



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 26: 1880

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 26: 1880* by Charles Spurgeon

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Questions Which Ought To Be Asked

A Sermon

(No. 1511)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

(*This was followed by a farewell address from his son, Thomas Spurgeon.*)

“But none saith, Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night; who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?”—Job 35:10-11.

ELIHU PERCEIVED the great ones of the earth oppressing the needy, and he traced their domineering tyranny to their forgetfulness of God: “None saith, Where is God my Maker?” Surely, had they thought of God they could not have acted so unjustly. Worse still, if I understand Elihu aright, he complained that even among the oppressed there was the same departure in heart from the Lord: they cried out by reason of the arm of the mighty, but unhappily they did not cry unto God their Maker, though he waits to be gracious unto all such, and executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. Both with great and small, with oppressors and oppressed, there is one common fault in our nature, which is described by the apostle in the Romans, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.” Until divine grace comes in and changes our nature there is none that saith, “Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?” This is a very grave fault, about which we shall speak for a few minutes, and may the Holy Ghost bless the word.

I. And first, LET US THINK OVER THESE NEGLECTED QUESTIONS, beginning with “Where is God my Maker?” There are four questions in the text, each of which reminds us of the folly of forgetting it. First, *Where is God?* Above all things in the world we ought to think of him. Pope said, “The proper study of mankind is man”; but it is far more true that the proper study of mankind is God. Let man study man in the second place, but God first. It is a sad thing that God is all in all, that we owe everything to him, and are under allegiance to him, and yet we neglect him. Some men think of every person but God. They have a place for everything else, but no place in their heart for God. They are most exact in the discharge of other relative duties, and yet they forget their God. They would count themselves mean indeed if they did not pay every man his own, and yet they rob God. They rob him of his honor, to which they never give a thought they rob him of obedience, for his law has no hold on them; they rob him of his praise, for they are receiving daily at his hands, and yet they yield no gratitude to their great Benefactor. “None saith, Where is God?” My dear hearer, do you stand convicted of this? Have you been walking up and down in this great house, and never asked to see the King whose palace it is? Have you been rejoicing at this great feast, and have you never asked to see your Host? Have you gone abroad through the various fields of nature, and have you never wished to know him whose breath perfumes the flowers, whose pencil paints the clouds, whose smile makes sunlight, and whose frown is storm. Oh, it is a strange, sad fact—God so near us, and so necessary to us, and yet not sought for!

The next point is, “None saith, Where is God *my Maker?*” Oh! unthinking man, God made you. He fashioned your curious framework, and put every bone into its place. He, as with needlework,

embroidered each nerve, and vein, and sinew. He made this curious harp of twice ten thousand strings: wonderful it is that it has kept in tune so long: but only he could have maintained its harmony. He is your Maker. You are a mass of dust, and you would crumble back to dust at this moment if he withdrew his preserving power: he but speaks, and you dissolve into the earth on which you tread. Do you never think of your Maker? Have you no thought for him without whom you could not think at all? Oh, strange perversity and insanity that a man should find himself thus curiously made, and bearing within his own body that which will make him either a madman or a worshipper; and yet for all that he lives as if he had nothing to do with his Creator—"None saith, Where is God my Maker?"

There is great force in the next sentence: "*Who giveth songs in the night.*" That is to say, God is our *Comforter*. Beloved friends, you that know God, I am sure you will bear witness that, though you have had very severe trials, you have always been sustained in them when God has been near you. Some of us have been sick—nigh unto death, but we have almost loved our suffering chamber, and scarce wished to come out of it, so bright has the room become with the presence of God. Some of us here have known what it is to bury our dearest friends, and others have been short of bread, and forced to look up each morning for your daily manna; but when your heavenly Father has been with you—speak, ye children of God—have you not had joy and rejoicing, and light in your dwellings? When the night has been very dark, yet the fiery pillar has set the desert on a glow. No groans have made night hideous, but you have sung like nightingales amid the blackest shades when God has been with you. I can hardly tell you what joy, what confidence, what inward peace the presence of God gives to a man. It will make him bear and dare, rest and wrestle, yield and yet conquer, die and yet live. It will be very sad, therefore, if we poor sufferers forget our God, our Comforter, our song-giver.

Two little boys were once speaking together about Elijah riding to heaven in the chariot of fire. One of them said, "I think he had plenty of courage. I should have been afraid to ride in such a carriage as that." "Ah!" Ah!" said the other, "but I would not mind if God drove it." So do Christians say. They mind not if they are called to mount a chariot of fire if God drives it, We speak as honest men what we do know and feel, and we tell all our fellow-men that as long as God is present with us we have no choice of what happens to us, whether we sorrow or whether we rejoice. We have learned to glory in tribulations also when God's own presence cheers our souls, Why do not they also seek to know the Giver of songs?

And then there is a fourth point. "None saith, Where is God my Maker, who *teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and make/h us wiser than the fowls of heaven?*" Here we are reminded that God is our *Instructor*. God has given us intellect; it is not by accident, but by his gift, that we are distinguished from the beasts and the fowls. Now, if animals do not turn to God we do not wonder, but shall man forget? Strange to say, there has been no rebellion against God among the beasts or the birds. The beasts obey their God, and bow their necks to man. There are no sin-loving cattle or apostate fowls, but there are fallen men. Think, O man, it may have been better for thee if thou hadst been made a frog or a toad than to have lived a man if thou shouldst live and die without making peace with thy Maker. Thou gloriest that thou art not a beast: take heed that the beast do not condemn thee. Thou thinkest thyself vastly better than the sparrow which lights upon thy dwelling: take heed that thou do better and rise to nobler things. Methinks if there were a choice in birds, and souls dwelt in them, their minstrelsy would be as pure as now it is: they would scorn to sing loose and frivolous songs, as men do, but they would carol everlastingly sweet psalms of

praise to God. Methinks if there were souls in any of the creatures, they would devote themselves to God. as surely as angels do. Why then, O man, why is it that thou with thy superior endowments must needs be the sole rebel, the only creature of earthly mould that forgets the creating and instructing Lord?

Four points are then before us. Man does not ask after his God, his Maker, his Comforter, his Instructor: is he not filled with a fourfold madness? How can he excuse himself?

II. Supposing you do not ask these questions, let me remind you that **THERE ARE QUESTIONS WHICH GOD WILL ASK OF YOU.**

When Adam had broken God's command he did not say, "Where is God my Maker?" but the Lord did not therefore leave him alone. No, the Lord came out, and a voice, silvery with grace, but yet terrible with justice, rang through the trees, "Adam, where art thou?" There will come such a voice to you who have neglected God. Your Judge will enquire, "Where art thou?" Though you hide in the top of Carmel, or dive with the crooked serpent into the depths of the sea, you will hear that voice, and you will be constrained to answer it. Your dust long scattered to the wind will come together, and your soul will enter into your body, and you will be obliged to answer, "Here am I, for thou didst call me."

Then you will hear the second question, "Why didst thou live and die without me?" And such questions as these will come thick upon you, "What did I do that thou shouldst slight me? Did I not give you innumerable mercies? Why did you never think of me? Did I not put salvation before you? Did I not plead with you? Did I not entreat you to turn unto me? Why did you refuse me? "You will have no answer to those questions: and then there will come another question—ah! how I wish it would come to you while there is time to answer it—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" To-night I put it to you that you may propose a way of escape, if your imagination is equal to the task. You will be baffled even in trying to invent an escape *now*, and how much more when your time of judgment really comes! If you neglect the salvation of God in Christ you cannot be saved. In the next world, how will you answer that question—"How shall we escape?" You will ask the rocks to hide you, but they will refuse you that dread indulgence. You will beseech them to crush you, that you may no longer see the terrible face of the King upon the throne, but even that shall be denied you. Oh, be wise, and ere you dare the wrath of the King eternal and dash upon the bosses of his buckler, turn and repent, for why will ye die?

III. Now, if any seek an answer to the grave enquiries of the text, and do sincerely ask, "Where is God my Maker?" let us **GIVE THE ANSWERS.** Where is *God*? He is everywhere. He is all around you now. If you want him, here he is. He waits to be gracious to you. Where is God your *Maker*? He is within eye-sight of you. You cannot see him, but *he* sees *you*. He reads each thought and every motion of your spirit, and records it too. He is within ear-shot of you. Speak, and he will hear you. Ay, whisper—nay, you need not even form the words with the lips, but let the thought be in the soul, and he is so near you—for in him you live and move and have your being—that he will know your heart before you know it yourself. Where is your *Comforter*? He is ready with his "songs in the night." Where is your *Instructor*? He waits to make you wise unto salvation.

"Where, then, may I meet him?" says one. You cannot meet him—you must not attempt it—except through the Mediator. "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." If you come to Jesus you have come to God. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself; not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation," which word we preach. Believe in Jesus Christ, and your God is with you.

Trust your soul with Jesus Christ, and you have found your Creator, and you shall never again have to say, “Where is God my Maker?” for you shall live in him, and he shall live in you. You have found your Comforter and you shall joy in him, while he shall joy in you. You have also in Christ Jesus found your Instructor, who shall guide you through life, and bring you to perfection in yon bright world above.

May the Holy Ghost use this little sermon as a short sword to slay your indifference; for Christ’s sake.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms 42, 53.

HYMNS FROM “Our Own Hymn Book”—550, 711, 606, 522.

Loyal to the Core

A Sermon

(No. 1512)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.”—2 Samuel 15:21.

Although the courage of David appears to have failed him when he fled from his son Absalom, yet certain other noble characteristics came out in brilliant relief, and among the rest, his large-heartedness and his thoughtfulness for others. A man in such a desperate condition as he was must have earnestly coveted many friends and have been anxious to retain them all, but yet he would not exact their services if they were too costly to themselves, and so he said to Ittai, who appears to have been a Philistine—a proselyte to Israel, who had lately come to join himself to David—“Wherefore I goest thou also with its? Thou hast newly come to me, and should I make thee wander with me in my sorrows? Return to thy place and abide with the new king, for thou art a stranger and an exile. May every blessing be upon thee. May mercy and truth be with thee.” He did not send him away because he doubted him, but because he felt that he had no claim to the great sacrifices which Ittai might have to make in attending his checkered fortunes. “I do not know what may become of me,” he seems to say, “but I do not want to drag you down with myself. Should my cause become desperate, I have no wish to involve you in it, and therefore with the best of motives I wish you farewell.” I admire this generosity of spirit. Some men have great expectations: they live upon their friends, and yet complain that charity is cold. These people expect more from their friends than they ought to give. A man’s best friends on earth ought to be his own strong arms. Loafers are parasitical plants, they have no root of their own, but like the mistletoe they strike root into some other tree, and suck the very soul out of it for their own nourishment. Sad that men should ever degrade themselves to such despicable meanness! While you can help yourselves, do so and while you have a right to expect help in times of dire necessity, do not be everlastingly expecting everybody else to be waiting upon you. Feel as David did towards Ittai—that you would by no means wish for services to which you have no claim. Independence of spirit used to be characteristic of Englishmen. I hope it will always continue to be so; and especially among children of God.

On the other hand, look at Ittai, perfectly free to go, but in order to end the controversy once for all, and to make David know that he does not mean to leave him, he takes a solemn oath before Jehovah his God, and he doubles it by swearing by the life of David that he will never leave him; in life, in death, he will be with him. He has cast in his lot with him for better and for worse, and he means to be faithful to the end. Old Master Trapp says, “All faithful friends went on a pilgrimage years ago, and none of them have ever come back.” I scarcely credit that, but I am afraid that friends quite so faithful as Ittai are as scarce as two moons in the sky at once, and you might travel over the edge of the world before you found them. I think, however, that one reason why faithful Ittai have become so scarce may be because large-hearted Davids are so rare. When you tell a man that

you expect a good deal of him, he does not see it. Why should you look for so much? He is not your debtor. You have closed at once the valves of his generosity. But when you tell him honestly that you do not expect more than is right, and that you do not wish to be a tax upon him, when he sees that you consult his welfare more than your own, that is the very reason why he feels attached to you, and counts it a pleasure to serve such a generous-hearted man. You will generally find that when two people fall out there are faults on both sides: if generous spirits be few, it may be because faithful friends are rare, and if faithful friends are scarce it may be because generous spirits are scarce too. Be it ours as Christians to live to serve rather than to be served, remembering that we are the followers of a Master who said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." We are not to expect others to serve us, but our life is to be spent in endeavoring to serve them.

I am going to use Ittai's language for a further purpose. If Ittai, charmed with David's person and character, though a foreigner and a stranger, felt that he could enlist beneath his banner for life—yea, and declared that he would do so there and then—how much more may you and I, if we know what Christ has done for us, and who He is and what He deserves at our hands, at this good hour plight our troth to Him and vow, "As the Lord liveth, surely in whatsoever place my Lord and Saviour shall be, whether in death or life, even there also shall His servant be."

And so, I shall begin by noticing first *in what form this declaration was made*, that we may learn from it how to make the same declaration.

I. IN WHAT FORM AND MANNER WAS THIS DECLARATION MADE?

It was made, first, at a time *when David's fortunes were at their lowest ebb*, and consequently it was made unselfishly, without the slightest idea of gain from it. David was now forsaken of everybody. His faithful bodyguard was all that he had on earth to depend upon, and then it was that Ittai cast in his lot with David. Now beloved, it is very easy to follow religion when she goes abroad in her silver slippers, but the true man follows her when she is in rags, and goes through the mire and the slough. To take up with Christ when everybody cries up his name is what a hypocrite would do, but to take up with Christ when they are shouting, "Away with him! away with him!" is another matter. There are times in which the simple faith of Christ is at a great discount. At one time imposing ceremonies are all the rage, and everybody loves decorated worship, and the pure simplicity of the gospel is overloaded and encumbered with meretricious ornaments; it is such a season that we must stand out for God's more simple plan, and reject the symbolism which verges on idolatry and hides the simplicity of the gospel.

At another time the gospel is assailed by learned criticisms and by insinuations against the authenticity and inspiration of the books of Scripture, while fundamental doctrines are undermined one by one, and he who keeps to the old faith is said to be behind the age, and so on. But happy is that man who takes up with Christ, and with the gospel, and with the truth when it is in its worst estate, crying, "If this be foolery, I am a fool, for where Christ is there will I be; I love Him better at His worst than others at their best, and even if He be dead and buried in a sepulchre I will go with Mary and with Magdalene and sit over against the sepulchre and watch until He rise again, for rise again He will; but whether He live or die, where He is there shall his servant be." Ho, then, brave spirits, will ye enlist for Christ when His banner is tattered? Will you enlist under Him when His armor is stained with blood? Will you rally to Him even when they report Him slain? Happy shall ye be! Your loyalty shall be proven to your own eternal glory. Ye are soldiers such as He loves to honor.

Ittai gave himself up wholly to David *when he was but newly come to him*, David says, “Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? But Ittai does not care whether he came yesterday or twenty years ago, but he declares, “Surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.” It is best to begin the Christian life with thorough consecration. Have any of you professed to be Christians, and have you never given yourselves entirely to Christ? It is time that you began again. This should be one of the earliest forms of our worship of our Master—this total resignation of ourselves to Him. According to His Word, the first announcement of our faith should be by baptism, and the meaning of baptism, or immersion in water, is death, burial, and resurrection. As far as this point is concerned, the avowal is just this. “I am henceforth dead to all but Christ, whose servant I now am. Henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. The watermark is on me from head to foot. I have been buried with Him in baptism unto death to show that henceforth I belong to Him.” Now, whether you have been baptized or not I leave to yourselves, but in any case this must be true—that henceforth you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. As soon as ever Christ is yours you ought to be Christ’s. “I am my Beloved’s” should be linked with “My Beloved is mine,” in the dawn of the day in which you yield to the Lord.

Again, Ittai surrendered himself to David *in the most voluntary manner*. No one persuaded Ittai to do this; in fact, David seems to have persuaded him the other way. David tested and tried him, but he voluntarily out of the fullness of his heart said, “Where, my lord, the king, is, there, also shall his servant be.” Now, dear young people, if you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is yours, give yourselves up to Him by a distinct act and deed. Feel that one grand impulse without needing pressure or argument—“The love of Christ constraineth me”; but do not wait to have your duty urged upon you, for the more free the dedication the more acceptable it will be. I am told that there is no wine so delicious as that which flows from the grape at the first gentle pressure. The longer you squeeze the harsher is the juice. We do not like that service which is pressed out of a man: and certainly the Lord of love will not accept forced labor. No; let your willingness show itself. Say—

Take myself, and I will be
Ever, *only*, ALL for thee.

My heart pants after the service after of her Lord. With the same spontaneity which Ittai displayed make a solemn consecration of yourselves to David’s Lord.

I used a word then which suggests another point, namely, that *Ittai did this very solemnly*. He took an oath which we Christians may not do, and may not wish to do, but still we should make the surrender with quite as much solemnity. In Dr. Doddridge’s “Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul” there is a very solemn form of consecration, which he recommends voting men to sign when they give themselves to Christ. I cannot say that I can recommend it, though I practiced it, for I fear that there is something of legality about it, and that it may bring the soul into bondage. I have known some write out a deed of dedication to Christ and sign it with their blood. I will neither commend nor censure, but I will say that a complete dedication must be made in some manner, and that it should be done deliberately and with grave thought. You have been bought with a price, and you should, therefore, in a distinct manner own your Lord’s property in you, and transfer to Him the title-deeds of your body, spirit, and soul.

And this, I think, *Ittai did publicly*. At any rate, he so acted that everybody saw him when David said, “Go over,” and march in front—the first man to pass the brook, Oh yes, dear friend, you must publicly own yourself a Christian. If you are a Christian you must not try to sneak to heaven round

the back alleys, but march up the narrow way like a man and like your Master. He was never ashamed of you, though He might have been: how can you be ashamed of Him when there is nothing in Him to be ashamed of? Some Christians seem to think that they shall lead an easier life if they never make a profession. Like a rat behind the wainscot they come out after candlelight and get a crumb, and then slip back again. I would not lead such a life. Surely, there is nothing to be ashamed of. A Christian—let us glory in the name! A believer in the Lord Jesus Christ—let them write it on our door plates, if they will. Why should we blush at that? “But,” says one, “I would rather be a very quiet one.” I will now place a torpedo under this cowardly quietness. What saith the Lord Jesus? Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven; but he that shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Take up your cross and follow Him, for “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” When our Master ascended up on high He told us to preach the gospel to every creature; and how did He put it? “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” There must be, therefore, the believing and the acknowledgment of believing. “But cannot I be saved as a believer if I do not openly confess Christ?” Dear friend, you have no business to tamper with your Master’s command, and then say, “Will He not graciously forgive this omission?” Do not neglect one of the two commands, but obey all His will. If you have the spirit of Ittai you will say, “Wheresoever my lord the king is, there also shall thy servant be.”

I leave the matter with the consciences of those who may be like Nicodemus, coming to Jesus by night, or may be like Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple, but secretly, for fear of the Jews. May they come out and own their Master, believing that then He will own them.

II. Secondly, WHAT DID THIS DECLARATION INVOLVE? As to Ittai, what did it involve?

First, that *he was henceforth to be David’s servant*. Of course, as his soldier, he was to fight for him, and to do his bidding. What sayest thou, man? Canst thou lift thy hand to Christ, and say, “Henceforth I will live as thy servant, not doing my own will, but thy will. Thy command is henceforth my rule?” Canst thou say that? If not, do not mock Him, but stand back. May the Holy Ghost give thee grace thus to begin, thus to perserve, and thus to end.

It involved, next, for Ittai that *he was to do his utmost for David’s cause*, not to be his servant in name, but his soldier, ready for scars and wounds and death, if need be, on the king’s behalf. That is what Ittai meant as, in tough soldier-tones, he took the solemn oath that it should be so. Now, if thou wouldst be Christ’s disciple, determine henceforth by His grace that thou wilt defend His cause; that if there be rough fighting thou wilt be in it; and if there be a forlorn hope needed thou wilt lead it, and go through floods and flames if thy Master’s cause shall call thee. Blessed is the man who will follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, giving himself wholly up to his Lord to serve Him with all His heart.

But Ittai in *his promise declared that he would give a personal attendance upon the person of his master*. That was, indeed, the pith of it, “In what place my lord, the king, shall be, even there also will thy servant be.” Brethren, let us make the same resolve in our hearts, that wherever Christ is, there we will be. Where is Christ? In heaven. We will be there by-and-by. Where is He here, spiritually? Answer: in His church. The church is a body of faithful men; and where these are met together, there is Jesus in the midst of them. Very well, then, we will join the church, for wherever our Lord, the King, is, there also shall His servants be. When the list of the redeemed is read we will be found in the register, for our Lord’s name is there.

Where else did Jesus go? In the commencement of His ministry He descended into the waters of baptism. Let us follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. At the close of His ministry He brake bread, and said, "This do ye in remembrance of me." Be often at His table, for if there is a place on the earth where He manifests Himself to His children it is where bread is broken in His name. Let me now tell a secret. Some of you may have heard it before, but you have forgotten it. Here it is—my Lord it generally here at prayer-meetings on Monday nights, and, indeed, whenever His people come together for prayer, there He is. So I will read you my text, and see ether you will come up to it—"Surely in what place my Lord the King shall be, whether it be in a prayer-meeting or at a sermon, even there also will thy servant be. "If you love your Lord, you know where His haunts are; take care that you follow hard after Him there.

Where is the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, brethren, He is wherever the truth is, and I pray God that He may raise up a race of men and women in England who are determined to be wherever the truth of God is. We have a host of molluscous creatures about who will always be where the congregation is the most respectable: respectability being measured by clothes and cash. Time was in the church of God when they most esteemed the most pious men; has it come to this that gold takes precedence of grace? Our fathers considered whether a ministry was sound, but now the question is—Is the man clever? Words ire preferred to truth, and oratory takes the lead of the gospel. Shame on such an age. O you who have, not altogether sold your birthrights, I charge you keep out of this wretched declension.

The man who loves Christ thoroughly will say, "Wheresoever the Lord the King is, there also shall His servant be, if it be with half a dozen poor Baptists or Methodists, or among the most despised people in the town." I charge you, beloved, in whatever town or country your lot is cast, be true to your colors, and never forsake your principles. Wherever the truth is, there go, and where there is anything contrary to truth, do not go, for there your Master is not to be found.

What next? Well, our Master is to be found wherever there is anything to be done for the good of our fellow-men. The Lord Jesus Christ is to be found wherever there is work to be done in seeking after His lost sheep. Some people say that they have very little communion with Christ, and when I look at them, I do not wonder. Two persons cannot walk together if they will not walk at the same pace. Now, my Lord walks an earnest pace whenever He goes through the world, for the King's business requires haste; and if His disciples crawl after a snail's fashion they will lose His company. If some of our groaning brethren would go to the Sunday-school, and there begin to look after the little children, they would meet with their Lord who used to say, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." If others were to get together a little meeting, and teach the ignorant, they would there find Him who had compassion on the ignorant on those that are out of the way. Our Master is where there are fetters to be broken, burdens to be removed, and hearts to be comforted, and if you wish to keep with Him you must aid in such service.

Where is our Master? Well, He is always on the side of truth and right. And, O, you Christian people, mind that in everything@politics, business, and everything you keep to that which is right,]lot to that which is popular. Do not bow the knee to that which for a little day may be cried up, but stand fast in that which is consistent with rectitude, with humanity, with the cause and honor of God, and with the freedom and progress of men. It can never be wise to do wrong. It can never be foolish to be right. It can never be according to the mind of Christ to tyrannize and to oppress. Keep you ever to whatsoever things are pure and lovely and of good report, and you will so far

keep with Christ. "Temperance, purity, justice—these are favorites with Him; do your best to advance them for His sake.

Above all, remember how Jesus loved secret prayer, and if you resolve to keep with Him you must be much at the throne of grace.

I will not detain you over each of these points, but simply say that Ittai's declaration meant also this—that *he intended to share David's condition*. If David was great, Ittai would rejoice. If David was exiled, Ittai would attend his wanderings. Our point must be to resolve in God's strength to keep to Christ in all weathers and in all companies, and that whether in life or death. Ah that word "death" makes it sweet, because then we reap the blessed result of having lived with Christ. We shall go upstairs for the last time and bid good-bye to all, and then we shall feel that in death He is still with us as in life we have been with Him. Though our good works can never be a ground of confidence when we are dying, yet if the Lord enables us to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and so to lead a decided, positive, downright, upright Christian life, our death pillow will not be stuffed with thorns of regret, but we shall have to bless God that we bore a faithful witness as far as were able to do so. In such a case we shall not when the dying wish to go back again to rectify the mistakes and insincerities of our lives. No, beloved, it will be very, very sweet to be alone with Jesus in death. He will make all our bed in our sickness; He will make our dying pillow soft, and our soul shall vanish, kissed away by His dear lips, and we shall be with Him forever and forever. Of those that are nearest to Him it is said, "These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. They shall walk with him in white, for they are worthy."

I conclude with this observation. Will our Lord Jesus Christ accept at our hands tonight such a consecrating word? If we are trusting in Him for salvation will He permit us to say that we will keep with Him as long as we live?

We reply, He will not permit us to say it in our own strength. There was a young man who said, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," but Christ gave him a cool reception: and there was an older man who said, "Though all men shall forsake thee yet will not I," and in reply his Master prayed for Him that his faith should not fail. Now, you must not promise as Peter did, or you will make a greater failure. But, beloved, this self-devotion is what Christ expects of us if we are His disciples. He will not have us love father or mother more than Him; we must be ready to give up all for His sake. This is not only what our Master expects from us, but what He deserves from us.

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

This, also, is what the Lord will help us to do, for He will give us grace if we will but seek it at His hands: and this it is which He will graciously reward, and has already rewarded, in that choice word of His in the twelfth of John, where He says of His disciples in the twenty-sixth verse, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor." Oh, to be honored of God in eternity when He shall say, "Stand back, angels; make way, seraphim and cherubim; here comes a man that suffered for the sake, of my dear Son. Here comes one that was not ashamed of my Only-begotten when his face was smeared with the spittle. Here comes one that stood in the pillory with Jesus, and was called ill names for His sake. Stand back, ye angels, these have greater honor than you." Surely the angels of heaven as they traverse the streets of gold and meet the martyrs will ask them about their sufferings, and say, "You are more favored than we, for you have had the privilege of suffering

and dying for the Lord." O brothers and sisters, snatch at the privilege of living for Jesus; consecrate yourselves this day unto Him; live from this hour forward, not to enrich yourselves, nor to gain honor and esteem, but for Jesus, for Jesus alone. Oh, if I could set Him before you here; if I could cause Him to stand on this platform just as He came from Gethsemane with His bloody sweat about Him, or as He came down from the cross with wounds so bright with glory and so fresh with bleeding out our redemption, I think I should hear you say, each one of you, "Lord Jesus, we are thine, and in what place Thou shalt be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servants be." So may the Lord help us by His most gracious Spirit who hath wrought all our works in us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 SAMUEL 15:13-23; Matthew 10:24-33.

HYMNS FROM "Our Own Hymn Book"—670, 658, 666.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

BELOVED FRIENDS,—The Lord has been graciously pleased to release his prisoner. I am weak, but the pain is gone, and in this land of bright sun and warm air I expect soon to recover strength. If my hopes are fulfilled, I shall have escaped this time with a lighter measure of chastening than for several previous years, and for this I feel doubly grateful. To all those by whose prayers I have been comforted and blessed I return hearty thanks.

Special services are commencing at the Tabernacle, and I entreat friends at home to throw their whole souls into them. I also beg my readers to pray that my beloved work at home may not suffer through my absence, but that it may please God through these special services to revive and increase the spiritual life of the church committed to my care. Then will all the agencies be quickened also, and great blessing will come to the people of God.

Unto the Lord our God belong the issues from death, and he restoreth our soul. To Him be glory for ever.

With love to all the saints, yours,
C.H. Spurgeon
Menton, Dec. 26, 1879.

Cheer Up, My Comrades!

A Sermon

(No. 1513)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And Josiah set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord”—2 Chronicles 35:2.

JOSIAH, as you remember, in the early part of his reign set his face against the idolatries that prevailed, to root them out of the land. He then bent his thoughts upon repairing and beautifying the temple. After that it was his heart's aim to restore the sacred services, to observe the solemn feasts, and to revive the worship of God after the due order, according to the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. Our text tells us something of the method with which he went to work; and it may well serve us as a model.

The first thing is to get every man into his proper place; the next thing is for every man to have a good spirit in his present place, so as to occupy it worthily. I will suppose, dear friends, that in the providence of God you are in your place, and that by the direction of God's Spirit you have also sought and found the precise form of usefulness in which you ought to exercise yourself. To-night it shall not be my business to arrange you; but assuming that it is well for you to keep where you are, my object shall be to encourage you to do your work for your Lord without being cast down. I am hardly going to preach so much as to talk to different persons who are discouraged in the work of the Lord, that we may rouse them up, rally them round us, and encourage them to keep rank.

I. And, first, I would speak a little to **THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY CAN DO NOTHING**. They will tell me that in such a sermon not a sentence can concern them: if I am to encourage men to the service of the house of the Lord, it will be in vain for them, as they can do nothing at all. Well, dear friends, you must not take that for granted; you must make quite sure that you cannot do anything before I may venture to speak to you as if it were a matter of fact; for sometimes there is a want of way because there is a want of will. Though I do not go so far as to allege that this is your case, we know too well that “cannot” often does mean “will not,” and not to have triumphed may mean that you have not tried. You have been so discouraged that you have excused yourself for inaction, and your inaction has grown into indolence. If a man, under the notion that he could not lift his right hand, constantly kept it still, I should not wonder if, after weeks and months, it would become a matter of fact that he had not the power to use it. It might actually stiffen for no reason but because he had not moved it. Do you not think that, before your muscles get rigid, it would be well to exercise them by attempting some kind of service? Especially you younger folk, if you do not work for the Lord almost as soon as you are converted it will be very difficult afterwards to make you take to it. Aptitude, I have often noticed, comes with employment, and through negligence and sloth people become enervated and helpless. You say that you cannot move your arm, and so you do not move it; take heed, for by-and-by your pretence will become the parent of real powerlessness.

But I will take what you have said as being true. You are ill; the vigour you felt in the bright days of health fails you now; you have to suffer pain, weariness, and exhaustion; you are often detained at home; and home seems now to you a gloomy hospital all the day long, rather than a genial hostelry when evening shadows fall. Little indeed, therefore, can you do; so little that you are apt to reckon it as nothing at all. The thought is a burden to you. You wish you could serve the Lord. How constantly you have dreamed of the pleasure since you have been denied the privilege! How willing your feet would be to run; how ready your hands would be to labour; how glad would your tongue be to testify! You envy those who are able, and you would fain emulate and excel them; not indeed that you harbour ill-will against them, but you devoutly wish that you could do some personal service in the cause of your Master.

Now, I want to encourage you first by reminding you that the law of the Son of David is the same as the law of David himself; and you know the law of David about those that went to the battle. There were some that were lame, and some that were otherwise incapable of action, and he left them with the baggage. "There," he said, "you are very weary and ill: stop in the camp: take care of the tents, and the ammunition, while we go and fight." Now, it happened once on a time that the men that went to fight claimed all the spoil. They said, "These people have done nothing: they have been lying in the trenches: they shall not carry off a share of the booty." But King David there and then made a law that they should share and share equally—those that were in the trenches and those that engaged in the fray. "As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel." Nor is the law of the Son of David less gracious. If by sickness you are detained at home,—if for any other reason, such as age or infirmity, you are not able to enter into actual service, yet if you are a true soldier and would fight if you could, and your heart is in it, you shall share even with the best and bravest of those who, clad in the panoply of God, encounter and grapple with the adversary.

And, brethren, you have no reason to envy, though you may admire to your heart's content, all who are diligent and successful in the service of Christ. Let me remind you of a law of the kingdom of heaven with which you are all familiar—"He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." In truth, it is a splendid appointment to be a servant of the Lord. David thought so, for you often read at the commencement of his psalms—"A prayer of David, the servant of God," though you never read, "A prayer of David, the king of Israel," for he thought more of being enrolled a servant of God than of being entitled a king of Israel. Health and strength, ability and opportunity to fulfil a mission for the Master are much to be desired, but these are not always to be taken as reliable evidence of personal salvation. A man may preach admirably, and he may work marvels in the church, and yet himself not be a partaker of saving grace. Hence, when the disciples came back from preaching, and said, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name," the Lord said, "Never the less, in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Judas was amongst them; Judas cast out devils; Judas preached the gospel; and yet Judas was a son of perdition, and is lost for ever. Because you cannot do much you must not infer that therefore you are not saved; for if you were to be among the chief of Christian workers it would not prove that you were certainly a child of God. Do not fret, then, because you are shut out from the cheerful activities in which others share; for, as long as your name is written in heaven, and your heart truly follows after the Lord, you shall have an abundant recompense at the last great day, even though here you are doomed to be a sufferer rather than a worker.

But to me it seems more than possible that some of you, dear friends, whose minds are tinged with melancholy, have painted your own lot in deeper shades than the justice of the case deserves. Is your life indeed a dull routine, which, for lack of busy change and lively enterprise, leaves no record behind? Not so, methinks. "The rich relics of a well-spent hour" do sometimes pour around your path a stream of light that cheers *our* eyes, though it may escape your notice. Are you patient under your sufferings? Do you try to keep the flesh in subjection, to govern your spirit, to refrain from murmuring, and to foster cheerfulness? That, my friend, is doing a great deal. I am sure that the holy serenity of a suffering child of God is one of the best sermons that can ever be preached in a family. A sick saint has often been more serviceable in a house than the most eloquent divine could have been. They see how sweetly you submit to the divine will, how patiently you can bear painful operations, how the Lord gives you songs in the night. Why, you are greatly useful. I have sometimes been called to visit bedridden persons who have been unable to rise for many, many years, and it has been within my knowledge that their influence has extended over whole parishes. They have been known as poor pious women or as experienced Christian men, and many have gone to visit them. Christian ministers have said that they derived more benefit from sitting half-an-hour talking to poor old Betsy than they did from all the books in their library, and yet Betsy said that she was doing nothing. Look at your case in that light, and you will see that you can praise God upon your bed, and make your chamber to be as vocal for God as this pulpit ever can be.

Besides, dear friends, do you not think we frequently limit our estimate of serving God to the public exercises of the sanctuary, and forget the strong claims that our Lord has upon our private fidelity and obedience? You say, "I cannot serve God," when you cannot teach in the school or preach in the pulpit, when you are unable to sit on a committee or speak on a platform: as if these were the only forms of service to be taken into account. Do you not think that a mother nursing her baby is serving God? Do you not think that men and women going about their daily toil with patient industry discharging the duties of domestic life are serving God? If you think rightly you will understand that they are. The servant sweeping the room, the mistress preparing the meal, the workman driving a nail, the merchant casting up his ledger, ought to do all in the service of God. Though, of course, it is very desirable that we should each and all have some definitely religious work before us, yet it is much better that we should hallow our common handicraft, and make our ordinary work chime with the melodies of a soul attuned for heaven. Let true religion be our life, and then our life will be true religion. That is how it ought to be. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him." So, then, let the stream of your common life as it flows on, obscure, unobserved, be holy and courageous; you will find that while "they also serve who only stand and wait," you shall not be neglected or overlooked who simply sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his words when you can do no more. This is service done for him which he can appreciate; complain who may.

Know, too, my dear sister, that by thy sorrows the Lord has drawn out thy sympathies. Thou, my dear brother, know that by the discipline which has chastened thee, thou hast learned to be a comforter. Say you, then, that you cannot do anything? I know a few secrets about you that you forget. You do not reckon yourself up as we reckon you. Did you not try to cheer a poor neighbour the other day by telling of the Lord's goodness to you when you were very sick yourself? How started from your eye that tear most sacred shed for a fellow-creature's pain? Is it not your habit, poor sufferer as you are, to let drop just a few words for your Master to others in a like condition whenever you can? You tell me that you cannot do anything. Why, dear hearts, the refreshing of

God's saints is one of the highest works in which anyone can be occupied. God will send *prophets* to his servants at times when they need to be rebuked; if he wants to comfort them he generally sends an *angel* to them, for that is angel's work. Jesus Christ himself, we read, had angels sent to minister to him. When? Was it not in the garden of Gethsemane, when he was bowed down with sorrow? Comforting is not ordinary work: it is a kind of angelic work. "There appeared unto him an angel strengthening him." A prophet was sent to warn the Israelites of their sin; but when a Gideon was to be encouraged to go and fight for his country, it was the angel of the Lord that came to him. So I gather that comforting work is angel's work. You, dear kind Christian men and women, who think that you are not able to do anything but to condole or to console with cheery words some souls cast down and sore dismayed, you are fulfilling a most blessed office, and doing work which many ministers find it difficult to perform. I have known some who have never known suffering or ill-health, and when they try to comfort God's weary people they are dreadfully awkward over it. They are like elephants picking up pins: they can do it, but it is with a wonderful effort. God's tried people comfort each other *con amore*; they take to the work as a fish to water. They understand the art of speaking a word in season to him that is weary, and when this is the case they may not complain that they are doing nothing.

And yet, beloved, you who thought that you did nothing, and now perceive that you are really useful, will, I hope, perceive that there is still a wider region into which you may advance. Breathe to-night the prayer of Jabez, who was more honourable than his brethren, because he was the child of his mother's sorrow; and this was the prayer—"Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast"! Ask God to open up to you a larger region of usefulness, and he will do it.

II. Now let me address a few words to another class of workers WHO THINK THAT THEY ARE LAID ASIDE.

"Dear sir," says one, "I wish you would encourage me. I used to be useful once; at least, I was recognized as one of a band of men who worked together right heartily, but since I have changed my residence I am unknown in the neighborhood where I am living, and I seem to have dropped out of the ranks. I have done little or nothing lately, and I feel uneasy about it. I wish that I could get to work." My dear brother, I hope you will; but do not waste five minutes in thinking it over. These times need so much Christian effort that when a man asks me, "How shall I do work for Christ"? I am accustomed to say, "Go and do it." "But what is the way to do it"? Start at once. Get at it, my brother. Do not be out of harness a minute. But suppose that you are obliged to desist awhile, do not let your interest in the cause of our Lord and Master decline. Some of the best of God's workers have been laid aside for long periods. Moses was forty years in the desert, doing nothing. A greater than he, our blessed Saviour himself, was thirty years,—I will not say doing nothing, but certainly doing no public work. When you are in a retired and inactive position, be preparing for the time when God brings you out again. If you are put away on the shelf, do not rust there, but pray the Master to brighten you up so that when he comes to use you again you may be fully fitted for the work which he has in hand for you.

While you must be laid aside, I want you to do this,—pray for others that are at work. Help them; encourage them. Do not get into that peevish, miserable frame of mind which grudges and undervalues other men's works. Be not like the dog in the manger. Some people, when they cannot do anything themselves, do not like anybody else to be diligent and laborious. Say, "If I cannot help, I will never hinder, but I will cheer my brethren."

Spend your time in prayer that you may be fit for the Master's use, and, meanwhile, be prompt in helping others. You remember that, at the siege of Gibraltar, when the fleet surrounded it and determined to storm the old rock, the governor fired red-hot shot down upon the men of war. The enemy did not at all admire the governor's warm reception. Think how it was done. Here were gunners on the ramparts firing away, and every man in the garrison would have liked to do the same. What did those do who could not serve a gun? Why, *they heated the shot*; and that is what you must do. I am master gunner here generally: heat my shot for me, if you will. Keep the furnace going, so that when we do fire off a sermon it may be red-hot, through your earnest prayers. When you see your friends sitting in the Sunday-school, or standing out in the street working for God, if you cannot join them yet say, "Never mind: I will heat the shot for them. My prayers shall not be wanting, if I can contribute nothing else." That is counsel for you who are for awhile laid on the shelf.

III. Others there are who are much discouraged because **THEY HAVE BUT SMALL TALENT**. "Oh," they say, "I wish I could serve Jesus Christ like Paul, or like Whitefield—that I could range the country through proclaiming his dear name and winning thousands of converts. But I am slow of speech and dull of thought, and what I attempt produces little or no effect." Well, brother, mind that you do what you can. Do you not recollect the parable of the men who had talents entrusted to them? I do not want to lay undue stress upon the fact that it was the man who had one talent who buried it. Yet why is he represented as doing so? I think it was not because the men of two and five talents do not sometimes bury theirs, but because the temptation lies most with the one talent people. They say, "What can I do? What is the use of me? I may be excused." That is the temptation. Brother, do not be entangled in that snare. If your Lord has only given you one talent he does not expect you to make the same interest upon it as the man does with five; but still he does expect his interest, and therefore do not wrap your talent in a napkin. It is but with strength imparted that any of us can serve him. We have nothing to consecrate to him but the gift we have first received from him. You are weak. You feel it; but what says your God to you? "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." He can make you useful though you have no extraordinary endowments. Grape-shot may do great execution, though it cannot compare with grenade or bomb-shell. A sinner may be brought to Christ by the simple earnestness of a peasant or an artisan, without calling in the aid of a professor's learning or a preacher's eloquence. God can bless you far above what you think to be your capacity, for it is not a question of your ability but of his aid. You have no self-reliance, you tell me. Then take refuge in God, I entreat you, for you evidently want more of the divine succor. Go and get it; it is to be had. He girds the weak with strength. "The young men shall faint and be weary, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Why, I think you are more likely to do good than if you had five talents, for now you will pray more and you will depend more upon God than you would have done if you had possessed strength of your own.

One other word. As you are not enriched with many talents, mind you economize those you have. Do you know how merchants and tradesmen who have only a small capital in business manage to compete with those who have larger means? They try to turn their money over every day. The costermonger cannot afford to deal out his goods to gentlemen who will pay him in three months. Not he. He must get his ready money at the door, and then go and buy another stock to-morrow morning, and turn it over, or else he could not pick up his living with so small a capital. If you have only ninepence, make it "nimble," and you will get as much profit out of a nimble ninepence as

another out of a lazy crown. Activity often makes up for lack of ability. If you cannot get force by the weight of the ball, get it by the velocity with which it travels. A little man with one talent all ablaze may become a perfect nuisance to the devil, and a champion for Christ. As for that great divine with his five talents, who marches on so sleepily, Satan can always overmatch him and win the day. If you can but turn over your one talent again and again, in the name of God, you may achieve great wonders. So I would encourage you in the work of the Lord.

IV. With workers WHO ARE UNDER GREAT DIFFICULTIES I would now have a word. I have known the day when perplexities pleased me, dilemmas afforded me delight, and instead of declining a difficult task I rather like it. Even now I enjoy puzzling over a problem, and attempting what others decline. Nothing good in this world can be effected without difficulty. The biggest diamonds lie under heavy stones which sluggards cannot turn over. That which is easy to do is hardly worth doing. In the face of difficulty the man of ardent, persevering spirit braces up his nerves, sharpens his wits, and brings all his powers into play to achieve an object that will reward his efforts. Have you great difficulties dear friend? You are not the first worker for God who has had difficulties to encounter. Let us go back to Moses again. He was to bring Israel out of Egypt; but his path did not appear very plain. He must go before Pharaoh and issue God's command. Pharaoh looked him through when he said, "Let my people go." The haughty monarch was greatly surprised to hear anybody, especially a Hebrew, talk like that; and so he bade him begone. But Moses returns with, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go"; and his courage was not even then crowned with immediate success. There must be plague upon plague, plague upon plague, till at last proud Pharaoh's heart was broken, the Israelites were saved from the hand of him that hated them; and Egypt was glad when they departed. This, however, was but the beginning of the mission of Moses. His was a life of difficulty—the meekest man, but the most provoked; and until he got to the top of Pisgah, and his gracious Master kissed away his soul, the prophet of Horeb had never done with difficulties. Any good thing, I say, especially any good thing done for God, must be surrounded with difficulties, and resisted by adversaries. Look at Nehemiah, and Ezra, and Zerubbabel, and those that built Jerusalem, the second time. These good men wrought zealously, but Sanballat and Tobiah were jeering and jesting, and trying to throw down the wall. If you build a city without difficulty, it is not Jerusalem. Be sure of that. As soon as ever you begin working for God you will find a great power working against you. If you encounter opposition, take it as a good sign. When our young men go to a provincial town to preach, and I want to know how they are getting on, after listening to their story, I ask, "Has somebody slandered you yet? Do the newspapers denounce you as a fool"? If they say "No," I conclude that they are not getting on much. If Christ's cause is prospering the world will reproach the soul-winner; if you do damage to the devil's kingdom he will roar at you. Should your course be smooth, it is because he says, "There is nothing to disturb me in that man's monotonous talk. I need not let fly the fiery dart of calumny at him: he is a chip in the porridge, I will let him alone." Such a man generally goes through life very comfortably. People say, "He is a quiet, inoffensive sort of man." We do not want such soldiers in the service of Christ. "What a disagreeable person"! said a king once of an officer whose sword rattled on the floor. "That sword of his is most offensive." "Sire," said the officer, "that is exactly what your majesty's enemies think." When ungodly persons say that we are troublesome, we are not broken-hearted at being out of their good looks. If the king's enemies think us troublesome, we reckon it to be high praise. When you, my dear brother, meet with opposition, encounter it with prayer. Exercise more faith. Antagonists ought never to hinder your going forward in the cause of

Christ. Diamond must cut diamond. There is nothing so hard in this world but you can cut it with something harder. If you ask God to steel your soul up to the conquering point, and to make your resolution like an adamant stone, you can cut your way through an alp of diamond in the service of your Lord and Master.

Let me inspire you in the face of assailants. The forces ranged against you might be stumbling-blocks to fools, but they shall only prove a stimulus to men. One day your honour shall be the greater and your reward shall be the higher because of these adverse elements. Therefore, be brave and fear not, but advance in the strength of God.

V. Fain would I now speak a passing word of comfort to another class of workers—**THOSE THAT ARE NOT APPRECIATED**. I am not going to say much, because I have not much sympathy with them. Yet I know that the smallest slight chafes those who are over sensitive. They murmur, "I do my best, and nobody thanks me." You think yourself a martyr, and complain that you are mis-represented. Be it so, dear friend; that was your Master's lot, and it is the lot of all his servants. This is a cross we must all carry, or we shall never wear the crown. Do you fancy that this is a new experience? Look at Joseph. His brethren could not bear him, and yet it was he that saved the family and fed them in time of famine. Look at David. His brothers asked why he had left the charge of the sheep to come down to the battle, suspecting that the pride of his heart had brought him among the soldiers and the standards. Yet nobody could bring back Goliath's head but that young David. Take a lesson from the ruddy hero; take no notice of what your brethren say about you. Go and bring back the giant's head. A good adventure is the best answer to evil accusations. If you are serving the Master let their scandal stir you up to more self-consecration. If they cry out against you as too forward, serve the Lord with more vigour, and you will antidote the venom of their tongues. Did you enter into Christ's work in order to be honoured among men? Then retire from it, for you came with a bad motive. But if you enlisted purely to bring honour to Him, and to win his smile, what more do you want? What more do you want? Be not therefore disheartened because you are not applauded. Be certain of this, that to be kept in the rear rank is often necessary to future eminence. If you take a man and put him in front, and pat him on the back and say, "What a great man he is"! he will make a false step before long, and there will be an end of your hero; but when a man is brought forward by God, he is often one whom everybody criticizes, finds fault with, and declaims as an impostor, but the banter he is exposed to serves as ballast for his mind. When he comes off with success he will not be spoiled with conceit, for the grace of God will make him bow with gratitude. The sword that is meant for a princely hand, to split through skull and backbone in the day of battle, must be annealed in the furnace again and again; it cannot be fit for such desperate work until it has passed through the fire full many a time. Do not ask to be appreciated. Never be so mean as that. Appreciate yourself in the serenity of conscience, and leave your honour with your God.

VI. I must speak now, in the last place, a little more at length to **THOSE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE THEY HAVE HAD SO LITTLE SUCCESS**.

It was my great delight a few evenings ago to meet a splendid band of men and women who are the Sunday-school teachers of this church. You will think it strange that I did not till then thoroughly estimate the extent of their work, as I had never added up the total of the various schools; but when I did so, and found that they mounted up to six thousand children, I felt full of joy. I shall run over with delight if they increase to twelve thousand in another twelve months. For so large a district this would not be too many, but still our present number is most encouraging. Now, I know

that some of our teachers are working away in back streets, in rooms not connected with any place but this, and we hardly knew of them, because they were pursuing their simple, unobtrusive labours so quietly. Are there any of you who fear that you have toiled in vain and spent your strength for nought? I would entreat you, dear friends, not to be satisfied with casting in the seed unless you reap some good results; yet do not be so faint-hearted as to give up because of a little disappointment. Though you cannot be satisfied without fruit, yet do not cease to sow because one season proves a failure. I would not have our friends the farmers abandon agriculture because this year they have a bad crop: if they were to measure their future prospects by the present failure, it would be a great pity. If you have preached or taught, or done work for Christ with little success until now, do not infer that you will always be unsuccessful. Regret the lack of prosperity but do not relinquish the labour of seeking it. You may reasonably be sorrowful, but you have no right to despair. Non-success is a trial of faith which has been endured by many a trusty servant who has been triumphant in the issue. Did not the disciples toil all night, and catch nothing? Did we not read just now of some who cast the net, and yet took no fish? Did not our Lord say that some seed would fall on stony ground, and some among the thorns, and that from these there would be no harvest? What good did Jeremiah do? I have no doubt he laboured, and God blessed him, but the result of his preaching was that he said, "The bellows are burned in the fire." He had blown up the fire till he had burnt the bellows, but no man's heart was melted. "Woe is me"! said he. "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears"! I do not know what was the result of Noah's ministry, but I do know that he was a preacher of righteousness for a hundred and twenty years, and yet he never brought a soul into the ark except his own family. Poor preaching we may count it judging by the influence it exerted: and yet we know that it was grand preaching, such as God commended. Do not, then, grudge the time, or the strength, you lay out in the service of our great Lord because you do not see your efforts thrive, for better men than you have wept over failure.

Remember, too, that if you really do serve the Lord thoroughly and heartily, he will accept you and acknowledge your service, even though no good should come of it. It is your business to cast the bread on the waters: if you do not find it after many days, that is not your business. It is your business to scatter the seed; but no farmer says to his servant, "John, you have not served me well, for there is no harvest." The man would say, "Could I make a harvest, sir? I have ploughed, and I have sowed. What more could I do"? Even so our good Lord is not austere, nor does he demand of us more than we can do. If you have ploughed and if you have sowed, although there should be no harvest, you are clear and accepted. Did it never strike you that you may be now employed in breaking up ground and preparing the soil from which other labourers who come after you will reap very plentifully. Perhaps your Master knows what a capital ploughman you are. He has a large farm, and he never means to let you become a reaper because you do the ploughing so well. Your Master does not intend you to take part in the harvest because you are such a good hand at sowing; and as he has crops that need sowing all the year round he keeps you at that work. He knows you better than you know yourself. Perchance if he were once to let you get on the top of a loaded wagon of your own sheaves, you would turn dizzy and make a fall of it; so he says, "You keep to your ploughing and your sowing, and somebody else shall do the reaping." Peradventure when your course is run you will see from heaven, where it will be safe for you to see it, that you did not labour in vain nor spend your strength for nought. "One soweth and another reapeth." This is the divine economy. I think that every man that loves his Master will say, "So long as there does but come a harvest, I will not stipulate about who reaps it. Give me faith enough to be assured that the

reaping will come, and I will be content.” Look at William Carey going to India, his prayer being “India for Christ.” What did Carey live to see? Well, he saw good-speed enough to rejoice his heart: but certainly he did not see the fulfillment of all his prayer. Successive missionaries have since gone and spent their life on that vast field of enterprise. With what result? A result amply sufficient to justify all their toil, but, as compared with the millions that sit in heathendom, utterly inadequate to the craving of the church, much less to the crown of Christ. It does not much matter how any one man fares. The mighty empire will revert to the world’s Redeemer, and I can almost trace in the records of the future the writing of “These be the names of the mighty men whom David had,” as the valiant deeds of his heroes are chronicled by our Lord. When old St. Paul’s cathedral had to be taken down in order to make room for the present noble edifice, some of the walls were immensely strong and stood like rocks. Sir Christopher Wren determined to throw them down by the old Roman battering-ram. The battering-ram began to work, and the men worked at it for hours and hours, day after day, without apparent effect. Blow after blow came on the wall; tremendous thuds that made the bystanders tremble. The wall continued to stand till they thought it was a useless operation. But the architect knew. He continued working his battering-ram till every particle of the wall felt the motion, and at last over it went in one tremendous ruin. Did anybody commend those workmen who caused the final crash, or ascribe all the success to them? Not a bit of it. It was the whole of them together. Those who had gone away to their meals, those who had begun days before, had as much honour in the matter as those who struck the last blow. And it is so in the work of Christ. We must keep on battering, battering, battering, and at last—though it may not be for another thousand years—the Lord will triumph. Though Christ cometh quickly he may not come for another ten thousand years, but in any case idolatry must die, and truth must reign. The accumulated prayers and energies of ages shall do the deed, and God shall be glorified. Only let us persevere in holy effort, and the end is sure. When a certain American general was fighting they said, “What are you doing?” He said, “I am not doing much, but I keep pegging away.” That is what we must do. We cannot do much at any one time, but we must keep on. We must keep on pegging away at the enemy, and something will come of it by-and-by.

Possibly, dear friends, some of you who think you have had slender success may have had a great deal more than you know of. Others there may be whose want of success should suggest to them to try somewhere else, or else to try some other method. If we cannot do good in one way we must do it in another. Bring the matter before God in prayer. Cry mightily to him, for he will help you yet to do it, and his shall be the glory. When he has laid you low, when he has taught you how inefficient you are, when he has driven you in despair to rely implicitly upon himself, then it may be that he will give you more trophies and triumphs than you ever dreamed of. Anyhow, whether I prosper in life or not is not my question. To bring souls to Christ is my main endeavour, but it is not the ultimate proof of my ministry. My business is to live for God, to lay aside self, and give myself up wholly to him, and if I do that I shall be accepted whatever else may happen. I wish we had the spirit of that brave old man who was condemned to the stake. They were going to burn him. He knew that the sentence was to be carried out the next morning, but with a soul full of courage, and with a merry heart, he sat the last thing at night talking with his friends—faggots and fire to face in the morning, recollect—and he said to one of them, “I am an old tree in my Master’s orchard. When I was young I bore a little fruit by his grace. It was unripe and sour, but he bore with it: and I have grown mellow in my older days and brought forth some fruit for him by his grace. Now the tree has grown so old that my Master is going to cut it down and burn the old log.

Well, it will warm the hearts of some of his family while I am burning"; and he even smiled for joy to think that he might be put to so good a purpose. I want you to have that spirit, and to say, "I will live for Christ while I am young: I will die for him, and warm the hearts of my brethren. You know that the persecutions of those martyr days begat such heroism and gallantry among disciples as prudent people in peaceful times can scarcely credit. It is said of the old Baptist church over in the City that the members went to Smithfield early one morning to see their pastor burnt, and when some one asked the young people what they went there for, they said that they went to learn the way. That is splendid! They went to learn the way. Oh, go to the Master's cross to learn the way to live and die! See how he spent himself for you, and then sally forth and spend yourselves for him. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall ye be glorious in the sight of the Lord." Though you may think that you do not succeed, your whole-hearted consecration shall be your honour in the day of the Lord. By your hallowed life, and your humble service, you shall bring glory to his name. O Lord, set us in our charges, and encourage us in the service of thy house! "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; establish thou the work of our hands: yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." May the blessing of our covenant God rest upon you, my brethren, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 21.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—245, 674, 694.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

BELOVED FRIENDS,—On this first day of a New Year I salute you with hearty good wishes, and pray that every blessing may attend your future steps. I beg also on my own behalf your prayers that through another year my ministry may be more edifying to the saints, more persuasive with sinners, and more acceptable to the Lord. I thank the great Healer that this day smiles upon me, and sees me free from pain, reviving in strength, and restored in spirit. I shall hope soon to be at work again. Oh for an anointing with fresh oil.

Yours to serve in hearty earnest,

C.H. Spurgeon

Menton, Jan. 1, 1880.

The Key-Note of a Choice Sonnet

A Sermon

(No. 1514)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“My soul doth magnify the Lord.”—Luke 1:46.

MARY HAD RECEIVED a wonderful intimation from heaven of which she herself scarcely understood the full length and breadth. Her faith had apprehended a great promise, which as yet her mind hardly comprehended. Her prayer, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word,” showed her joyful submission and childlike confidence, and this made her blessed with the blessedness of patient hope. Under divine guidance she made a speedy journey into the hill country to see her cousin Elisabeth, and from her she received a confirmation of the wonderful tidings which the angel had brought to her. Elisabeth herself had been favored from above, for the Lord had looked upon her, and taken away from her the reproach of barrenness. Amongst other choice words, Elisabeth said to her, “Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.” When Mary had thus been comforted by her friend, and her spirit had been elevated, and her confidence confirmed, she began to sing unto the Lord most sweetly, saying, “My soul doth magnify the Lord.” Now, if it is a good time with any of you—if in communion with some older believer your confidence has been strengthened, make sure that the Lord has a return for it. When your own heart is lifted up, then lift up the name of the Lord. Exalt him when he exalts you. You will perhaps tell me that the Virgin had very especial reason for magnifying the Lord, and I answer, Assuredly she had. “Blessed is she among women,” and we are not backward to own the eminent honor which was put upon her. Blessed indeed she was, and highly favored. But yet, is there any true believer who has not also received special favor of the Lord? Sitting down quietly in our chamber, can we not each one say that the Lord has favored him or her with some special token of divine love? I think there is something about each believer’s case which renders it special. We are none of us exactly like our brethren, for the manifestations of divine grace are very various; and there are some bright lines about your case, brother, which will be seen nowhere else, and some peculiar manifestations about your happiness, my sister, of which no one else can tell. I might not be straining words if I were to say to many a sister in Christ here, “Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.” And I might say the same to many a brother here: “Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among men. The Lord hath done great things for thee, and let thy spirit be glad.” True, there is one point in which we cannot be compared to Mary literally. She was to be the mother of the human nature of our Lord; but there is a parallel case in each one of us in which a higher mystery—a more spiritual mystery—gives us a like privilege, for, behold, the Holy Ghost dwells in each believer. He lives within us as within a temple, and reigns within us as in a palace. If we be partakers of the Holy Ghost, what more can we desire by way of favor from God, and what greater honor can be bestowed upon us? It was by her that the Word became incarnate, but so also is it by us, for we can make God’s Word stand out visibly

in our lives. It is ours to turn into actual, palpable existence among the sons of men the glorious Spirit of grace and truth which we find in the Word of God. Truly did our Lord speak when he said to his disciples, "These are my mother, and sister, and brother." We bear as close a relationship to Christ as did the Virgin mother, and we in some sense take the same position spiritually which she took up corporeally in reference to him. May he be formed in us the hope of glory, and may it be ours to tend his infant cause in the world, and watch over it as a nurse does over a child, and spend our life and strength in endeavoring to bring that infant cause to maturity, even though a sword should pass through our own heart while we cherish the babe.

But now, having introduced to you her *magnificat*, we will dwell upon these words, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," and I do earnestly hope that many of us can adopt the language without being guilty of falsehood: we can as truly say as Mary did, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." If there are any of you present to-night who cannot say it, get to your chambers, fall upon your knees, and cry to the Lord to help you to do so; for as long as a man cannot magnify God he is not fit for heaven, where the praises of God are the eternal occupation of all the blessed spirits. If you cannot magnify God, it probably is because you are magnifying yourself. May the Lord cut self down and make nothing of you, and then you will make everything of him. When you sink in your own estimation, then will God rise in your esteem. May God the Holy Ghost make it so.

I. Touching these words, I notice that, first, our text suggests to us AN OCCUPATION FOR ALL GRACIOUS PEOPLE: "My soul doth magnify the Lord." Here is an occupation for all of us who know the Lord, and have been born into his family.

Observe, it is an occupation which *may be followed by all sorts of people*. This humble woman speaks of her low estate, and yet she could magnify the Lord. All believers, of every rank and condition, can attend to this work. There are some things that you cannot do, but this one thing every gracious heart can do, and should delight to do, namely, to magnify the Lord.

This is an occupation which *can be followed in all places*. You need not go up to the meeting-house to magnify the Lord, you can do it at home: you need not step out of your own quiet little room, for you may sit still, and all alone you may magnify the Lord. You may be tossed about upon the sea in a storm, but you may trust his name, and be calm, and so magnify him. Or, you may be no traveler, and never go a hundred yards out of the village in which you were born, but you may magnify the Lord just as well for all that.

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

and in every place this hallowed occupation may be carried out, and we may always say—at least the place will not prevent our saying, "My soul doth magnify the Lord."

This is not an occupation which requires a crowded congregation, *it can be fitly performed in solitude*. I suppose that this sonnet of the Virgin was sung with only one to hear it, her cousin Elisabeth. There is a quorum for God's praise even where there is only one; but, where there are two that agree to praise God, then is the praise exceeding sweet. Ah, my dear sisters, you will never stand up to speak to thousands, and many of my brethren now present would be very timid if they had to praise the Lord before a score. Never mind about that. Praise does not require even two or three, but in the quiet of the night, or in the loneliness of the wood far away from the haunts of men, your soul may pursue this blessed task, and daily, hourly, constantly sing—"My soul doth magnify the Lord."

This is an occupation also, dear friends, which *requires no money*. Mary was a poor maiden. She had no gold or silver, and yet did she sweetly say, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." It is an honorable thing to be entrusted with this world's treasure to lay it out for Jesus. The church has its temporal needs, and happy is that man who is privileged to supply them: but this kind of work can be followed by the child who has no money, and by the workwoman who scarcely knows how to find herself in bread. It may be followed by the poor man reduced to the workhouse; and by the poor woman who lies in the infirmary breathing out her life. "My soul doth magnify the Lord," is as fit for paupers as for peers. Oh! these are golden notes, and those that use them have golden mouths, as golden as Chrysostom of old, even though they have to say, "Silver and gold have I none."

And this is an occupation, dear friends, which I commend to all here present, because *it does not require great talent*. A simpleton may sing "My soul doth magnify the Lord." We have each one a soul, and when that soul has been renewed by grace it can follow this blessed pursuit of magnifying the Lord. Perhaps you have not the abilities of Mary, for she was, doubtless, a woman of considerable culture, like Hannah who preceded her, whose song she partly borrowed. Hannah seems to me to be one of the most gifted women of the Old Testament, and to be worthy of more notice than is generally given to her. But if you could not write a hymn, if you could not compose a verse, if you have no ability that way, ay, and if you cannot sing—and there are some of us that have such cracked voices that we never shall, and there are one or two brethren here who have such bad ears for time that I generally hear them a note behind everybody else, as I did to-night—well, never mind about that, our souls can magnify the Lord. It is an occupation that does not depend upon the voice, or upon any kind of talent whatever. Those who sing worst to the ear of man may, perhaps, sing best to the ear of God; and those who have the least apparent ability may, from the warmth of their heart and the ardor of their devotion, really have the greatest capacity in God's judgment for magnifying his name.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord." I would invite all my brothers and sisters here to take this for their occupation as long as they live, and never to cease from it. Nay, even should death for a moment suspend it, let them so praise God that it shall be no new work for them to begin again and praise him for ever in heaven.

Dear friends, albeit that this magnifying of the Lord is an occupation to be taken up by all Christians, do not let us think little of it. To magnify the Lord seems to me *the grandest thing we mortals do*, for, as I have already said, it is the occupation of heaven. When the saints of the Most High pass into their glorified state they have nothing else to do but to magnify the Lord. The word signifies, to put it in a Saxon form instead of a Latin one, to "greaten God." We cannot make him really greater, but we can show forth his greatness. We can make him appear greater. We can make others have greater thoughts of him, and that we do when we are praising him. We can ourselves try to have greater and yet greater thoughts of him—make him to our apprehension a greater God than we once knew him to be; and this, I say, is no mean occupation, because it is followed in heaven by all redeemed and perfected spirits. Even here, it is the end of everything. Praying is the end of preaching, for preaching and hearing are nothing in themselves except men be brought to Christ and led to prayer. But then praying is not the end: praising is the end of praying. Prayer is the stalk of the wheat, but praise is the ear of the wheat: it is the harvest itself. When God is praised, we have come to the ultimatum. This is the thing for which all other things are designed. We are to be saved for this end, "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted

in the Beloved.” We are not saved for our own sakes. How often does the Scripture tell us this in sense, and sometimes in words, “Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you; be ashamed and be confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.” The glory of God is to my mind the highest conceivable end—it certainly is the chief end of my being. So, my dear brother, if you cannot go out to preach—if after looking over all your condition you feel that your sickness and other circumstances may excuse you from active service, and even if you are compelled to keep your bed, do not suppose that you are useless as to the highest end of your being. You may still serve it by lying upon the couch of pain and magnifying the Lord by patience. Have you ever looked at those lovely lilies which adorn our gardens with their golden petals and their milk-white leaves? How they praise God! And yet they never sing. You do not even hear a rustle, but they stand still and praise God by existing—by just, as it were, enjoying the sun and the dew, and showing what God can do. A genuine Christian shut up under pain and sickness may glorify God by being his beloved child, by receiving the love of God, by showing in his common-place daily character, which is only noticeable from its holiness, what the grace of God can do. Oh may this be the occupation of us all since it is so noble a pursuit! “My soul doth magnify the Lord.” Come, what are you doing to-night? Have you been during this day murmuring and complaining and grumbling? End that, and begin praising. Some of you are farmers, and I have no doubt you have grumbled because of the weather. I do not wonder, but I hope that you will not do it any more, but rather believe that God knows better about skies and clods and clouds and crops than you do. If we had the management of the weather, I have no doubt we think we should do it very splendidly, but I question whether we should not ruin all creation. Our great Lord and Master knows how to manage everything. Let us cease from all criticism of what he does, and say, “My soul does not grumble. My soul does not complain; I have taken up a better business than that. ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord.’ That is her one engagement from which she will never cease.”

II. Secondly, if you look at the text from another point of view, it provides for us A REMEDY FOR SELF-CONGRATULATION.

If any one of us had been favored, as the Virgin was, with the promise that we should become the *parent of the Savior*, do you not think that we should have felt exceedingly lifted up? It was natural that she should be proud, but it was gracious on her part that she was humble. Instead of magnifying herself she magnified the Lord. It was a great thing, and somebody must be magnified for it. Nature would have said, “Mary, magnify thyself”; but grace said, “Mary, magnify the Lord.” If the Lord has been very gracious to any one of us, our only way to escape from vain-glorious pride, which will be exceedingly wicked if we indulge in it, is by giving vent to our feelings in quite another direction. Do you notice how she sets off the greatness of God by her own insignificance? “He that is mighty hath done to me great things.” “To me,” she says. “They are great things, and he is mighty, but they are to me. He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.” Over against the greatness of God’s goodness to you be sure to set in contrast your own meanness and unworthiness. Has the Lord redeemed you, called you, justified you, sanctified you, set you in his church, and given you a name and a place among his people? When you are inclined to run up the topgallants, and to hang out all the flags, and to glory in your flesh, recollect who you are and what you are, and the hole of the pit whence you were drawn, and the rock out of which you were hewn, and say, “Why me, Lord? Why me?” Begin to magnify the name of the Lord, and that will be a death-blow to the temptation to pride.

Mary had a *specialty*: no one else should be the mother of our Lord: but so have we. Electing love has pitched on us. Many have been passed by, but the Lord has loved us with a special love; yet we cannot rejoice in it so as to glory in ourselves, for this election is according to his sovereign will, and not of ourselves. It is all of grace and free favor, and not according to merit. Hence my soul doth magnify the Lord for everlasting love and special redemption. Whence is this to me? What am I, and what is my father's house, that thou, O Lord, shouldst choose me?

Mary knew also that she was *to be famous*. "All generations shall call me blessed." But do notice how she balances her fame with another fame. She says, "Holy is his name, and his mercy is on them that fear him." She magnifies the name of the Lord. If he has given her a measure of honor, she lays it at his feet. Mind you do the same. Be not so vain as to be lifted up with a little success. We have all passed through this test of character, and in the fining-pot how few of us have borne the fire without loss! Perhaps you have preached a sermon and God has blessed it; the congregation is increased, and crowds are gathering; the probability is that the devil whispers, "You are a capital preacher. Well done! You put your point admirably: God is blessing you. There must be something admirable in your character and abilities." Away, away, thou fiend of the pit! This is ruinous pride! But suppose, dear brother, that the fiend will not go away while he finds you musing upon your success, what are you to do? Try him with this—"My soul doth magnify the Lord." Praise the name of the Lord that ever he should make use of such a poor, unsuitable instrument as yourself. Give him all the honor and all the glory, if honor and glory there be, and see if the arch-enemy does not take to flight, for God's praises are abhorrent to the devil.

In whatever capacity you are serving the Lord, if he puts any honor upon you, mind you give it all back to him. Sedulously and carefully endeavor to do this, for robbery here will be fatal; he will not give his glory to another. If we begin to pilfer even a little of the praise, we shall find that our Master will reckon us to be unfaithful stewards, and give us a discharge. If we glory in our strength, we may have to go out and shake ourselves like Samson when his hair was lost, because the Lord has taken our strength away from us. A heart that is lifted up with self-esteem will soon be cast down in the mire. Mary knew that God's favors are given to us, not that we may congratulate ourselves, but that we may worship him; and she acted accordingly. If grace be come to thee, my brother, it is a wanton waste of it to pride thyself upon it. Like the manna in the Israelite's house when kept till the morning, it will breed worms and stink: no worm ever brought swifter decay than pride. Bear the shield of thine honor as an armor-bearer for thy Lord, Know that thou hast nothing but what belongs to him. Use all for him, and glorify him for all, and in all; and so wilt thou do well. I recommend the text, then, as a cure for pride: "My soul doth magnify the Lord."

III. Thirdly, and I will be brief on each point, the text is A FRUITFUL UTTERANCE FOR HOLY FEELINGS. "My soul doth magnify the Lord," is evidently the overflow of a full soul.

There must have been great mixture of feeling in the heart of this holy woman; but these few words furnished expression for every variety of her emotions. Those feelings were of an opposite character, and yet they all spoke by this one sentence. It is clear that she was filled with *wonder*. Her thoughtful spirit asked, how can so great a thing be true to me? Shall the Son of the Highest be born of Mary, the village maiden? Oh, miracle of condescension! With the amazement there was mingled, not the unbelief which too often comes of wonder, but an *expectation* of the promised marvel. She believed that the things which were spoken to her would be performed by the Lord, and she looked that God should keep his word to her. How sweetly those two feelings, wonder and expectation, are blended, hidden away and yet expressed, in these few words, "My soul doth magnify

the Lord"! It is as though she had said, "I cannot understand the favor promised me. How glorious in his grace is the Lord my God! But I expect the blessing: I am sure of it, for the Lord is true! So I praise him concerning it." The sentence is tinged with two fair colors, the vermilion of wonder and the azure of hope, and they meet harmoniously upon the same ground. The words are wonderful on that account.

Now take two other mental states. The first would be her *believing*. She was not like Zacharias, who needed to be struck dumb because he doubted the word of the Lord. Mary had faith, and yet, at the same time she must have been *awe-stricken* by the revelation. That she should give birth to the Son of the Highest must have utterly abashed and overwhelmed her. Now both these states of mind are here—faith and awe. Faith says, "I know that the angel's message is true, and therefore my soul doth magnify the Lord." Awe says, "What a solemn thing it is that God should come to dwell in my breast! My soul doth magnify the Lord." Thus in these words confidence and reverence have met together, assurance and adoration have kissed each other. Here is faith with its familiarity, and devotion with its godly fear.

Here, also, you very clearly perceive two other holy emotions. Her *humility* is apparent, and in the text it seems to ask the question, "How can this happen to me? How can it be that such a poor woman, affianced to a humble carpenter, should be the mother of my Lord?" Humility sheds its perfume here, like a violet hidden away. She seems to say, "Not unto me, not unto me be the glory! My soul doth magnify the Lord." But that humility is not of the cringing and crouching kind which draws back from God, for it is clearly mixed with *love*. "I rejoice in my gracious Lord," she seems to say, "I bless him: I love him: I praise him. My soul doth magnify the Lord. I am not worthy of his promised visitation, but it will be mine, and infinite condescension will do this thing unto me. Therefore do I love my God, and I draw near to him. My soul doth magnify the Lord."

Brothers and sisters, you will often find the language of my text the most expressive of utterances for all that is good in your minds. Many sweet passions, like little birds, may fold their wings, and dwell together in this one well-compacted nest,—“My soul doth magnify the Lord,” Holy emotions may fly hither in swarms, and make the text like a hive of bees, stored with honey. As I turn and think it over, it sheds abroad its own spirit within me, as spices breathe out their own perfume, and I cry, “My soul doth magnify him.”

I think I perceive in these words a singular mixture of *admiration* and *calm thought*: a wonder in which there is no surprise. The blessed Virgin is evidently, as I have said before, wonder-struck that such a thing should come to her, and yet there is about that wonder no startling of amazement, but a marvelling which is the result of previous careful thought. She had considered the prophecies and promises, and saw them about to be fulfilled in her seed. She sang in the fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth verses, “He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.” She had turned over the subject in her mind, and she came to the conclusion, “He has said he will do this. It is as he spake.” So, oftentimes, when you get a mercy given to you, you will be surprised at it at first, but afterwards you will say, “This is even as the Lord promised to me. He doeth no new thing to his servant. It is only my forgetfulness that has made me to be astonished. Did he not promise that he would help me—that he would deliver me—that he would give me all that I needed? And inasmuch as he has done it in this surprising way, my soul doth magnify him twice over for the wonderful mercy, and for the faithfulness of his covenant love which kept the ancient promise which he made to be yea and amen in Christ Jesus.” Again, I say, I commend the text as an expression of your feelings. How sweet

are the words, "My soul doth magnify the Lord"! They are full, many-sided, and natural, and yet most spiritual.

IV. Fourthly, I think my text may be used as A REASON FOR HOPEFULNESS.

It would be well to be wrapped up in this spirit with regard to everything. The mood which bids us sing "My soul doth magnify the Lord" is full of a hope which will be useful in a thousand ways. For instance, concerning *our own providential condition*, let us magnify the Lord. Surrounded with difficulties, let us walk on with confidence, because our great God is equal to every emergency, and can both level the mountains and fill up the valleys. Burdened with labors and stripped by necessities, let us maintain an unchanging cheerfulness, because we magnify the might and the bounty of the eternal Jehovah, whose name is God All-sufficient. When danger is magnified by fear, let God be magnified by faith. When the troubles of our heart are enlarged, let our expectations from the Lord be enlarged also.

The same God-magnifying spirit should attend *our glances into futurity*, if we indulge in any, and we are all too apt to do so. Ah! we would like to know, some of us, what is going to happen to us. Fain would we steal a glance behind the screen, and each one see

"What gloomy lines are writ for me,
Or what dark scenes arise"

There is a desire in most persons' minds to draw away the curtain which God has so wisely placed over the future. This is very wrong of us, and yet it is as common as it is blamable. We all turn prophets every now and then, and when we do we prophesy evil, and therefore it would be well if we could catch the spirit of Mary with regard to our forecasts of the future, and say, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." Why do we set our blear-eyed anxieties to watch the signs of heaven? If we must pry, and guess, and speculate, why not employ our brighter powers, and let blue-eyed hope scan the ensigns of the sky? When we meddle with the future how dare we foretell that which would dishonor the Lord? If we must needs write bitter things against ourselves, yet we ought not to write untruthful things against *him*. When we do forecast the future at all, let us do it in the spirit wherewith we sing, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." Let us be certain that we shall find him to be a great God in the future, greatly good, wondrously gracious, magnifying his mercy. We shall have troubles, but our soul doth magnify the Lord, for she foresees that we shall ride out all storms with Jesus at the helm, and come safe into port. Our anxious eye foresees necessities, but our soul doth magnify the Lord, for she sees him with a golden key opening the treasures of David, and supplying all her wants. Our troubled ear can hear the wolf, but our soul doth magnify the Lord, for she sings, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and he will preserve me." In this spirit you may look forward to the swellings of Jordan, magnifying the living God while you yourself lie down to die. If you faint and begin to say, "Ah! I shall never be able to die triumphantly," you are minimizing, and not magnifying, the Lord. You are making him little, and not great. Try and say, "How marvellously will he show his grace to me, a dying worm! Oh, how wondrous he will be in the eyes of angels that will crowd the banks to' hear a poor trembling soul like me go singing through the stream! My God will be great in that day; then will he lay bare his arm, and therefore will I fear no evil, for he will be with me; his rod and his staff will comfort me." Think great things of God. Greaten God. Magnify his name whenever you look forward to the future. Chase from your mind any imagination or foreboding which would detract from the greatness or the goodness of your God.

Judge in the same manner with regard to *the salvation of your fellow-men*. Never say, "It is of no use inducing such a man to attend the means of grace. He is a blaspheming wretch. All that he would do if he heard a sermon would be to make sport of it for the next week. I have no faith in taking such a man to hear a ministry which he would be sure to ridicule." Such unbelieving talk is making little of God. Is it not so? Is it not dishonoring God to think that his gospel cannot reach the most depraved hearts? Why, if I knew that a man had seven thousand devils in him, I believe the gospel could drive them all out. Get the sinners under the sound of the word, and the worse they are, oftentimes, the more does God love to display the greatness of his grace in casting down the power of their sin. Believe great things of God. I can honestly say this—that since God saved me I never doubted his power to save anybody. All things are possible now that he has brought *me* to his feet, and kept me these years as his loving child. I must think great things of God who has done such great things for so great a sinner as I am. Greaten God, my brethren; greaten God. Believe great things of him. Believe that China can be made into a province of the celestial kingdom. Believe that India will cast her riches at Jesus' feet. Believe that the round world will yet be a pearl on Christ's finger-ring. Do not go in for the dispiriting, despairing, unmanly, un-Christly ideas of those who say, "The world is not to be converted. It is a poor wreck that will go to pieces, and we are to fish off here and there one from the water-logged hulk." Brethren, never believe that we are to stand by and see the eternal defeat of God. Deem not that our God is unable to win upon the old lines, and must needs shift the plan of the campaign. It shall never be said that God could not save the world by the preaching of the gospel, and by the work of the Holy Spirit, and therefore must needs bring in the advent of the Lord to do it. I believe in the coming of the Lord, but, blessed be his name, I believe also that the battle which he has begun in the Spirit he will fight out in the old style, and finish with a victory in the very manner in which he opened the conflict. It pleases him by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, and it will please him to continue to do so till the whole round earth shall ring with hallelujahs of praise to the grace of God, who by the feeblest of his creatures shall have defeated sin, and death, and hell. Do not get into a desponding state of mind, and rush into half-insane theories of prophecy in order to excuse your unbelief and idleness. Never throw down your weapons, and pretend that the victory is to be won by doting and dreaming: we are to fight to the end with the same weapons, and in the same name. We will drive the devil out of the world yet, by the grace of God, by the old, efficient weapons of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Greaten God, and magnify his name, by believing in the success of the gospel of his dear Son.

As to *the nearer future*, never believe any human prophecy that does not glorify God. Expect great things of God, and if you hear any prediction that is not to the glory of God, conclude that it is a blunder. "Oh!" said one to me, "this country will go back to Romanism: the gospel light will be quenched in England." Ah, dear me! Some brethren are mightily fond of this prognostication. But, my dear friend, there is one thing that always comforts me, namely, that God is not dead: and he is not going to be defeated by the pope of Rome, or fifty popes of Rome. He will win the victory yet. Always have courage, for it is God's cause, and it is in God's hands, and, being in God's hands, it is safe enough. See what you do:—because you cannot trust God's hand you trust your own! You thrust out your sacrilegious arm to interfere with God's peculiar work. What are you at? You are about to defile God's ark. Recollect the story of Uzzah. Pluck your hand back, and leave the ark alone. The Lord will help you to do such work as he gives you to do, but he has not made you Lord of empires, nor director of providence. Leave to his sovereign sway the purposes of his eternal

grace, and depend upon it he will bring the world to Jesus' feet. Christ himself shall come: be you looking for him every day, but be constant in his service, working for him every hour. Believe, too, that he shall reign amongst his ancients gloriously, and where amidst Judea's glades Christ has been dishonored and the false prophet has ruled, there too shall he reign, and Jew and Gentile shall worship and adore his ever-blessed name. I say again, magnify the Lord with all your souls. Greaten God. Expect great things in the future, and with the cheery note of confidence go forward to battle for him whose is the victory for ever and ever.

V. Once more, and I have done. Our text should be used as a GUIDE IN OUR THEOLOGY. We will finish with that. Here is a very useful test for young disciples who are beginning to study God's word. "My soul doth magnify the Lord." If you will carry this with you it will often save you from error, and guide you into truth. There is certain teaching which makes a great deal of man: it talks much of man's free-will, ability, capacity, and natural dignity. It evidently makes man the center and end of all things, and God is placed in a position of service to his creature. As for the Fall: father Adam slipped and broke his little finger, or something of the kind, but this theology sees no great ruin as the result of the fall. As for salvation: it is a slight cure for a small ill, and by no means the infinite grace which we consider it to be. Dear brethren, let those have this theology who like it, but do not you touch it even with a pair of tongs. It is of no use to man, for it mistakes his position, and only ministers to his pride. Man's place is not on the throne, but at the foot of the cross. Listen to another theology, in which the sinner is laid low, his sinfulness is exposed, his corruption is unfolded, Christ's redemption is magnified, free grace is extolled, and the Holy Ghost is adored. That is the theology for you, believe it: that is the theology of the Scriptures, accept it. I do not think that you will often be led wrong if this be your mode of judgment: that which glorifies God is true, and that which does not glorify God is false.

Sometimes you will meet with an undoubted teaching of God's word which you do not understand. You know that the doctrine is taught in the word, but you cannot make it coincide with some other truth, and you cannot quite see, perhaps, how it glorifies God. Then, dear brother, dear sister, glorify God by believing it. To believe a doctrine which you see to be true by mere reason is nothing very wonderful. There is no very great glory to God in believing what is as clear as the sun in the heavens; but to believe a truth when it staggers you—oh, gracious faith! oh, blessed faith! You will perhaps remember an illustration taken from Mr. Gough, where the little boy says, "If mother says it is so, it is so if it is not so." That is the kind of believing for a child towards its mother, and that is the sort of believing we ought to exercise towards God. I do not see the fact, and I cannot quite apprehend it, but God says it is so, and I believe *him*. If all the philosophers in the world should contradict the Scriptures, so much the worse for the philosophers; their contradiction makes no difference to our faith. Half a grain of God's word weighs more with us than a thousand tons of words or thoughts of all the modern theologians, philosophers, and scientists that exist on the face of the earth; for God knows more about his own works than they do. They do but think, but the Lord knows. With regard to truths which philosophers ought not to meddle with, because they have not specially turned their thoughts that way, they are not more qualified to judge than the poorest man in the church of God, nay, nor one-half so much. Inasmuch as the most learned unregenerate men are dead in sin, what do they know about the living things of the children of God? Instead of setting them to judge we will sooner trust our boys and girls that are just converted, for they do know something of divine things, but carnal philosophers know nothing of them. Do not be staggered, brothers and sisters, but honor God, glorify God, and magnify him by believing

great things and unsearchable—past your finding out—which you know to be true because he declares them to be so. Let the *ipse dixit* of God stand to you in the place of all reason, being indeed the highest and purest reason, for God, the Infallible, speaks what must be true.

So, then, I come back to where I started. Let us go forth and practically try to magnify the name of the Lord. Go home and speak well of his name: gather your children together and tell them what a good and great God he has been. Some of you who have a swarm of youngsters could not do better than spend half an hour in telling them of his goodness to you in all your times of trouble. Leave to your children the heirloom of gratitude. Tell them how good the Lord was to their father, and how good he will be to his children: tell your servants, tell your work-people, tell anybody with whom you come in contact what a blessed God the Lord is. For my part, I never can speak well enough of his adorable name. He is the best of masters, his service is delight; he is the best of fathers, his commands are pleasure. Was there ever such a god as our God, our enemies themselves being judges?

Magnify his name by the brightness of your countenances. Rejoice and be glad in him. When you are in sorrow and must needs fast, yet appear not unto men to fast, but anoint your faces and still wear a smile. Let not the world think that the servants of a king go mourning all their days. Make the world feel what a great God you serve, and what a blessed Savior Christ is, and thus evermore let your soul magnify the Lord. God grant you grace to do so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 34.

HYMNS FROM "Our Own Hymn Book"—174, 775.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

Dear Friends,—Your continued prayers are sought for the special services at the tabernacle, that by their success any injury occurring through the pastor's enforced absence may be remedied. It would be an affliction indeed if our life-work should suffer through painful sickness, which in itself is a heavy cross to bear. By your prayers this will be averted, and the trial will be turned into a blessing.

Right thankful am I to report rapid, and I trust real, progress in my own case. Living in an unbroken series of summer days, where no cold mists are dreamed of, it is no great marvel that rheumatic pains fly away, and depression of spirit departs. The healing Lord has breathed a restoring influence over land, and sea, and sky, and I am feeling it to my great joy. Hoping soon to be among my own people, and to issue sermons newly preached, I am, to my many hearty friends, their grateful servant.

C.H. Spurgeon

Menton, Jan. 8, 1880.

Salvation by Knowing the Truth

A Sermon

(No. 1516)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”—1 Timothy 2:3, 4.

MAY GOD THE HOLY GHOST guide our meditations to the best practical result this evening, that sinners may be saved and saints stirred up to diligence. I do not intend to treat my text controversially. It is like the stone which makes the corner of a building, and it looks towards a different side of the gospel from that which is mostly before us. Two sides of the building of truth meet here. In many a village there is a corner where the idle and the quarrelsome gather together; and theology has such corners. It would be very easy indeed to set ourselves in battle array, and during the next half-hour to carry on a very fierce attack against those who differ from us in opinion upon points which could be raised from this text. I do not see that any good would come of it, and, as we have very little time to spare, and life is short, we had better spend it upon something that may better tend to our edification. May the good Spirit preserve us from a contentious spirit, and help us really to profit by his word.

It is quite certain that when we read that God will have all men to be saved it does not mean that he wills it with the force of a decree or a divine purpose, for, if he did, then all men would be saved. He willed to make the world, and the world was made: he does not so will the salvation of all men, for we know that all men will not be saved. Terrible as the truth is, yet is it certain from holy writ that there are men who, in consequence of their sin and their rejection of the Savior, will go away into everlasting punishment, where shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. There will at the last be goats upon the left hand as well as sheep on the right, tares to be burned as well as wheat to be garnered, chaff to be blown away as well as corn to be preserved. There will be a dreadful hell as well as a glorious heaven, and there is no decree to the contrary.

What then? Shall we try to put another meaning into the text than that which it fairly bears? I trow not. You must, most of you, be acquainted with the general method in which our older Calvinistic friends deal with this text. “All men,” say they,—“that is, some men”: as if the Holy Ghost could not have said “some men” if he had meant some men. “All men,” say they; “that is, some of all sorts of men”: as if the Lord could not have said “all sorts of men” if he had meant that. The Holy Ghost by the apostle has written “all men,” and unquestionably he means all men. I know how to get rid of the force of the “alls” according to that critical method which some time ago was very current, but I do not see how it can be applied here with due regard to truth. I was reading just now the exposition of a very able doctor who explains the text so as to explain it away; he applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it. I thought when I read his exposition that it would have been a very capital comment upon the text if it had read, “Who *will not* have all men to be saved, nor come to a knowledge of the truth.” Had such been the inspired language every remark of the learned doctor would have been exactly in keeping, but as it happens

to say, “Who *will* have all men to be saved,” his observations are more than a little out of place. My love of consistency with my own doctrinal views is not great enough to allow me knowingly to alter a single text of Scripture. I have great respect for orthodoxy, but my reverence for inspiration is far greater. I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent with the word of God. I never thought it to be any very great crime to seem to be inconsistent with myself; for who am I that I should everlastingly be consistent? But I do think it a great crime to be so inconsistent with the word of God that I should want to lop away a bough or even a twig from so much as a single tree of the forest of Scripture. God forbid that I should cut or shape, even in the least degree, any divine expression. So runs the text, and so we must read it, “God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”

Does not the text mean that it is the wish of God that men should be saved? The word “wish” gives as much force to the original as it really requires, and the passage should run thus—“whose wish it is that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.” As it is my wish that it should be so, as it is *your* wish that it might be so, so it is God’s wish that all men should be saved; for, assuredly, he is not less benevolent than we are. Then comes the question, “But if he wishes it to be so, why does he not make it so?” Beloved friend, have you never heard that a fool may ask a question which a wise man cannot answer, and, if that be so, I am sure a wise person, like yourself, can ask me a great many questions which, fool as I am, I am yet not foolish enough to try to answer. Your question is only one form of the great debate of all the ages,—“If God be infinitely good and powerful, why does not his power carry out to the full all his beneficence?” It is God’s wish that the oppressed should go free, yet there are many oppressed who are not free. It is God’s wish that the sick should not suffer. Do you doubt it? Is it not your own wish? And yet the Lord does not work a miracle to heal every sick person. It is God’s wish that his creatures should be happy. Do you deny that? He does not interpose by any miraculous agency to make us all happy, and yet it would be wicked to suppose that he does not wish the happiness of all the creatures that he has made. He has an infinite benevolence which, nevertheless, is not in all points worked out by his infinite omnipotence; and if anybody asked me why it is not, I cannot tell. I have never set up to be an explainer of all difficulties, and I have no desire to do so. It is the same old question as that of the negro who said, “Sare, you say the devil makes sin in the world.” “Yes, the devil makes a deal of sin.” “And you say that God hates sin.” “Yes.” “Then why does not he kill the devil and put an end to it?” Just so. Why does he not? Ah, my black friend, you will grow white before that question is answered. I cannot tell you why God permits moral evil, neither can the ablest philosopher on earth, nor the highest angel in heaven.

This is one of those things which we do not need to know. Have you never noticed that some people who are ill and are ordered to take pills are foolish enough to chew them? That is a very nauseous thing to do, though I have done it myself. The right way to take medicine of such a kind is to swallow it at once. In the same way there are some things in the Word of God which are undoubtedly true which must be swallowed at once by an effort of faith, and must not be chewed by perpetual questioning. You will soon have I know not what of doubt and difficulty and bitterness upon your soul if you must needs know the unknowable, and have reasons and explanations for the sublime and the mysterious. Let the difficult doctrines go down whole into your very soul, by a grand exercise of confidence in God.

I thank God for a thousand things I cannot understand. When I cannot get to know the reason why, I say to myself, “Why should I know the reason why? Who am I, and what am I, that I should

demand explanations of my God?" I am a most unreasonable being when I am most reasonable, and when my judgment is most accurate I dare not trust it. I had rather trust my God. I am a poor silly child at my very best: my Father must know better than I. An old parable-maker tells us that he shut himself up in his study because he had to work out a difficult problem. His little child came knocking at the door, and he said "Go away, John: you cannot understand what father is doing; let father alone." Master Johnny for that very reason felt that he must get in and see what father was doing—a true symbol of our proud intellects; we must pry into forbidden things, and uncover that which is concealed. In a little time upon the sill, outside the window, stood Master Johnny, looking in through the window at his father; and if his father had not with the very tenderest care just taken him away from that very dangerous position, there would have been no Master Johnny left on the face of the earth to exercise his curiosity in dangerous elevations. Now, God sometimes shuts the door, and says, "My child, it is so: be content to believe." "But," we foolishly cry. "Lord, why is it so?" "It is so, my child," he says. "But why, Father, is it so?" "It is so, my child, believe me." Then we go speculating, climbing the ladders of reasoning, guessing, speculating, to reach the lofty windows of eternal truth. Once up there we do not know where we are, our heads reel, and we are in all kinds of uncertainty and spiritual peril. If we mind things too high for us we shall run great risks. I do not intend meddling with such lofty matters. There stands the text, and I believe that it is my Father's wish that "all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." But I know, also, that he does not will it, so that he will save any one of them, unless they believe in his dear Son; for he has told us over and over that he will not. He will not save any man except he forsakes his sins, and turns to him with full purpose of heart: that I also know. And I know, also, that he has a people whom he will save, whom by his eternal love he has chosen, and whom by his eternal power he will deliver. I do not know how that squares with this; that is another of the things I do not know. If I go on telling you of all that I do not know, and of all that I do know, I will warrant you that the things that I do not know will be a hundred to one of the things that I do know. And so we will say no more about the matter, but just go on to the more practical part of the text. God's wish about man's salvation is this,—that men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Men are saved, and the same men that are saved come to a knowledge of the truth. The two things happen together, and the two facts very much depend upon each other. God's way of saving men is not by leaving them in ignorance. It is by *a knowledge of the truth that men are saved*; this will make the main body of our discourse, and in closing we shall see how this truth *gives instruction to those who wish to be saved, and also to those who desire to save others*. May the Holy Spirit make these closing inferences to be practically useful.

Here is our proposition: **IT IS BY A KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH THAT MEN ARE SAVED.**

Observe that stress is laid upon the article: it is *the* truth, and not every truth. Though it is a good thing to know the truth about anything, and we ought not to be satisfied to take up with a falsehood upon any point, yet it is not every truth that will save us. We are not saved by knowing any one theological truth we may choose to think of, for there are some theological truths which are comparatively of inferior value. They are not vital or essential, and a man may know them, and yet may not be saved. It is *the* truth which saves. Jesus Christ is *the* truth: the whole testimony of God about Christ is *the* truth. The work of the Holy Ghost in the heart is to work in us *the* truth. The knowledge of the truth is a large knowledge. It is not always so at the first: it may begin with

but a little knowledge, but it is a large knowledge when it is further developed, and the soul is fully instructed in the whole range of the truth.

This knowledge of the grand facts which are here called the truth saves men, and we will notice its mode of operation. Very often it begins its work in a man by arousing him, and thus it *saves him from carelessness*. He did not know anything about the truth which God has revealed, and so he lived like a brute beast. If he had enough to eat and to drink he was satisfied. If he laid by a little money he was delighted. So long as the days passed pretty merrily, and he was free from aches and pains, he was satisfied. He heard about religion, but he thought it did not concern him. He supposed that there were some people who might be the better for thinking about it, but as far as he was concerned, he thought no more about God or godliness than the ox of the stall or the ostrich of the desert. Well, the truth came to him, and he received a knowledge of it. He knew only a part, and that a very dark and gloomy part of it, but it stirred him out of his carelessness, for he suddenly discovered that he was under the wrath of God. Perhaps he heard a sermon, or read a tract, or had a practical word addressed to him by some Christian friend, and he found out enough to know that “he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God.” That startled him. “God is angry with the wicked every day:”—that amazed him. He had not thought of it, perhaps had not known it, but when he did know it, he could rest no longer. Then he came to a knowledge of this farther truth, that after death there would be a judgment, that he would rise again, and that, being risen, he would have to stand before the judgment-seat of God to give an account of the things which he had done in the body. This came home very strikingly to him. Perhaps, also, such a text as this flamed forth before him,—“For every idle word that man shall speak he must give an account in the day of judgment.” His mind began to foresee that last tremendous day, when on the clouds of heaven Christ will conic and summon quick and dead, to answer at his judgment-seat for the whole of their lives. He did not know that before, but, knowing it, it startled and aroused him. I have known men, when first they have come to a knowledge of this truth, become unable to sleep. They have started up in the night. They have asked those who were with them to help them to pray. The next day they have been scarcely able to mind their business, for a dreadful sound has been in their ears. They feared lest they should stumble into the grave and into hell. Thus they were saved from carelessness. They could not go back to be the mere brute beasts they were before. Their eyes had been opened to futurity and eternity. Their spirits had been quickened—at least so much that they could not rest in that doltish, dull, dead carelessness in which they had formerly been found. They were shaken out of their deadly lethargy by a knowledge of the truth.

The truth is useful to a man in another way: *it saves him from prejudice*. Often when men are awakened to know something about the wrath of God they begin to plunge about to discover divers methods by which they may escape from that wrath. Consulting, first of all, with themselves, they think that, if they can reform—give up their grosser sins, and if they can join with religious people, they will make it all right. And there are some who go and listen to a kind of religious teacher, who says, “You must do good works. You must earn a good character. You must add to all this the ceremonies of our church. You must be particular and precise in receiving blessing only through the appointed channel of the apostolical succession.” Of the aforesaid mystical succession this teacher has the effrontery to assure his dupe that he is a legitimate instrument; and that sacraments received at his hands are means of grace. Under such untruthful notions we have known people who were somewhat aroused sit down again in a false peace. They have done all that they judged right and attended to all that they were told. Suddenly, by God’s grace, they come to a knowledge

of another truth, and that is that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God. They discover that salvation is not by works of the law or by ceremonies, and that if any man be under the law he is also under the curse. Such a text as the following comes home, "Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"; and such another text as this, "Ye must be born again," and then this at the back of it—"that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." When they also find out that there is necessary a righteousness better than their own—a perfect righteousness to justify them before God, and when they discover that they must be made new creatures in Christ Jesus, or else they must utterly perish, then they are saved from false confidences, saved from crying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. It is a grand thing when a knowledge of the truth stops us from trusting in a lie. I am addressing some who remember when they were saved in that way. What an opening of the eyes it was to you! You had a great prejudice against the gospel of grace and the plan of salvation by faith; but when the Lord took you in hand and made you see your beautiful righteousness to be a moth-eaten mass of rags, and when the gold that you had accumulated suddenly turned into so much brass, cankered, and good for nothing,—when you stood stripped naked before God, and the poor cobwebs of ceremonies suddenly dropped from off you, oh, then the Lord was working his salvation in your soul, and you were being saved from false confidences by a knowledge of the truth.

Moreover, it often happens that a knowledge of the truth stands a man in good stead for another purpose; *it saves him from despair*. Unable to be careless, and unable to find comfort in false confidences, some poor agitated minds are driven into a wide and stormy sea without rudder or compass, with nothing but wreck before them. "There is no hope for me," says the man. "I perceive I cannot save myself. I see that I am lost. I am dead in trespasses and sins, and cannot stir hand or foot. Surely now I may as well go on in sin, and even multiply my transgressions. The gate of mercy is shut against me; what is the use of fear where there is no room for hope?" At such a time, if the Lord leads the man to a knowledge of the truth, he perceives that though his sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool, and though they be red like crimson they shall be as white as snow. That precious doctrine of substitution comes in—that Christ stood in the stead of the sinner, that the transgression of his people was laid upon him, and that God, by thus avenging sin in the person of his dear Son, and honoring his law by the suffering of the Savior, is now able to declare pardon to the penitent and grace to the believing. Now, when the soul comes to know that sin is put away by the atoning blood; when the heart discovers that it is not our life that saves us, but the life of God that comes to dwell in us; that we are not to be regenerated by our own actions, but are regenerated by the Holy Ghost who comes to us through the precious death of Jesus, then despair flies away, and the soul cries exultingly, "There is hope. There is hope. Christ died for sinners: why should I not have a part in that precious death? He came like a physician to heal the sick: why should he not heal me? Now I perceive that he does not want my goodness, but my badness; he does not need my righteousness, but my unrighteousness: for he came to save the ungodly and to redeem his people from their sins. I say, when the heart comes to a knowledge of this truth, then it is saved from despair; and this is no small part of the salvation of Jesus Christ.

A saving knowledge of the truth, to take another line of things, works in this way. A knowledge of the truth *shows a man his personal need of being saved*. O you that are not saved, and who dream you do not need to be, you only require to know the truth, and you will perceive that you must be saved or lost for ever.

A knowledge of the truth *reveals the atonement by which we are saved*: a knowledge of the truth *shows us what that faith is by which the atonement becomes available for us*: a knowledge of the truth teaches us that faith is the simple act of trusting, that it is not an action of which man may boast; it is not an action of the nature of a work, so as to be a fruit of the law; but faith is a self-denying grace which finds all its strength in him upon whom it lives, and lays all its honor upon him. Faith is not self in action but self forsaken, self abhorred, self put away that the soul may trust in Christ, and trust in Christ alone. There are persons now present who are puzzled about what faith is. We have tried to explain it a great many times to you, but we have explained it so that you did not understand it any the better; and yet the same explanation has savingly instructed others. May God the Holy Ghost open your understandings that you may practically know what faith is, and at once exercise it. I suppose that it is a very hard thing to understand because it is so plain. When a man wishes the way of salvation to be difficult he naturally kicks at it because it is easy; and, when his pride wants it to be hard to be understood, he is pretty sure to say that he does not understand it because it is so plain. Do not you know that the unlettered often receive Christ when philosophers refuse him, and that he who has not called ninny of the great, and many of the mighty, has chosen poor, foolish, and despised things? That is because poor foolish men, you know, are willing to believe a plain thing, but men wise in their own conceits desire to be, if they can, a little confounded and puzzled that they may please themselves with the idea that their own superior intellect has made a discovery; and, because the way of salvation is just so easy that almost an idiot boy may lay hold of it, therefore they pretend that they do not understand it. Some people cannot see a thing because it is too high up; but there are others who cannot see it because it is too low down. Now, it so happens that the way of salvation by faith is so simple that it seems beneath the dignity of exceedingly clever men. May God bring them to a knowledge of this truth: may they see that they cannot be saved except by giving up all idea of saving themselves; that they cannot be saved except they step right into Christ, for, until they get to the end of the creature, they will never get to the beginning of the Creator. Till they empty out their pockets of every mouldy crust, and have not a crumb left; they cannot come and take the rich mercy which is stored up in Christ Jesus for every empty, needy sinner. May the Lord be pleased to give you that knowledge of the truth!

When a man comes in very deed to a knowledge of the truth about faith in Christ, he trusts Christ, and he is there and then saved from the guilt of sin; and he begins to be saved altogether from sin. God cuts the root of the power of sin that very day; but yet it has such life within itself that at the scent of water it will bud again. Sin in our members struggles to live. It has as many lives as a cat: there is no killing it. Now, when we come to a knowledge of the truth, we begin to learn how sin is to be killed in us—how the same Christ that justifies, sanctifies, and works in us according to his working who worketh in us mightily, that we may be conformed to the image of Christ, and made meet to dwell with perfect saints above. Beloved, many of you that are saved from the guilt of sin, have a very hard struggle with the power of sin, and have much more conflict, perhaps, than you need to have, because you have not come to a knowledge of all the truth about indwelling sin. I therefore beg you to study much the word of God upon that point, and especially to see the adaptation of Christ to rule over your nature, and to conquer all your corrupt desires, and learn how by faith to bring each sin before him that, like Agag, it may be hewed in pieces before his eyes. You will never overcome sin except by the blood of the Lamb. There is no sanctification except by faith. The same instrument which destroys sin as to its guilt must slay sin as to its power.

“They overcame by the blood of the Lamb,” and so must you. Learn this truth well, so shall you find salvation wrought in you from day to day.

Now, I think I hear somebody say, “I think I know all about this.” Yes, you may think you know it, and may not know anything at all about it. ” Oh, but,” says one, “I do know it. I learned the ‘Assembly’s Catechism’ when I was a child. I have read the Bible ever since, and I am well acquainted with all the commonplaces of orthodoxy.” That may be, dear friend, and yet you may not know the truth. I have heard of a man who knew how to swim, but, as he had never been in the water, I do not think much of his knowledge of swimming: in fact, he did not really know the art. I have heard of a botanist who understood all about flowers, but as he lived in London, and scarcely ever saw above one poor withered thing in a flowerpot, I do not think much of his botany. I have heard of a man who was a very great astronomer, but he had not a telescope, and I never thought much of his astronomy. So there are many persons who think they know and yet do not know because they have never had any personal acquaintance with the thing. A mere notional knowledge or a dry doctrinal knowledge is of no avail. We must know the truth in a very different way from that.

How are we to know it, then? Well, we are to know it, first, by *a believing knowledge*. You do not know a thing unless you believe it to be really so. If you doubt it, you do not know it. If you say, “I really am not sure it is true,” then you cannot say that you know it. That which the Lord has revealed in holy Scripture you must devoutly believe to be true. In addition to this, your knowledge, if it becomes believing knowledge, must be *personal knowledge*—a persuasion that it is true in reference to yourself. It is true about your neighbor, about your brother, but you must believe it about *yourself*, or your knowledge is vain—for instance, you must know that *you* are lost—that *you* are in danger of eternal destruction from the presence of God—that for *you* there is no hope but in Christ—that for *you* there is hope if you rest in Christ—that resting in Christ *you* are saved. Yes, *you*. You must know that because you have trusted in Christ *you* are saved, and that now *you* are free from condemnation, and that now in *you* the new life has begun, which will fight against the old life of sin, until it overcome, and you, even you, are safely landed on the golden shore. There must be a personal appropriation of what you believe to be true. That is the kind of knowledge which saves the soul.

But this must be *a powerful knowledge*, by which I mean that it must operate in and upon your mind. A man is told that his house is on fire. I will suppose that standing here I held up a *telegram*, and said, “My friend, is your name so-and-so?” “Yes.” “Well, your house is on fire.” He knows the fact, does he not? Yes, but he sits quite still. Now, my impression is about that good brother, that he does not know, for he does not believe it. He cannot believe it, surely he may believe that somebody’s house is on fire, but not his own. If it is his house which is burning, and he knows it, what does he do? Why he gets up and goes off to see what he can do towards saving his goods. That is the kind of knowledge which saves the soul—when a man knows the truth about himself, and therefore his whole nature is moved and affected by the knowledge. Do I know that I am in danger of hell fire? And am I in my senses? Then I shall never rest till I have escaped from that danger. Do I know that there is salvation for me in Christ? Then I never shall be content until I have obtained that salvation by the faith to which that salvation is promised: that is to say, if I really am in my senses, and if my sin has not made me beside myself as sin does, for sin works a moral madness upon the mind of man, so that he puts bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, and dances on

the jaws of hell, and sits down and scoffs at Almighty mercy, despises the precious blood of Christ and will have none of it, although there and there only is his salvation to be found.

This knowledge when it comes really to save the soul is what we call *experimental knowledge*—knowledge acquired according to the exhortation of the psalmist, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good”—acquired by tasting. Now, at this present moment, I, speaking for myself, know that I am origin ally lost by nature. Do I believe it? Believe it? I am as sure of it as I am of my own existence. I know that I am lost by nature. It would not be possible for anybody to make me doubt that: I have felt it. How many weary days I spent under the pressure of that knowledge! Does a soldier know that there is such a thing as a cat when he has had a hundred lashes? It would take a deal of argument to make him believe there is not such a thing, or that backs do not smart when they feel the lash. Oh, how my soul smarted under the lash of conscience when I suffered under a sense of sin! Do I know that I could not save myself? Know it? Why, my poor, struggling heart labored this way and that, even as in the very fire with bitter disappointment, for I labored to climb to the stars on a treadmill, and I was trying and trying and trying with all my might, but never rose an inch higher. I tried to fill a bottomless tub with leaking buckets, and worked on and toiled and slaved, but never accomplished even the beginning of my unhappy task. I know, for I have tried it, that salvation is not in man, or in all the feelings, and weepings, and prayings, and Bible readings, and church goings, and chapel goings which zeal could crowd together. Nothing whatsoever that man does can avail him towards his own salvation. This I know by sad trial of it, and failure in it.

But I do know that there is real salvation by believing in Christ. Know it? I have never preached to you concerning that subject what I do not know by experience. In a moment, when I believed in Christ I leaped from despair to fullness of delight. Since I have believed in Jesus I have found myself totally new—changed altogether from what I was; and I find now that, in proportion as I trust in Jesus, I love God and try to serve him; but if at any time I begin to trust in myself, I forget my God, and I become selfish and sinful. Just as I keep on being nothing and taking Christ to be everything, so am I led in the paths of righteousness. I am merely talking of myself, because a man cannot bear witness about other people so thoroughly as he can about himself. I am sure that all of you who have tried my Master can bear the same witness. You have been saved, and you have come to a knowledge of the truth experimentally; and every soul here that would be saved must in the same way believe the truth, appropriate the truth, act upon the truth, and experimentally know the truth, which is summed up in few words:—“Man lost: Christ his Savior. Man nothing: God all in all. The heart depraved: the Spirit working the new life by faith.” The Lord grant that these truths may come home to your hearts with power.

I am now going to draw two inferences which are to be practical. The first one is this: in regard TO YOU THAT ARE SEEKING SALVATION. Does not the text show you that it is very possible that the reason why you have not found salvation is because you do not know the truth? Hence, I do most earnestly entreat the many of you young people who cannot get rest to be very diligent searchers of your Bibles. The first thing and the main thing is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but if you say, “I do not understand it,” or “I cannot believe,” or if there be any such doubt rising in your mind, then it may be because you have not gained complete knowledge of the truth. It is very possible that somebody will say to you, “Believe, believe, believe.” I would say the same to you, but I should like you to act upon the common-sense principle of knowing what is to be believed and in whom you are to believe. I explained this to one who came to me a few evenings ago. She

said that she could not believe. "Well," I said, "now suppose as you sit in that chair I say to you, 'Young friend, I cannot believe in you': you would say to me, 'I think you should.' Suppose I then replied, 'I wish I could.' What would you bid me do? Should I sit still and look at you till I said, 'I think I can believe in you'? That would be ridiculous. No, I should go and enquire, 'Who is this young person? What kind of character does she bear? What are her connections?' and when I knew all about you, then I have no doubt that I should say, 'I have made examination into this young woman's character, and I cannot help believing in her.'" Now, it is just so with Jesus Christ. If you say, "I cannot believe in him," read those four blessed testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and especially linger much over those parts where they tell you of his death. Do you know that many, while they have been sitting, as it were, at the foot of the cross, viewing the Son of God dying for men, have cried out, "I cannot help believing. I cannot help believing. When I see my sin, it seems too great; hut when I see my Savior my iniquity vanishes away." I think I have put it to you sometimes like this: if you take a ride through London, from end to end, it will take you many days to get an idea of its vastness; for probably none of us know the size of London. After your long ride of inspection you will say, "I wonder how those people can all be fed. I cannot make it out. Where does all the bread come from, and all the butter, and all the cheese, and all the meat, and everything else? Why, these people will be starved. It is not possible that Lebanon with all its beasts, and the vast plains of Europe and America should ever supply food sufficient for all this multitude." That is your feeling. And then, to-morrow morning you get up, and you go to Covent Garden, you go to the great meat-markets, and to other sources of supply, and when you come home you say, "I feel quite different now, for now I cannot make out where all the people come from to eat all this provision: I never saw such store of food in all my life. Why, if there were two Londons, surely there is enough here to feed them." Just so—when you think about your sins and your wants you get saying, "How can I be saved?" Now, turn your thoughts the other way; think that Christ is the Son of God: think of what the merit must be of the incarnate God's hearing human guilt; and instead of saying, "My sin is too great," you will almost think the atoning sacrifice too great. Therefore I do urge you to try and know more of Christ; and I am only giving you the advice of Isaiah, "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." Know, hear, read, and believe more about these precious things, always with this wish—"I am not hearing for hearing's sake, and I am not wishing to know for knowing's sake, but I am wanting to hear and to know that I may be saved." I want you to be like the woman that lost her piece of silver. She did not light a candle and then say, "Bravo, I have lit a candle, this is enough." She did not take her broom and then sit down content, crying, "What a splendid broom." When she raised a dust she did not exclaim, "What a dust I am making! I am surely making progress now." Some poor sinners, when they have been seeking, get into a dust of soul-trouble, and think it to be a comfortable sign. No, I'll warrant you, the woman wanted her groat: she did not mind the broom, or the dust, or the candle; she looked for the silver. So it must be with you. Never content yourself with the reading, the hearing, or the feeling. It is Christ you want. It is the precious piece of money that you must find; and you must sweep until you find it. Why, there it is! There is Jesus! Take him! Take him! Believe him now, even now, and you are saved.

The last inference is for **YOU WHO DESIRE TO SAVE SINNERS**. You must, dear friends, bring *the truth* before them when you want to bring them to Jesus Christ. I believe that exciting meetings do good to some. Men are so dead and careless that almost anything is to be tolerated that wakes them up; but for real solid soul-work before God' telling men the truth is the main thing.

What truth? It is gospel truth, truth about Christ that they want. Tell it in a loving, earnest, affectionate manner, for God wills that they should be saved, not in any other way, but in this way—by a knowledge of the truth. He wills that all men should be saved in this way—not by keeping them in ignorance, but by bringing the truth before them. That is God’s way of saving them. Have your Bible handy when you are reasoning with a soul. Just say, “Let me call your attention to this passage.” It has a wonderful power over a poor staggering soul to point to the Book itself. Say, “Did you notice this promise, my dear friend? And have you seen that passage?” Have the Scriptures handy. There is a dear brother of mine here whom God blesses to many souls, and I have seen him talking to some, and turning to the texts very handily. I wondered how he did it so quickly, till I looked in his Bible, and found that he had the choice texts printed on two leaves and inserted into the book, so that he could always open upon them. That is a capital plan, to get the cheering words ready to hand, the very ones that you know have comforted you and have comforted others. It sometimes happens that one single verse of God’s word will make the light to break into a soul, when fifty days of reasoning would not do it. I notice that when souls are saved it is by our texts rather than by our sermons. God the Holy Ghost loves to use his own sword. It is God’s word, not man’s comment on God’s word, that God usually blesses. Therefore, stick to the quotation of the Scripture itself, and rely upon *the truth*. If a man could be saved by a lie it would be a lying salvation. Truth alone can work results that are true. Therefore, keep on teaching *the truth*. God help you to proclaim the precious truth about the bleeding, dying, risen, exalted, coming Savior; and God will bless it.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Timothy 2.

HYMNS FROM “Our Own Hymn Book”—551, 546, 556.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—Accept again my heartiest salutations. I hope soon to issue sermons preached at home on the previous Sabbaths, for I purpose, if the Lord will, to leave this shelter on February 2, or thereabouts. Six weeks of continuous fine weather have by God’s blessing delivered me from my pains, and enabled me to regain a large measure of strength; and the daily good tidings from home has also helped to quiet my mind and revive my spirit. O that I may be the better for this affliction. As after heavy showers the fountains and brooks run with new force and fullness, so may it be with these sermons now that with me “the rain is over and gone.” If you, dear readers, are the more refreshed I shall count pain and weakness to be a small cost for so blessed a result.

Yours most heartily

C.H. Spurgeon

Menton, January 16, 1880.

For the Candid and Thoughtful

A Sermon

(No. 1517)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And when Jesus saw” [“saw him,” so it should be] “that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”—Mark 12:34.

THIS MAN BEGAN with Christ as a foe, and he ended as a friend. It does not quite appear from Mark, but it is plainly stated by Matthew, that the scribe asked a question of the Savior “tempting him.” He was, therefore, an enemy. Put the mildest sense you like on the word “tempt” and it will retain the idea of an unfriendly testing; yet nothing could be more hearty in the end than the verdict with which he commended our Lord’s answer, “Well, Master, thou hast said the truth.” Our Lord Jesus Christ has an almighty power over men’s minds; he possesses irresistible charms by which he turns adversaries into advocates. He has a secret key which fits the wards of human hearts, and he can open that which seems to be the most securely closed against him. “Never man spake like this man,” for in his voice, even in his humiliation, there were traces of the eternal fiat which of old spake the primeval midnight into noon.

It strikes me that this scribe was half-hearted in the work of tempting our Lord, even at the first. I should imagine him to have been a very superior man amongst his fellows, a man of greater light and discernment than the rest, and of greater ability in statement and discussion. Possibly for this cause his brother scribes selected him, and put him forward to ask the testing questions. Now, it will sometimes happen that a man is thrust forward by others to do what he would never have thought of doing of his own accord, and quite unwillingly he acts as the mouthpiece of a set of people whom he half despises. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a ready reader of human hearts, and he very soon discovers whether what a man does is being done of himself or whether he is acted upon by a power behind. He discerns the difference between the malicious adversary and the less guilty victim of circumstances. These words of mine may be reaching persons who have opposed a religious movement, or fought against a gracious truth, not because they themselves would have done so if they had been left alone, but others have egged them on and made use of them, and thus they have been drawn or driven into a false position. The people whom they have been accustomed to lead have led them: it is too often the fate of leaders. The circle of which they have been the center and the head has imprisoned its own apparent master, and made him captive, so that he fights against that which in his heart he half suspects to be right. If, even now, he could be set free from his surroundings he would side with the right. Friend, my blessed Master can read your heart, and understand the pressure under which you are acting. I pray that as he reads your inmost soul he may see what of good there remaineth among the evil, and deliver you out of the false and dangerous position into which you have drifted. Jesus can set you right, my friend—can take you away from the entanglements of your surroundings, sever you from those who are making a tool of you, but who are at the same time sinking you down to their own level: can bring you to be his own friend, and lift you up to his own standard, so that you too shall be the champion of everything that is good

and true, and shall go forward with him as your Master, bearing his cross, and looking to wear his crown.

Although the scribe in the narrative before us appeared first under the aspect of an antagonist, and tried to tempt our Lord, yet before long the great Teacher had put him into such a mental condition that he said of him, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." At this time I shall first notice *the commendation which is here expressed*; and then, in the second place, I shall dwell for a little while upon *the question which is here suggested*—suggested, I think, by no idle curiosity, but very naturally suggested: Did this man, who was so near to the kingdom, actually enter it, or did he not?

I. May the Holy Spirit instruct and impress us while, first, we consider the COMMENDATION EXPRESSED:—"THOU art not far from the kingdom of God." I am not going to use this text after the usual fashion. It has been made the heading of a catalogue of characters who are supposed to be not far from the kingdom of God. It is a very proper thing to address hopeful persons, and to give descriptions of conditions about which there is much that is cheering, and yet much to create anxiety; but the text itself does not deal with many cases, but with one whom Jesus judged to be not far from the kingdom of God, of whom it gives us such information that we see why he was thus spoken of. It speaks of one particular individual: "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God*"; and it tells us that Jesus said this because he saw that he answered discreetly. We may infer without fear of mistake that any man who would answer as this man answered is not far from the kingdom of God. Let us read his answer: "Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but he; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices."

With care let us investigate this reply, and see how far it might be our own language. The first point in which our Savior saw that the scribe was not far from the kingdom of God was this, that *he possessed candour*, and possessed so much of it that he rose superior to party considerations. He was a scribe, and naturally he took the side of the scribes and pharisees, but still he was not so much a scribe and pharisee that he would follow them against the truth. He kept himself open to conviction, and as soon as the Savior had given a fitting answer to the question, he did not, as other pharisees would have done, sneer at him, and continue still to pick fresh holes in his coat, but, like a candid man, he said, "Well, master, thou hast answered rightly"; and thus he did, as it were, separate himself from the unjust and bigoted party for whom he had been the temporary spokesman. He did not avow himself to be a disciple of Christ, yet he gave the great Teacher his due, and said of him what he felt bound to say, namely, that he had answered rightly. Now, my brethren, there is always some hope of a man who is candid, and there is more hope still of one who, being placed by circumstances amongst the bigoted and prejudiced, nevertheless breaks away from bondage, keeps a conscience, preserves his eye from total blindness, is willing to see light if light is to be had, and is anxious to know the truth if the truth can be brought before him. It gives me great delight to meet with such persons, even though they confess that they are of a sceptical turn of mind, when it is clear that they are ready to yield to evidence, and are not mere cavillers. Time is wasted upon men who have made up their minds, or who have no minds to make up, but enquirers are worth trouble, and those who will admit right and truth when they see it are among the most hopeful of hearers. We do not wish people to open their mouths and shut their eyes and swallow everything that we may like to give them, yet the mouth ought to be open, or at least willing to be opened, as

well as the eye, or our service at the gospel feast will be a weary task. When hearers are willing to receive the truth as well as to examine what they hear, they are in a good state. They will not only “prove all things,” which a great many will do, but they are ready also to “hold fast that which is good,” which some will not do: among such persons was the scribe.

I will suppose that I am addressing one who has been brought up under a system which makes little of Christ. Perhaps your form of religion makes much of the priest, and of sacraments, but it does not say much of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are faiths which make more of human things than of our divine Savior, the blessed Redeemer of sinners, and it may be that you profess one of these. Or you may have hitherto lived under a religion which makes much of your good works, and doings, and feelings, and so on. It may be that the Lord will enable you to rise superior to the influence of creeds, of education, and of association, and to say, “I only wish to know God’s way of salvation. My desire is to be guided by what the Lord has revealed. I am prepared to accept whatever is plainly taught in the Word of God, even should it reverse all my former beliefs, and deprive me of my most cherished consolations. With sincere heart I ask enlightenment from the divine Spirit.” Now, when we meet with a man of that kind, and see him hearing the gospel, we may say of him, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” These are the kind of people who feel the force of truth, and are converted to the faith of Jesus, these straightforward people, these hearty lovers of that which is good. The Savior called some men, “honest and good ground,” and they were such even before the seed of the word fell upon them. Of course, even this natural openness and sincerity of character is God’s gift, but assuredly these are the people upon whom the heavenly work takes most effect. Your tricksters, shufflers, players, make-believes, and men without principle or heart, are seldom converted. I speak from wide observation. I have seen scores of blustering blasphemers, who were downright in their profanity, brought to Jesus’ feet, but I do not remember seeing a deceitful person brought there. Your deeply lying character—I will not say that it is beyond the power of grace to save him, but I will say this, it is the rarest thing under heaven for a man who has long been a liar ever to be converted. I will say nothing in the praise of human nature, nor give any reason for the absolutely free election of grace, but still I notice that for the most part there is a sort of honest openness and freedom from trickery about those whom the Lord calls to himself. I notice that characteristic in the first fishermen apostles, who were no doubt ignorant and weak, but they were as transparent as glass, and as free from guile as Nathanael. Even in their follies, and their sins, and their blunders they were always open-hearted, and so, in general, are those upon whom the Lord looks with an eye of love. Tricksters come in like Judas, but they go out again, for they are not of us. They experience no change from their association with godliness, or from their knowledge of truth, but would pick the purse of Christ himself, and sell their Redeemer for pieces of silver. Far otherwise is it with a man of candid and thorough spirit, for he is glad to receive the gospel, and it soon displays its gracious power in him. We may say of the candid man as Christ did of this scribe, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”

A second point is, perhaps, even more clear. This man also *possessed spiritual knowledge*. It is a great error to suppose that ignorance can do anybody any good. There is a religion which prefers to have ignorant people to deal with, but we have learned the truth of what Solomon said: “That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good.” To be ignorant of the law of God is to be far off from the kingdom; and to be ignorant of the gospel is also to be in a measure far off from the kingdom: but this man knew the law, and knew it well. He had a spiritual appreciation of its range,

meaning, and spirituality. Notice how he puts it: he puts it well. He says, “To love God with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength,—this is the first commandment.” Here we see, first, that he mentions *sincere love*, in the words “to love him with all the heart.” God is to be loved, not in name, not with lip language, not with mere pretense, but with the heart. God requireth by his law the hearty obedience of his creatures. Next, the scribe puts it, “With all thy understanding”; that is, God deserves and demands the *intelligent* love of his creatures. He does not ask blind love of them: he desires them to know something of him, and of his works, and of his claims upon them, so as to love him because he deserves their affection. The understanding must justify and impel the affections. Then, he puts it, “with all thy soul”; that is, with *the emotional nature*. Love God with feeling—not coolly, but with the whole force of your feeling. Love him with your soul, for soul love is the soul of love. And then he adds, “and with all thy strength”; that is to say, *intensity* is to be thrown into our love to God. We are to serve him with our might, and throw all our whole energy into his worship. Thus he gives us, under four heads, a description of the kind of love which the law of God requires of us—sincere—“with all thy heart”; intelligent—“with all thy understanding”; emotional—“with all thy soul”; intense and energetic—“with all thy strength.” This the scribe knew, and it was most valuable knowledge. Beloved, when a man begins intelligently to grasp the doctrines of the law and the gospel, when we perceive that he is no stranger to divine things, but that he can give a reason for his beliefs, and can state them to others, although we dare not conclude because of this knowledge that such a man is actually in the kingdom of God, we may safely conclude that he is not far from it. Give us candor, and let that candour be attended with enlightenment, and we are sure that the possessor of these things is not far from the kingdom of God.

A third point is more remarkable still, because it is to be feared that hundreds of professed Christians are nothing like so near to the kingdom of heaven as this man was. This scribe *knew the superiority of an inward religion over that which is external*, for he declares, To love him with all thy heart is more than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Thousands at this hour are publicly teaching us that the principal point of religion is that you shall be duly and properly baptized and confirmed, and shall reverently and properly receive the sacrament. They lay stress upon your receiving before you have your breakfast, and upon the breaker of the sacred bread having been duly touched on the head by a bishop, and I do not know what else of mere outward circumstance. Books have been written about how the service is to be performed, and how it is not to be performed, and a great noise has been made about a piece of bread which was brought before a court of law. I believe a very great dignitary has been so weak as to certify that this baked dough has been “reverently consumed”: and yet this is not a heathen country, nor are we worshippers of fetishes! Great importance is attached to the style of garment, which should be worn by priests on Holy Monday, or Good Friday. Colours vary according to the almanack, and the age of the moon. I must confess I need all my gravity when I think of copes, and girdles, and surplices, and gowns being matters of serious discussion. Surely these poor dupes of superstition are far, very far, from the kingdom of God, which is not meat and drink, nor clothing, nor posture, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Their whole line of thought is alien to the mind of God, who is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. In the whole business of exhibitional religion what is there to content the soul? What can there be in it to please God? If our God were a royal puppet I could conceive of his being pleased with ceremonial; or if he were like the heathens’ idiotic deities I could understand that mummeries, masquerades, postures, processions, robes, and

round-robins might please him; but seeing that he is God, the only wise, be it far from me to dream of such a thing. Such child's play can scarce be borne with by full-grown men, but for that glorious mind that filleth all immensity to be thought to be particular about the cut and color of a vestment seems to me to be little short of blasphemy. When the thing was typical of truth yet to be revealed, it was important; but now that the true light has risen, and the shadows have departed, no such explanation is possible. Can it really be true that courts of law and assemblies of the church discuss the question of men's turning to the east or to the west when they pray? Is it thought to be of some consequence how men shall turn, and twist, and bend? What god is this that they serve? What being is this that they adore? Certainly not Jehovah, the God of heaven, whom we worship, for he "dwelleth not in temples made with hands," that is to say, of this building; and he hath abolished all rubrics save this:—"they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Only spiritual worship is worship, and only as the heart adores does God accept the homage which is offered to him. This scribe knew that even whole burnt offerings, though God had ordained them, and they were therefore right, and sacrifices, though the law had settled them, and they were therefore due, were nothing when compared with loving God with all the heart and with all the soul. He expresses this most plainly that "to love God with all the heart is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." And see how broadly he puts it—"All whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" put together. If they could slay all the bullocks upon a thousand hills, and set Lebanon's self on fire, making it one huge altar upon which the holocaust should smoke, and even if they should pour out rivers of oil, and side by side with it ran streams of blood of fat beasts, yet all would be nothing. Who hath required this at their hands? The Lord's demands are not of this sort. "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not." What God asks is that we should love him first of all, and our neighbor as ourselves. Now, a man who has come so far as to shake off the superstition of confidence in external worship is not far from the kingdom of God. He who knows that if saved it will be by a spiritual change, and not by going to a place of worship, not by repeating prayers, not by joining a church, not by being baptized, not by taking the sacrament, knows more than many; and he who also knows that loving God with all his heart is an absolutely needful evidence of his being a child of God, and longs to feel that love, is not far from the kingdom. A sense of the value and necessity of spiritual religion is a most hopeful sign. I do not say that it is a sure sign of saving grace; but I am sure it is a token of being very near the kingdom. Oh that the man would take the one step which is now needed by turning his knowledge into practice! Oh that he would believe with all his heart, and live!

Another point is manifest in this man's confession; *he saw very plainly the supremacy of God over the whole of our manhood*. It was clear to him that there was but one God, and that man was made on purpose to be one and undivided in his service. He perceived that man should love, honor, and serve that one God with all his heart, with all his heart, with all his understanding, with all his soul, and with all his strength. Do you know that, dear friend? Come now, if you are not a saved man, I will ask you—do you recognize this to be true, that it is your bounden duty to serve your God with all your heart and understanding, and soul, and strength? Do you admit this? If you do, and if you are an honest man, you are not far from the kingdom of God, because honest men earnestly endeavor to pay their debts, and when they find that they cannot, they are distressed. If you are in distress of mind because you cannot meet your obligations to God, then you are not far from the kingdom. I rejoice in your discovery of shortcoming, failure, and inability, for these lie near that hearty penitence which is the sister of saving faith, and the sure herald of joy and peace. When a man feels his own inability to do as he ought, when he trembles before the law which, nevertheless,

he honors and admits to be just and right, then he is not far from self-renunciation, and from accepting that matchless righteousness which Jesus Christ has come to bring. A consciousness of the supremacy of the sovereignty of God over us, so that he ought to have every thought, every breath, every pulse, is the work of the Spirit, who thereby convinces us of sin, and it is a sweet sign of dawn in the once darkened soul. Admit that God ought to be heartily loved, and you are not far from loving him; feel that you are guilty for not loving, and the seeds of love are in your heart.

Once more only. Although this hopeful scribe recognized the value of spiritual religion, and the need of heart-work, and of the heart being wholly given to God, *yet he did not despise outward religion so far as it was commanded of God*. He says that to love God is better than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices; which was an admission that these things were good in their places. He was no rejecter of ceremonies which are commanded, because of the superstition of will-worshippers who invent ceremonies. We are not to give up the baptism of believers because of the unscriptural rite of infant sprinkling, nor to forsake the Lord's Supper because of the popish mass. Ordinances of God are good in their places, and what is to be dreaded is the perversion of them by thrusting them into the place of better and more important matters. Thus the scribe showed a well-balanced mind all round, and proved himself not far from the kingdom of God.

My dear friend, are you prepared to lay hold of truth wherever you find it? Are you prepared to break away from party ties and family prejudices? Are you prepared to believe that the inward and spiritual part of religion is infinitely superior to the external part of it, be it right or be it wrong? Do you also admit the divine supremacy of God, and his right to you in all respects? And are you willing to take ordinances, such as he has ordained, in their place, and not out of it? Then, if all these things be in you, your character resembles that of this scribe of whom Jesus said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." I am right glad to meet with you, for you are not far from submitting to the divine authority, since you are already found admitting its right to you. I trust you are not far from entering into the realm of spiritual religion, for you already value it. You are not far from the privilege of being wholly renewed in heart, since you see the need of it. How glad I am that you should be now listening to the gospel! Happier still shall I be if God shall help me to say the right word to you at this good hour. The Lord send it!

II. Our second point is THE QUESTION SUGGESTED—*this man came so near to the kingdom: did he ever enter it?* We do not know. If anybody were to assert that he did not I should be ready to question his statement. If anybody were to declare that he did I should at once demand his authority for the assertion. We receive no information from the Scriptures, and it is always better where the word of God is silent to be silent ourselves. We should also observe another very good rule if you have to judge of a man's state, and know but little of it, always judge it favourably. Judges usually give a prisoner the benefit of the doubt; and when a man is not a prisoner, when he has come so far towards grace as this scribe, let us at any rate hope that he did enter into the kingdom.

I see no reason why he should not have done so; and that is my first answer to the question. He should have done so. Having come so far there were many doors by which, God's Spirit being with him, he might have entered into the kingdom; I mean doors of thought, by which the Holy Spirit would readily have led his candid mind into the faith of Christ. I will show you one. There was in after years another scribe, a rabbi—you will recollect his name—who said, "I consent unto the law, that it is good; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

You see the process of thought. It is a very simple one. This scribe sees the law of God to be a spiritual law, demanding the obedience of his heart, his understanding, his soul, and his strength. If he had thought awhile he would, as a candid man, have said, "I have not kept this law. What is more, I cannot keep it. If I try to keep it I find a something within me against which I struggle, but which, nevertheless, brings me into captivity to another law—a law of selfishness, a law of sin." Then, as a man anxious to be right, he would have said, "How can I be delivered? Oh that I might be set free to keep the law of God! I cannot abide in this bondage. I ought to keep this law, I shall never be happy till I do love God with all my heart, for he ought to be so loved, and I perceive that there can be no heaven to a heart which does not love God intensely, for this is one of the essentials of peace and rest. How can I get at it?" In such a condition as that, if he had heard the sweet invitation of our Lord, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," would he not have leaped at the sound? Do you not see the simple doorway for such a man as that to become a Christian? He had come so far that surely he should come a little farther. Let us trust that he did. At any rate, if any of you have come so far, may God's sweet Spirit lead you to take those other steps, and to enter into the kingdom, submitting to the sweet sovereignty of the Prince Immanuel, whose scepter is of silver, and whose servitude is an honor and a delight to all his subjects.

That is one door; now follow with me another track. Suppose this man had really loved God with all his heart, and understanding, and soul, and strength—I will not say perfectly, for that would be supposing an impossibility, but supposing that he had truly and sincerely loved God, he could not have been an hour in the company of the Lord Jesus without feeling the deepest union of heart to him. Would he not have exclaimed, "This man, too, loves God with all his heart"? He must have perceived it, for the zeal which Christ had for the Father was immeasurable; it flashed in every gleam of his eye, it tintured every word that fell from his lips. Jesus lived for God, and glorified the Father with all his heart and soul, and any person who truly loved God would soon have perceived that fact. "Ah!" he would have exclaimed, "here is one who loves God better than I do; here is one who honors God more than I do; here is one who is more consecrated, more devoted, more godlike than I am." By that door he would have been led to admiration of Jesus, to communion with him, and ultimately to belief in him as the Messiah. Let us hope that the scribe was so led, for the way is plain enough. At any rate, if God in his grace has led any man here to love the Father, I am persuaded that he will love the Son; for he that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him. My hearer, thou art certainly not far from the kingdom of God if thou hast come so far as to love God, even though thou knowest little as yet of his only begotten Son. God help you to take that one other step.

Here is another door. You notice that he said that to love God was more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. Now, suppose that with that in his mind, he had sat down, and said, "This loving God is the main thing; why, then, is the law encumbered with burnt offerings and sacrifices? If they really are inferior to the moral precepts, and especially to the spiritual precepts, why are they there at all?" Then methinks he would have seen that they must be there for a spiritual purpose. And suppose he had begun to try and read the meaning of the paschal lamb, or of the daily lamb, or of the sin-offering, why, methinks, if he turned to that blessed fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and began to read it in order to understand the sacrifices of the old law, it would have happened to him as it did to the eunuch when Philip opened to him the Scriptures—he would have seen Jesus in them all. He must have seen him. And if you, dear friend, have come to see the right place of gospel

ordinances through candidly searching out their meaning, you have seen that their whole teaching is Christ Jesus, the sacrifice for sin. There is nothing in the two great gospel ordinances but Christ. Christ's sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection set forth in baptism: Christ's death set forth until he come at the communion table—life given us by our Savior's death, and life sustained by the same means. Jesus is the body of the ordinances of the Old Testament, and the soul of those of the New. If you are but candid enough to desire to push through the veil, and get at the real meaning of every outward ordinance, you will see Jesus ere long.

There is another road by which the scribe might have been led to the Savior. Think again. Suppose that he had continued to glow and burn with love to God. As that love grew the understanding would also become enlightened with it, and the soul would rise towards God. You know why that would be. It must be because the Holy Spirit was in the man, for no man loveth God or striveth to love God, with all his heart, and understanding, and soul, and strength, without there being in secret and unknown to him a divine power at the back impelling him in that direction. Now, do you think that the Holy Spirit would thus work in the man and not reveal Christ to him for his salvation? I cannot believe it. I am persuaded that, coming as that man did under the gospel of Christ, he would be by his candour, by his love of God, by the influence of the divine Spirit, in such a state of mind that, as when sparks fall upon dry tinder they ignite at once, so would the words of Jesus fall upon a mind prepared of the Spirit of God. That scribe was, therefore, not far from the kingdom of God. I do hope that there are some such hearts present at this hour. Some of you, I trust, can say, "Oh that I had Christ! I would give my eyes for him." If you mean that, why do you not have him? He is to be had for nothing. "Oh," says another, "I would die if I might have him and be saved." Why not live, and be saved? "Oh, but I would give anything." Why not leave off the idea of giving, and take freely what Jesus presents to you? But yet that very desire of yours—that longing of yours—proves that you are not far from the kingdom of God. My heart's desire is that as you have come so far you may now yield yourselves up to Jesus. That is the way of salvation: have done with self-salvation and let Jesus save you. When a man is in the water, if he kicks and struggles he will drown, but if he lies still he will float. When another comes to help, if he will be passive he will be saved, but all that he can do will hinder his deliverance. Be passive in the hands of Christ till he gives you life to be active with. Be nothing, and let him be everything. Trust him wholly and alone. Drop into his arms, and let him bear the weight of your sins and sorrows, and it shall not be said of you any longer that you are not far from the kingdom of God, but it shall be sung on earth and in heaven—"He has returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, glory be to God!"

Still, as I have said, there is the dark supposition that *perhaps the scribe never did enter the kingdom*. He may have been so near to the kingdom, and yet he may have lacked the one thing needful. If it were so, it was a grievous fact; and all we can now do is to profit by it. What could have been the reason why he did not enter the kingdom? I cannot tell, we know so little of him; but if we might infer from the little we do know, I should suppose that if he did not enter it was from the unworthy motive of being swayed by his fellow-men. We judged that when he came to Christ to put the question, he came not of his own mind and motion. We began by thinking that he seemed half-hearted in his opposition, and that so he the more readily turned from a questioner into a candid admirer. It is, however, just possible that, being the spokesman for others, he had grown fond of taking the lead; and if he did not really enter the kingdom, it may have been because he would have lost his place in the front rank of scribe and pharisee, and this was too great a price to pay for truth

and righteousness. I have known a man deeply impressed with religious things, and feeling his way aright; but a little company of half a dozen whom he met in the evening, of whom he was the leading spirit, have sufficed to hold him in bondage. They invite him to come again; they miss his genial society, his jest, his song, his merry talk. He cannot face it out, and tell them that he has a call elsewhere, a call to nobler things. He has not the resolute will to lead them in another direction, and dreads even to make the attempt. He wants to be the leading man; and so he gives up what his conscience suggests to him rather than not be the leader of men whom in his heart he must know to be unworthy of such a homage. In his own mind he thinks them fools; but, still, he is afraid that they should think *him* so, and therefore he becomes a greater and more guilty fool than they. Oh, that fear of men, that fear of men! You may meet with here and there a man of the better sort who begins to feel, "Yes, there is the light there: light worth having." He breaks away from his party, and its surroundings, and for a while is eager for the truth, which he has half discovered; but he fears the cold shoulder which society would give him, dreads the jeer of "Sir John," and the sneer of "My Lord." The half-opened eye is closed with saddest determination from fear of other children of darkness, who would mock at its better sight. This is a sight which might make an angel weep. Jesus is sold, but not for so much as clinked in the hand of Judas; he is bartered for a fool's smile, and for the company of the vain and frivolous. Ah me, that ever the sun should behold so dread a sight! Multitudes who know the truth, and are not far from the kingdom of God, nevertheless, never enter it, because of the fear of man, the love of approbation, the horror of being laughed at and jested at. With such vile fetters immortal souls are bound for execution, and held back from everlasting blessedness. There is something very beautiful about many a young man of enquiring mind, and if you could transplant him, and set him in another soil, you might make something of him; but not in that shop, where all his fellows would make him the butt of their mirth if he were really a Christian, not in that work-room, where all the artisans would swear and chaff if he were but to avow his half-formed convictions. Want of courage, want of self-denial, is that fatal flaw which ruins what else had been a gem in the Redeemer's crown. All brave hearts mournfully pronounce that he is justly lost who is not bold enough to own his Savior, and the truth.

"I had as lief not be, as live to be

In awe of such a thing as I myself."

Afraid of another man! Am I then myself a man? Or am I but the mere mockery of manhood? Oh, sirs, let your manhood come to the rescue. God grant you grace to say, "What can it matter to me what men say as long as I am right?" They cannot break bones with their jests; and if they did, there have been Christians who have not only suffered the breaking of their bones, but the burning of their whole bodies for Christ's sake sooner than deny his sacred claims. What did Jesus say? "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." He who, to gain the whole world, would keep back a solitary truth, is a huge loser for his pains. He is mean and base, and not worthy to be numbered amongst those who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Oh! if I speak to one who hesitates, let me remind him that, however it may look to-night to be a daring step to be decided for Christ, it will look very differently soon when the great trumpet shall sound, and ring o'er earth and sea, and the dead shall rise, and the judgment-seat shall be set, and the great white throne shall be unveiled. Then it will be seen to be a far more desperate daring to deny the Lord even to save life itself. What will the cowards do in that day who, to please men, forsook their Lord? What will they do who suppressed truth and stifled conscience when the Shepherd begins to divide the goats and the sheep from each other? Ay, what will they do who find themselves driven with the goats,

though once they half decided to be numbered with the sheep? They were near the fold, but never entered. What will they feel when he shall say, "Depart! Depart! I know you not. You knew not me in the day of my humiliation. You were ashamed of me in the world. You blushed at my name. You covered up what was in your conscience in order to avoid man's laughter and rebuke. You knew not me, and now I know not you. Depart! Depart!" In proportion to the light against which you have shut your eyes will be your horror when that light shall blind you into eternal night. In proportion to the violence which you have done to your consciences will be the terror which your awakened consciences will work in you. In proportion to the nearness of the kingdom within which you came shall be the dreadful distance to which you will be driven.

I was thinking that, if the Lord were to pay men in their own coin, what an awful thing it would be if those who are now not far from the kingdom were told by the Lord, "You shall stay there for ever. You, who heard the gospel, and did not accept it, must stop where you are." Halt, sir! not a step more! Close to the gates of heaven—you stop there! To hear its music for ever, and to gnash your teeth for ever, because you cannot join in it! To hear the songs of the righteous, while you wail for ever! To know the brightness of bliss, but to be yourself in the black darkness for ever! To be within an inch of heaven, and yet in hell! The living water flowing at your feet, and yet your tongue for ever parched! The bread of life nigh at hand, and yet you cannot eat! Oh, think of it! Eternally not far from the kingdom! If you would not wish to be so, oh, be not out of Christ another minute! May God's Spirit enable you to leap right away from your undecided condition into living faith and loving obedience to Christ.

"So near to the Kingdom! yet what dost thou lack?
So near to the Kingdom! what keepeth thee back?
Renounce every idol, tho' dear it may be,
And come to the Savior now pleading with thee."

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—Nothing remains to report to you but my hope of being in my own pulpit on Feb. 8. I beg you to join with me in thanks to the healing Lord for this restoration. The Lord bringeth down to the grave and raiseth up again, and to him be praise for ever.

It would be a great favor to me personally, and a means of good to many, if the readers of the sermons would aid in increasing their circulation. They are already very widely scattered, but if twice the number could be sent abroad we might look for double fruit. After standing the test of twenty-five years the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit may be pardoned if it asks those who profit by the sermons to introduce them to others.

May future discourses be more full of unction and power, and so may you, dear readers, reap a harvest from my pains and sicknesses.

Yours ever heartily,

C.H. Spurgeon

Menton, January 22, 1879.

Beloved, and yet Afflicted

Notes of a Sermon

(No. 1518)

PREACHED BEFORE AN AUDIENCE OF INVALID LADIES AT MENTONE, BY
C. H. SPURGEON,

“Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.”—John 11:3.

THAT DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED is not at all backward to record that Jesus loved Lazarus too: there are no jealousies among those who are chosen by the Well-beloved. Jesus loved Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus: it is a happy thing where a whole family live in the love of Jesus. They were a favoured trio, and yet, as the serpent came into Paradise, so did sorrow enter their quiet household at Bethany. Lazarus was sick. They all felt that if Jesus were there disease would flee at his presence; what then should they do but let him know of their trial? Lazarus was near to death's door, and so his tender sisters at once reported the fact to Jesus, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.” Many a time since then has that same message been sent to our Lord, for in full many a case he has chosen his people in the furnace of affliction. Of the Master it is said, “himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,” and it is, therefore, no extraordinary thing for the members to be in this matter conformed to their Head.

I. Notice, first, A FACT mentioned in the text: “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.” The sisters were somewhat astonished that it should be so, for the word “behold” implies a measure of surprise. “*We love him, and would make him well directly: thou lovest him, and yet he remains sick. Thou canst heal him with a word, why then is thy loved one sick?*” Have not you, dear sick friend, often wondered how your painful or lingering disease could be consistent with your being chosen, and called, and made one with Christ? I dare say this has greatly perplexed you, and yet in very truth it is by no means strange, but a thing to be expected.

We need not be astonished that the man whom the Lord loves is sick, for *he is only a man*. The love of Jesus does not separate us from the common necessities and infirmities of human life. Men of God are still men. The covenant of grace is not a charter of exemption from consumption, or rheumatism, or asthma. The bodily ills, which come upon us because of our flesh, will attend us to the tomb, for Paul saith, “we that are in this body do groan.”

Those whom the Lord loves are the more likely to be sick, since they are *under a peculiar discipline*. It is written, “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Affliction of some sort is one of the marks of the true-born child of God, and it frequently happens that the trial takes the form of illness. Shall we therefore wonder that we have to take our turn in the sick chamber? If Job, and David, and Hezekiah must each one smart, who are we that we should be amazed because we are in ill-health?

Nor is it remarkable that we are sick if we reflect upon the *great benefit which often flows from it to ourselves*. I do not know what peculiar improvement may have been wrought in Lazarus, but many a disciple of Jesus would have been of small use if he had not been afflicted. Strong men are apt to be harsh, imperious, and unsympathetic, and therefore they need to be put into the furnace, and melted down. I have known Christian women who would never have been so gentle, tender, wise, experienced, and holy if they had not been mellowed by physical pain. There are fruits in

God's garden as well as in man's which never ripen till they are bruised. Young women who are apt to be volatile, conceited, or talkative, are often trained to be full of sweetness and light by sickness after sickness, by which they are taught to sit at Jesus' feet. Many have been able to say with the psalmist, "It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." For this reason even such as are highly favoured and blessed among women may feel a sword piercing through their hearts.

Oftentimes this sickness of the Lord's loved ones is *for the good of others*. Lazarus was permitted to be sick and to die, that by his death and resurrection the apostles might be benefited. His sickness was "for the glory of God." Throughout these nineteen hundred years which have succeeded Lazarus' sickness all believers have been getting good out of it, and this afternoon we are all the better because he languished and died. The church and the world may derive immense advantage through the sorrows of good men: the careless may be awakened, the doubting may be convinced, the ungodly may be converted, the mourner may be comforted through our testimony in sickness; and if so, would we wish to avoid pain and weakness? Are we not quite willing that our friends should say of us also "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick"?

II. Our text, however, not only records a fact, but mentions A REPORT of that fact: the sisters sent and told Jesus. Let us keep up a constant correspondence with our Lord about everything.

"Sing a hymn to Jesus, when thy heart is faint;

Tell it all to Jesus, comfort or complaint."

Jesus knows all about us, but *it is a great relief to pour out our hearts before him*. When John the Baptist's broken-hearted disciples saw their leader beheaded, "they took up the body, and went and told Jesus." They could not have done better. In all trouble send a message to Jesus, and do not keep your misery to yourself. In his case there is no need of reserve, there is no fear of his treating you with cold pride, or heartless indifference, or cruel treachery. He is a confident who never can betray us, a friend who never will refuse us.

There is this fair hope about telling Jesus, that *he is sure to support us under it*. If you go to Jesus, and ask, "Most gracious Lord, why am I sick? I thought I was useful while in health, and now I can do nothing; why is this?" He may be pleased to show you why, or, if not, he will make you willing to bear his will with patience without knowing why. He can bring his truth to your mind to cheer you, or strengthen your heart by his presence, or send you unexpected comforts, and give you to glory in your afflictions. "Ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us." Not in vain did Mary and Martha send to tell Jesus, and not in vain do any seek his face.

Remember, too, that *Jesus may give healing*. It would not be wise to live by a supposed faith, and cast off the physician and his medicines, any more than to discharge the butcher, and the tailor, and expect to be fed and clothed by faith; but this would be far better than forgetting the Lord altogether, and trusting to man only. Healing for both body and soul must be sought from God. We make use of medicines, but these can do nothing apart from the Lord, "who healeth all our diseases." We may tell Jesus about our aches and pains, and gradual declinings, and hacking coughs. Some persons are afraid to go to God about their health: they pray for the pardon of sin, but dare not ask the Lord to remove a headache: and, yet, surely, if the hairs outside our head are all numbered by God it is not much more of a condescension for him to relieve throbs and pressures inside the head. Our big things must be very little to the great God, and our little things cannot be much less. It is a proof of the greatness of the mind of God that while ruling the heavens and the earth, he is not so absorbed by these great concerns as to be forgetful of the least pain or want of any one of his

poor children. We may go to him about our failing breath, for he first gave us lungs and life. We may tell him about the eye which grows dim, and the ear which loses hearing, for he made them both. We may mention the swollen knee, and the gathering finger, the stiff neck, and the sprained foot, for he made all these our members, redeemed them all, and will raise them all from the grave. Go at once, and say, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick."

III. Thirdly, let us notice in the case of Lazarus A RESULT which we should not have expected. No doubt when Mary and Martha sent to tell Jesus they looked to see Lazarus recover as soon as the messenger reached the Master; but they were not gratified. For two days the Lord remained in the same place, and not till he knew that Lazarus was dead did he speak of going to Judea. This teaches us that Jesus may be informed of our trouble, and yet may act as if he were indifferent to it. We must not expect in every case that prayer for recovery will be answered, for if so, nobody would die who had chick or child, friend or acquaintance to pray for him. In our prayers for the lives of beloved children of God we must not forget that there is one prayer which may be crossing ours, for Jesus prays, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." We pray that they may remain with us, but when we recognize that Jesus wants them above, what can we do but admit his larger claim and say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt"? In our own case, we may pray the Lord to raise us up, and yet though he loves us he may permit us to grow worse and worse, and at last to die. Hezekiah had fifteen years added to his life, but we may not gain the reprieve of a single day. Never set such store by the life of any one dear to you, or even by your own life, as to be rebellious against the Lord. If you hold the life of any dear one with too tight a hand, you are making a rod for your own back; and if you love your own earthly life too well, you are making a thorny pillow for your dying bed. Children are often idols, and in such cases their too ardent lovers are idolaters. We might as well make a god of clay, and worship it, as the Hindus are said to do, as worship our fellow-creatures, for what are they but clay? Shall dust be so dear to us that we quarrel with our God about it? If our Lord leaves us to suffer, let us not repine. He must do that for us which is kindest and best, for he loves us better than we love ourselves.

Did I hear you say, "Yes, Jesus allowed Lazarus to die, *but he raised him up again*"? I answer, he is the resurrection and the life to us also. Be comforted concerning the departed, "Thy brother shall rise again," and all of us whose hope is in Jesus shall partake in our Lord's resurrection. Not only shall our souls live, but our bodies, too, shall be raised incorruptible. The grave will serve as a refining pot, and this vile body shall come forth vile no longer. Some Christians are greatly cheered by the thought of living till the Lord comes, and so escaping death. I confess that I think this no great gain, for so far from having any preference over them that are asleep, those who are alive and remain at his coming will miss one point of fellowship, in not dying and rising like their Lord. Beloved, all things are yours, and death is expressly mentioned in the list, therefore do not dread it, but rather "long for evening to undress, that you may rest with God."

IV. I will close with A QUESTION—"Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"—does Jesus in a special sense love you? Alas, many sick ones have no evidence of any special love of Jesus towards them, for they have never sought his face, nor trusted in him. Jesus might say to them "I never knew you," for they have turned their backs upon his blood and his cross. Answer, dear friend, to your own heart this question, "Do you love Jesus?" If so, you love him because he first loved you. Are you trusting him? If so, that faith of yours is the proof that he has loved you from before the foundation of the world, for faith is the token by which he plights his troth to his beloved.

If Jesus loves you, and you are sick, let all the world see how you glorify God in your sickness. Let friends and nurses see how the beloved of the Lord are cheered and comforted by him. Let your holy resignation astonish them, and set them admiring your Beloved, who is so gracious to you that he makes you happy in pain, and joyful at the gates of the grave. If your religion is worth anything it ought to support you now, and it will compel unbelievers to see that he whom the Lord loveth is in better case when he is sick than the ungodly when full of health and vigour.

If you do not know that Jesus loves you, you lack the brightest star that can cheer the night of sickness. I hope you will not die as you now are, and pass into another world without enjoying the love of Jesus: that would be a terrible calamity indeed. Seek his face at once, and it may be that your present sickness is a part of the way of love by which Jesus would bring you to himself. Lord, heal all these sick ones in soul and in body. Amen.

The Holy Spirit's Intercession

A Sermon

(No. 1532)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, April 11th, 1880, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should what pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according the to will of God.”—Romans 8:26,27.

THE APOSTLE PAUL was writing to a tried and afflicted people, and one of his objects was to remind them of the rivers of comfort which were flowing near at hand. He first of all stirred up their pure minds by way of remembrance as to their sonship,—for saith he “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” They were, therefore, encouraged to take part and lot with Christ, the elder brother, with whom they had become joint heirs; and they were exhorted to suffer with him, that they might afterwards be glorified with him. All that they endured came from a Father's hand, and this should comfort them. A thousand sources of joy are opened in that one blessing of adoption. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have been begotten into the family of grace.

When Paul had alluded to that consoling subject he turned to the next ground of comfort—namely, that we are to be sustained under present trial by hope. There is an amazing glory in reserve for us, and though as yet we cannot enter upon it, but in harmony with the whole creation must continue to groan and travail, yet the hope itself should minister strength to us, and enable us patiently to bear “these light afflictions, which are but for a moment.” This also is a truth full of sacred refreshment: hope sees a crown in reserve, mansions in readiness, and Jesus himself preparing a place for us, and by the rapturous sight she sustains the soul under the sorrows of the hour. Hope is the grand anchor by whose means we ride out the present storm.

The apostle then turns to a third source of comfort, namely, the abiding of the Holy Spirit in and with the Lord's people. He uses the word “likewise” to intimate that in the same manner as hope sustains the soul, so does the Holy Spirit strengthen us under trial. Hope operated spiritually upon our spiritual faculties, and so does the Holy Spirit, in some mysterious way, divinely operate upon the new-born faculties of the believer, so that he is sustained under his infirmities. In his light shall we see light: I pray, therefore, that we may be helped of the Spirit while we consider his mysterious operations, that we may not fall into error or miss precious truth through blindness of heart.

The text speaks of “our infirmities,” or as many translators put it in the singular—of “our infirmity.” By this is intended our affliction, and the weakness which trouble discovers in us. The Holy Spirit helps us to bear the infirmity of our body and of our mind; he helps us to bear our cross, whether it be physical pain, or mental depression, or spiritual conflict, or slander, or poverty, or persecution. He helps our infirmity; and with a helper so divinely strong we need not fear for the result. God's grace will be sufficient for us; his strength will be made perfect in weakness.

I think, dear friends, you will all admit that if a man can pray, his trouble is at once lightened. When we feel that we have power with God and can obtain anything we ask for at his hands, then our difficulties cease to oppress us. We take our burden to our heavenly Father and tell it out in the accents of childlike confidence, and we come away quite content to bear whatever his holy will may lay upon us. Prayer is a great outlet for grief; it draws up the sluices, and abates the swelling flood, which else might be too strong for us. We bathe our wound in the lotion of prayer, and the pain is lulled, the fever is removed. We may be brought into such perturbation of mind, and perplexity of heart, that we do not know how to pray. We see the mercy-seat, and we perceive that God will hear us: we have no doubt about that, for we know that we are his own favoured children, and yet we hardly know what to desire. We fall into such heaviness of spirit, and entanglement of thought, that the one remedy of prayer, which we have always found to be unfailing, appears to be taken from us. Here, then, in the nick of time, as a very present help in time of trouble, comes in the Holy Spirit. He draws near to teach us how to pray, and in this way he helps our infirmity, relieves our suffering, and enables us to bear the heavy burden without fainting under the load.

At this time our subjects for consideration shall be, firstly, *the help which the Holy Spirit gives*; secondly, *the prayers which he inspires*; and thirdly, *the success which such prayers ore certain to obtain*.

I. First, then, let us consider THE HELP WHICH THE HOLY GHOST GIVES.

The help which the Holy Ghost renders to us meets the weakness which we deplore. As I have already said, if in time of trouble a man can pray, his burden loses its weight. If the believer can take anything and everything to God, then he learns to glory in infirmity, and to rejoice in tribulation; but sometimes we are in such confusion of mind that we know not what we should pray for as we ought. In a measure, through our ignorance, we never know what we should pray for until we are taught of the Spirit of God, but there are times when this beclouding of the soul is dense indeed, and we do not even know what would help us out of our trouble if we could obtain it. He see the disease, but the name of the medicine is not known to us. We look over the many things which we might ask for of the Lord, and we feel that each of them would be helpful, but that none of them would precisely meet our case. For spiritual blessings which we know to be according to the divine will we could ask with confidence, but perhaps these would not meet our peculiar circumstances. There are other things for which we are allowed to ask, but we scarcely know whether, if we had them, they would really serve our turn, and we also feel a diffidence as to praying for them. In praying for temporal things we plead with measured voices, ever referring our petition for revision to the will of the Lord. Moses prayed that he might enter Canaan, but God denied him; and the man that was healed asked our Lord that he might be with him, but he received for answer, "Go home to thy friends." We pray evermore on such matters with this reserve, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." At times this very spirit of resignation appears to increase our spiritual difficulty, for we do not wish to ask for anything that would be contrary to the mind of God and yet we must ask for something. We are reduced to such straits that we must pray, but what shall be the particular subject of prayer we cannot for a while make out. Even when ignorance and perplexity are removed, we know not what we should pray for "as we ought." When we know the matter of prayer, we yet fail to pray in a right manner. We ask, but we are afraid that we shall not have, because we do not exercise the thought, or the faith, which we judge to be essential to prayer. We cannot at times command even the earnestness which is the life of supplication: a torpor steals over us, our heart is chilled, our hand is numbed, and we cannot wrestle with the angel. We know what to pray for

as to objects, but we do not know what to pray for "*as we ought*" it is the manner of the prayer which perplexes us, even when the matter is decided upon. How can I pray? My mind wanders: I chatter like a crane; I roar like a beast in pain; I moan in the brokenness of my heart, but oh, my God, I know not what it is my inmost spirit needs; or if I know it, I know not how to frame my petition aright before thee. I know not how to open my lips in thy majestic presence: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. My spiritual distress robs me of the power to pour out my heart before my God. Now, beloved, it is in such a plight as this that the Holy Ghost aids us with his divine help. and hence he is "a very present help in time of trouble."

Coming to our aid in our bewilderment *he instructs us*. This is one of his frequent operations upon the mind of the believer: "he shall teach you all things." He instructs us as to our need, and as to the promises of God which refer to that need. He shows us where our deficiencies are, what our sins are, and what our necessities are; he sheds a light upon our condition, and makes us feel deeply our helplessness, sinfulness, and dire poverty; and then he casts the same light upon the promises of the Word, and lays home to the heart that very text which was intended to meet the occasion—the precise promise which was framed with foresight of our present distress. In that light he makes the promise shine in all its truthfulness, certainty, sweetness, and suitability, so that we, poor trembling sons of men, dare take that word into our mouth which first came out of God's mouth, and then come with it as an argument, and plead it before the throne of the heavenly grace. Our prevalence in prayer lies in the plea, "Lord, do as thou hast said." How greatly we ought to value the Holy Spirit, because when we are in the dark he gives us light, and when our perplexed spirit is so befogged and beclouded that it cannot see its own need, and cannot find out the appropriate promise in the Scriptures, the Spirit of God comes in and teaches us all things, and brings all things to our remembrance, whatsoever our Lord has told us. He guides us in prayer, and thus he helps our infirmity.

But the blessed Spirit does more than this, he will often *direct the mind to the special subject of prayer*. He dwells within us as a counsellor, and points out to us what it is we should seek at the hands of God. We do not know why it is so, but we sometimes find our minds carried as by a strong under current into a particular line of prayer for some one definite object. It is not merely that our judgment leads us in that direction, though usually the Spirit of God acts upon us by enlightening our judgment, but we often feel an unaccountable and irresistible desire rising again and again within our heart, and this so presses upon us, that we not only utter the desire before God at our ordinary times for prayer, but we feel it crying in our hearts all the day long, almost to the supplanting of all other considerations. At such times we should thank God for direction and give our desire a clear road: the Holy Spirit is granting us inward direction as to how we should reckon upon good success in our pleadings. Such guidance will the Spirit give to each of you if you will ask him to illuminate you. He will guide you both negatively and positively. Negatively, he will forbid you to pray for such and such a thing, even as Paul essayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered him not: and, on other hand, he will cause you to hear a cry within your soul which shall guide your petitions, even as he made Paul hear the cry from Macedonia, saying, "Come over and help us." The Spirit teaches wisely, as no other teacher can do. Those who obey his promptings shall not walk in darkness. He leads the spiritual eye to take good and steady aim at the very centre of the target, and thus we hit the mark in our pleadings.

Nor is this all, for the spirit of God is not sent merely to guide and help our devotion, but *he himself "maketh intercession for us"* according to the will of God. By this expression it cannot be

meant that the Holy Spirit ever groans or personally prays; but that *he excites intense desire and created unutterable groanings in us*, and these are ascribed to him. Even as Solomon built the temple because he superintended and ordained all, and yet I know not that he ever fashioned a timber or prepared a stone, so doth the Holy Spirit pray and plead within us by leading us to pray and plead. This he does by arousing our desires. The Holy Spirit has a wonderful power over renewed hearts, as much power as the skillful minstrel hath over the strings among which he lays his accustomed hand. The influences of the Holy Ghost at times pass through the soul like winds through an Eolian harp, creating and inspiring sweet notes of gratitude and tones of desire, to which we should have been strangers if it had not been for his divine visitation. He can arouse us from our lethargy, he can warm us out of our lukewarmness, he can enable us when we are on our knees to rise above the ordinary routine of prayer into that victorious importunity against which nothing can stand. He can lay certain desires so pressingly upon our hearts that we can never rest till they are fulfilled. He can make the zeal for God's house to eat us up, and the passion for God's glory to be like a fire within our bones; and this is one part of that process by which in inspiring our prayers he helps our infirmity. True Advocate is he, and Comforter most effectual. Blessed be his name.

The Holy Spirit also divinely operates *in the strengthening of the faith of believers*. That faith is at first of his creating, and afterwards it is of his sustaining and increasing: and oh, brothers and sisters, have you not often felt your faith rise in proportion to your trials? Have you not, like Noah's ark, mounted towards heaven as the flood deepened around you? You have felt as sure about the promise as you felt about the trial. The affliction was, as it were, in your very bones, but the promise was also in your very heart. You could not doubt the affliction, for you smarted under it, but you might almost as soon have doubted the divine help, for your confidence was firm and unmoved. The greatest faith is only what God has a right to expect from us, yet do we never exhibit it except as the Holy Ghost strengthens our confidence, and opens up before us the covenant with all its seals and securities. He it is that leads our soul to cry, "though my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure." Blessed be the Divine Spirit then, that since faith is essential to prevailing prayer, he helps us in supplication by increasing our faith. Without faith prayer cannot speed, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed, and such an one may not expect anything of the Lord; happy are we when the Holy Spirit removes our wavering, and enables us like Abraham to believe without staggering, knowing full well that he who has promised is able also to perform.

By three figures I will endeavour to describe the work of the Spirit of God in this matter, though they all fall short, and indeed all that I can say must fall infinitely short of the glory of his work. The actual mode of his working upon the mind we may not attempt to explain; it remains a mystery, and it would be an unholy intrusion to attempt to remove the veil. There is no difficulty in our believing that as one human mind operates upon another mind, so does the Holy Spirit influence our spirits. We are forced to use words if we would influence our fellow-men, but the Spirit of God can operate upon the human mind more directly, and communicate with it in silence. Into that matter, however, we will not dive lest we intrude where our knowledge would be drowned by our presumption.

My illustrations do not touch the mystery, but set forth the grace. The Holy Spirit acts to his people somewhat *as a prompter to a reciter*. A man has to deliver a piece which he has learned; but his memory is treacherous, and therefore somewhere out of sight there is a prompter, so that

when the speaker is at a loss and might use a wrong word, a whisper is heard, which suggests the right one. When the speaker has almost lost the thread of his discourse he turns his ear, and the prompter gives him the catch-word and aids his memory. If I may be allowed the simile, I would say that this represents in part the work of the Spirit of God in us,—suggesting to us the right desire, and bringing all things to our remembrance whatsoever Christ has told us. In prayer we should often come to a dead stand, but he incites, suggests, and inspires, and so we go onward. In prayer we might grow weary, but the Comforter encourages and refreshes us with cheering thoughts. When, indeed, we are in our bewilderment almost driven to give up prayer, the whisper of his love drops a live coal from off the altar into our soul, and our hearts glow with greater ardour than before. Regard the Holy Spirit as your prompter, and let your ear be opened to his voice.

But he is much more than this. Let me attempt a second simile: he is *as an advocate to one in peril at law*. Suppose that a poor man had a great law-suit, touching his whole estate, and he was forced personally to go into court and plead his own cause, and speak up for his rights. If he were an uneducated man he would be in a poor plight. An adversary in the court might plead against him, and overthrow him, for he could not answer him. This poor man knows very little about law, and is quite unable to meet his cunning opponent. Suppose one who was perfect in the law should take up his cause warmly, and come and live with him, and use all his knowledge so as to prepare his case for him, draw up his petitions for him, and fill his mouth with arguments,—would not that be a grand relief? This counsellor would suggest the line of pleading, arrange the arguments, and put them into right courtly language. When the poor man was baffled by a question asked in court, he would run home and ask his adviser, and he would tell him exactly how to meet the objector. Suppose, too, that when he had to plead with the judge himself, this advocate at home should teach him how to behave and what to urge, and encourage him to hope that he would prevail,—would not this be a great boon? Who would be the pleader in such a case? The poor client would plead, but still, when he won the suit, he would trace it all to the advocate who lived at home, and gave him counsel: indeed, it would be the advocate pleading for him, even while he pleaded himself. This is an instructive emblem of a great fact. Within this narrow house of my body, this tenement of clay, if I be a true believer, there dwells the Holy Ghost, and when I desire to pray I may ask him what I should pray for as I ought, and he will help me. He will write the prayers which I ought to offer upon the tablets of my heart, and I shall see them there, and so I shall be taught how to plead. It will be the Spirit's own self pleading in me, and by me, and through me, before the throne of grace. What a happy man in his law-suit would such a poor man be, and how happy are you and I that we have the Holy Ghost to be our Counsellor!

Yet one more illustration: it is that of *a father aiding his boy*. Suppose it to be a time of war centuries back. Old English warfare was then conducted by bowmen to a great extent. Here is a youth who is to be initiated in the art of archery, and therefore he carries a bow. It is a strong bow, and therefore very hard to draw; indeed, it requires more strength than the urchin can summon to bend it. See how his father teaches him. "Put your right hand here, my boy, and place your left hand so. Now pull"; and as the youth pulls, his father's hands are on his hands, and the bow is drawn. The lad draws the bow: ay, but it is quite as much his father, too. We cannot draw the bow of prayer alone. Sometimes a bow of steel is not broken by our hands, for we cannot even bend it; and then the Holy Ghost puts his mighty hand over ours, and covers our weakness so that we draw; and lo, what splendid drawing of the bow it is them! The bow bends so easily we wonder how it

is; away flies the arrow, and it pierces the very centre of the target, for he who giveth have won the day, but it was his secret might that made us strong, and to him be the glory of it.

Thus have I tried to set forth the cheering fact that the Spirit helps the people of God.

II. Our second subject is THE PRAYER WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT INSPIRES, or that part of prayer which is especially and peculiarly the work of the Spirit of God. The text says, "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." It is not the Spirit that groans, but we that groan; but as I have shown you, the Spirit excited the emotion which causes us to groan.

It is clear then the prayers which are indited in us by the spirit of God are *those which arise from our inmost soul*. A man's *heart* is moved when he groans. A groan is a matter about which there is no hypocrisy. A groan cometh not from the lips, but from the heart. A groan then is a part of prayer which we owe to the Holy Ghost, and the same is true of all the prayer which wells up from the deep fountains of our inner life. The prophet cried, "My bowels, my bowels, I am pained at my very heart: my heart maketh a noise in me." This deep ground-swell of desire, this tidal motion of the life-floods is caused by the Holy Spirit. His work is never superficial, but always deep and inward.

Such prayers will rise within us when the mind is far too troubled to let us speak. We know not what we should pray for as we ought, and then it is that we groan, or utter some other inarticulate sound. Hezekiah said, "like a crane or a swallow did I chatter." The psalmist said, "I am so troubled that I cannot I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart"; but he added, "Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee." The sighing of the prisoner surely cometh up into the ears of the Lord. There is real prayer in these "groanings that cannot be uttered." It is the power of the Holy Ghost in us which creates all real prayer, even that which takes the form of a groan because the mind is incapable, by reason of its bewilderment and grief, of clothing its emotion in words. I pray you never think lightly of the supplications of your anguish. Rather judge that such prayers are like Jabez, of whom it is written, that "he was more honourable than his brethren, because his mother bare him with sorrow." That which is thrown up from the depth of the soul, when it is stirred with a terrible tempest, is more precious than pearl or coral, for it is the intercession of the Holy Spirit.

These prayers are sometimes "groanings that cannot be uttered," because *they concern such great things that they cannot be spoken*. I want, my Lord! I want, I want; I cannot tell thee what I want: but I seem to want all things. If it were some little thing, my narrow capacity could comprehend and describe it, but I need all covenant blessings. Thou knowest what I have need of before I ask thee, and though I cannot go into each item of my need, I know it to be very great, and such as I myself can never estimate. I groan, for I can do no more. Prayers which are the offspring of great desires, sublime aspirations, and elevated designs are surely the work of the Holy Spirit, and their power within a man is frequently so great that he cannot find expression for them. Words fail, and even the sighs which try to embody them cannot be uttered.

But it may be, beloved, that *we groan because we are conscious of the littleness of our desire, and the narrowness of our faith*. The trial, too, may seem too mean to pray about. I have known what it is to feel as if I could not pray about a certain matter, and yet I have been obliged to groan about it. A thorn in the flesh may be as painful a thing as a sword in the bones, and yet we may go and beseech the Lord thrice about it, and getting no answer we may feel that we know not what to pray for as we ought; and yet it makes us groan. Yes, and with that natural groan there may go up

an unutterable groaning of the Holy Spirit. Beloved, what a different view of prayer God has from that which men think to be the correct one. You may have seen very beautiful prayers in print, and you may have heard very charming compositions from the pulpit, but I trust you have not fallen in love with them. Judge these things rightly. I pray you never think well of *fine* prayers, for before the thrice holy God it ill becomes a sinful suppliant to play the orator. We heard of a certain clergyman who was said to have given forth “the finest prayer ever offered to a Boston audience.” Just so! The Boston audience received the prayer, and there it ended. We want the mind of the spirit in prayer, and not the mind of the flesh. The tail feathers of pride should be pulled out of our prayers, for they need only the wing feathers of faith; the peacock feathers of poetical expression are out of place before the throne of God. Hear me, what remarkably beautiful language he used in prayer!” “What an intellectual treat his prayer was! Yes, yes; but God looks at the heart. To him fine language is as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal, but a groan has music in it. *We* do not like groans: our ears are much too delicate to tolerate such dreary sounds; but not so the great Father of spirits. A Methodist brother cries, “Amen,” and you say, “I cannot bear such Methodistic noise”; no, but if it comes from the man’s heart God can bear it. When you get upstairs into your chamber this evening to pray, and find you cannot pray, but have to moan out, “Lord, I am too full of anguish and too perplexed to pray, hear thou the voice of my roaring,” though you reach to nothing else you will be really praying. When like David we can say, “I opened my mouth and panted,” we are by no means in an ill state of mind. All fine language in prayer, and especially all intoning or performing of prayers, must be abhorrent to God; it is little short of profanity to offer solemn supplication to God after the manner called “intoning.” The sighing of a true heart is infinitely more acceptable, for it is the work of the Spirit of God.

We may say of the prayers which the Holy Spirit works in us that they are *prayers of knowledge*. Notice, our difficulty is that we know not what we should pray for; but the Holy Spirit does know, and therefore he helps us by enabling us to pray intelligently, knowing what we are asking for, so far as this knowledge is needful to valid prayer. The text speaks “of the mind of the Spirit.” What a mind that must be!—the mind of that Spirit who arranged all the order which now pervades this earth! There once was chaos and confusion, but the Holy Spirit brooded over all, and His mind is the originator of that beautiful arrangement which we so admire in the visible creation. What a mind his must be! The Holy Spirit’s mind is seen in our intercessions when under his sacred influence we order our case before the Lord, and plead with holy wisdom for things convenient and necessary. What wise and admirable desires must those be which the Spirit of Wisdom himself works in us!

Moreover, the Holy Spirit’s intercession creates *prayers offered in a proper manner*. I showed you that the difficulty is that we know not what we should pray for “as we ought,” and the Spirit meets that difficulty by making intercession for us in a right manner. The Holy Spirit works in us humility, earnestness, intensity, importunity, faith, and resignation, and all else that is acceptable to God in our supplications. We know not how to mingle these sacred spices in the incense of prayer. We, if left to ourselves at our very best, get too much of one ingredient or another, and spoil the sacred compound, but the Holy Spirit’s intercessions have in them such a blessed blending of all that is good that they come up as a sweet perfume before the Lord. Spirit-taught prayers are offered as they ought to be. They are his own intercession in some respects, for we read that the Holy Spirit not only helps us to intercede but “maketh intercession.” It is twice over declared in our text that he maketh intercession for us; and the meaning of this I tried to show when I described a father as putting his hands upon his child’s hands. This is something more than helping us to pray,

something more than encouraging us or directing us,—but I venture no further, except to say that he puts such force of his own mind into our poor weak thoughts and desires and hopes, that he himself maketh intercession for us, working in us to will and to pray according to his good pleasure.

I want you to notice, however, that *these intercessions of the Spirit are only in the saints*. “He maketh intercession *for us*,” and “He maketh intercession *for the saints*.” Does he do nothing for sinners, then? Yes, he quickens sinners into spiritual life, and he strives with them to overcome their sinfulness and turn them into the right way; but in the saints he works with us and enables us to pray after his mind and according to the will of God. His intercession is not in or for the unregenerate. O, unbelievers you must first be made saints or you cannot feel the Spirit’s intercession within you. What need we have to go to Christ for the blessing of the Holy Ghost, which is peculiar to the children of God, and can only be ours by faith in Christ Jesus! “To as man as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God”; and to the sons of God alone cometh the Spirit of adoption, and all his helping grace. Unless we are the sons of God the Holy Spirit’s indwelling shall not be ours: we are shut out from the intercession of the Holy Ghost, ay, and from the intercession of Jesus too, for he hath said, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me.”

Thus I have tried to show you the kind of prayer which the Spirit inspires.

III. Our third and last point is THE SURE SUCCESS OF ALL SUCH PRAYERS.

All the prayers which the Spirit of God inspires in us must succeed, because, first, *there is a meaning in them which God reads and approves*. When the Spirit of God writes a prayer upon a man’s heart, the man himself may be in such a state of mind that he does not altogether know what it is. His interpretation of it is a groan, and that is all. Perhaps he does not even get so far as that in expressing the mind of the Spirit, but he feels greenings which he cannot utter, he cannot find a door of utterance for his inward grief. Yet our heavenly Father, who looks immediately upon the heart, reads what the Spirit of God has indited there, and does not need even our groans to explain the meaning. He reads the heart itself: “he knoweth,” says the text, “what is the mind of the Spirit.” The Spirit is one with the Father, and the Father knows what the Spirit means. The desires which the Spirit prompts may be too spiritual for such babes in grace as we are actually to describe or to express, and yet the Spirit writes the desire on the renewed mind, and the Father sees it. Now that which God reads in the heart and approves of—for the word to “know” in this case includes approval as well as the mere act of omniscience—what God sees and approves of in the heart must succeed. Did not Jesus say, “Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of these things before you ask them”? Did he not tell us this as an encouragement to believe that we shall receive all needful blessings? So it is with those prayers which are all broken up, wet with tears, and discordant with those sighs and inarticulate expressions and heavings of the bosom, and sobbings of the heart and anguish and bitterness of spirit, our gracious Lord reads them as a man reads a book, and they are written in a character which he fully understands. To give a simple figure: if I were to come into your house I might find there a little child that cannot yet speak plainly. It cries for something, and it makes very odd and objectionable noises, combined with signs and movements, which are almost meaningless to stranger, but his mother understands him, and attends to his little pleadings. A mother can translate baby-talk: she comprehends incomprehensible noises. Even so doth our Father in heaven know all about our poor baby talk, for our prayer is not much better. He knows and comprehends the cryings, and meanings, and sighings, and chatterings of his bewildered children. Yea, a tender mother knows her child’s needs before the child knows what it wants. Perhaps the

little one stutters, stammers, and cannot get its words out, but the mother sees what he would say, and takes the meaning. Even so we know concerning our great Father:—

“He knows the thoughts we mean to speak,
Ere from our opening lips the break.”

Do you therefore rejoice in this, that because the prayers of the Spirit are known and understood of God, therefore they will be sure to speed.

The next argument for making us sure that they will speed is this—that *they are “the mind of the Spirit.”* God the ever blessed is one, and there can be no division between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. These divine persons always work together, and there is a common desire for the glory of each blessed Person of the Divine Unity, and therefore it cannot be conceived without profanity, that anything could be the mind of the Holy Spirit and not be the mind of the Father and the mind of the Son. The mind of God is one and harmonious; if, therefore, the Holy Spirit dwells in you, and he move you to any desire, then his mind is in your prayer, and it is not possible that the eternal Father should reject your petitions. That prayer which came from heaven will certainly go back to heaven. If the Holy Ghost prompts it, the Father must and will accept it, for it is not possible that he should put a slight upon the ever blessed and adorable Spirit.

But one more word, and that circles the argument, namely, that *the work of the Spirit in the heart is not only the mind of the Spirit which God knows, but it is also according to the will or mind of God*, for he never maketh intercession in us other than is consistent with the divine will. Now, the divine will or mind may be viewed two ways. First, there is the will declared in the proclamations of holiness by the Ten Commandments. The Spirit of God never prompts us to ask for anything that is unholy or inconsistent with the precepts of the Lord. Then secondly, there is the secret mind of God, the will of his eternal predestination and decree, of which we know nothing; but we do know this, that the Spirit of God never prompts us to ask anything which is contrary to the eternal purpose of God. Reflect for a moment: the Holy Spirit knows all the purposes of God, and when they are about to be fulfilled, he moves the children of God to pray about them, and so their prayers keep touch and tally with the divine decrees. Oh would you not pray confidently if you knew that your prayer corresponded with the sealed book of destiny? We may safely entreat the Lord to do what he has ordained to do. A carnal man draws the inference that if God has ordained an event we need not pray about it, but faith obediently draws the inference that the God who secretly ordained to give the blessing has openly commanded that we should pray for it, and therefore faith obediently prays. Coming events cast their shadows before them, and when God is about to bless his people his coming favour casts the shadow of prayer over the church. When he is about to favour an individual he casts the shadow of hopeful expectation over his soul. Our prayers, let men laugh at them as they will, and say there is no power in them, are the indicators of the movement of the wheels of Providence. Believing supplications are forecasts of the future, He who prayeth in faith is like the seer of old, he sees that which is to be: his holy expectancy, like a telescope, brings distant objects near to him. He is bold to declare that he has the petition which he has asked of God, and he therefore begins to rejoice and to praise God, even before the blessing has actually arrived. So it is: prayer prompted by the Holy Spirit is the footfall of the divine decree.

I conclude by saying, see, my dear hearers, the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit, for if the saints know not what they should pray for as they ought; if consecrated men and women, with Christ suffering in them, still feel their need of the instruction of the Holy Spirit, how much more do you who are not saints, and have never given yourselves up to God, require divine teaching!

On, that you would know and feel your dependence upon the Holy Ghost that he may prompt the once crucified but now ascended Redeemer that this gift of the Spirit, this promise of the Father, is shed abroad upon men. May he who comes from Jesus lead you to Jesus.

And, then O ye people of God, let this last thought abide with you,—what condescension is this that Divine Person should dwell in you for ever, and that he should be with you to help your prayers. Listen to me for a moment. If I read in the Scriptures that in the most heroic acts of faith God the Holy Ghost helpeth his people, I can understand it; if I read that in the sweetest music of their songs when they worship best, and chant their loftiest strains before the Most High God, the Spirit helpeth them, I can understand it; and even if I hear that in their wrestling prayers and prevalent intercessions God the Holy Spirit helpeth them, I can understand it: but I bow with reverent amazement, my heart sinking into the dust with adoration, when I reflect that God the Holy Ghost helps us when we cannot speak, but only groan. Yea, and when we cannot even utter our groanings, he doth not only help us but he claims as his own particular creation the “groanings that cannot be uttered.” This is condescension indeed! In deigning to help us in the grief that cannot even vent itself in groaning, he proves himself to be a true Comforter. O God, my God, thou hast not forsaken me: thou art not far from me, nor from the voice of my roaring. Thou didst for awhile leave the Firstborn when he was made a curse for us, so that he cried in agony, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” but thou wilt not leave one of the “many brethren” for whom he died: the Spirit shall be with them, and when they cannot so much as groan he will make intercession for them with groanings that cannot be uttered. God bless you, my beloved brethren, and may you feel the Spirit of the Lord thus working in you and with you. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 8:14 to end.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—1009, 978, 400.

The Waterpots at Cana

A Sermon

(No. 1556)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.”—John 2:7.

YOU KNOW THE NARRATIVE. Jesus was at a wedding feast, and when the wine ran short, he provided for it right bountifully. I do not think that I should do any good if I were to enter upon the discussion as to what sort of wine our Lord Jesus made on this occasion. It was wine, and I am sure it was very good wine, for he would produce nothing quite but the best. Was it wine such as men understand by that word now? It was wine; but there are very few people in this country who ever see, much less drink, any of that beverage. That which goes under the name of wine is not true wine, but a fiery, brandied concoction of which I feel sure that Jesus would not have tasted a drop. The fire-waters and blazing spirits of modern wine manufacturers are very different articles from the juice of the grape, mildly exhilarating, which was the usual wine of more sober centuries. As to the wine such as is commonly used in the East, a person must drink inordinately before he would become intoxicated with it. It would be possible, for there were cases in which men were intoxicated with wine; but, as a rule, intoxication was a rare vice in the Savior's times and in the preceding ages. Had our great Exemplar lived under our present circumstances, surrounded by a sea of deadly drink, which is ruining tens of thousands, I know how he would have acted. I am sure he would not have contributed by word or deed to the rivers of poisonous beverages in which bodies and souls are now being destroyed wholesale. The kind of wine which he made was such that, if there had been no stronger drink in the world, nobody might have thought it necessary to enter any protest against drinking it. It would have done nobody any hurt, be sure of that, or else Jesus our loving Savior would not have made it.

Some have raised a question about the great quantity of wine, for I suppose there must have been no less than one hundred and twenty gallons, and probably more. “They did not want all that,” says one, “and even of the weakest kind of wine it would be a deal too much.” But you are thinking of an ordinary wedding here, are you not, when there are ten or a dozen, or a score or two, met together in a parlour? An oriental wedding is quite another affair. Even if it be only a village, like Cana of Galilee, everybody comes to eat and drink, and the feast lasts on for a week or a fortnight. Hundreds of people must be fed, for often open house is kept. Nobody is refused, and consequently a great quantity of provision is required. Besides, they may not have consumed all the wine at once. When the Lord multiplied loaves and fishes, they must eat the loaves and fishes directly, or else the bread would grow mouldy, and the fish would be putrid; but wine could be stored and used months afterwards. I have no doubt that such wine as Jesus Christ made was as good for keeping as it was for using. And why not set the family up with a store in hand? They were not very rich people. They might sell it if they liked. At any rate, that is not my subject, and I do not intend getting into hot water over the question of cold water. I abstain myself from alcoholic drink in every

form, and I think others would be wise to do the same; but of this each one must be a guide unto himself.

Jesus Christ commenced the gospel dispensation, not with a miracle of vengeance, like that of Moses, who turned water into blood, but with a miracle of liberality, turning water into wine. He does not only supply necessities, but gives luxuries, and this is highly significant of the kingdom of his grace. Here he not only gives sinners enough to save them, but he gives abundantly, grace upon grace. The gifts of the covenant are not stinted or stunted, they are neither small in quantity nor in quality. He gives to men not only the water of life that they may drink and be refreshed, but “wines on the lees well refined” that they may rejoice exceedingly. And he gives like a king, who gives lavishly, without counting the cups and bottles. As to one hundred and twenty gallons, how little is that in comparison with the rivers of love and mercy which he is pleased to bestow freely out of his bountiful heart upon the most needy souls. You may forget all about the wine question, and all about wine, bad, good, or indifferent. The less we have to do with it the better, I am quite sure. And now let us think about our Lord’s mercy, and let the wine stand as a type of his grace, and the abundance of it as the type of the abundance of his grace which he doth so liberally bestow.

Now, concerning this miracle, it may well be remarked how simple and unostentatious it was. One might have expected that when the great Lord of all came here in human form he would commence his miraculous career by summoning the scribes and Pharisees at least, if not the kings and princes of the earth, to see the marks of his calling and the guarantees and warrants of his commission; gathering them all together to work some miracle before them, as Moses and Aaron did before Pharaoh, that they might be convinced of his Messiahship. He does nothing of the kind. He goes to a simple wedding among poor people, and there in the simplest and most natural way he displays his glory. When the water is to be turned into wine, when he selects that as the first miracle, he does not call for the master of the feast even, or for the bridegroom himself or for any of the guests, and begin to say, “You clearly perceive that your wine is all gone. Now, I am about to show you a great marvel, to turn water into wine.” No, he does it quietly with the servants: he tells them to fill the waterpots: he uses the baths: he does not ask for any new vessels, but uses what were there, making no fuss or parade. He uses water, too, of which they had abundance, and works the miracle, if I may so speak, in the most commonplace and natural style; and that is just the style of Jesus Christ. Now, if it had been a Romish miracle it would have been done in a very mysterious, theatrical, sensational way, with no end of paraphernalia; but, being a genuine miracle, it is done just as nearly after the course of nature as the supernatural can go. Jesus does not have the waterpots emptied and then fill them with wine, but he goes as far with nature as nature will go, and uses water to make the wine from; therein following the processes of his providence which are at work every day. When the water drops from heaven, and flows into the earth to the roots of the vine, and so swells out the clusters with ruddy juice, it is through water that wine is produced. There is only a difference as to time whether the wine is created in the cluster, or in the waterpots. Our Lord does not call for any strangers to do it, but the ordinary servants shall bring ordinary water; and while they are drawing out the water, or what appears to them to be water, the servants shall perceive that the water has been turned into wine.

Now, whenever you try to serve Jesus Christ do not make a fuss about it, because he never made any fuss in what he did, even when he was working amazing miracles. If you want to do a good thing, go and do it as naturally as ever you can. Be simple hearted and simple minded. Be yourself. Do not be affected in your piety, as if you were going to walk to heaven on stilts: walk

on your own feet, and bring religion to your own door and to your own fireside. If you have a grand work to do, do it with that genuine simplicity which is next akin to sublimity; for affectation, and everything that is gaudy and ostentatious, is, after all, mean and beggarly. Nothing but simple naturalness has a bout it a genuine beauty; and such a beauty there is about this miracle of the Savior.

Let all these remarks stand as a kind of preface; for now I want to draw out *the principles which are hidden in my text*; and then, secondly, when I have displayed those principles, I want to show *how they should be carried out*.

I. "Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water." WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES INVOLVED IN OUR LORD'S MODE OF PROCEDURE?

First, that, as a rule, *when Christ is about to bestow a blessing he gives a command*. This is a fact which your memories will help you to establish in a moment. It is not always so; but, as a general rule, a word of command goes before a word of power, or else with it. He is about to give wine, and the process does not consist in saying, "Let wine be," but it begins by a command addressed to men,—*"Fill the waterpots with water."* Here is a blind man: Christ is about to give him sight. He puts clay on his eyes, and then says, "Go to the pool of Siloam and wash." There is a man with his arm swinging at his side, useless to him: Christ is going to restore it, and he says, "Stretch forth thine hand." Ay, and the principle goes so far that it holds good in cases where it would seem to be quite inapplicable, for if it be a child that is dead he says, "Maid, arise;" or if it be Lazarus, who by this time stinks, being four days buried, yet he cries, "Lazarus, come forth." And thus he bestows a benefit by a command. Gospel benefits come with a gospel precept.

Do you wonder that this principle which is seen in the miracles is seen in the wonders of his divine grace? Here is a sinner to be saved. What does Christ say to that sinner? "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Can he believe of himself? Is he not dead in sin? Brethren, raise no such questions, but learn that Jesus Christ has bidden men believe, and has commissioned his disciples to cry, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." And he bids us go and preach this word—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But why command them? It is his will to do so, and that should be enough for you who call yourself his disciple. It was so even in the olden times, when the Lord set forth in vision his way of dealing with a dead nation. There lay the dry bones of the valley, exceeding many, and exceeding dry, and Ezekiel was sent to prophesy to them. What said the prophet? "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." Is that his way of making them alive? Yes, by a command to hear; a thing which dry bones cannot do. He issues his command to the dead, the dry, the helpless, and by its power life comes. I pray you, be not disobedient to the gospel, for faith is a duty, or we should not read of "the obedience of faith." Jesus Christ, when he is about to bless, challenges men's obedience by issuing his royal orders.

The same thing is true when we come away from the unconverted to believers. When God means to bless his people and make them blessings it is by issuing a command to them. We have been praying to the Lord that he would arise and make bare his arm. His answer is, "Awake, awake, O Zion." We ask that the world may be brought to his feet, and his reply is, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them." The command is to us the vehicle of the blessing. If we are to have the blessing of converts multiplied, and churches built up, Christ must give us the boon: it is altogether his gift, as much as it was his

to turn the water into wine; yet first of all he says to us, "Go ye and proclaim my salvation unto the ends of the earth," for thus are we to fill the waterpots with water. If we be obedient to his command we shall see how he will work—how mightily he will be with us, and how our prayers shall be heard.

That is the first principle that I see here: Christ issues commands to those whom he will bless.

Secondly, *Christ's commands are not to be questioned, but to be obeyed.* The people want wine, and Christ says, "Fill the waterpots with *water*." Well, now, if these servants had, been of the mind of the captious critics of modern times, they would have looked at our Lord a long while, and objected boldly: "We do not want any water; it is not the feast of purifications; it is a wedding feast. We do not require water at a wedding. We shall want water when we are going up to the synagogue, or to the temple, that we may purify our hands according to our custom: but we do not want water just now: the hour, the occasion, and the fitness of things, call for *wine*." But Mary's advice to them was sound—"Whatsoever he saith to you, do it." Thus, too, let us neither question nor cavil, but do his bidding straight away.

It may sometimes seem that Christ's command is not pertinent to the point in hand. The sinner, for instance, says, "Lord, save me: conquer in me my sin." Our Lord cries, "Believe," and the sinner cannot see how believing in Jesus will enable him to get the mastery over a besetting sin. There does not at first sight appear to be any connection between the simple trusting of the Savior and the conquest of a bad temper, or the getting rid of a bad habit, such as intemperance, passion, covetousness, or falsehood. There is such a connection, but recollect, whether you can see the connection or not, it is yours "not to reason why," but yours to do what Jesus bids you do; for it is in the way of the command that the miracle of mercy will be wrought. "Fill the waterpots with water," though what you want is wine. Christ sees a connection between the water and the wine, though you do not. He has a reason for the pots being filled with water, which reason, as yet, you do not know: it is not yours to ask an explanation, but to yield obedience. You are, in the first instance, just to do what Jesus bids you, as he bids you, now that he bids you, and because he bids you, and you shall find that his commandments are not grievous, and in keeping of them there is a great reward.

Sometimes these commands may even seem to be trivial. They may look as if he trifled with us. The family were in need of wine; Jesus says, "Fill the waterpots with water." The servants might have said, "This is clearly a mere putting of us off and playing with us. Why, we should be better employed in going round to these poor people's friends, and asking them to contribute another skin of wine. We should be much better employed in finding out some shop where we could purchase more: but to send us to the well to fill those great waterpots that hold so much water does seem altogether a piece of child's play." I know, brethren, that sometimes the path of duty seems as if it could not lead to the desired result. We want to be doing something more; that something more might be wrong, but it looks as if we could thereby compass our design more easily and directly, and so we hanker after this uncommanded and perhaps forbidden course. And I know that many a troubled conscience thinks that simply to believe in Jesus is too little a thing. The deceitful heart suggests a course which looks to be more effectual. "Do some penance: feel some bitterness; weep a certain amount of tears. Goad your mind, or break your heart": so cries carnal self. Jesus simply commands, "Believe." It does appear to be too little a thing to be done, as if it could not be that eternal life should be given upon putting your trust in Jesus Christ: but this is the principle we want to teach you—that when Jesus Christ is about to give a blessing he issues a command which is not

to be questioned, but to be at once obeyed. If ye will not believe, neither shall ye be established; but if ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.”

The third principle is this—that *whenever we get a command from Christ it is always wisdom to carry it out zealously*. He said, “Fill the waterpots with water,” and they filled them *up to the brim*. You know there is a way of filling a waterpot, and there is another way of filling it. It is full, and you cannot heap it up; but still you can fill it up till it begins almost to run over: the liquid trembles as if it must surely fall in a crystal cascade. It is a filling fullness. In fulfilling Christ’s commands, my dear brethren and sisters, let us go to their widest extent: let us fill them up to the brim. If it is “Believe,” oh, believe him with all your might; trust him with your whole heart. If it is “Preach the gospel,” preach it in season and out of season; and preach *the* gospel—the whole of it. Fill it up to the brim. Do not give the people a half gospel. Give them a brimming-over gospel. Fill the vessels up to the very brim. If you are to repent, ask to have a hearty and a deep repentance—full to the brim. If you are to believe, ask to have an intense, absolute, childlike dependence, that your faith may be full to the brim. If you are bidden pray, pray mightily: fill the vessel of prayer up to the brim. If you are to search the Scriptures for blessing, search them from end to end: fill the Bible-reading vessel up to the brim. Christ’s commands are never meant to be done in a half-hearted manner. Let us throw our whole soul into whatever he commands us, even though, as yet, we cannot see the reason why he has set us the task. Christ’s commands should be fulfilled with enthusiasm, and carried out to the extreme, if extreme be possible.

The fourth principle is that *our earnest action in obedience to Christ is not contrary to our dependence upon him, but it is necessary to our dependence upon him*. I will show you that in a moment. There are some brethren I know who say, “Hem! you hold what you call revival services, and you try to arouse men by earnest appeals and exciting addresses. Do you not see that God will do his own work? These efforts are just your trying to take the work out of God’s hands. The proper way is to trust in him, and do nothing.” All right, brother. We have your word for it—that you trust in him and do nothing. I take the liberty not to be so very certain that you do trust him, for if I remember who you are, and I think I have been to your house, you are about the most miserable, desponding, unbelieving person that I know. You do not even know whether you are saved yourself nine times out of ten. Well now, I think you should hardly come and cry yourself up for your faith. If you had such a wonderfully great faith, there is no doubt whatever that according to your faith it would be unto you. How many have been added to your church through your doing nothing this year—that blessed church of yours, where you exercise this, blessed faith without works? How many have been brought in? “Well, we do not have very many additions.” No, and I think you are not likely to have. If you go about the extension of the Redeemer’s kingdom by inaction, I do not think that you go *the way* to work which Jesus Christ approves of. But we venture to say to you that we who go in for working for Christ with all our heart and soul, using any means within our reach to bring men in to hear the gospel, feel as much as ever you do that we cannot do anything at all in the matter apart from the Holy Spirit, and we trust in God, I think, almost as much as you do, because our faith has produced rather more results than yours has done. I should not wonder if it turns out that your faith without works is dead, being alone, and that our faith having works with it has been living faith after all. I will put the case thus: Jesus Christ says, “Fill the waterpots with water.” The orthodox servant says, “My Lord, I fully believe that thou canst make wine for these people without any water, and by thy leave I will bring no water. I am not going to interfere with

the work of God. I am quite certain that thou dost not want our help, gracious Lord. Thou canst make these waterpots to be full of wine without our bringing a single bucket of water, and so we will not rob thee of the glory of it. We will just stand back, and wait for thee. When the wine is made we will drink some of it and bless thy name; but meanwhile we pray thee have us excused, for pails are heavy carrying, and a good many must needs be brought to fill all those waterpots. It would be interfering with the divine work, and so we would rather take our ease." Do you not think that servants who talked so would prove that they had no faith in Jesus at all? We will not say that it would prove their unbelief, but we will say that it looks very like it. But look at the servant there who, as soon as ever Jesus commands "Fill the waterpots with water," says, "I do not know what he is at. I do not see the connection between fetching this water and providing the feast with wine, but I am off to the well: here, hand me a couple of pails. Come along, brother; come along and help fill the baths." There they go, and soon come joyfully back with the water, pouring it into the troughs till they are full up to the brim. Those seem to me to be the believing servants who obey the command, not understanding it, but expecting that, somehow or other, Jesus Christ knows the way to work his own miracle. By our earnest exertions we are not interfering with him, dear friends; far from it. We are proving our faith in him if we work for him as he bids us work, and trust in him alone with undivided faith.

The next principle I must lay equal stress upon is this,—*our action alone is not sufficient*. That we know, but let me remind you of it yet again. There are these waterpots, these troughs, these baths: they are full, and could not be fuller. What a spilling of water there is! You see that in their trying to fill them the water runs over here and there. Well, all these six great baths are full of water. Is there any more wine for all that? Not a drop. It is water that they brought, nothing but water, and it remains water still. Suppose that they should take that water into the feast; I am half afraid that the guests would not have thought cold water quite the proper liquid to drink at a wedding. They ought to have done so; but I am afraid they were not educated in the school of total abstinence. They would have said to the master of the feast, "Thou hast given us good wine, and water is a poor finish for the feast." I am sure it would not have done. And yet water it was, depend upon it, and nothing else but water, when the servants poured it into the pots. Even so, after all that sinners can do, and all that saints can do, there is nothing in any human effort which can avail for the saving of a soul till Christ speaks the word of power. When Paul has planted and Apollos watered, there is no increase till God gives it. Preach the gospel, labor with souls, persuade, entreat, exhort; but there is no power in anything that you do until Jesus Christ displays his divine might. His presence is our power. Blessed be his name, he will come; and if we fill the waterpots with water, he will turn it into wine. He alone can do it, and those servants who show the most alacrity in filling up the waterpots are among the first to confess that it is he alone who can perform the deed.

And now the last principle here is that *although human action in itself falls short of the desired end, yet it has its place, and God has made it necessary by his appointment*. Why did our Lord have these waterpots filled with water? I do not say that it was necessary that it should have been done. It was not absolutely necessary in itself; but in order that the miracle might be all open and above board, it was necessary; for suppose he had said, "Go to those waterpots and draw out wine," those who watched him might have said that there was wine there before, and that no miracle was wrought. When our Lord had them filled up with water, there remained no room for any wine to be hidden away. It was just the same as with Elijah, when, in order to prove that there was no concealed fire upon the altar at Carmel, he bade them go down to the sea, and bring water, and pour it upon the

altar, and upon the victim, till the trenches were filled. He said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time, and no possibility of imposture remained. And so, when the Lord Jesus bade the servants fill the waterpots with water, he put it beyond all possibility that he should be charged with imposture; and thus we see why it was necessary that they should be filled with water.

Moreover, it was necessary, because it was so instructive to the servants. Did you notice when I was reading it that the master of the feast, when he tasted the good wine, did not know where it came from. He could not make it out, and he uttered an expression which showed his surprise, mingled with his ignorance. But it is written, "The servants which drew the water knew." Now, when souls are converted in a church, it happens much in the same way with certain of the members, who are good people, but they do not know much about the conversion of sinners. They do not feel much joy in revivals; in fact, like the elder brother, they are rather suspicious of these wild characters being brought in: they consider themselves to be very respectable, and they would rather not have the lowest of people sitting in the pew with them: they feel awkward in coming so near them. They know little about what is going on. "But the servants which drew the water knew": that is to say, the earnest believers who do the work, and try to fill the waterpots, know all about it. Jesus bade them fill the vessels with water on purpose that the men who drew the water might know that it was a miracle. I warrant you, if you bring souls to Christ you will know his power. It will make you leap for joy to hear the cry of the penitent, and mark the bright flash of delight that passes over the new-born believer's face when his sins are washed away, and he feels himself renewed. If you want to know Jesus Christ's miraculous power you must go and—not work miracles, but just draw the water and fill the waterpots. Do the ordinary duties of Christian men and women—things in which there is no power of themselves, but which Jesus Christ makes to be connected with his divine working, and it shall be for your instruction, and your comfort, that you had such work to do. "The servants which drew the water knew."

I think that I have said enough upon the principles which lie concealed within my text.

II. You must have patience with me while I try to apply these principles to practical purposes. LET US SEE HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS DIVINE COMMAND, "Fill the waterpots with water."

First, *use in the service of Christ such abilities as you have*. There stood the waterpots, six of them, and Jesus used what he found ready to his hand. There was water in the well; our Lord used that also. Our Lord is accustomed to employ his own people, and such abilities as they have, rather than angels or a novel class of beings created fresh for the purpose. Now, dear brothers and sisters, if you have no golden chalices, fill your earthen vessels. If you cannot consider yourselves to be goblets of rarest workmanship in silver, or if you could not liken yourselves to the best Sevres ware, it does not matter; fill the vessels which you have. If you cannot, with Elias, bring fire from heaven, and if you cannot work miracles with the apostles, do what you can. If silver and gold you have none, yet such as you have dedicate to Christ. Bring water at his bidding, and it will be better than wine. The commonest gifts can be made to serve Christ's purpose. Just as he took a few loaves and fishes, and fed the crowd with them, so will he take your six waterpots and the water, and do his wine-making therewith.

Thus, you see, they improved what they had; for the waterpots were empty, but they filled them. There are a good many brethren here from the College to-night, and they are trying to improve their gifts and their abilities. I think you do right, my brethren. But I have heard some people say,

“The Lord Jesus does not want your learning.” No, it is very likely that he does not, any more than he needed the water: but then he certainly does not want your stupidity and your ignorance, and he does not want your rough, uncultivated ways of speaking. He did not seek for empty pitchers on this occasion; he would have them full, and the servants did well to fill them. Our Lord to-day does not want empty heads in his ministers, nor empty hearts; so, my brethren, fill your waterpots with water. Work away, and study away, and learn all you can, and fill the waterpots with water. “Oh,” somebody will say, “but how are such studies to lead to the conversion of men? Conversion is like wine, and all that these young fellows will learn will be like water.” You are right; but still I bid these students fill the waterpots with water, and expect the Lord Jesus to turn the water into wine. He can sanctify human knowledge so that it shall be useful to the setting forth of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. I hope that the day has gone by when it is so much as dreamed that ignorance and coarseness are helpful to the kingdom of Christ. The great Teacher would have his people know all that they can know, and especially know himself and the Scriptures, that they may set him forth, and proclaim his gospel. “Fill the waterpots with water.”

Next, to apply this principle, let us all *use such means of blessing as God appoints*. What are they? First, there is the reading of the Scriptures. “Search the Scriptures.” Search them all you can. Try to understand them. “But if I know the Bible, shall I be therefore saved.” No, you must know Christ himself by the Spirit. Still, “fill the waterpots with water.” While you are studying the Scriptures you may expect the Savior will bless his own word, and turn the water into wine.

Then there is attendance upon the means of grace, and hearing a gospel ministry. Mind you fill that waterpot with water. “But I may hear thousands of sermons and not be saved.” I know it is so, but your business is to fill this waterpot with water, and while you are listening to the gospel God will bless it, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Take care to use the means which God appoints. Since our Lord has appointed to save men by the preaching of the word, I pray that he will raise up those who will preach without ceasing, in season and out of season, indoors and in the streets. “But they won’t be saved by our preaching.” I know that. Preaching is the water: and while we are preaching, God will bless it, and turn the water into wine. Let us distribute religious books and tracts. “Oh, but people won’t be saved by reading them.” Very likely not, but while they are reading them God may bring his truth to remembrance and impress their hearts. “Fill the waterpots with water.” Give away abundance of tracts. Scatter religious literature everywhere. “Fill the waterpots with water,” and the Lord will turn the water into wine.

Remember the prayer-meeting. What a blessed means of grace it for it brings down power for all the works of the church: fill that waterpot with water. I have not to complain of your attendance at prayer-meetings; but oh, keep it up, dear brethren! You can pray. Blessed be his name, you have the spirit of prayer. Pray on! “Fill the waterpots with water,” and in answer to prayer Jesus will turn it into wine. Sunday-school teachers, do not neglect your blessed means of usefulness. “Fill the waterpots with water.” Work the Sunday-school system with all your might. “But it will not save the children merely to get them together, and teach them of Jesus. We cannot give them new hearts.” Who said that you could? “Fill the waterpots with water.” Jesus Christ knows how to turn it into wine, and he does not fail to do it when we are obedient to his commands.

Use all the means, but *take care that you use those means right heartily*. I come back to that part of the text—“And they filled them up to the brim.” When you teach the young ones in the Sunday-school, teach them well. Fill them to the brim. When you preach, dear sir, do not preach as if you were only half awake; stir yourself up; fill your ministry to the brim. When you are trying

to evangelize the community, do not attempt it in a half-hearted way, as if you did not care whether their souls were saved or not; fill them to the brim; preach the gospel with all your might, and beg for power from on high. Fill every vessel to the brim. Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. Nobody ever yet served Christ too well. I have heard that in some services there may be too much zeal, but in the service of Christ you may have as much zeal as ever you will and yet not exceed, if prudence be joined therewith. "Fill the waterpots with water," and fill them to the brim. Go in for doing good with all your heart and soul and strength.

Further, in order to apply this principle, be sure to *remember when you have done all that you can do, that there is a great deficiency in all that you have done*. It is well to come away from tract-distributing and Sunday-school teaching and preaching, and go home and get to your knees, and cry, "Lord, I have done all that thou hast commanded me, and yet there is nothing done unless thou givest the finishing touch. Lord, I have filled the waterpots, and though I could only fill them with water, yet I have filled them to the brim. Lord, to the best of my ability, I have sought to win men for thyself. There cannot be a soul saved, a child converted, or any glory brought to thy name by what I have done, in and of itself; but, my Master, speak the miracle-working word, and let the water which fills the vessels blush into wine. Thou canst do it, though I cannot. I cast the burden upon thee."

And this leads me to the last application of the principle, which is—*trust in your Lord to do the work*. You see, there are two ways of filling 'waterpots. Suppose these people had never been commanded to fill the waterpots, and their doing it had had no reference to Christ whatever; suppose that it had been a freak of their own imagination, and they had said, "These people have no wine, but they shall have a bath if they like, and so we will fill the six waterpots with water." Nothing would have come of such a proceeding. There would have stood the water. The Eton school-boy said, "The conscious water saw its God and blushed," a truly poetic expression; but the conscious water would have seen the servants, and would not have blushed. It would have reflected their faces upon its shining surface, but nothing more would have happened. Jesus Christ himself must come, and in present power must work the miracle. It was because he had commanded the servants to fill the waterpots with water that therefore he was bound, if I may use such an expression of our free King, bound to turn it into wine, for otherwise he would have been making fools of them, and they also might have turned round and said, "Why didst thou give us such a command as this?" If, after we have filled the waterpots with water, Jesus does not work by us, we shall have done what he bade us; but if we believe in him, I make bold to say that he is bound to come; for though we should be losers, and dreadful losers too, if he did not display his power, for we should have to lament, "I have labored in vain, and spent my strength for nought," yet we should not be such losers as he would be, for straightway the world would affirm that Christ's commands are empty, fruitless, idle. It would be declared that obedience to his word brings no result. The world would say, "You have filled the waterpots with water because he told you to do it. You expected him to turn the water into wine, but he did not do it. Your faith is vain; your whole obedience is vain; and he is not a fit Master to be served." *We* should be losers, but *he* would be a greater loser still, for he would lose his glory. For my part, I do not believe that a good word for Christ is ever spoken in vain. I am sure that no sermon with Christ in it is ever preached without result. Something will come of it, if not to-night, nor to-morrow; something will come of it. When I have printed a sermon, and seen it fairly in the volume, I have before long been delighted to hear of souls saved by its means. And when I have not printed, but only preached, a discourse, I have still thought, something will come

of it. I preached Christ. I put his saving truth into that sermon, and that seed cannot die. If it shall lie in the volume for years, like the grains of wheat in the mummy's hand, it will live, and grow, and bear fruit. Consequently, I have heard but lately of a soul brought to Christ by a sermon that I preached twenty-five years ago. I hear almost every week of souls having been brought to Christ by sermons preached at Park Street, and Exeter Hall, and the Surrey Gardens, and therefore I feel that God will not let a single faithful testimony fall to the ground. Go on, brethren. Go on filling the waterpots with water. Do not believe that you are doing much when you have done your utmost. Do not begin to congratulate yourselves on your past success. All must come from Christ; and it *will* come from Christ. Do not go to the prayer-meeting and say, "Paul *may* plant and Apollos *may* water, but "—and so on. That is not how the passage runs. It says just the contrary, and runs thus,—“Paul planteth, Apollos watereth, but God giveth the increase.” The increase is surely given by God where the planting and sowing are rightly done. The servants fill the waterpots: the Master turns the water into wine.

The Lord grant us grace to be obedient to his command, especially to that command, “Believe and live!” and may we meet him in the marriage-feast above to drink of the new wine with him for ever and ever. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 1:29-51; John 2:1-11.

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