to God than any other existences. He was Lord of angels, seraphim and cherubim obeyed his behests; but the Son desired to be at the head of a race of beings more nearly allied to him than any existing spirits. There was no kinship between the

Lord Jesus and angels, for to which of the angels had the Father said at any time, "Thou art my Son?" They are by nature servants, and he is the Son, this is a wide distinction. The Eternal Son desired association with beings who should be sons as he was, towards whom he could stand in a close relationship as being like to them in nature and Sonship, and the Father therefore ordained that a seed whom he has chosen should be conformed to the image of the Son, that his Son might head up and be chief among an order of beings more nearly akin to God than any other. The serpent said to Eve, "God doth know that ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." That lie had in it a residuum of truth, for by sovereign grace we have become such. There were no obedient creatures in the world of that sort, knowing good and evil, in the days of Eden's glory. The angels in heaven had known good, and only good, and preserved by grace had not fallen; the evil spirit had fallen, and he knew evil, but he had forgotten good, and was incapable of ever choosing it again; he is now for ever banished from hope of restoration. But here are we who know both good and evil; we understand the one, and the other too, and now there is begotten in us a nature which loves holiness and cannot sin, because it is born of God; we are left free agents, yea, we are freer than ever we were, and yet in this life, and in the life to come, our path is like that of the just which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Angels know not evil; have never had to battle with evil known and felt within; they have not tried the paths of sinful pleasure, and through grace been turned from them, so as with full purpose of heart to cleave to holiness for ever. Jesus now heads a race assailed but victorious; sorely tempted but enabled to overcome. Joyfully and cheerfully for ever shall it be our delight to do the Father's will. For ever with Christ at our head he shall be the nearest to the eternal throne; the most attached of servants, because also sons; the most firmly adhesive to good, because we once knew the bitterness of evil. Even as Christ had to drink the cup of suffering, for sin, we also have sipped of it. We have known horror caused by guilt, and, therefore, for the future shall be throughout eternity a nobler race, freer to serve, and serving God after a nobler fashion than any other creatures in the universe. I take it that it is the meaning of the text, that the Lord would have Christ to be the first of a nobler order of beings.

But, secondly, the object of grace is that there may be some in heaven with whom Christ can hold brotherly converse. Note the expression, "Many brethren"—not that he might be the firstborn among many, but among "many brethren," who should be like himself. Our blessed Lord delights in fellowship; such is the greatness of his heart that he would not be alone in his glory, but would have associates in his happiness. Now, I speak with bated breath. God can do all things, but I see not any way by which he could give to his only-begotten Son beings that should be akin to himself, except through the processes which we discover in the economy of grace. Here are beings that know evil, and know also good, beings placed under infinite obligations by bonds of love and gratitude to choose for ever the good, beings with a nature so renewed that they always must be holy beings; and these beings can commune with the incarnate God upon spurring as angels cannot, upon the penalty of guilt as angels cannot; upon heart-throes, conflicts, reproaches, and brokenness of spirit as angels cannot: and to them the Lord Jesus can reveal the glory of holiness, the bliss of conquering sin, and the sweetness of benevolence as only they can comprehend them. Renewed men are made fit companions for the Son of God. He shall feast all the more joyously because they shall eat bread with him in his kingdom. He shall be joyful when he declares the Lord's name unto his brethren. He shall joy in their joy, and be glad in their gladness.

No doubt, however, the text means that these will for ever love and honor the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The children look up to the firstborn. In the East the firstborn is the lord and king of the

household. We love Jesus now, and esteem him our head and chief. How will we, when we once get to heaven, love and adore him as our dear elder brother with whom we shall be on terms of the closest familiarity and most reverent obedience. How joyfully will we serve him, how rapturously adore him. Shall we not want to have our voices made more loud till they become as thunders, or like many waters, or surely we shall not be able to praise him as we would? If there be work to do for him in future ages we will be the first to volunteer for service; if there be battles to be fought in times to come with other rebellious races, if there be wanted servants to fly over the vast realms of the infinite to carry Jehovah's messages, who shall fly so swiftly as we shall, when once we feel that in his courts we shall dwell not as mere servants, but as members of the royal family, partakers of the divine nature, nearest to God himself. What bliss to know that he who is "very God of very God," and sits on the eternal throne, is also of the same nature with ourselves, our kinsman, who is not ashamed even amidst the royalties of glory to call us brethren. O brethren, what honors are ours! What a heritage lies before us! Who among us would change with Gabriel? We shall have no need to envy angels, for what are they but ministering spirits, servants in our Father's halls; but we are sons, and sons of no inferior order, no sons of a secondary rank like Abraham's children born of Keturah, or like the son of the bondwoman, but we are the Isaacs of God, born according to the promise, heirs of all that he hath, a seed beloved of the Lord for ever. Oh, what joy ought to fill our spirits this morning, at the prospect which this text reveals, and which predestination secures!

Perhaps our fullest thought upon the text is this. God was so well pleased with his Son, and saw such beauties in him, that he determined to multiply his image. "My beloved," said he, "thou shalt be the model by which I will fashion my noblest creature, I will for thy sake make men able to converse with thee, and bound to thee by bands of love, who shall be next akin to myself, and in all things like to thee." Behold from heaven's mint golden pieces of inestimable value are sent forth, and each one bears the image and superscription of the Son of God. The face of Jesus is more lovely to God than all the worlds, his eyes are brighter than the stars, his voice is sweeter than bliss; therefore doth the Father will to have his Son's beauty reflected in ten thousand mirrors in saints made like to him, and his praises chanted by myriads of voices of those who love him, because his blood has saved them. The Father knew how happy his Son would be to associate his chosen with himself, for of old his delights were with the sons of men. As a shepherd loves his sheep, as a king loves his subjects, so Jesus loves to have his people around him; but deeper yet is the mystery, as it is not good for a man to be alone, and as for this cause doth a man leave his father and mother and is joined unto his wife, and they twain are one flesh, even so is it with Christ and his church. He was made like to her for her salvation, and now she is made like to him for his honor. In what way could the Father put greater honor on his Son than by forming a race like to himself, who shall be the many brethren among whom he is the well-beloved firstborn?

Now, brethren, this word I say and send you home. Keep your model before you. You see what you are to come to, therefore, set Christ before your eyes always. You see what you are predestinated to be: aim at it, aim at it every day. God worketh, and he worketh in you not to sleep, but to will and to do according to his own good pleasure. Brethren, grieve at your failures; when you see anything in yourselves that is not Christlike mourn over it, for it must be put away, it is so much dross that must be consumed; you cannot keep it, for God's predestination will not let you retain anything about you which is not according to the image of Christ. Cry mightily to the Holy Spirit to continue his sanctifying work upon you; beseech him not to be grieved and vexed, and, therefore, in any measure to stay his hand. Cry, "Lord, melt me, pour me out like wax, and set thy seal upon

me until the image of Christ be clearly there." Above all, commune much with Christ. Communion is the fountain of conformity. Live with Christ and you will soon grow like Christ. They said of Achilles, the greatest of the Grecian heroes, that when he was a child they fed him upon lion's marrow, and so made him brave; feed upon Christ and be Christlike. They record on the other hand of blood-thirsty Nero, that he became so because he was suckled by a woman of a ferocious, barbaric nature. If we drink in our nutriment from the world, we shall be worldly; but, if we live upon Christ and dwell in him, our conformity with him shall be readily accomplished, and we shall be recognized as brethren of that blessed family of which Jesus Christ is the firstborn. How I wish every one here had a share in the text: I mourn that some have not, for he that believeth not on the Son hath not life, and therefore cannot have conformity to a living Christ. God grant to you all to be believers in Christ, now and for ever. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 8:16-39; 1 Corinthians 15:39-58.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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The Great Assize

A Sermon

(No. 1076)

Delivered on Lord's Day Evening, August 25th, 1872, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”—2Corinthians 5:10.

THIS MORNING WE preached concerning the resurrection of the dead, and it seems consistent with order to carry forward our thoughts this evening, to that which follows immediately after the resurrection, namely: THE GENERAL JUDGMENT; for the dead rise on purpose that they may be judged in their bodies. The Resurrection is the immediate prelude to the Judgment. There is no need that I try to prove to you from Scripture that there will be a general judgment, for the Word of God abounds with proof-passages. You have them in the Old Testament. You find David anticipating that great assize in the Psalms (especially in such as the forty-ninth and fiftieth, the ninety-sixth Psalm, and the three that follow it), FOR MOST ASSUREDLY THE LORD COMETH: HE COMETH TO JUDGE THE EARTH IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. Very solemnly and very tenderly does Solomon in the Ecclesiastes warn the young man, that, let him rejoice as he may and cheer his heart in the days of his youth, for all these things God will bring him into judgment; for God will judge every secret thing. Daniel in the night visions beholds the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven, and drawing near to the Ancient of Days; then he sits upon the throne of judgment AND THE NATIONS ARE GATHERED BEFORE HIM. It was no new doctrine to the Jews; it was received and accepted by them as a most certain fact that there would be a day in which God would judge the earth in righteousness. The New Testament is very express. The twenty-fifth of Matthew, which we read to you just now, contains language, which could not possibly be more clear and definite, from the lips of the Saviour himself. He is the faithful witness, and cannot lie. You are told that before him will be gathered ALL NATIONS, and he shall divide them the one from the other, as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. Other passages there are in abundance, as, for instance, the one that is now before us, which is plain enough. Another we might quote is in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, the first chapter, from the seventh to the tenth verse. Let Us read it, ” And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.” The book of the Revelation is very graphic in its depicting that last general judgment. Turn to the twentieth chapter, at the eleventh and twelfth verses. The seer of Patmos says, ” And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written

in the books, according to their works." Time would fail me to refer you to all the Scriptures. It is asserted over and over again by the Holy Spirit, whose Word is truth, that **THERE WILL BE A JUDGMENT OF THE QUICK AND OF THE DEAD.**

Beside that direct testimony, it should be remembered there is a convincing argument that so it must needs be, from the very fact that God is just as the Ruler over men. In all human governments there must be an assize held. Government cannot be conducted without its days of session and of trial, and, inasmuch as there is evidently sin and evil in this world, it might fairly be anticipated that there would be a time when God will go on circuit, and when he will call the prisoners before him, and the guilty shall receive their condemnation. Judge for yourselves: is this present state the conclusion of all things? If so, what evidence would you adduce of the divine justice, in the teeth of the fact that the best of men are often in this world the poorest and the most afflicted, while the worst of men acquire wealth, practice oppression, and receive homage from the crowd? Who are they that ride in the high places of the earth? Are they not those, great transgressors, who "wade through slaughter to a throne and shut the gates of mercy on mankind"? Where are the servants of God? They are in obscurity and suffering full often. Do they not sit like Job among the ashes, subjects of little pity, objects of much upbraiding? And where are the enemies of God? Do not many of them wear purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day? If there be no hereafter, then Dives has the best of it; and the selfish man who fears not God, is after all, the wisest of men and more to be commended than his fellows. But it cannot be so. Our common sense revolts against the thought. There must be another state in which these anomalies will all be rectified. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable," says the apostle. The best of men were driven to the worst of straits in those persecuting times for being God's servants. How say ye then, "*Finis coronat opus,*" the end crowns the work? That cannot be the final issue of life, or justice itself were frustrated. There must be a restitution for those who suffer unjustly: there must be a punishment for the wicked and the oppressor.

Not only may this be affirmed from a general sense of justice, but there is in the conscience of most men, if not of all, an assent to this fact. As an old Puritan says, "God holds a petty session in every man's conscience, which is the earnest of the assize which he will hold by and by; for almost all men judge themselves, and their conscience knows this to be wrong and that to be right. I say 'almost all,' for there seems to be in this generation a race of men who have so stultified their conscience that the spark appears to have gone out, and they put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. The lie they seem to approve, but the truth they do not recognize. But let conscience alone and do not stultify her, and you shall find her bearing witness that there is a Judge of all the earth who must do right." Now this is peculiarly the case when conscience is allowed full play. Men who are busy about their work or entertained with their pleasures, often keep their consciences quiet. As John Bunyan puts it, they shut up Mr Conscience; they blind his windows; they barricade his doors; and as for the great bell on the top of the house, which the old gentleman was wont to ring, they cut the rope of it, so that he cannot get at it, for they do not wish him to disturb the town of Man-soul. But when death comes, it often happens that Mr. Conscience escapes from his prison-house, and then, I warrant you, he will make such a din that there is not a sleeping head in all Man-soul. He will cry out and avenge himself for his constrained silence, and make the man know that there is a something within him not quite dead, which cries out still for justice, and that sin cannot go unchastised. There must be a judgment, then. Scripture asserts it, that would be

enough: but by way of collateral evidence the natural order of things requires it; and conscience attests it.

Now we come to consider what our text says about the Judgment. I pray you, brethren, if I should speak coldly tonight on this momentous truth, or fail to excite your attention and stir your deepest emotions, forgive me, and may God forgive me, for I shall have good reason to ask God's forgiveness, seeing that if ever a topic should arouse the preacher to a zeal for the honor of his Lord and for the welfare of his fellow creatures, and so make him doubly in earnest, it is this. But, then, permit me to say, that, if ever there was a theme quite independent of the speaker, which on its own account alone should command your thoughtfulness, it is that which I now bring before you. I feel no need of oratory or of speech well selected: the bare mention of the fact that such a judgment is impending, and will ere long occur, might well hold you in breathless silence, still the very throbbings of your pulse, and choke the utterance of my lips. The certainty of it, the reality of it, the terrors that accompany it, the impossibility of escaping from it, all appeal to us now and demand our vigilance.

I. Ask ye now, who is it, or who ARE THEY THAT WILL HAVE APPEAR BEFORE THE THRONE OF JUDGMENT? The answer is plain; it admits of no exemption: "We must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ." This is very decisive, if there were no other text. We must all appear; that is to say, every one of the human race. We must *all* appear. And that the godly will not be exempted from this appearance is very clear, for the apostle here is speaking to Christians. He says, "*We walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident. We labour*" and so on; and then he puts it, "*We must all appear.*" So that, beyond all others, it is certain that all Christians must appear there. The text is quite conclusive upon that point. And if we had not that text, we have the passage in Matthew, which we have read, in which the sheep are summoned there as certainly as are the goats; and the passage in the Revelation, where all the dead are judged according to the things which are written in the books. They are all there. And if the objection should be raised, "We thought that the sins of the righteous being pardoned, and for ever blotted out, they could never come into judgment," we have only to remind you, beloved, that if they are so pardoned and blotted out, as they undoubtedly are, the righteous have no reason to fear coming into judgment. They are the persons who covet the judgment, and will be able to stand there to receive a public acquittal from the mouth of the great Judge. Who, among us, wishes, as it were, to be smuggled into heaven unlawfully? Who desires to have it said by the damned in hell, "You were never tried, or else you might have been condemned as we were." No, brethren, we have a hope that we can stand the trial. The way of righteousness by Christ Jesus enables us to submit ourselves to the most tremendous tests which even that burning day can bring forth. We are not afraid to be put into the balances. We even desire that day when our faith in Jesus Christ is strong and firm; for we say, "who is he that condemneth?" We can challenge the day of judgment. Who is he that shall lay anything to our charge in that day, or at any other, since Christ hath died and hath risen again? It is needful that the righteous should be there that there may not be any partiality in the matter whatever; that the thing may be all clear and straight, and that the rewards of the righteous may be seen to be, though of grace, yet without any violation of the most rigorous justice. Dear brethren, what a day it will be for the righteous! For some of them were—perhaps some here present are—lying under some very terrible accusation of which they are perfectly guiltless. All will be cleared up then, and that will be one great blessing of that day. There will be a resurrection of reputations as well as of bodies. Men call the righteous, fools; then shall they shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

They hounded them to death, as not being fit to live. In early ages they laid to the Christians charges of the most terrible character, which I should count it shame to mention. But then they will all be clear; and those of whom the world was not worthy, who were driven and hunted about find made to dwell in the caves of the earth, they shall come forth as worthy ones, and the world shall know her true aristocracy, earth shall own her true nobility. The men whose names she cast out as evil, all then be held in great repute, for they shall stand out clear and transparent without spot or blemish. It is well that there should be a trial for the righteous, for the clearing of them, the vindication of them, and that it should be public, defying the evil and criticism of all mankind.

“We must *all* appear.” What a vast assembly, what a prodigious gathering, that of the entire human race! It struck me as I was meditating upon this subject, what would be the thoughts of Father Adam, as he stood there with Mother Eve and looked upon his offspring. It will be the first time in which he has ever had the opportunity of seeing all his children met together. What a sight will he then behold—far stretching, covering all the globe which they inhabit, enough not only to people all earth’s plains, but crown her hill-tops, and cover even the ways of the sea, so numberless must the human race have been, if all the generations that have ever lived, or shall ever live, shall at once rise from the dead. Oh, what a sight will that be! Is it too marvelous for our imagination to picture? Yet it is quite certain that the assemblage will be mustered, and the spectacle will be beheld. Every one from before the Flood, from the days of the Patriarchs, from the times of David, from the Babylonian kingdom, all the legions of Assyria, all the hosts of Persia, all the phalanx of the Greeks, all the vast armies and legions of Rome, the barbarian, the Scythian, the bond, the free, men of every color and of every tongue—they shall all stand in that great day before the Judgment Seat of Christ. There come the kings—no greater than the men they call their slaves. There come the princes—but they have doffed their coronets, for they must stand like common flesh and blood. Here come the judges, to be judged themselves, and the advocates and barristers, needing an advocate on their own account. Here come those that thought themselves too good, and kept the street to themselves. There are the Pharisees, hustled by the Publicans on either side and sunk down to the natural level with them. Mark the peasants rising from the soil; see the teeming myriads from outside the great cities streaming in, countless hosts such as no Alexander or Napoleon ever beheld! See how the servant is as great as his master! “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” are now proclaimed. No kings, no princes, no nobles, can shelter themselves behind their order, assert a privilege or claim an immunity. Alike on one common level they stand together, to be tried before the last tremendous tribunal. There shall come the wicked of every sort. Proud Pharaoh shall be there; Senacherib, the haughty; Herod, that would have slain the young child; Judas, that betrayed his master; Demas, that sold him for gold; and Pilate, who would fain have washed his hands in innocency. There shall come the long list of infallibles, the whole line of popes, to receive their damnation at the Almighty’s hands, and the priests that trod upon the necks of nations, and the tyrants that used the priests as their tools—they shall come to receive the thunderbolts of God which they so richly deserve. Oh, what a scene will it be! These little companies, which look to us so large when they are gathered together beneath this roof, how do they shrink into the drop of a bucket as compared with the ocean of life that shall swell around the throne at the last great Judgment day. They shall all be there.

Now, the most important thought connected with this to *me*, is that *I* shall be there; to *you* young men, that *you* will be there; to *you*, ye aged of every sort, that *you*, *in propria personae*—each one shall be there. Are you rich? Your dainty dress shall be put off. Are you poor? Your rags shall not

exempt you from attendance at that court. None shall say—I am too obscure.” You must come up from that hiding place. None shall say, “I am too public.” You must come down from that pedestal. Everyone must be there. Note the word “*We*”, “*We* must *all* appear.”

And still further, note the word, “appear.” “We must all *appear*.” No disguise will be possible. Ye cannot come there dressed in masquerade of profession or attired in robes of state, but we must *appear*; we must be seen through, must be displayed, must be revealed; off will come your garments, and your spirit will be judged of God, not after appearance, but according to the inward heart. Oh, what a day that will be when every man shall see himself, and every man shall see his, fellow, and the eyes of angels and the eyes of devils, and the eyes of God upon the throne, shall see us through and through. Let these thoughts dwell upon your minds, while you take this for the answer to our first enquiry, “Who is to be judged?”

II. Our second question is, Who will be the judge? “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” That Christ should be appointed judge of all mankind is most proper and fitting. Our British law ordains that a man shall be tried by his peers, and there is justice in the statute. Now the Lord God will judge men, but at the same time it will be in the person of Jesus Christ the man. Men shall be judged by a man. He that was once judged by men shall judge men. Jesus knows what man should be; he has been under the law himself in deep humility, who is ordained to administer the law in high authority. He can hold the scales of justice evenly, for he has stood in man’s place and borne and braved man’s temptations; he therefore is the most fit judge that could be selected. I have sometimes heard and read sermons in which the preacher said that a Christian ought to rejoice that his judge is his friend. There may be no impropriety intended, still it seems to me rather a questionable suggestion. I should not like to put it use that way myself; because any judge that was partial to his friends when he sat on the judgment seat would deserve to come off the seat immediately. As a judge I expect no favoritism from Christ. I expect when he sits there he will deal out even-handed justice to all. I cannot see how it is right for any minister to hold it forth that we should find encouragement in the judge being our friend. Friend or no friend, we shall go in for a fair trial every one of us, and Christ will not be a respecter of persons. Of him whom God has appointed to judge the world, it shall not be said when the assize is over that he winked at the crimes of some and extenuated them, while he searched out the faults of others and convicted them. He will be fair and upright throughout. He is our friend, I grant you, and he will be our friend and Saviour for ever; but, as a judge, we must keep to the thought, and believe and maintain it that he will be impartial to all the sons of men. You will have a fair trial, man. He that will judge you will not take sides against you. We have sometimes thought that men have been shielded from the punishment they deserved, because they were of a certain clerical profession, or because they occupied a certain official position. A poor labourer who kills his wife shall be hanged, but when another matt of superior station does the like deed of violence, and stains his hands with the blood of her whom he had vowed to love and cherish, the capital sentence shall not be executed upon him. Everywhere we see in the world that with the best intentions justice somehow or other does squint a little. Even in this country there is just the slightest possible turning of the scale, and God grant that may be cured ere long. I do not think it is intentional; and I hope the nation will not long have to complain about it. There ought to be the same justice for the poorest beggar that crawls into a casual ward, as for his Lordship that owns the broadest acres in all England. Before the law, at least, all men ought to stand equal. So shall it be with the Judge of all the earth. *Fiat justia, ruat coelum*. Christ will by all means hold the scales even. Thou shalt have a fair trial and a full trial,

too. There shall be no concealment of anything in thy favour, and no, keeping back of anything against thee. No witnesses shall be borne across the sea to keep them out of the way. They shall all be there, and all testimony shall be there, and all that is wanted to condemn or to acquit shall be produced in full court at that trial, and hence it will be a final trial. From that court there will be no appeal. If Christ, saith "Cursed!" cursed must they be for ever. If Christ saith "Blessed!", blessed shall they be for aye. Well, this is what we have to expect then, to stand before the throne of the man Christ Jesus the Son of God, and there to be judged.

III. Now the third point is, WHAT WILL BE RULE OF JUDGEMENT? The text says that "every one may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Then it would appear that our *actions* will be taken in evidence at the last. Not our profession, not our boastings, but our actions will be taken in evidence at the last, and every man shall receive according to what he hath done in the body. That implies that everything done by us in this body will be known. It is all recorded; it will be all brought to light. Hence, in that day every secret sin will be published. What was done in the chamber, what was hidden by the darkness, shall be published as upon the housetop—every secret thing. With great care you have concealed it, most dexterously you have covered it up; but it shall be brought out to your own astonishment to form a part of your judgment. There, hypocritical actions as well as secret sins will be laid bare. The Pharisee who devoured the widow's house and made a long prayer, will find that widow's house brought against him, and the long prayer too; for the long prayer will then be understood as having been a long lie against God from beginning to end. Oh, how fine we can make some things look With the aid of paint and varnish and gilt; but at the last day off will come the varnish and veneer, and the true metal, the real substance, will then be seen.

When it is said that everything that is done in the body will be brought up as evidence against us or for us, remember this includes every omission as well as every commission; for that which is not done that ought to have been done is as greatly sinful as the doing of that which ought not to be done. Did not you notice when we were reading the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, how those on the left hand were condemned, not for what they did, but for what they did not do: "I was an hungry, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink." Where would some of you stand, according to this rule, who have lived in neglect of holiness, and neglect of faith, and neglect of repentance, before God all your days? Bethink yourselves, I pray you.

Recollect, too, that all our words will be brought up. For every idle word that man shall speak he will have to give an account. And all our thoughts, too, for these lie at the bottom of our actions and give the true colour to them good or bad. Our motives, our heart sins, especially, our hatred of Christ, our neglect of the gospel, our unbelief—all of these shall be read aloud and published unreservedly. "Well," saith one, "who then can be saved?" Ah! indeed, who then can be saved? Let me tell you who will be. There will come forward those who have believed in Jesus, and albeit they have many sins to which they might well plead guilty, they will be able to say, "Great God, thou didst provide for us a substitute, and thou didst say that if we would accept him he should be a substitute for us and take our sins upon himself, and we did accept him and our sins were laid upon him, and we have now no sins; they have been transferred from us to the great Saviour, substitute and sacrifice." And in that day there will be none who can put in a demurrer to that plea: it will hold good; for God has said, "Whosoever believeth on Christ Jesus shall never be condemned." Then will the actions of the righteous, the gracious actions, be brought forth to prove that they had faith. For that faith which never evidences itself by good works is a dead faith and a faith that will

never save a soul. Now, if the dying thief were brought up, he would say, "My sins were laid on Jesus." "Ay, but how about your good works? Thou must have some evidence of thy faith," Satan might reply. Then would the recording angel say, "The dying thief said to his fellow thief who was dying with him, 'Wherefore art thou railing? In his last moments he did what he could; he rebuked the thief that was dying with him and made a good confession of his Lord. There was the evidence of the sincerity of his faith.'" Dear hearer, will there lie any evidence of the sincerity of your faith? If your faith has no evidence before the Lord, what will you do? Suppose you thought you had a faith and went on drinking. Suppose you did as I know some have done here, go straight from this place into the public house? Or suppose you joined the Christian church and remained a drunkard? Ay, and women have done that also as well as men. Suppose you professed to have faith in Christ and yet cheated in your weights and measures and common dealings? Do you think that God will never requite these things at your hands? Oh, sirs, if ye be no better than other men in your conduct, ye *are* no better than other men in your character, and ye will stand no better than other men in the judgment day. If your actions are not superior to theirs, you may profess what you will about your faith, but you are deceived, and, as deceivers, you will be discovered at the last great day. If grace does not make us differ from other men, it is not the grace which God gives his elect. We are not perfect, but all God's saints keep their eyes on the great standard of perfection, and, with strong desire, aim to walk worthy of their high calling of God and to bring forth works which prove that they love God; and if we have not these signs following faith, or if they are not put in as evidence for us, at the last great day we shall not be able to prove our faith. It will be proof positive that you hated God; for a man must hate God indeed who will spurn his counsels, give no heed to his reproof, scorn his grace, and dare the vengeance of him who points out the way of escape and the path that leadeth to life. He that will not be saved by God's mercy proves that he hates the God of mercy. If God gives his own Son to die and men will not trust in his Son, will not have him as their Saviour, that one sin, if they had no other, would at once prove that they were enemies of God and black at heart. But if thy faith be in Jesus, if thou lovest Jesus, if thy heart goes out to Jesus, if thy life be influenced by Jesus, if thou makest him thy example as well as thy Saviour, there will be evidence—thou canst not see it, but there will be evidence—in thy favour. For notice those gracious things, when the evidence was brought, and Christ said, "I was an hungry, and ye gave me no meat, thirsty and ye gave me no drink," they said, "O Lord, we never knew this." Should any man stand up here and say, "I have plenty of evidence to prove my faith," I should reply, "Hold your tongue, sir! Hold your tongue! I am afraid you have no faith at all, or you would not be talking about your evidence." But if you are saying, "Oh, I am afraid I have not the evidence that will stand me in good stead at the last," yet if all the while you have been feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, and doing all you can for Christ, I would tell you not to be afraid. The master will find witnesses to say, "That man relieved me when I was in poverty. He knew I was one of Christ's and he came and helped me." And another will come and say (perhaps it will be an angel), "I saw him when he was alone in his chamber and heard him pray for his enemies." And the Lord will say, "I read his heart when I saw how he put up with rebuke, and slander, and persecution, and would not make any answer for my sake. He did it all as evidence that my grace was in his heart." You will not have to fetch up the witnesses: the judge will call them, for he knows all about your case; and as he calls up the witness, will be surprised to find how even the ungodly will be obliged to consent to the just salvation of the righteous. Oh, how the secret deeds and the true heart-sincerity of the righteous, when thus unveiled, will make devils bite their tongues in wrath to think that there was

so much of grace given to the sons of men, with which to defeat persecution, to overcome temptation, and to follow on in obedience to the Lord. Oh yes, the deeds, the deeds, the deeds of men—not their prating, not their profession, not their talk, but their deeds (though nobody shall be saved by the merits of his deeds)—their deeds shall be the evidence of their grace, or their deeds shall be the evidence of their unbelief; and so, by their works shall they stand before the Lord, or by their world shall they be condemned as evidence and nothing more.

IV. Now the last point is this: What is the object of this judgment? Will sentence of acquittal and condemnation be given, and then the whole thing be over? Far from it. The judgment is with a view to the thereafter—“That every man may receive the things done in his body.” The Lord will grant unto his people an abundant reward for all that they have done. Not that they deserve any reward, but that God first gave them grace to do good works, then took their good works as evidence of a renewed heart, and then gave them a reward for what they had done. Oh, what a bliss it will be to hear it said, “Well done, good and faithful servant,”—and to find that you have worked for Christ when nobody knew it, to find that Christ took stock of it all,—to you that served the Lord under misrepresentation, to find that the Lord Jesus cleared the chaff away from the wheat, and knew that you were one of his precious ones. For him, then, to say, “Enter into the joy of thy Lord,” oh, what a bliss will it be to you.

But to the ungodly how terrible. They are to receive the things that they have done; that is to say, the punishment due,—not every man alike, but the greater sinner the greater doom; to the man who sinned against light a greater damnation than to the man who had not the same light,—Sodom and Gomorrah their place, Tyre and Sidon their place, and then to Capernaum and Bethsaida their place of more intolerable torment, because they had the Gospel and rejected it—so the Lord himself tells us. And the punishment will not only be meted out in proportion to the transgression, but it will be a development of the evil actions done in the evil consequences to be endured, as every man shall eat the fruit of his own ways. Sin, after the natural order, ripens into sorrow. This is not a blind fate, but it is the operation of a divine law, wise and invariable. Oh, how dreadful it will be for the malicious man to have for ever to gnaw his own envious heart, to find his malice come home to him, as birds come home to roost, to hoot for ever in his own soul; for the lustful man to feel lust burning in every vein, which he can never gratify;—for the drunkard to have a thirst, which not even a drop of water can allay;—for the glutton who has fared sumptuously every day, to be in hunger perpetually; and the soul that has been wrathful to be for ever wrathful, with the fire of wrath for ever burning like a volcano in his soul; and the rebel against God for ever a rebel, cursing God whom he cannot touch, and finding his curses come back upon himself.

There is no punishment worse than for a man who is sinfully disposed to gratify his lusts, to satiate his bad propensities, and to multiply and fatten his vices. Only let men grow into what they would be, and then see what they would be like! Take away the policemen in some parts of London, and give the people plenty of money, and let their do just as they like. Last Saturday, it might be, there were half-a-dozen broken heads, and wives and children were in one general skirmish. Keep those people together: let their vigor continue unimpaired by age or decay, while they keep on developing their characters. Why, they would be worse than a herd of tigers! Let them give way to their rage and anger, with nothing to check their passions; let miserly, greedy people for ever go on with their greed. It makes them miserable here, but let these things be indulged in for ever, and what worse hell do you want? Oh, sin is hell and holiness is heaven. Men will receive the things done in their body. If God has made them to love him, they shall go on to love him; if God has

made them trust him, they shall go on to trust in him; if God has made them to be like Christ, they shall go on to be like Christ, and they shall receive the things done in their body as a reward; but if a man has lived in sin, “he that is filthy shall be filthy still”; he that has been unbelieving shall be unbelieving still. This, then, shall be the worm that never dieth, and the fire which never shall be quenched, to which shall be added the wrath of God forever and ever. Oh, that we may have grace every one of us to flee to Christ! There is our only safety. Simple faith in Jesus is the basis for the character which will evidence at last that you are chosen of God. A simple belief in the merit of the Lord Jesus, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, is the rock foundation upon which shall he built up, by the same divine hands, the character which shall evidence that the kingdom was prepared for us from before the foundations of the world. God work in us such a character, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

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