



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 27: 1881

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 27: 1881* by Charles Spurgeon

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Hearken and Look; or, Encouragement for Believers

A Sermon

(No. 1596)

Delivered on Wednesday, April 27th, 1881, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At Exeter Hall.

(The Annual Sermon on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society)

“Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.”—Isaiah 51:2-3.

THE second verse contains my actual text. It is the argument by which faith is led to look for the blessings promised in the third verse.

It is habitual with some persons to spy out the dark side of every question or fact: they fix their eyes upon the “waste places,” and they study them till they know every ruin, and are familiar with the dragons and the owls. They sigh most dolorously that the former times were better than these, and that we have fallen upon most degenerate days. They speak of “shooting Niagara,” and of all sorts of frightful things. I am afraid that a measure of this tendency to write bitter things dwells in almost all of us at this present season, for certain discouraging facts which cannot be ignored are pressing heavily upon men’s spirits. The habit of looking continually towards the wildernesses is injurious because it greatly discourages; and anything that discourages an earnest worker is a serious leakage for his strength. Perhaps a worse result than honest discouragement comes of depressing views, for they often afford an apology for indifference and inaction. The smallest peg suffices to hang an excuse upon when we are anxious to escape from the stern service of faith. “I pray thee have me excused,” is a request which was supported in the parable by the flimsiest of pretences, and discouragement makes one of the same sort. The sluggard’s argument is on this wise,—“I will not attempt the work, for it is far too heavy for my poor strength. I fear the times are ill adapted to any special effort; indeed, I am not quite certain that success will ever attend the general work.” It is therefore a dreadful thing when the Christian church begins to be discouraged, and means must be used to stay the evil. Such means we would use this day. Lo, we lift the standard of the divine promise. “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,” sounds out like a silver trumpet in the front of the host. Be encouraged, O ye of the faint heart; there are no more difficulties now than there were of old. The cause is no more in jeopardy than it was a thousand years ago. The result, the end, the consummation of all things is absolutely certain: it is in his hand who cannot fail, therefore be of good courage, and in waiting upon the Lord renew your strength.

Remember, ye that are cast down, that there are other voices besides those of the bittern and owl from the “waste places.” My text has near to it twice, nay, three times, “HEARKEN TO ME.” You have listened long enough to dreary suggestions from within, to gloomy prophecies from desponding friends, to the taunts of foes, and to the horrible whisperings of Satan: now hearken to him who promises to make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert like the garden of the Lord.

O ye whose eyes are quick to discover evil, there are other sights in the world besides waste places and deserts, and hence my text hath near to it twice over the exhortation, "LOOK"—"Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn"; "Look unto Abraham your father." Why should your eyes for ever ache over desolations? Probably you have seen as much in the wilderness as you are ever likely to see there. It does not take long to discover all the treasures and comforts of the burning sand; you have probably discovered them all by now. As for the discomforts and wants of the desert, you are perhaps as well acquainted with them as you need to be. Gaze no longer at the thirsty land and the burning sky; turn your eye where the finger of the Lord points by his word. If we enquire what it is that the Lord would have us observe, he answers, "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you"; for there we may find comfort. O for the presence of the Holy Spirit, that the word may be full of the dew of heaven to refresh our souls.

I. We shall first look towards Abraham that we may see in him THE ORIGINAL OF GOD'S ANCIENT PEOPLE, the foundation stone, as it were, of the dispensation by which God blessed the former ages. In Judah was God known, his name was great in Israel: let us look to the rock whence Israel and Judah were hewn.

We observe, first, that the founder of God's first people was *called out of a heathen family*. "Your fathers," says Joshua, "dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and they served other gods." Abraham, the founder of the great system in which God was pleased to reveal himself for so long a time, and to whose seed the oracles of God were committed, was a dweller in Ur of the Chaldees, the city of the moon-god. We cannot tell to what extent he was actually engrossed in the superstition of his fathers, but it is certain that the family was years afterwards tainted with idolatry; for in Jacob's day the teraph was still venerated, and Rachel stole her father's images. Abraham, therefore, was called out from the place of his birth, and from the household to which he belonged, that in a separated condition, as a worshipper of the one God, he might keep the truth alive in the world. Recollect, then, that the first man from whom sprang that wondrous nation which God hath not even yet cast away was originally himself an idolater, and had to be called out of his sinful state by effectual grace. Why, then, might not the Lord, if the cause of truth were this day reduced to its utmost extremity, again raise up a church out of one man? If an almost universal apostasy should hide the divine light, could he not kindle a torch among the heathen, and by its light illuminate the earth again? He could call out another Abraham, and bless him and increase him, and achieve the whole of his eternal purposes if all of us should sleep in the dust, and the visibly organised church of to-day should pass away as the snow of winter at the advent of spring. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is he not able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham? As to anything like discouragement, it ought to vanish at the thought that not only out of your Sunday-schools, your colleges, and your pulpits can God raise up leaders for his church, but he can find them in the very centre of heathenism. Where Satan's seat is, even there can the Lord raise up advocates for his cause. The thick darkness of superstition shall not prevent the chosen one from seeing the light, neither shall the bondage of sin hold back the captive from finding freedom and proclaiming it to others.

"Ah," you say, "but men are not called now, as Abraham was, by miraculous calls from heaven." I reply,—The statement may be true; but God's visible means of calling men are now so many that there can seldom be need of miracle. The Lord can by his Spirit make one of the millions of Bibles scattered over the world to be as powerful a means of call as though he had sent an angel from heaven; yea, a solitary leaf of a printed tract, if wafted by the wind, or carried by the wave, may

be borne where God shall bless it to the calling forth of a champion ordained of old to do great exploits. Where ordinary means are so plentiful wisdom resorts not to signs and wonders. Miracles were of admirable use while they were necessary; but now that they are no longer required the prudence of God forbids an extravagant display of the supernatural. Now that the word of God is scattered "thick as leaves in Valambrosa" everywhere by willing and ready hands, what need can there be of voices of the day or visions of the night? The same Spirit who called Abraham by a supernatural voice can call others by the word of truth. Instead of regarding it as a prodigy that a man should be unexpectedly called out from among the heathen I look for it, and shall not be surprised to hear that in the remoter provinces of China, or in the centre of Thibet, or in the recesses of Africa men have been raised up to found churches for our Lord Jesus. God can through the printed page or by hints and rumours passed from hand to hand convey enough instruction to call out more Abrahams and bless them, and increase his kingdom by them. "Omnipotence hath servants everywhere." Let us never dream that the God of Abraham is short of means for calling out chosen men to build up his church. Surely Christian people should never doubt the power of God to raise up lights in dark places when we remember that the greatest preacher of the gospel, namely, the apostle Paul, was drafted into the army of Christ from the ranks of his direst foes. The proud Pharisee, a fanatic of the fanatics, embittered against Christ, and persecuting his people, became the earnest advocate of Christ Jesus. Aforetime his breath was threatening and slaughter, yet on the road to Damascus he was conquered and transformed. As a lion roareth over his prey, so did Paul rejoice that the saints in Damascus were now in his power; but the Lord struck him down, and turned the lion to a lamb, and henceforth where sin abounded grace did much more abound. First in the ranks of Christian heroes stands the man who called himself the chief of sinners because he persecuted the church of God. My brethren, as Luther came from among the monks, so out of Rome, yea, from the Vatican itself, can God, if he wills, call another Luther. The darkness of the times cannot forbid it, for God is Light. The weakness of the church cannot hinder it, for all power belongeth unto God. There may not be among us to-day one whom God will so greatly honour as to make him a spiritual father of nations; but there may be such a one in the courts of Whitechapel or in the rookeries of St. Giles. The Christ, who was himself called the Galilean, despises no place or people. Our king is not particular as to the mine from which he digs his gold. The great seeker of precious souls full often finds his purest pearls in the deepest and the blackest waters. Take this, then, for encouragement, ye who tremble for the ark of God: he can build up a spiritual house for himself out of dark quarries, and find cedars for his temple in forests untraversed by the feet of missionaries.

"Ah," say you, "but Abraham was naturally a man of noble mould. Where do you find such a princely spirit as his?" I answer, Who made him? He that made him can make another like him. There is a grace of God which goes before what we are accustomed to call saving grace: I mean a grace of God which, in the creating of the nature, makes it a fit instrument for the grace which is after to be bestowed. By such sovereign favour one man is from his birth endowed with a superior mind and character, being adorned, even as a natural man, with much that is excellent in its own order. How often do you see among certain men of the world a generosity, honesty, open-heartedness, and nobility of disposition which are not grace, but which mark men out as fit to be leaders in all that is good when grace calls them into the divine service? The Lord can just as soon make a man after the type of Abraham as after any other type; and doubtless he has such in store even now, to whom his call will yet come. We may expect to see men of strong convictions converted into

believers who “stagger not at the promise through unbelief.” From among priests and pagans we may hope that the Lord will raise up pillars for his church. Is not this hope encouraged in your breasts as you “Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you”?

Look again and observe that *Abraham was but one man*. Do not be startled at the sound which seems to have such terrors for certain brethren. I have heard the cant of those who object to a “one-man ministry,” a ministry to which all the while they usually submit in their own meetings; but to my ear there is music, and not terror, in the term “a one-man ministry.” I bless God that all my hope of salvation hangs upon the divine ministry of the One Man. Is not Christ, as the servant of God, the very pattern of all ministries which are of God? Working out the Father’s eternal purpose by a life which was necessarily unique in many points, he trod the wine-press alone; in this, however, he causes many of his people to have fellowship with him, even as in the case of Paul, who says, “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me.” I am bold also to say that the Lord has as a rule wrought more nobly by one man than by bands and corporations of men. He in whose seed all nations are blessed was but one. “I called him,” saith he, “alone, and blessed him, and increased him.” Nor is this a solitary instance. When the earth was utterly corrupt God conserved the race by a solitary preacher of righteousness, who prepared an ark for the saving of his house. See how one Joseph saved whole nations from famine, and one Moses brought out a race from bondage. Who was there to keep Israel right when Moses fell on sleep but the one man Joshua? What were the prosperous times in the era of the Judges but days when one man was to the front as a leader? When all the rest hid away in dens and caves, some Barak or Gideon, or Jephthah, or Samson came boldly forward and delivered Israel. One man, standing like a figure at the head of many ciphers, soon headed victorious thousands, through faith in God. What was there but one man in the days of David? The Philistines had still triumphed over the land if the one lad had not brought back Goliath’s head, and if the one man had not again and again smitten the uncircumcised in the name of the Lord. Beloved, if we should ever be reduced, as we shall not be, to one man, yet by one man will God preserve his church, and work out his great purposes. I hope we shall never go into our chamber, and shut to the door, and cry with Elias, “I only am left, and they seek my life!” No, my brother, there are more faithful men in this world than you. The Lord has yet reserved to himself his thousands that have not bowed the knee to Baal. We are this day, not one man, but many, and we all desire to live for the glory of God, and for the spread of his gospel; but if our hosts were so diminished that we could be numbered by a little child upon his fingers, still there would be no excuse for dismay, for the God of Abraham still liveth, even he who created a people to his praise by one man, of whom he says, “I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.”

Think, my brethren, of the power for good or evil which may be enshrined in a single human life. What mischievous results may come of one man! One sinner destroyeth much good, and if there were but one person left who had knowledge of the ways of vice and the words of blasphemy that one man would suffice to infect the race with his abominations. If evil be so mighty, is not good with God in it quite as powerful? We may rightly measure quantities in reference to many things, but with others it is absurd. It would be ridiculous to measure the power of fire by the quantity which burns on our hearth. Give us fit materials and a single match, and you shall see what fire can do. If ordinary fire, that may so readily be extinguished, is thus powerful, who shall venture to measure the power of the fire from heaven, which neither men nor devils can quench, the fire which fell at Pentecost, and burns among us still. Ye carry fire, ye servants of God; ye work

with a heaven-sent force of boundless energy. Why, therefore, should you despair? If all the lights in the world were put out except a solitary lamp, there is enough fire in one wick to kindle all the lamps in the universe. What inch of ground remains for despair to stand upon?

Furthermore, we are bound to notice that *this one man was a lone man*. He had not only to do the work of God, but he had nobody to help him. "I called him alone." True, he was attended by Lot—a poor miserable lot he was, costing his noble uncle more trouble than he ever brought him profit. How little did he maintain or adorn the righteousness which, nevertheless, had saved him; true type of many a feeble professor in these days. Abraham was not backed by any society when he crossed the Euphrates and afterwards traversed the desert to sojourn in Canaan as a pilgrim and a stranger. If ever man was fairly cut adrift and cast upon the Lord it was the great father of the faithful. He certainly found no patronage in his onward course save the all-sufficient patronage of the Lord his God. When he came near to kings it was a source of trouble to him; it led to contention, and once to war; or else he felt bound to refuse their offers of gifts, and say as he did to the king of Sodom, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." "That same boastful sentence might be uttered by the State concerning some churches that I know of, but not concerning us: may God preserve us, my brethren, from every desire to come under obligations to earthly sovereignties, lest, becoming indebted to them, we should be bound to render suit and service at their bidding, such service being already due to "another king, one Jesus."

Abraham had no prestige of parentage, rank, or title. If you had looked at the stately patriarch when he trod the plains of Mamre you would have seen about him a presence, a calm dignity, a truly regal manner; but that came to him solely through his faith in God and his communion with heaven. Abraham was distinguished from other men only by the grace of God. What grander difference can there be than that which is established by the existence of faith in the heart? Thus Abraham was in the fullest sense a lone man, unsupported by any of those outward distinctions which enable some men to do more than others.

The fulfilment of his calling rested on his loneliness; for he must get away from his kindred, and wander up and down with his flocks, even as the church of God now does, dwelling in a strange land, and feeding her flock apart. When he was alone God blessed Abraham,—"I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." The blessing did not come to him in Charran while he still had some connection with the old stock; he was not yet become thoroughly nonconformist, but held in some small degree to the old house at home, and till the last link was snapped the blessing could not come. And now, my brother, if in the town or district where you live you seem to lose all your helpers; if they die one by one, and it seems as if nobody would be left to you; if even the prayer-meeting fails for want of earnest, pleading men, still persevere, for it is the lone man that God will bless. "He setteth the solitary in families." In your present forlorn condition you are learning sympathy with that lone man in Gethsemane, with that lone man upon the cross, who there vanquished all your foes. Remember that your enemies are thus beaten before you encounter them, and therefore you may readily overcome through the blood of the Lamb. Oh, be not afraid. Thus saith the Lord—"I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." Grasp that, ye that dwell remote from human sympathy. Oh that our missionaries abroad may feel the rich comfort of this fact; for they full often, like lone sentinels, keep watch with eyes that long to see a friend. They are separated from intercourse with brethren, they miss the friendships which tend to comfort and confirm, but it is God that calls them alone, and he will bless them and increase them. The purer

churches of to-day, standing alone as they do, because they dare not make unholy alliances with any,—standing alone, I say, in simple trust in the living Lord—ought not to be afraid with any amazement, but attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.

Once more, I cannot help asking your attention to the fact that Abraham was not only a man called from heathendom, one man, and a lone man; but he was *a man who had to be stripped yet further*. The blessing was—“Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee,” but the manifest fulfilment of it was not by-and-by. As we have already seen, he must come away from his kindred and his father’s house, and he must dwell in Palestine till the promised seed was born. But how long he waited for the expected heir! Twenty, yes, almost thirty years rolled away, and the man Abraham was ninety years old and nine. He is very old; and yet he is to be blessed with a son. He must number the full tale of a hundred years before Isaac can be born. This promised child was to be according to promise, and therefore it could not be born till nature was recognised as spent. As for Sarah—it was not possible that she should become a mother at her advanced age, and yet it must be so, for God had said it.

The believing pair had waited on till in an evil hour Sarah suggested a desperate attempt to fulfil the promise, in which she still firmly believed. That artifice broke down; it was a part of the divine plan that it should do so. The covenant promise was not to the seed after the flesh. When that scheme had been set aside, the Lord in his own time fulfilled his word.

Joy! joy! in the house of Abraham and Sarah. What a feast there was that Isaac was born, filling the house with laughter. But he must die! “Get thee up,” said God, “and take thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” The grand old man will do it. He will get up early in the morning, and the father and the son will journey together silently; for the aged heart is too full to talk. He believes God, and is sure that even if he should actually slay his son at God’s command the promise would somehow be kept. Abraham could not tell how, but it was no business of his to tell how; he was fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform. God had said to him “In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” and he believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead, or in some other way achieve the promise. Thus he grasped the resurrection. He laid hold on a truth which was deeper than he knew of: by his faith he realised resurrection for Isaac though as yet the Lord Jesus had not shown the way by his own rising from the dead. What a stripping Abraham had endured! Who can describe what would have been the wretchedness of that aged parent if it had not been for his faith! Men intensely love the children of their old age. See how a grandchild is fondled by his grandsire, and thus must Isaac have been loved of Abraham and yet he must die by his father’s own hand. Oh, most miserable among the miserable must he have been who stood there on Mount Moriah, called to such a duty, his heart breaking while his soul obeyed. Such, doubtless, would have been the case had not faith been his stay. Look, then, to Abraham your father, and say is he not the greatest of men, the grandest human representative of the great Father God himself, who in the fullness of time spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all? Likeliest to God among mortal men art thou Abraham, and therefore well mightest thou be his friend! In thy trial brought to such a stripping we may yet envy thee as we hear the Lord saying, “Now know I that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” Now, if in all these trials Abraham was yet blessed, and God’s purposes were accomplished in him, can we not believe that the same God can work by us also, despite our downcastings and humiliations? When we are utterly broken and crushed may not the Lord’s strength be made perfect in our weakness?

Let us not question the promise because of our personal deadness and inability, but believe God without wavering, for he hath said, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Now, brothers and sisters, here is the sum and substance of this first head of my discourse: in looking to the rock whence we are hewn, we have to see the Lord working the greatest results from apparently inadequate causes. This teaches us to cease from calculating means, possibilities, and probabilities, for we have to deal with God, with whom all things are possible. Almighty God can assuredly do whatever he says he will do. Who is to hinder him? Let the voice ring out over all the earth, and let it be heard in hell itself—who shall stay the arm of God when he wills to achieve a thing? He fears no opposition, and he needs no help. Of what did he make the world? With whom took he counsel? Who instructed him? And, if all the things that are have been spoken into existence by God alone, by his mere word, can he not yet build up his church, even if on her earthly side there should seem to be no material with which to raise her walls? Consider creation and remark what God hath wrought. See how all the millions of mankind have sprung from a single pair, because God blessed them in the beginning. But I must not multiply illustrations from nature or from history, for they rise spontaneously before your own minds. Refresh your faith by a reference to our own island history. If you would firmly believe in the conversion of the heathen remember what your fathers were when bloody rites were performed in the oak woods or amid the huge monoliths of Stonehenge. The Druidic system was as cruel and degrading as any that now curses a savage people; but the heralds of Jesus conquered. Where are the gods of the Druids now? Who reverences the golden sickle and the sacred oak? The thing is gone, as though it never had been. Why, then, should not other evil idolatries pass away? Look again at the triumph of Protestantism in this country. What was it at first? A thing utterly despised and hunted down. The stakes of Smithfield cannot be forgotten by those who dwell so near the spot. Yet, despite all, the gospel of God triumphed, and rood, and pyx, and image were broken in contempt. Let the days of the Puritans, the palmy days when God was known in England, tell how thoroughly Bible truth won the victory. Why not again? Why not everywhere? If you desire another illustration, look at our own body of Christians? History has hitherto been written by our enemies, who never would have kept a single fact about us upon the record if they could have helped it, and yet it leaks out every now and then that certain poor people called Anabaptists were brought up for condemnation. From the days of Henry II. to those of Elizabeth we hear of certain unhappy heretics who were hated of all men for the truth's sake which was in them. We read of poor men and women, with their garments cut short, turned out into the fields to perish in the cold, and anon of others who were burnt at Newington for the crime of Anabaptism. Long before your Protestants were known of, these horrible Anabaptists, as they were unjustly called, were protesting for the "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism." No sooner did the visible church begin to depart from the gospel than these men arose to keep fast by the good old way. The priests and monks wished for peace and slumber, but there was always a Baptist or a Lollard tickling men's ears with holy Scripture, and calling their attention to the errors of the times. They were a poor, persecuted tribe. The halter was thought to be too good for them. At times ill-written history would have us think that they died out, so well had the wolf done his work on the sheep. Yet here we are, blessed and multiplied; and Newington sees other scenes from Sabbath to Sabbath. As I think of your numbers and efforts, I can only say in wonder—What a growth! As I think of the multitudes of our brethren in America, I may well say, What hath God wrought? Our history forbids discouragement. Never cause more hopeless once; none more hopeful to-day! It matters little what may yet happen, the cause is safe. What if all our Baptist organisations expire!

What if but one man should be left faithful to the old banner, our Captain would yet triumph gloriously, for he saveth not by many nor by few. Though all else faileth, the Lord shall reign for ever and ever. This is the lesson which, I pray, we may all of us learn, and then, by faith, go forth to act upon it.

II. With great brevity, I shall dwell for a moment upon the second point, namely—THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF THIS CHOSEN MAN. The text says, “Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you,” and it must mean,—consider him and see what he was, that you may learn from him. You perceive at once that his grand characteristic was *his faith*. In this faith many other most brilliant qualities are comprehended, but his faith lay at the bottom of all. Here is his epitaph:—“Abraham believed God.” That was a mainspring of all his acts, the glory of his life, “Abraham believed God.” The men that God will work by, whatever else they have not, must have faith in God. Though it is to be desired that the believer should have every mental and moral qualification, yet it is astounding how, if there be real faith, a multitude of imperfections are swallowed up, and the man is still a power. I would mention Samson as an extreme case. He was the feeblest of men, and the least fitted to be a judge in Israel; but oh, what faith! And what wonders it achieved! A thousand men! He is like a child in his belief that God is with him. He never calculates at all; it is all the same to him whether there are a thousand or one. He flings himself upon the host, and has slain them before we can realise the deadly odds. A sword; no, he has no sword: an old jawbone of an ass is quite enough for an arm which God strengthens. See how he smites them, hip and thigh, till they lie in heaps before him. I do not suppose that it would have signified to Samson if there had been a million Philistines: with a thousand to one, a man is so thoroughly outnumbered that numbers cease to count. Here was an impossibility before him, and what could be worse. Brethren, when you do get off your feet, and must swim, you may as well have fifty fathoms of water beneath you as not, for you can but drown. In the case of faith, drowning is out of the question, and swimming is good in deep water, for there is no fear of striking against a rock. Faith glories in difficulties and infirmities, because the power of God doth rest upon her. If the work is barely possible to her strength faith hardly likes it; but she gets into her sphere when in trials far beyond human strength she laughs at impossibility, and cries, “It shall be done.”

Abraham’s faith was such that it led him to obedience. He was called to go out, and he went, not knowing whither he went. His faith through grace led him to perseverance; for once in God’s way he did not leave it, but still abode a sojourner with God. His faith led him to expectancy; he looked for the promised seed, and not only for an Isaac but for the Messiah. So clear was the vision of his expectancy that before his eyes Christ was set forth, visibly. Did not the Saviour, who knew all things, say, “Abraham saw my day; he saw it, and was glad”?

The like faith also dwelt in the breast of Sarah; and, as we are told in the text to look to Sarah as well as Abraham, let us not fail to do so. The faith of Sarah was not little when she left home with her husband; forsaking her kith and kin from love to God, and to him whom she called “lord.” She acted as if she had said to the great patriarch, “Where thou goest I will go; where thou dwellest I will dwell, for thy God is my God.” Nor did the trial of her faith end with the moving, she had to take up with tent-life and all its inconveniences. It is the woman that knows the discomfort of domestic life under such circumstances. We never hear that she complained for a moment, though the cold of winter and the heat of summer are neither of them warded off by a tent. How readily she entertained her husband’s guests. Though they might drop in at most unseasonable hours, or call her to bake bread in the heat of the day, she was glad to welcome strangers, for like her husband

she was given to hospitality. I saw you smile, dear friends, when I mentioned domestic matters; but to me it is the solemnity of faith that men and women can not only pray and sing, but can put up with household discomforts out of obedience to God. Certain people look upon faith as a fine, airy, sentimental thing with which to roam among the stars, anticipate millenniums, and enjoy yourself in lofty contemplation. I believe far more in a faith which, whether it eats or drinks, does all to the glory of God; faith which like Sarah dwells in the tent and works there; faith which is cheerful over a scanty meal and drives away the fear of want; faith which can come down in life from the mansion to the cottage, if providence so decrees. From Abraham's comfortable home at Ur to his gipsy wanderings in Palestine the change must have been great, but Abraham may not have felt it one half as much as Sarah, for men can rough it and live out of doors, but the housewife knows all about it, and great was her Faith that she never raised a question about the propriety of her husband's course of life: and though she laughed when she was told that she should bear a son, yet remember that in the eleventh of Hebrews it is written—"Through faith also Sarah herself received strength." She was the mother of Isaac, not in the power of the flesh, but through the energy of faith, therefore look at her as the text bids you.

Christian men and Christian women, mark well this fact—that the characteristic of the person whom God will bless is that he believes and acts upon his belief. Without faith it is impossible to please God; but the man of faith is God's man. And why is this? I answer, because *faith is the only faculty of our spirit which can grasp God's ideal*. The greatest man, without faith, cannot tread in the divine footsteps. The ideas of God are as high above us as the heavens are above the earth: and therefore it is not by any fancied vastness of our feeble minds that we can ever rise into fellowship with God. Faith in the sight of God's thought whispers to herself—"I cannot understand this great thing, nor need I wish to do so. What is my understanding? Perhaps I trust to it too much already. I am called to do what God bids me, without knowing why, and I am glad it is so, for now I can worship him by bowing before his sovereign will." There is a capacity about faith for grasping divine promises and purposes, a width, a breadth, a height, a depth, which can hold the infinite truth as no other power can do. Love alone can rival it, for it embraces the infinite God himself. With the far-reaching plans and promises of God faith alone is fit to deal; carnal reason is altogether out of the lists.

Faith, too, has a great power of reception, and therein lies much of her adaptation to the divine purpose. Self-confidence, courage, resolution, cool reasoning, whatever else they are good at, are bad at humbly receiving. Those vessels which are full already are of no use as receivers; but faith presents her emptiness to God, and opens her mouth that God may fill it. Mercy needs not a jewel, but a casket into which to put her gems, and faith is exactly what she wants.

Then, again, *faith always uses the strength that God gives her*. Pride would vapour with it, and doubt would evaporate it; but faith is practical, and economically uses the talent entrusted to her. Faith has already spent all her own strength, and she so yearns to achieve her purposes that she uses all the power that God will lend her. Faith eats her manna and leaves not a morsel for worms to breed in.

Faith, too, can wait the Lord's time and place. When faith is weak men are in a dreadful hurry, but strong faith does not judge the Lord to be slack concerning his promise. As God achieves his purpose with infinite leisure, he loves a faith that is patient and looks not for its reward this day or the next. "He that believeth shall not make haste": that is to say, he shall not be ashamed or

confounded by present trials so as to rush upon unbelieving actions. Faith leaves times and seasons with God to whom they belong.

God loveth faith and blesseth it too, because *it giveth him all the glory*. The true believer will not allow a trace of self-glory to linger on his hands. "Where is boasting then?" was a question once asked in the house of faith, and the searchers examined every nook and corner in every chamber to find it, but they found it not. Then they said to faith, "Where is boasting?" She answered, "I shut him out." "It is excluded," shut out, and the door fastened in its face. You do not believe God if you boast of what you are doing: least of all do you believe if you pride yourself in your faith, for faith is not mistrustful of her God but of herself. Faith looks to God to keep her alive as well as to fulfil the promise that he has made to her. This then is the kind of faith which was characteristic of Abraham, and the question is, have we got it? Have we so much of it that God can largely bless us? The comfort is that, if we have it not, the author of faith can give it to us, and if we have it in scant measure he can increase our faith.

Is not this a solid reason why you and I should take heart? You who do not believe that missions will succeed; you who readily become discouraged and discourage others; I beg you go home and seek more faith. We cannot go down to the battle with such soldiers as you; you do but encumber the host. The men that lapped are the only ones that Gideon will take to war. Send the fearful ones to the rear and let them take care of the baggage, so that when the battle is won they may have a share of the spoil, according to David's law. For actual service and warfare we must have men of faith. Cromwell found that when his men came dressed in all sorts of suits and colours they were apt to injure one another in the melee, and so he put them all in uniform. The uniform of the Prince Immanuel is faith: no man may call himself a soldier of the cross who hath it not. This is the victory which overcometh the world, even your faith. Brother ministers, let us take heed lest we be found qualified for our ministry in all respects except this one. You have learning, eloquence, industry, honesty, but do you so believe in God as to expect his word to act divinely on men's hearts. Do you preach believingly? Do you pray believingly? I leave the question with you.

III. I have shown you, dear friends, that God effected his purpose, and raised up a chosen nation out of one man, whose chief characteristic was his faith: and now I want you to notice OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THAT ONE MAN. I dwelt upon that while reading the chapter (Romans 4.) There is a relation between us and Abraham even as Paul assures us in the epistle to the Galatians, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Something, surely, is expected of the children of such a man as Abraham. O, for shame, thou unbelieving one! Is Abraham thy father? Art thou one of the faithful seed? Great mountains are often succeeded by low valleys. Perhaps that is the case with you; but it should not be so. The natural seed were cut off because they had no faith, let not those who are grafted in, think to do without it. It is by faith that you are a son at all. You disprove your pedigree if you tolerate unbelief. Oh! let nobody find fault with Abraham through you, and surely they may do so if they find you staggering. That staggering is a shocking business: staggering at God's promises is terrible. Abraham staggered not at the promise through unbelief. May we never dishonour the right noble grace of faith, but so believe that all men may know Abraham's God to be our God. O for abounding spiritual life, for the God of Abraham is not the God of the dead but of the living; and we can only live unto God by faith.

Brethren, because we are the seed of Abraham, the apostle declares that the blessing of Abraham has come upon us also. I pray that all the friends and labourers in our Missionary Society may grasp

the blessing of Abraham. What is it? It is a covenant favour that belongs to all who are the servants of God by faith. Here is the substance of it: "Surely blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thee." That is the grand old covenant promise and it belongs to the church. Note that the blessing is attended with multiplying. Some friends are afraid of statistics which represent the increase of the churches; I am far more afraid of those statistics which will show that we do not increase as we could wish. The blessing of the church is the increase of the church. The two go together: "Blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thee." How much are Christians to be multiplied in the world? At the present moment we do not seem to be increasing as fast as the population. I am afraid that the number of converted persons relatively to the population is scarcely as great as it was thirty years ago; we long to be multiplied at a very different rate from this—and we shall be if we have faith in our God. Hear ye the covenant word: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." These are lines from the covenant, which is sure to all the seed and can never be broken. We have been called and blessed, and it is of necessity that we increase also. We are bound to increase; we are destined to overrun the nations; the Hittites, the Hivites, the Amorites, of Popery, Mahometanism, and Idolatry are in the land, but their false systems are utterly to perish. Jesus at the head of his people shall drive them out—I mean not the men, but their evil beliefs. They may take notice to quit, for he is coming before whom all men must bow. O that ere he himself shall appear his spiritual presence in the midst of his church might suffice for victory, that all mankind might call him blessed. We are bound to increase, till the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for us, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Upon the church in her vigour shall yet descend the blessings of the tribes of Joseph. "His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth." The success of truth is the battle of the Lord, and the increase of his church is according to his own promise, therefore in quietness we may possess our souls.

IV. Last of all consider for a minute OUR POSITION BEFORE ABRAHAM'S GOD. Do not let anything that I have said about Abraham for a moment take your mind off from the Lord himself, because the pith of it all lies here,—"*I called him alone.*" Look to Abraham, but only as to the rock from which the Lord quarried his people:" your main thought must be Jehovah himself. "*I, I called him alone, and blessed him.*" "*I the Lord do all these things.*" Look unto the everlasting God who doeth great wonders, and stay yourselves upon him.

Let us joyfully recollect that *the Lord our God has not changed*, nay, not in one jot or tittle. He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." There is so far a change in the revelation of him, that it is brighter now in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, than it could have been through seer and vision; but that should be a motive for increased faith. "His arm is not shortened that he cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear." This God of Abraham is still almighty, and still in the midst of the covenanted ones. If the ages that have passed over his awful brow could wrinkle it and his strength could decay, then might we also decline in our confidence; but it is not so. He fainteth not, neither is weary. Our behaviour towards him, therefore, should resemble that of Abraham; and especially, representing, as we do many of us, the churches of Jesus Christ as ministers or deacons, we must never dishonour the Lord by unbelief. Doubt everything but God. Let God be true and every man a liar. This the everlasting decree which none can change,—Christ must reign; he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied; the kings of the earth must

bow before him. Do not doubt it, for God hath sworn by his own life that all flesh shall see his glory. Here is the grand argument for strong faith.

Notice next that *the covenant of God has not changed*. God hath not recalled his words, nor taken a pen and struck out his promises from the record. Read the covenant words, and write them upon the doorposts of your mission-house, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." This is the covenant with the one spiritual seed of Abraham, that is the marrow of it, and it has never been revoked. As I have said before, we read it now in clearer light, and understand better the fullness of its provisions, but the covenant is not disannulled. Let us go to God with any one promise of it, and we can say to him, "This is thy promise in Christ Jesus; and thou hast not spoken in secret in a dark place and withdrawn thy word and said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain." Such pleading will prevail. He will never run back from his word. Has he said, and will he not do it? Therefore let us cry, "Remember thy word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope."

But there is this also to be added, that this work which we desire the Lord to do is in some respects even less than that which he has done with Abraham. What ask we? Not that he should begin with one man to build up a nation, or create a church? No, but that Zion being builded, he should comfort her, and cause her waste places to rejoice. The field is the world, and the seed is ready for the sowing. The gospel is in the hands of those who have the best means of spreading it. Everything is ready for its ultimate triumph. The train is laid; we only need the heavenly fire to touch it, and the deed is accomplished. O that the work of the Lord may be speedily done; that the Lord may carry on his work of righteousness and make a short work in the earth. I say that if God has done this greater thing, if he has excavated a nation from the quarry of Abraham, we may well expect the self-same God to keep his covenant, to multiply his church, and build her up after the similitude of a palace. The time to favour Zion, even the set time, has come. Beside that; we have been already visited by God as Abraham had not been when first he was called. Abraham had not known the Lord till he called him, but our Sion is familiar with God, for she is the city of the great king. He dwelleth in our midst by his Holy Spirit, and holy hymn and prayer rise every day from the multitudes that fear him. The Lord hath redeemed, and justified, and saved his people, and surely we may look to him to refresh and revive his heritage.

What marvellous things hath God done on the face of the earth since Abraham's days!—the stupendous marvel of incarnation, the height and depth of which none of us can measure; the wondrous work of redemption, the highest, grandest, divinest achievement of the Deity—all this is done; what may we not expect after this? You know more of God than Abraham could know; I beseech you then, trust him, at least up to the level of the patriarch. How shall we forge an excuse if we do not? What can excuse us if we distrust so glorious a God.

Brethren, it remains for me only to add this practical word. Let us throw ourselves more and more upon our God. If you have any work appointed you of the Lord, and it is within the compass of your strength, shame upon you if you do not perform it at once; but if it be beyond you, herein will God be glorified if you do it by his power. If there remaineth no might, wit, or wisdom in you, if you are deeply conscious of your weakness you are by this experience made the more fit to be used of the Lord, for when we are weak then are we strong. If you have confidence in God all things are possible to him that believeth. Oh, when will the church cast herself upon her God as men throw themselves into the stream when they mean to swim? They seek no longer for foothold, their foot

leaves the spot whereon it rested, and they throw themselves trustfully upon the wave. The everlasting ocean of love and power is ready to upbear us: we shall swim gallantly to shore if we will but trust this blessed sea of love.

Let us begin to believe God and then let us act in daily life as if we believed him. The just shall live by faith. Some people have a faith which is for show, a Sunday faith, faith that cannot bear the wear and tear of every day life; varnished and gilded, but with no pure metal in it. The faith of Abraham could lead strings of camels and flocks of sheep away from Haran to Canaan. His was the faith which could drive the tent-pin into a foreign soil, or roll up the canvas and seek another unknown halting place. The faith of Abraham is a faith that saith to wayfaring men, "Turn in, and I will get you a little water and wash your feet." It is a practical, active, living, week-day, everyday faith. I will speak very broadly and plainly, and say we need a bread-and-cheese faith, that is to say, a faith which believes that God who feeds the ravens will send us our daily bread; a faith which believes that the heavenly Father who clothes the lilies will much more clothe his children; the faith that can believe God about the things that are actually around it, and that does not live in the region of fiction. See how God blessed Abraham with flocks and herds, and everything temporal as well as spiritual, because he walked in reference to these things along the line of faith; gave Lot his choice of pasturage, refused the offer of the king of Sodom, and resolutely paid the children of Heth the full price for the cave and the field. If we walk by faith in business life God may not in every case bless us with abundance of temporal mercies, but assuredly we shall be blessed. He may send us adversity, and poverty, but in these things faith is more than conqueror, glorying in tribulations also.

In the Lord's work of evangelising the world you must have a downright, practical faith; not a faith that will sing when the organ begins to play, and then be so busy fumbling the hymn paper as to forget the collection: not the faith of those who boast of Carey, and Marshman, and Knibb, but whose own names never appear in the subscription list for a single shilling: not a faith which sings—

"Fly abroad thou mighty Gospel."

but never lends a bit of down to make a feather for its wings.

Let us hear the scripture, as it says, "Hearken! "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, *"Hearken!"* for you may hear the Sabbath bells ringing in the everlasting peace, and angel songs welcoming the reign of grace over all nations. Let the ears of deaf unbelief be unstopped, for the whole earth echoes with the praises of the Lord. Say not that the day is distant. Hearken! Let faith be the listener, and she will hear across the ages which divide us from the gladsome period. Then shall you listen all day and all night long for many a year, but never hear the roll of drum or roar of cannon. Hearken! Ye shall hear from the islands of the sea, and from the once benighted continents, psalms and hymns, and holy songs, ascending unto the one Jehovah and to his Christ. Hearken! for ears were never gladdened with sweeter music.

Then *look!* till you see the temples of false gods crumbling into dust. See how the shrines are tottering, and the idols breaking as though smitten with a rod of iron. Mohammed's crescent wanes, never to wax again; and she, of the Seven Hills, is hated of the kings, and they burn her with fire. "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth! "Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. They fall! They fall! They are as the slain. The day breaketh, and the shadows flee away. O ye watchers that look for the dawning, fall not asleep through sorrowful weariness. The morning cometh. It shall not tarry. Do you doubt it? Know ye

not that the Lord reigneth? Is he not the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." If you doubt it, dissolve your Missionary Society, and do not pretend to do a work in which you have no faith; but if you believe in the triumph of God's work, and that you are called to it, behave worthily to so divine an enterprise. God do so to you as you deal with him in this matter. Amen.

A Greater Than Solomon

A Sermon

(No. 1600)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Evening, February 6th, 1881, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Behold a greater than Solomon is here”—Luke 11:31.

OUR FIRST thought is that no mere man would have said this concerning himself unless he had been altogether eaten up with vanity; for Solomon was among the Jews the very ideal of greatness and wisdom. It would be an instance of the utmost self-conceit if any mere man were to say of himself—“A greater than Solomon is here.” Any person who was really greater and wiser than Solomon would be the last man to claim such preeminence. A wise man would never think of it; a prudent man would never say it. The Lord Jesus Christ, if we regard Him as a mere man, would have never uttered such an expression, for a more modest, self-forgetting man was never found in all our race. View it on the supposition that the Christ of Nazareth was a mere man, and I say that His whole conduct was totally different from the spirit which would have suggested an utterance like this—“A greater Solomon is here.” For men to compare themselves with one another is not wise, and Christ was wise; it is not humble, and Christ was humble. He would not have thus spoken if there had not been cause and reason in His infinitely glorious nature. It was because the divinity within Him must speak out. For God to say that He is greater than all His creatures is no boasting; for what are they in His sight? All worlds are but sparks from the anvil of His omnipotence. Space, time, eternity, all these are as nothing before Him; and for Him to compare or even to contrast Himself with one of His own creatures is supreme condescension, let Him word the comparison how He may. It was the divinity within our Lord which made Him say—and not even then with a view to exalt Himself, but with a view to point the moral that He was trying to bring before the people—“A greater than Solomon is here.” He did as good as say, “The queen of the south came from a distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but you refuse to hear *me*. She gave attention to a man, but you will not regard your God. You will not listen to me incarnate Deity who tells you words of infinite, infallible wisdom.” Our Lord Jesus is aiming at His hearers' good, and where the motive is so disinterested there remains no room for criticism. He tells them that He is greater than Solomon, to convince them of the greatness of their crime in refusing to listen to the messages of love with which His lips were loaded. Foreigners came from afar to Solomon; but I, says He, have come to your door, and brought infinite wisdom into your very gates, and yet you refuse me. Therefore the queen of the south shall rise up in judgment against you, for, in rejecting me, you reject a greater than Solomon.

The second thought that comes to one's mind is this: notice the self-consciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He knows who He is, and what He is, and He is not lowly in spirit because He is ignorant of His own greatness. He was meek and lowly in heart—“*Servus servorum*,” as the Latins were wont to call Him, “Servant of servants,” but all the while He knew that He was *Rex regum*, or King of kings. He takes a towel and He washes His disciples' feet; but all the while He knows that He is

their Master and their Lord. He associates with publicans and harlots, and dwells with the common people; but all the while He knows that He is the only begotten of the Father. He sits as a child, in the temple hearing and asking questions of the rabbis; He stands among His disciples as though He were one of themselves, conversing with the ignorant and foolish of the day, seeking their good; but He knows that He is not one of them; He knows that He has nothing to learn from them: He knows that he is able to teach senates and to instruct kings and philosophers, for he is greater than Solomon. He wears a peasant's garb, and has not where to lay His head; but He knows that, whatever the lowliness of His condition, He is greater than Solomon; He lets us perceive that he knows it, that all may understand the love which brought Him down so low. It is grand humility on Christ's part that He condescends to be our servant, our Saviour, when He is so great that the greatest of men are as nothing before Him. "He counted it not robbery to be equal with God": mark that; and yet "He made himself of no reputation." Some people do not know their own worth, and so, when they stoop to a lowly office it is no stoop to their minds, for they do not know their own abilities. They do not know to what they are equal; but Christ did know: He knew all about His own Deity, and His own wisdom and greatness as man. I admire, therefore, the clear understanding which sparkles in His deep humiliation, like a gem in a dark mine. He is not one who stoops down according to the old rhyme—

As needs he must who cannot sit upright;

but He is One who comes down wittingly from His throne of glory, marking each step and fully estimating the descent which He is making. The cost of our redemption was known to Him, and He endured the cross, despising the shame. Watts well sings—

This was compassion like a God,
That *when the Saviour knew*
The price of pardon was his blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew.

Brethren, if our Saviour Himself said that He was greater than Solomon, you and I must fully believe it, enthusiastically own it, and prepare to proclaim it. If others will not own it, let us be the more prompt to confess it. If He Himself had to say, before they would own it, "A greater than Solomon is here," let it not be necessary that the encomium should be repeated, but let us all confess that He is indeed greater than Solomon. Let us go home with this resolve in our minds, that we will speak greater things of Christ than we have done, that we will try to love Him more and serve Him better, and make Him in our own estimation and in the world's greater than He has ever been. Oh for a glorious high throne to set Him on, and a crown of stars to place upon His head! Oh to bring nations to His feet! I know my words cannot honor Him according to His merits: I wish they could. I am quite sure to fail in my own judgment when telling out His excellence; indeed, I grow less and less satisfied with my thoughts and language concerning Him. He is too glorious for my feeble language to describe Him. If I could speak with the tongues of men and of angels, I could not speak worthily of Him. If I could borrow all the harmonies of heaven, and enlist every harp and song of the glorified, yet were not the music sweet enough for His praises. Our glorious Redeemer is ever blessed: let us bless Him. He is to be extolled above the highest heavens; let us sound forth His praises. Oh for a well-tuned harp! May the Spirit of God help both heart and lip to extol Him at this hour.

First, then, we shall try to *draw a parallel between Jesus and Solomon*; and, secondly, we will break away from all comparisons, and show where *there cannot be any parallel between Christ and Solomon at all*.

I. First, then, BETWEEN CHRIST AND SOLOMON there are some points of likeness.

When the Saviour Himself gives us a comparison it is a clear proof that a likeness was originally intended by the Holy Spirit, and therefore we may say without hesitation that Solomon was meant to be a type of Christ. I am not going into detail, nor am I about to refine upon small matters; but I shall give you five points in which Solomon was conspicuously like to Christ, and in which our Lord was greater than Solomon. O for help in the great task before me.

And, first, in *wisdom*. Whenever you talked about Solomon to a Jew his eyes began to flash with exultation; his blood leaped in his veins with national pride. Solomon—that name brought to mind the proudest time of David's dynasty, the age of gold. Solomon, the magnificent, why, surely, his name crowns Jewish history with glory, and the brightest beam of that glory is his wisdom. In the east, and I think I may say in the west, it still remains a proverb, "To be as wise as Solomon." No modern philosopher or learned monarch has ever divided the fame of the son of David, whose name abides as the synonym of wisdom. Of no man since could it be said as of him, "And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart." He *intermeddled with all knowledge*, and was a master in all sciences. He was a naturalist: "and he spoke of trees from the cedar trees that are in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." He was an engineer and architect, for he wrote: "I made me great works; I built me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees." He was one who understood the science of government—politician of the highest order. He was everything, in fact. God gave him wisdom and largeness of heart, says the Scripture, like the sand of the sea: "and Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezralite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about." Yes; but our Saviour knows infinitely more than Solomon. I want you tonight to come to Him just as the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, only for weightier reasons. You do not want to learn anything concerning architecture or navigation, agriculture or anatomy. You want to know only how you shall be built up a spiritual house, and how you shall cross those dangerous seas which lie between this land and the celestial city. Well, you may come to Jesus and He will teach you all that you need to know, for all wisdom is in Christ. Our divine Saviour knows things past and present and future: the secrets of God are with Him. He knows the inmost heart of God, for no one knoweth the Father save the Son and He to whom the Son shall reveal Him. To Him it is given to take the book of prophetic decree and loose the seven seals thereof. Come, then, to Christ Jesus if you want to know the mind of God, for it is written that He "is made unto us wisdom." Solomon might have wisdom, but he could not be wisdom to others; Christ Jesus is that to the full. In the multifarious knowledge which He possesses—the universal knowledge which is stored up in Him—there is enough for your guidance and instruction even to the end of life, however intricate and overshadowed your path may be.

Solomon proved his wisdom in part by his *remarkable inventions*. We cannot tell what Solomon did not know. At any rate, no man knows at this present moment how those huge stones, which have lately been discovered, which were the basis of the ascent by which Solomon went up to the

house of the Lord, were ever put into their places. Many of the stones of Solomon's masonry are so enormous that scarcely could any modern machinery move them; and without the slightest cement they are put together so exactly that the blade of a knife could not be inserted between them. It is marvelous how the thing was done. How such great stones were brought from their original bed in the quarry—how the whole building of the temple was executed—nobody knows. The castings in brass and silver are scarcely less remarkable. No doubt many inventions have passed away from the knowledge of modern times, inventions as remarkable as those of our own age. We are a set of savages that are beginning to learn something, but Solomon knew and invented things which we shall, perhaps, rediscover in 500 years time. By vehement exertion this boastful nineteenth century, wretched century as it is, will crawl towards the wisdom which Solomon possessed ages ago. Yet is Jesus greater than Solomon. As for inventions, Solomon is no inventor at all compared with Him who said, "Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom." O Saviour, didst thou find out the way of our salvation? Didst thou bring into the world and carry out and execute the way by which hell-gate should be closed, and heaven-gate, once barred, should be set wide open? Then, indeed, art thou wiser than Solomon. Thou art the deviser of salvation, the architect of the church, the author and finisher of our faith.

Solomon has left us some very *valuable books*—the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the matchless Song. But, oh, the words of Solomon fall far short of the words of Jesus Christ, for they are spirit and life. The power of the word of Jesus is infinitely greater than all the deep sayings of the sage. Proverbial wisdom cannot match His sayings, nor can "The Preacher" rival His sermons, and even the divine Song itself would remain without a meaning—an allegory never to be explained—if it were not that Christ Himself is the sum and substance of it. Solomon may sing of Christ, but Christ is the substance of the song. He is greater than Solomon in His teachings, for His wisdom is from above, and leads men up to heaven. Blessed are they that sit at His feet.

Again, Solomon showed His wisdom in *difficult judgments*. You know how he settled the question between the two women concerning the child; many other puzzles Solomon solved, and many other knots Solomon was able to untie. He was a great ruler and governor—a man wise in politics, in social economy, and in commerce—wise in all human respects. But a greater than Solomon is present where Christ is. There is no difficulty which Christ cannot remove, no knot which He cannot untie, no question which He cannot answer. You may bring your hard questions to Him, and He will answer them; and if you have any difficulty on your heart tonight, do but resort to the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer, and search His word, and you shall hear a voice as from the sacred oracle, which shall lead you in the path of safety.

My point at this time, especially as we are coming to the Communion table, is this: I want you that love the Lord Jesus Christ to believe in His infinite wisdom, and come to Him for direction. I fear that when you are in trouble, you half suppose that the great keeper of Israel must have made a mistake. You get into such an intricate path that you say, "Surely, my Shepherd has not guided me aright." Never think so. When you are poor and needy still say, "This my poverty was ordained by a greater than Solomon." What if you seem to be deprived of every comfort, and you are brought into a strange and solitary way, where you find no city to dwell in? Yet a guide is near, and that guide is not foolish; but a greater than Solomon is here. I think I look tonight into a great furnace. It is so fierce that I cannot bear to gaze into its terrible blaze. For fear my eyeballs should utterly fail me and lose the power of sight through the glare of that tremendous flame, I turn aside, for the fury of its flame overpowers me. But when I am strengthened to look again I see ingots of silver

refining in the white heat, and I note that the heat is tempered to the last degree of nicety. I watch the process to the end, and I say, as I behold those ingots brought out all clear and pure, refined from all dross, and ready for the heavenly treasury, "Behold, a greater than Solomon was in that furnace work." So you will find it, O sufferer. Infinite wisdom is in your lot. Come, poor child, do not begin to interfere with your Saviour's better judgment, but let it order all things. Do not let your little "Know" ever rise up against the great knowledge of your dear Redeemer. Think of this when you wade in deep waters and comfortably whisper to yourself—"A greater than Solomon is here."

I have not time to enlarge, and therefore I would have you notice, next, that our Lord Jesus Christ is greater than Solomon in wealth. This was one of the things for which Solomon was noted. He had great treasures: he "made gold to be as stones, and as for silver it was little accounted of," so rich did he become. He had multitudes of servants. I think he had 60,000 hewers in the mountains hewing out stones and wood, so numerous were the workmen he employed. His court was magnificent to the last degree. When you read of the victuals that were prepared to feed the court, and of the stately way in which everything was arranged from the stables of the horses upwards to the ivory throne, you feel, like the queen of Sheba, utterly astonished, and say, "The half was not told me." But, oh, when you consider all the wealth of Solomon, what poor stuff it is compared with the riches that are treasured up in Christ Jesus. Beloved, He who died upon the cross, and was indebted to a friend for a grave; He who was stripped even to the last rag ere He died; He who possessed no wealth but that of sorrow and sympathy, yet had about Him the power to make many rich, and He has made multitudes rich—rich to all the intents of everlasting bliss; and therefore He must be rich Himself. Is He not rich who enriches millions? Why, our Lord Jesus Christ, even by a word, comforted those that were bowed down. When He stretched out His hand He healed the sick with a touch. There was a wealth about His every movement. He was a full man, full of all that man could desire to be full of; and now, seeing that He has died and risen again, there is in Him a wealth of pardoning love, a wealth of saving power, a wealth of intercessory might before the Father's throne, a wealth of all things by which He enriches the sons of men, and shall enrich them to all eternity.

I want this truth to come home to you: I want you to recognize the riches of Christ, you that are His people; and, in addition, to remember the truth of our hymn—

Since Christ is rich can I be poor?

What can I want besides?

I wish we could learn to reckon what we are by what Christ is. An old man said, "I am very old; I have lost my only son; I am penniless; and, worst of all, I am blind. But," added he, "this does not matter, for Christ is not infirm; Christ is not aged; Christ has all riches; and Christ is not blind; and Christ is mine; and I have all things in Him." Could you not get hold of that somehow, brothers and sisters? Will not the Holy Spirit teach you the art of appropriating the Lord Jesus and all that He is and has. If Christ be your representative, why, then you are rich in Him. Go to Him to be enriched. Suppose I were to meet a woman, and I knew her husband to be a very wealthy man, and that he loved her very much, and she were to say to me, "I am dreadfully poor; I do not know where to get raiment and food." "Oh," I should say, "That woman is out of her mind." If she has such a husband, surely she has only to go to him for all that she needs. And what if nothing is invested in her name, yet it is in his name, and they are one, and he will deny her nothing." I should say, "My good woman, you must not talk in that fashion, or I will tell your husband of you." Well, I think that I shall have to say the same of you who are so very poor and cast down, and yet are

married to Jesus Christ. I shall have to tell your Husband of you, that you bring such complaints against Him, for all things are yours, for ye are Christ's and Christ is God's; wherefore, "lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees"; use the knees of prayer and the hand of faith, and your estate will well content you. Do not think, that you are married to Rehoboam, who will beat you with scorpions, for you are joined to a greater than Solomon. Do not fancy that your heavenly Bridegroom is a beggar. All the wealth of eternity and infinity is His; how can you say that you are poor while all that He has is yours?

Now, thirdly, and very briefly indeed. There was one point about Solomon in which every Israelite rejoiced, namely that he was *the prince of peace*. His name signifies peace. His father, David, was a great warrior, but Solomon had not to carry on war. His power was such that no one dared to venture upon a conflict with so great and potent a monarch. Every man throughout Israel sat under his vine and figtree, and no man was afraid. No trumpet of invader was heard in the land. Those were halcyon days for Israel when Solomon reigned. Ah, but in that matter a greater than Solomon is here; for Solomon could not give his subjects peace of mind, he could not bestow upon them rest of heart, he could not ease them of their burden of guilt, or draw the arrow of conviction from their breast and heal its smart. But I preach to you tonight that blessed divine Man of Sorrows who has wrought out our redemption, and who is greater than Solomon in His peace-giving power. Oh, come and trust Him. Then shall your "peace be as a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea." Am I addressing one of God's people who is sorely troubled, tumbled up and down in his thoughts? Brother or sister, do not think that you must wait a week or two before you can recover your peace. You can become restful in a moment, for "He is our peace"—even He Himself, and He alone. And, oh, if you will but take Him at once, laying hold upon Him by the hand of faith as your Saviour, this Man shall be the peace even when the Assyrian shall come into the land. There is no peace like the peace which Jesus gives; it is like a river, deep, profound, renewed, ever flowing, overflowing, increasing and widening into an ocean of bliss. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and mind, through Jesus Christ." Oh, come to Him. Come to Him at this moment. Do not remain an hour away from your Noah, or rest, for with Him in the ark your weary wing shall be tired no longer. You shall be safe and restful the moment you return to Him. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. I want you to get that joy and to enter into this peace. Blessed combination, joy and peace! Peace, peace, there is music in the very word: get it from Him who is the Word, and whose voice can still a storm into a calm. A greater than Solomon is here to give you that peace; beat the sword of your inward warfare, into the plow-share of holy service; no longer sound an alarm, but blow up the trumpet of peace in this day of peace.

A fourth thing for which Solomon was noted was his *great works*. Solomon built the temple; which was one of the seven wonders of the world in its time. A very marvelous building it must have been, but I will not stay to describe it, for time fails us. In addition to this he erected for himself palaces, constructed fortifications, and made aqueducts and great pools to bring streams from the mountains to the various towns. He also founded Palmyra and Baalbed—those cities of the desert—to facilitate his commerce with India, Arabia, and other remote regions. He was a marvelous man. Earth has not seen his like. And yet a greater than Solomon is here, for Christ has brought the living water from the throne of God right down to thirsty men, being Himself the eternal aqueduct through which the heavenly current streams. Christ has built fortresses and munitions of defense, behind which His children stand secure against the wrath of hell; and He has founded and is daily finishing a wondrous temple, His church, of which His people are the living stones, fashioned, polished,

rendered beautiful—a temple which God Himself shall inhabit, for He “dwelleth not in temples made with hands, that is to say, of this building”; but He dwells in a temple which He Himself doth pile, of which Christ is architect and builder, foundation, and chief corner-stone. But Jesus builds for eternity, an everlasting temple, and, when all visible things pass away, and the very ruins of Solomon’s temple and Solomon’s aqueduct are scarcely to be discerned, what a sight will be seen in that New Jerusalem! The twelve courses of its foundations are of precious stones, its walls bedight with diamonds rare, its streets are paved with gold, and its glory surpasses that of the sun. I am but talking figures, poor figures, too; for the glory of the city of God is spiritual, and where shall I find words with which to depict it? There, where the Lamb Himself is the light, and the Lord God Himself doth dwell—there the whole edifice, the entire New Jerusalem—shall be to the praise and the glory of His grace who gave Jesus Christ to be the builder of the house of His glory, of which I hope we shall form a part for ever and ever.

Now, if Christ does such great works, I want you to come to Him, that He may work in you the work of God. That is the point. Come and trust Him at once. Trust Him to build you up. Come and trust Him to bring the living water to your lips. Come and trust Him to make you a temple of the living God. Come, dear child of God, if you have great works to do, come and ask for the power of Christ with which to perform them. Come, you that would leave some memorial to the honor of the divine name, come to Him to teach and strengthen you. He is the wise master-builder; come and be workers together with Christ. Baptize your weakness into His infinite strength, and you shall be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His mind. God help you to do so.

Once more. I draw the parallel upon the fifth point, and I have done with it. Solomon was great as to *dominion*. The kingdom of the Jews was never anything like the size before or after that Solomon made it. It appears to have extended from the river of Egypt right across the wilderness far up to the Persian Gulf. We can scarcely tell how far Solomon’s dominions reached; they are said to have been “from sea to sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the earth.” By one mode or another he managed to bring various kings into subjection to him, and he was the greatest monarch that ever swayed the sceptre of Judah. It has all gone now. Poor, feeble Rehoboam dropped from his foolish hands the reins his father held. The kingdom was rent in pieces, the tributary princes found their liberty, and the palmy days of Israel were over. On the contrary, our Lord Jesus Christ at this moment has dominion over all things. God has set Him over all the works of His hands. Ay, tell it out among the heathen that the Lord reigneth. The feet that were nailed to the tree are set upon the necks of His enemies. The hands that bore the nails sway at this moment the sceptre of all words: Jesus is King of kings, and Lord of lords! Hallelujah! Let universal sovereignty be ascribed to the Son of man: to Him who was “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Tell it out, ye saints, for your own comfort. The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof. Everything that happens in providence is under His sway still, and the time is coming when a moral and spiritual kingdom will be set up by Him which shall encompass the whole world. It does not look like it, does it? All these centuries have passed away, and little progress has been made. Ah, but He cometh; and when He cometh, or ere He cometh, He shall overturn, overturn, overturn, for His right it is, and God will give it Him. And, as surely as God lives, unto Him shall every man bow the knee, “and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Do not be afraid about it. Do not measure difficulties, much less tremble at them. What is faith made for but to believe that which seems impossible? To expect universal dominion for Christ when everything goes well is but the expectation

of reason; but to expect it when everything goes ill, is the triumph of Abrahamic confidence. Look upon the great mountain and say, "Who art thou, great mountain? Before the true Zerubbabel thou shall become a plain." In the blackest midnight, when the ebon darkness stands thick and hard as granite before you, believe that, at the mystic touch of Christ, the whole of it shall pass away, and at the brightness of His rising the eternal light shall dawn, never to be quenched. This is to act the part of a believer; and I ask you to act that part, and believe to the full in Christ the Omnipotent. What means this stunted faith in an almighty arm? What a fidget we are in and what a worry seizes us if a little delay arises! Everything has to be done in the next ten minutes, or we count our Lord to be slack. Is this the part of wisdom? The Eternal has infinite leisure, who are we that we should hasten Him?

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour.

A day is long to us: but a thousand years to Him are but the twinkling of a star. Oh, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, for the time shall come when the God of Israel shall put to rout His adversaries, and the Christ of the cross shall be the Christ of the crown. We shall one day hear it said—The great Shepherd reigns; and His unsuffering kingdom now hath come, Then rocks and hills, and vales and islands of the sea shall all be vocal with the one song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor and glory and power and dominion and might forever and ever!"

Thus have I tried to draw the parallel, but I pray you to see the Lord Jesus for yourself, and know whether I have spoken the truth about Him. You have heard the report; now, like the Queen of Sheba, go and see for yourself. Get to Christ, as to His dominion, come under His sway and own His sceptre. Go and trust your King; love your King; praise your King; delight in your King. How courtiers delight to be summoned to court! How glad they are to see the queen's face. How pleased they are if she gives them but a kindly word! Surely, their fortune is made, or at least their hopes are raised and their spirits lifted up. Shall we not sun ourselves in the presence of the blessed and only Potentate? Let us come into the presence of our King tonight, or else let us sit here and weep. Let us come to His table to feed upon Himself. Let us live on His Word. Let us delight in His love; and we shall surely say, "A greater than Solomon is here."

II. I shall not detain you longer than a minute or two while I remark that we must rise beyond all parallels, if we would reach the height of this great argument, for BETWEEN CHRIST AND SOLOMON THERE IS MUCH MORE CONTRAST THAN COMPARISON—much more difference than likeness.

In His *nature* the Lord Jesus is greater than Solomon. Alas, poor Solomon! The strongest man that ever lived, namely, Samson, was the weakest of men; and the wisest man that ever lived, was, perhaps, the greatest, certainly the most conspicuous, fool. How different is our Lord! There is no infirmity in Christ, no folly in the incarnate God. The backsliding of Solomon finds no parallel in Jesus, in whom the prince of this world found nothing though he searched Him through and through.

Our Lord is greater than Solomon because He is not mere man. He is man, perfect man, man to the utmost of manhood, sin excepted; but still He is more, and infinitely more, than man. "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." He is God Himself, "The Word was God." God dwells in Him, and He Himself is God.

As in nature He was infinitely superior to Solomon, and not to be compared with him for a moment, so was He in *character*. Look at Christ and Solomon for a minute as to real greatness of character, and you can hardly see Solomon with a microscope, while Christ rises grandly before

you, growing every moment till He fills the whole horizon of your admiration. Principally let me note the point of self-sacrifice. Jesus lived entirely for other people; He had never a thought about Himself. Solomon was, to a great extent, wise unto himself, rich unto himself, strong unto himself; and you see in those great palaces, and in all their arrangements, that he seeks his own pleasure, honor, and emolument; and, alas! that seeking of pleasure leads him into sin, that sin into a still greater one. Solomon, wonderful as he is, only compels you to admire him for his greatness, but you do not admire him for his goodness. You see nothing that makes you love him, you rather tremble before him than feel gladdened by him. Oh, but look at Christ. He does not have a thought for Himself. He lives for others. How grandly magnificent He is in disinterested love. He “loved his church and gave himself it.” He pours out even His heart’s blood for the good of men: and hence, dear friends, at this moment our blessed Lord is infinitely superior to Solomon in His *influence*. Solomon has little or no influence today. Even in his own time he never commanded the influence that Christ had in His deepest humiliation. I do not hear of any that were willing to die for Solomon; certainly nobody would do so now. But how perpetually is enthusiasm kindled in 10,000 breasts for Christ! They say that if again there were stakes in Smithfield we should not find men to burn at them for Christ. I tell you, it is not so. The Lord Jesus Christ has at this moment a remnant according to the election of His grace who would fling themselves into a pit of fire for Him, and joy to do it. “Who can separate us”—even us poor pygmies—“from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” “Oh,” says one, “I do not think I could suffer martyrdom.” You are not yet called to do so, my brother, and God has not given You the strength to do it before the need arises; but you will have strength enough if ever it comes to your lot to die for Jesus. Did you never hear of the martyr who, the night before he was to be burnt, sat opposite the fire, and, taking his shoe off, he held his foot close to the flame till he began to feel the burning of it? He drew it back and said, “I see God does not give me power to bear such suffering as I put upon myself, but I make none the less doubt,” said he, “that I shall very well stand the stake tomorrow morning, and burn quick to the death for Christ without starting back.” And so he did, for he was noticed never to stir at all while the flames were consuming him. There is a great deal of difference between your strength today and what your strength would be if you were called to some tremendous work or suffering. My Lord and Master, let me tell you, wakes more enthusiasm in human breasts at this moment than any other name in the universe. Napoleon once said, “I founded a kingdom upon force, and it will pass away”; but “Christ founded a kingdom upon love, and it will last forever and ever.” And so it will. Blot out the name of Christ from the hearts of His people? Strike you sun from the firmament, and quench the stars; and when you have achieved that easy task, yet have you not begun to remove the glory of the indwelling Christ from the hearts of His people. Some of us delight to think that we bear in our body the marks of the Lord Jesus. “Where?” says one. I answer, it is all over us. We have been buried into His name, and we belong to Him, in spirit, soul, and body. That watermark, which denotes that we are His, can never be taken out of us. We are dead with Him, wherein also we were buried with Him and are risen again with Him; and there is nothing at this moment that stirs our soul like the name of Jesus. Speak for yourselves. Is it not so? Have you never heard of one who lay dying, his mind wandering, and his wife said to him, “My dear, do you not know me?” He shook his head; and they brought near his favorite child. “Do you not know me?” He shook his head. One whispered, “Do you know the lord Jesus Christ?” and he said, “He is all my salvation and all my desire.” Oh, blessed name! Blessed name! Some years ago I was away from this place for a little rest, and I was thinking to myself, “Now, I wonder whether

I really respond to the power of the gospel as I should like to do? I will go and hear a sermon and see." I would like to sit down with you, in the pews sometimes and hear somebody else preach—not everybody, mark you, for when I hear a good many I want to be doing it myself. I get tired of them if they do not glow and burn. But that morning I thought I would drop into a place of worship such as there might be in the little town. A poor, plain man, a countryman, began preaching about Jesus Christ. He praised my Master in very humble language, but he praised Him most sincerely. Oh, but the tears began to flow. I soon laid the dust all round me where I sat, and I thought, "Bless the Lord! I do love Him." It only wants somebody else to play the harp instead of me, and my soul is ready to dance to the heavenly tune. Only let the music be Christ's sweet, dear, precious name, and my heart leaps at the sound. Oh, my brethren, sound out the praises of Jesus Christ! Sound out that precious name! There is none like it under heaven to stir my heart. I hope you can all say the same. I know you can if you love Him; for all renewed hearts are enamored of the sweet Lord Jesus. "A greater than Solomon is here." Solomon has no power over your hearts, but Jesus has. His influence is infinitely greater; *his power to bless* is infinitely greater; and so let us magnify and adore Him with all our hearts.

Oh, that all loved Him! Alas that so many do not! What strange monsters! Why, if you do not love Christ, what are you at? You hearts of stone, will you not break? If His dying love does not break them, what will? If you cannot see the beauties of Jesus, what can you see? You blind bats! O you that know not the music of His name, you are deaf. O you that do not rejoice in Him, you are dead. What are you at, that you are spared through the pleadings of His love, and yet do not love Him? God have mercy upon you, and bring you to delight yourselves in Christ, and trust him! As for us who do trust Him, we mean to love Him and delight in Him more and more, world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—COLOSSIANS 1.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—390, 389, 416.

The Minstrel

A Sermon

(No. 1612)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, August 7th, 1881, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

The text is a somewhat singular one, but I hope it will suggest a profitable idea.

“But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.”—2 Kings 3:15.

ELISHA needed that the Holy Spirit should come upon him to inspire him with prophetic utterances. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” We need that the hand of the Lord should be laid upon us, for we can never open our mouths in wisdom except we are under the divine touch. Now, the Spirit of God works according to his own will. “The wind bloweth where it listeth,” and the Spirit of God operates as he chooseth. Elisha could not prophesy just when he liked; he must wait until the Spirit of God came upon him, and the Spirit of God could come or not even as he pleased. Elisha had noticed that the Spirit of God acted upon him most freely when his mind was restful and subdued. He found himself best prepared for the heavenly voice when the noise within his soul was hushed, and every disturbing emotion was quieted. Having ascertained this fact by observation he acted upon it. He could not create the wind of the Spirit, but he could set his sail to receive it, and he did so.

At the particular time alluded to in the text Elisha had been greatly irritated by the sight of Jehoram, the king of Israel, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. In the true spirit of his old master, Elijah, the prophet let Jehoram know what he thought of him; and having delivered his soul, he very naturally felt agitated and distressed, and unfit to be the mouthpiece for the Spirit of God. He knew that the hand of the Lord would not rest upon him while he was in that state, and therefore he said, “Bring me a minstrel.” The original Hebrew conveys the idea of a man accustomed to play upon the harp. Listening to the dulcet tones which were produced by a skilful harper, who very likely sang one of David's psalms to the music, the prophet waited awhile, and then the hand of the Lord came upon him. Under the influence of minstrelsy his mind grew quiet, his agitation subsided, his thoughts were collected, and the Spirit of God spake through him. It was a most commendable thing for him to use the means which he had found at other times helpful, though still his sole reliance was upon the hand of the Lord. It would seem from a passage in the First Book of Samuel that Elisha was not the only prophet who had found music helpful, for we read, “Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy.” Elisha, like his predecessors, only used a natural means for putting himself into readiness for receiving supernatural help.

Let us see if we can bring forth the practical lesson which this incident may teach us.

I. First: here is a lesson to those who wish to serve God, and to speak in his name. **LET US STRIVE TO BE IN A FIT STATE FOR THE LORD'S WORK.** If we know of anything that will put our mind into such a condition that the Spirit of God is likely to work upon us and speak through us, let us make use of it. Elisha cried, “Bring me a minstrel”; let us also say—“bring me that which

will be helpful to me.” The harper could be of no service to Elisha for bringing him inspiration; but by putting him into a calm, equable state of mind he prepared him for the heavenly communication, and removed from his soul that which would have hindered the divine working.

It is very evident that we, too, like the prophet, have *our hindrances*. We are at times unfit for the Master’s use. Our minds are disarranged, the machinery is out of order, the sail is furled, the pipe is blocked up, the whole soul is out of gear. The hindrance in Elisha’s case came from *his surroundings*. He was in a camp; a camp where three nations mixed their discordant voices; a noisy, ill-disciplined camp, and a camp ready to perish for thirst. There was no water, and the men-at-arms were perishing; the confusion and clamour must have been great. Prophetic thought could scarcely command itself amid the uproar, the discontent, the threatening from thousands of thirsty men. Three kings had waited on the prophet; but this would not have disconcerted him had not one of them been Jehoram, the son of Ahab, and Jezebel. What memories were awakened in the mind of Elijah’s servant by the sight of the man in whom the proud dame of Sidon and her base-minded consort lived again. Naboth’s vine-yard must have come to his mind, and the stern threat of Elijah—“The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.” “For there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.”

Elisha acted rightly, and bravely. When he saw Jehoram coming, to him for help, he challenged him thus—“What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the Prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother.” When the king, humbly and with bated breath confessed that he saw the hand of Jehovah in bringing the three kings together, the prophet scarcely moderated his tone, but exclaimed, “As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.” It was fit that he should be in that temper; the occasion demanded it. Still it was not a fit preface to the inward whisper of the Spirit of God, and the prophet did not feel ready for his work: the circumstances were not soothing or elevating, and so he said, “Bring me a minstrel.” Do you not occasionally find yourself in an unhappy position? You have to preach, or to teach a class in school, or to carry an edifying word to a sick person; but everything distracts you. What with noise, or domestic trouble, or sinful neighbors, or the railing words of some wicked man, you cannot get into a fit frame of mind. You have had a duty to do which has caused you much pain and disquietude, and you cannot get over it, for everything conspires to worry you. Little things grieve great minds. The very sight of some individuals will throw a preacher off the rails. I know that the height of the pulpit, the thinness of the audience, the sleepiness of a hearer, or the heaviness of the atmosphere, may put the preacher’s heart out of tune, and incapacitate him for the blessing. Yes, we have our hindrances even as Elisha had.

Elisha’s hindrances lay mainly *in his inward feelings*: he could not feel the hand of the Lord upon him until the inner warfare had been pacified. He burned with indignation at the sight of the son of Jezebel, and flashed words of flame into his face, and, as I have already said, he was justified in so doing; but still the excitement marred the holy peace in which he usually lived, and he did not feel in a right condition to speak in the name of the Lord. Anger, even if it be of the purest kind, is a great disturber of the heart; it ruffles all our garments, and makes us unfit to minister before the Lord. I know of nothing that is more likely to put a man out of order for the communications of the Spirit of God than indignation. Even though we may be able to say, “I do well to be angry,” yet it is a very trying emotion. The unruffled lake reflects the skies, but if it be tossed with tempest

even the purest water becomes a broken mirror; even thus in the quiet of the soul the thoughts of God's Spirit are reflected, while in the rush of indignation they are broken and confused.

Doubtless, also, the prophet's spirits were depressed. He saw before him the king of Edom, an idolater; the king of Israel, a votary of the calves of Jeroboam; and Jehoshaphat, the man of God, in confederacy with them. This last must have pained him as much as anything. What hope was there for the cause of truth and holiness when even a godly prince was in alliance with Jezebel's son? This burdened the heart of the man of God. Everything was wrong, and going worse and worse. The warnings of Elijah and his own teachings seemed to go for nothing; the honour of God was forgotten, and the cause of evil triumphed.

Moreover, the servant of God must have been the subject of a fierce internal conflict between two sets of thoughts. Indignation and pity strove within his heart. His justice and his piety made him feel that he could have nothing to do with two idolatrous kings; but pity and humanity made him wish to deliver the army from perishing by thirst. Like a patriot, he sympathised with his people; but, like a prophet, he was jealous for his God. The men of Judah and Israel, whatever they might be in character, were the Lord's people by covenant; he could not let them die: yet they had broken that covenant, and how could he help them? The prophet was perplexed, and his heart grew heavy. How can we do the Lord's work when we are cast down in spirit? The joy of the Lord is our strength, and when we lose it our hands are feeble. When the heart is torn with inner conflict how can we speak words of comfort to those who are weary? We have need to escape from this inward strife before we can become sons of consolation to others. While rent with conflicting feeling, there was no rest in the prophet's spirit; and the hand of the Lord did not come upon him. Most wisely he did not attempt to speak in the name of the Lord, but sought for a means by which his excitement could be allayed. In the face of many hindrances we shall be wise if we imitate him. When we feel ourselves cumbered with much serving we shall act discreetly if we pause in it, and take Mary's place, for awhile, at least, and sit at Jesus' feet; or, if the service must be done at once, it will be well to use the readiest means for preparing the mind for doing it. It may be that some simple natural means will be helpful, and if so, we must not be so ultra-spiritual as to disdain to cry, "Bring me a minstrel." It is often pride which makes us decline the use of natural means. David went against Goliath in the name of the Lord, but he took his sling and his stone with him; even our Lord, who could open men's eyes with a word, did not refuse to use clay, or to send his patient to the pool of Siloam to wash. If you and I are out of order we must do our best to get right. If I go to do the Lord's work with a vexed or distracted mind, I shall do it badly. Perhaps I shall do more harm than good. I shall spill the cup of consolation if I am all in a tremble myself. God's servants should serve their Master well: the best we can render falls short of his deservings; but it would be a pity to do less than our very best. Occasionally we are quite out of form, cannot think, or feel, or speak aright; we have to confess that we are all in confusion, and, what is worse, we dare not even expect God come and help us till we are in a less excited condition. I know what I mean better than I can tell you. Some of our brethren are always even and calm, but others of us go dangerously up and sadly down, and are at times unfit either to receive the heavenly word or to convey it to others. At such times let us remember our text. The prophet said "Bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."

But what are our *helps* when we are pressed with hindrances? Is there anything which in our case may be as useful as a harp? "Bring me a minstrel," said the prophet, for his mind was easily moved by that charming art. Music and song soothed and calmed, and cheered him.

“Through every pulse the music stole,
And held high converse with his soul.”

On the wings of melody his mind rose above the noisy camp, and floated far away from the loathed presence of Jehoram; the melting mystic strain laid all his passions asleep, and his soul was left in silence to hear the voice of the Lord. Well did Luther say, “Music is the art of the prophets, the only art that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us.”

Among our own helps *singing* holds a chief place; as saith the apostle, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in Your heart to the Lord.” Note how he connects it with peace in his epistle to the Colossians: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts . . . teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” “I cannot sing,” says one. You need not sing as sweetly as Asaph and Heman, and other sweet birds of paradise whose names we read in Scripture; but we should all sing better if we sang more. Those with cracked voices would be kind if they would not sing quite so loudly in the congregation, for they grievously disturb other people; but they might get alone and have good times with themselves, where nobody could complain of their strong voices and lusty tones. It is good to sing praises unto the Lord, and a part of its goodness lies in the comfort which it brings. It is not without significance, that after supper, before our Lord went to his great sacrifice, he sang a hymn. Did not even he find refreshment in that holy exercise? My mind dwells sweetly on a season which I have often mentioned to you when a new lie had been forged against me, a lie of peculiar bitterness, and it vexed me. I was never particularly pleased at being slandered, though I have had my fair share of it. Well, I went alone awhile, and sung over to myself in my own poor way,—

“If on my face, for thy dear name,
Shame and reproaches be,
I'll hail reproach, and welcome shame,
If thou remember me.”

By that means the sting was removed, and I felt merry again. “Bring me a minstrel:” the restoring means may be a little thing, but if you do not look to the linchpin of a cartwheel the wheel may come off, and down will go the cart, and what is the poor horse to do then? If you can get your mind right again by such a simple thing as singing, pray do not neglect it.

Suppose, however, that singing has no such power over you; let me recommend to you the quiet *reading* of a chapter of God's word. Go upstairs and open the Book, and think upon a few verses. If you are much perplexed, read that blessed chapter which begins, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” Those verses act like a charm upon many minds: many and many a time a storm has subsided into a calm by the reading of those words. Some such passage read quietly will often operate as the harper acted upon Elisha. If time be pressing, see what is the text for the day in the almanac; or choose out some one precious promise which in other days was sweet to you. It is wonderful the effect of a single verse of Scripture when the Spirit of God applies it to the soul. There is music to a miser in the jingling of his money bag: but what music can equal this—“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”? If you are in poverty, what melody lies in this: “Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” What power would come upon the

soul to calm and quiet it, and make it ready for the hand of God, if we would grasp a single line of Scripture and suck the honey out of it till our soul is filled with sweetness.

You will find it equal to bringing a minstrel, and perhaps even more efficient, if you will get alone to *pray*. That horrible Rabshakeh's letter—you read it, and then you wished you had never seen it. You put it behind the glass, but you fetch it out again, and read it again, and cry, "What a trial is this! who can bear it?" There is a kind of basilisk power in an abominable letter, so that you feel compelled to read it again and again. Can you not break the spell? What is the wisest course? Go upstairs, open it wide, spread it before the Lord, and say, "O Lord, thou hast seen letters like this before; for thy servant Hezekiah showed thee one." I would say of every sorrow, "Pray over it." An old divine, after he had heard a young minister preach a poor discourse, said to him, "Sir, I beg you to try and pray that sermon over." He replied that he could not pray it over. Now, a sermon that cannot be prayed over ought never to be preached at all, and a trouble that you cannot pray over is a trouble which you ought not to have. It must be a grief of your own making; it cannot be a trial of God's sending. Tell the Lord your affliction, and the bitterness of it will be past, and you will go back to your daily service calm and quiet, fitted for the hand of the Lord to be laid upon you. Men will wonder whence your joy has come, and what makes your face to shine. The secret is that you have waited upon the Lord, and renewed your strength.

It may be you will find fittest help in *Christian association*. I commend this to those believers who are seldom fit for God to use because they are morose and fault-finding. You ought to say, "Bring me a minstrel:"—find me some praying sister whom I may talk with, or find me some genial brother who rejoices in the Lord, and let me converse with such. "It may be that the Master will join you and make a third, and then shall your heart be glad. Much misery is caused by Christians attempting to go to heaven alone. You remember how Mr. Bunyan describes Christian as journeying alone at first; he soon picked up with Hopeful, and then he was more cheery. As for Christiana and Mercy, and the family, they scarcely could have gone on pilgrimage at all if it had not been for Mr. Greatheart: but when they all went in company, with Mr. Greatheart to lead the band, they could sing all the way to the gates of the Celestial City. You, my friend, who are hindered in the service of Christ, might often be put right, so that God could use you, if you would become a companion of all them that fear God, and of them that keep his precepts. Holy converse acts as a minstrel to the spirit.

What is *the duty* that arises out of this? It is this: if you get into a bad state, don't stick there. "Ah," says one, "it is very close weather, and I feel depressed, so that the Spirit of God does not work upon my mind." Then cry at once, "Bring me a minstrel." Do not say "I cannot help being stupid." You need not be: at least, not more so than you are by nature. You may get out of your dullness by making an effort, and you ought to make it. Did I not hear you say "Everybody has gone away for a holiday, and I cannot leave my work. Trade is dull, and so am I"? But you need not be dull. Why should you always be heavy? You say, "I do not feel fit to go to my class," or, "I do not feel fit to preach." Should you, therefore, cease from the work of the Lord? By no means. Rouse yourself. Think of the way in which God has aforetime helped you, and use the same means again. While you are helping yourselves God will help you, and the hand of the Lord will come upon you.

Do not give way to feelings which unhinge you. Fight against them and cry with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" Still, do not rush into God's service in an unfit condition. Resort to such means as are within reach for calming the lower faculties, and the Spirit of God will move

upon your higher powers. Act rationally. Use your best judgement and most prudent endeavours, or we shall suspect that you have no particular wish to do the Lord's work, or fancy that anything is good enough for your God. Say to yourself, "Being in an unsuitable condition, I cannot expect God to use me. I must therefore get right. Here is my harp, but every string is out of tune. I cannot expect the Holy Spirit to play upon it until it is put in order. What can I do to help myself in this matter, for that I will do, and thus prove the sincerity of my prayer when I ask God the Holy Spirit to help me."

This, then, is the first lesson, and I am sure there is real practical teaching in it, though some superior persons may despise it.

II. My second word is to those who have not yet found the Lord. WE SHOULD USE EVERY MEANS TO OBTAIN THE TOUCH OF THE DIVINE HAND. There are some here present who do not yet know whether they are believers in Christ or not: and I am sure I cannot tell them. I hope they are believers, for they are sincerely desirous of eternal salvation, but sometimes I am afraid they are not, for they do not appear to understand the meaning of the finished work of Christ. What are those, who are earnestly seeking the Lord, to do? There is but one answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Faith is the one and only course commanded. But some one replies, "Alas, I cannot get at that." But, my friend, you must get at it, or perish. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Still, to help you, let me urge you to do this which lies near at hand if you cannot feel that the Spirit of God will bless you as you are, call for some minstrel, who may aid you in your search after the blessing. If there be any subordinate means which may be helpful, use it with a view to the higher and better thing. I would first say—If you feel that you have not the faith which you ought to have, *use what faith you have*. It is wonderful what an immense amount of possibility lie in a mustard seed of faith. It is a very small, tiny thing; but sow it and it will grow. You have not enough faith to believe that Christ *will* save you, but you have enough to feel sure that Christ *can* save you. That is something: hold to it and follow it out to its fair conclusions. If a man has not money enough to pay for a week's provisions, let him not starve; but let him spend what he has, hoping that more will come. Have you a small dust of faith? use that, and it will multiply.

If you want to feel the hand of the Lord, I would next say, Go and *hear a sound, earnest, lively preacher*. I am advising you to do as I acted myself. I was muddled, and could not exercise faith, and so resolved to obey that other precept, "Hear, and your soul shall live."

If you long for faith, listen to the preacher who preaches the gospel most simply and most forcibly. Perhaps you say, "I have been listening to a very clever minister, a very intellectual minister, and his word has never been blessed to my soul." Then shift your place, and say, "Bring me a minstrel;" for then it may be that the hand of the Lord may be upon you. It is better to go a hundred miles to hear a faithful minister than to listen to a man from whom you get no good because he happens to preach near you. Men go many miles to a skilful physician, or a healing fountain. When we are in earnest to find Christ we shall have the sense to go where he is most honoured and most spoken of.

"But suppose I have attended such a ministry, and have found no good; what shall I do?" Why, the Scripture says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ ' and thou shalt be saved." Still, if you cannot get at this for the moment, *attend earnest meetings* where souls have been converted, and many have been brought to Jesus' feet. Trust not to preachers or meetings; but, still, go where the rain is falling, and there may be a drop for you. If a ministry is blessing others, resort to it, praying, "O

Lord, *bless* me.” Our immediate need is the hand of the Lord, and we may be made ready to receive it by hearing the gospel; therefore let us diligently incline our ear to the heavenly word.

Let me also advise you to *read gracious books*. Ask Christian people what writings were blessed to their conversion, and carefully study the same. There is no book for saving souls like the Bible. Say, “Bring me a minstrel,” and read the Scriptures again and again. The Lord Jesus feedeth among the lilies: get among the beds of lilies, and you will find him there. Oh, how many have found Christ when they have been searching the Scriptures to see “whether those things were so.”

I would also strongly recommend you to *get a good deal alone*. You poor souls, who cannot find Christ, and do not seem to understand what it is to believe in him, should think much, and meditate much, upon Jesus and his cross. David said, “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.” If you want a minstrel, think of your sin, your sin against your God, till it breaks your heart; then think of Christ, his nature, his work, his love, his deeds of mercy: think of the Holy Spirit, and his power to renew, regenerate, comfort, sanctify: think over those precious truths of the word of God, which are set there on purpose to be beacons to light souls to Christ, and while you are thinking of these it shall be to you as when the minstrel played, and the hand of the Lord came upon his prophet. Get much alone; but still recollect there is no hope for you if you trust in being alone, or trust in reading the Scriptures, or trust in hearing, or trust in anything but Christ. What you want is the hand of Jesus laid upon you: one touch from him, and you will be made whole. If you can but touch the hem of his garment, virtue shall come out of him to you. I am merely mentioning these things because sometimes they lead up to the one thing, and when a man is in earnest to obtain the one thing needful, he will be willing to attend to anything by which he will be likely to attain it, and to attend to any secondary means which God has blessed in the case of others. He will be willing to be taught by a child, if peradventure God will bless him in that manner. He will say, “Bring me a minstrel;” “Bring me a good book;” “Bring me a godly minister;” “Bring me a Christian man accustomed to speak to troubled hearts;” “Bring me an aged Christian whose testimony shall confirm my spirit, and be the means of working faith in me: for I must get to God; I must get salvation. Tell me, tell me, where Christ is to be obtained, and I will find him if I ransack the globe to discover him.” I do not believe any person who has desires to find Christ will seek in vain. I am certain that when people hunger and thirst after Christ they shall be filled, and when they say, “We will do anything by which we may be led to Jesus,” they are not far from the kingdom of heaven, and the Holy Spirit is at work in them.

III. Thirdly, WE SHOULD MORE ABUNDANTLY USE HOLY MINSTRELSY. Saints and sinners, too, would find it greatly to their benefit if they said, “Bring me a minstrel.” This is the world’s cry whenever it is merry, and filled with wine. The art of music has been prostituted to the service of Satan. Charles Wesley well said,—

Listed into the cause of sin,
 Why should a good be evil?
 Music, alas! too long has been
 Press’d to obey the devil.
 Drunken, or lewd, or light, the lay
 Flow’d to the soul’s undoing;
 Widen’d, and strew’d with flowers the way
 Down to eternal ruin.”

It is for us to use singing in the service of God, and to make a conquest of it for our Redeemer. Worldlings want the minstrel to excite them; we want him to calm our hearts and still our spirits. That is his use to us, and we shall do well to employ the harper to that end.

Let us give instances: I will suppose that this morning you were thinking about coming up to the assembly of God's people, and you felt hardly up to the mark. It would have been wise to do as I did this morning. I read at family prayer the eighty-fourth Psalm, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God."

What a sweet piece of Sabbath minstrelsy it is! How often have we been quieted and prepared for sanctuary worship by Psalm 84:—

"How did my heart rejoice to hear
My friends devoutly say,
'In Zion let us all appear
And keep thy holy day!'"

When the house is full of trouble, and your heart is bowed down, is it not well to say—"Bring me a minstrel, and let him sing to me the twenty-seventh Psalm. 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.'" You need not confine the harper to that one strain; for David has written many psalms for burdened hearts. It is wonderful what provision God has made of sacred minstrels to play us up out of the depths into the heights if we will but make a right use of them.

I will suppose you are in a state of alarm; it may be there is a thunderstorm, or possibly a disease is stalking through the land. Did you ever sing in such times that forty-sixth Psalm: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early." Such music is like the breath of heaven. How comforting are the words of the ninety-first Psalm when diseases are abroad, or when the thunder rolls through the sky: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust." I remember being in a family one night when I was but a lad, when everybody in the house, strong men though some of them were, trembled and were afraid. A child was upstairs and must be brought down, but no one dared pass by the window on the staircase. Well do I remember fetching the child, awed but not alarmed, and then I sat down and read aloud the ninety-first Psalm, and saw how it quieted both men and women. Ah, my brethren, David as a musician is one of a thousand; we need no other minstrel. The word of God hushes the tempest of the soul, and refreshes the heart with a celestial dew. "Bring me a minstrel," but let him sing us one of the songs of Zion.

Do you ever get depressed in spirit, beloved friends? I fear you do; and are you ever troubled because you seem to have more affliction than anybody else? Have you watched the wicked and seen them prosperously sailing while you have been tossed to and fro on a raging sea of troubles? Do you want to get peace to your mind by the power of the Holy Spirit? Then say, "Bring me a minstrel" and let him sing that thirty-seventh Psalm, "Fret not thyself because of evildoers." Or if you would have a change from the thirty-seventh, turn the figures round, and let him sing the seventy-third, and the notes will run thus: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped." You will not be long before you will rise to the note—"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

Happily, you are not always depressed: there are times of great joy with you, and then you long to have communion with God. If you wish to have fellowship with Jesus, you will find it helpful to say, "Bring me a minstrel;" and when he asks, "What shall I sing?" say to him, "Sing the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." Then shall you find utterance for your heart in some such canticles as these: "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" Possibly your tongue will take up notes like these: "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." "My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the daybreak, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of division." The whole book is full of utterances which may seem strange to worldly minds, but which exactly suit those who know the Well-beloved. Read that third verse of the eighth chapter of the Song. Did you ever sing it? "His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please." "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."

When we come to die we will breathe our last breath to music. Then will we say, "Bring me a harper," and like Jacob and Moses we will sing ere we depart. Our song is ready. It is the twenty-third Psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

This is the kind of minstrel for me. Say you not so, my brethren? When you are in trouble or distress, will you not remember your son in the night? If such be the strain, I am of the same mind as Martin Luther, whose words I have copied out to read to you. His language is always strong. Luther speaks thunderbolts. "One of the finest and noblest gifts of God is music. This is very hateful to the devil, and with it we may drive off temptations and evil thoughts. After theology I give the next place and highest honour to music. It has often aroused and moved me so that I have won a desire to preach. We ought not to ordain young men to the office of preacher if they have not trained themselves and practised singing in the schools." That is pretty strong. I fear many would not have been preachers if they must first have been singers. Still, there is a power about song; and to sing the praises of God in psalms such as those I have read to you is most consoling.

Suppose you have done with the minstrelsy which I have now mentioned, there is next *the music of gospel doctrine*. I confess to you that, when depressed in spirit, I love a little of thorough

Calvinistic doctrine. I turn to Coles on Divine Sovereignty, and relish his plain speaking upon sovereign grace. The doctrine of election is noble music: predestination is a glorious hallelujah. Grace abounding, love victorious, truth unchanging, faithfulness invincible: these are melodies such as my ear delights in. The truth of God is fit music for angels. The harps of the redeemed never resound with more noble music than the doctrines of grace. Every truth has its melody, every doctrine is a psalm unto God. When my heart is faint, "Bring me a minstrel," and let him sing of free grace and dying love.

If these do not charm you, fetch a minstrel from *experience*. Think how God has dealt with you in times of sorrow and darkness long gone by, and then you will sing, "His mercy endureth for ever." That one hundred and third Psalm might last a man from now till he entered heaven, he need not change the strain,—“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” He may keep on chanting it until his song melts into the hymn of the angels, and he adds another voice to the chorus of the redeemed above.

If you want music, there is yet a sweeter store. Go fetch a minstrel *from Calvary*. Commend me for sweetness to the music of the cross. At Calvary I hear one piece of music set to the minor key which bred more joy beneath the skies than all else. Hear it: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus deserted is the comfort of deserted souls: Jesus crying, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" is the joy of the spirit that has lost the light of God's countenance. That grave and solemn note can lift despair into delight.

But if you want another hymn of the cross to be sung with the accompaniment of the high-sounding cymbals, or with trumpet and sound of cornet, let me commend you to this other song of the cross, "IT IS FINISHED." All music lies there. Condensed into those three words you have the harmonies of eternity, the melodies of the infinite. Angels themselves when on their loftiest key did never sing a canticle so sweet. "*Consummatum est*" is the consummation of song. "It is finished;" sin is blotted out, reconciliation is complete, everlasting righteousness is brought in, and believing souls are saved. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! "Till the day break, and the shadows flee away," "Bring me a minstrel," and let us sing unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 136; 2 Kings 3:1-15.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—136 (Song II.), 166, 229.

Love's Labours

A Sermon

(No. 1617)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, September 4th, 1881, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”—1 Corinthians 13:7.

THE grace of charity, or love, of which so much is most admirably spoken in this chapter, is absolutely essential to true godliness. So essential is it that, if we have everything beside, but have not charity, it profiteth us nothing. The absence of charity is absolutely fatal to vital godliness; so saith the Holy Ghost in this chapter. When, then, you read the apostle's high encomiums of charity, do not say, “This is a fancy virtue to which certain special saints have attained, and we are bound to admire them for it, but we need not imitate them.” Far from it. This charity is the common, everyday livery of the people of God. It is not the prerogative of a few; it must be the possession of all. Do not, therefore, however lofty the model may be, look up to it as though you could not reach it: you must reach it. It is put before you not only as a thing greatly desirable, but as absolutely needful; for if you excelled in every spiritual gift, yet if you had not this all the rest would profit you nothing whatever. One would think that such excellent gifts might benefit us a little, but no, the apostle sums them all up, and saith of the whole, “it profiteth me nothing.” I pray that this may be understood of us at the very beginning, lest we should manage to slip away from the truth taught us by the Holy Ghost in this place, and should excuse ourselves from being loving by the notion that we are so inconsiderable that such high virtue cannot be required of us, or so feeble that we cannot be expected to attain to it. You must attain it, or you cannot enter into eternal life, for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his, and the Spirit of Christ is sure to beget the charity of our text, which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

What does this teach us at the outset, but that a salvation which leads to this must be of God, and must be wrought in us by his power? Such a comely grace can never grow out of our fallen nature. Shall such a clean thing as this be brought out of an unclean? This glorious salvation unto pure love must be grasped by faith, and wrought in us by the operation of the Spirit of God. If we consider salvation to be a little thing, we bring it, as it were, within the sphere of human possibility, but if we set it forth in its true proportions as involving the possession of a pure, loving, elevated state of heart, then we perceive that it is a divine wonder. When we estimate the renewed nature aright we cry, “This is the finger of God,” and right gladly do we then subscribe to Jonah's creed, “Salvation is of the Lord.” If charity be in any man and abound, God must have the glory of it; for assuredly it was never attained by mere natural effort, but must have been bestowed by that same hand which made the heavens. So then, brethren, I shall hope when I conclude to leave upon your minds the impression of your need of the grace of God for the attainment of love. I would not discourage you, but I would have you feel how great a labour lies before you, and how impossible it will be unless you are girt with a strength beyond your own. This shall be your solace that if it

cannot be the outcome of your own effort, yet “the fruit of the Spirit is love,” and the Spirit is ready and willing to bear fruit in us also.

Notice then, first, *the multitude of love's difficulties*; it has to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things: secondly, observe *the triumph of love's labour*; it does all these four things, it “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things”: and then, thirdly, this will bring us back to the point we have started from, *the sources of love's energy*, and how it is she is able thus to win her fourfold victory over countless difficulties.

I. Consider well THE MULTITUDE OF LOVE'S DIFFICULTIES. When the grace of God comes into a man he is born at once to love. He that loveth is born of God, and he that is born of God loveth. He loveth him that begat, even God, and he loveth him that is begotten of him, even all the saved ones. He commences to obey the great command to love his neighbour as himself. His motto is no longer that of an earthly kingdom, *Dieu et mon droit*—God and my right; but he bears another word on his escutcheon, *Dieu et mon frŠre*—God and my brother.

No sooner is love born than she finds herself at war. Everything is against her, for the world is full of envy, hate, and ill-will. I would warn the most loving-hearted that they have entered upon a war for peace, a strife for love: they are born to hate hatred, and to contend against contention. As the lily among thorns, so is love among the sons of men. As the hind among the dogs, so is charity among the selfish multitude.

Evidently the difficulties of love are many, for the apostle speaks of them as “all things,” and as if this were not enough he repeats the words, and sets forth the opposing armies as four times “all things.” I do not know whether you can calculate this mighty host. “All things” would seem to comprehend as much as can be, but here in the text you have this amount multiplied by four. For, my brother, you will have to contend with all that is within *yourself*. Nothing in your original nature will help you. God has put within you a new life, but the old life seeks to smother it. You will find it a severe struggle to master yourself, and if you succeed therein you will be a conqueror indeed. Besides that you will have to contend with “all things” in *the persons* whom you are called upon to love. You must have fervent charity towards the saints, but you will find very much about the best of them which will try your patience; for, like yourself, they are imperfect, and they will not always turn their best side towards you, but sometimes sadly exhibit their infirmities. Be prepared, therefore, to contend with “all things” in them. As for the ungodly whom you are to love to Christ, you will find everything in them that will oppose the drawings of your love, for they, like yourself, by nature are born in sin, and they are rooted in their iniquities. When you have mastered that kind of “all things” you will have to contend with “all things” in *the world*, for the world lieth in the wicked one, and all its forces run towards self, and contention, and hate. Every man's hand is against his fellow, and few there be who honour the gentle laws of love; they know not that divine charity which “seeketh not her own.” The seed of the serpent is at enmity with all that is kind, and tender, and self-sacrificing, for these are the marks of the woman's seed. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. And then remember that “all things” in *hell* are against you. What a seething mass of rebellious life, all venomous with hate, is seen in the regions of darkness. The prince of the power of the air leads the van, and the host of fallen spirits eagerly follow him, like bloodhounds behind their leader. All these evil spirits will endeavour to create dissension, and enmity, and malice, and oppression among men, and the soldier of love must wrestle against all these. See, O my brother, what a battle is yours! Speak of crusades against the Paynim, what a crusade is this against hate and evil. Yet we shrink not from the fray.

Happily, though love has many difficulties, *it overcomes them all*, and overcomes them four times. There is such vitality in evil that it leaps up from the field whereon it seemed to be slain, and rages with all its former fury. First, we overcome evil by *patience*, which “beareth all things.” Let the injury be inflicted, we will forgive it, and not be provoked: even seventy times seven will we bear in silence. If this suffice not, by God’s grace we will overcome by *faith*: we trust in Jesus Christ, we rely upon our principles, we look for divine succour, and so we “believe all things.” We overcome a third time by *hope*: we rest in expectation that gentleness will win, and that long-suffering will wear out malice, for we look for the ultimate victory of everything that is true and gracious, and so we “hope all things.” We finish the battle by *perseverance*: we abide faithful to our resolve to love, we will not be irritated into unkindness, we will not be perverted from generous, all-forgiving affection, and so we win the battle by steadfast non-resistance. We have set our helm towards the port of love, and towards it we will steer, come what may. Baffled often, love “endureth all things.”

Yes, brethren, and love *conquers on all four sides*. Love does, as it were, make a hollow square, and she sets the face of her warriors towards all quarters of the compass. Does God seem himself to smite love with afflictions? She “beareth all things.” Do her fellow Christians misrepresent her, and treat her ill? She believes everything that is good about them, and nothing that is injurious. Do the wicked rise against her? When she tries to convert them, do they return evil for good? She turns her hopefulness to the front in that direction, and hopes that yet the Spirit of God will bring them to a better mind. And does it happen that all her spiritual foes attack her with temptations and desperate insinuations? She lifteth up the banner of patience against them, and by the power of God’s grace she putteth the infernal enemy to the rout, for she “endureth all things.” What a brave mode of battle is this! Is not love a man-of-war? Is it not invincible? Hear love’s heroic cry as she shouts her defiance—

“Come one, come all, this rock shall fly,
From its firm base as soon as I.”

If once taught in the school of Christ to turn love to every point of the compass, and so to meet every assault against our heart, we have learned the secret of victory.

It seems to me that I might read my text as if it said that *love conquers in all stages of her life*. She begins in conversion, and straightway those that mark her birth are angry, and the powers of evil are at once aroused to seek her destruction. Then she “beareth all things.” Let them mock, love never renders railing for railing: Isaac is not to be provoked by Ishmael’s jeers.

She gathers strength and begins to tell out to others what she knows of her Lord and his salvation. She “believeth all things,” and so she confesses her faith, and her fellow Christians are confirmed by her witness. It is her time of energy, and so she tries to woo and win others, by teaching them the things which she believes.

She advances a little farther; and, though often disappointed by the unbelief of men and the coldness of her fellow Christians, she nevertheless “hopes all things,” and pushes on in the expectation of winning more of them. Her dove’s eyes see in the dark, and she advances to victory through ever-growing conflict.

Ay, and when infirmities thicken upon her, and old age comes, and she can do little else but sit still, and bear and believe and hope, she still perseveres, and accepts even the stroke of death itself without complaining, for love “endureth all things.”

I do not think I need say more upon the difficulties of love. I am sure that every experienced person knows that these difficulties are supreme, and that we require superlative grace if we are to master them. Love does not ask to have an easy life of it: self-love makes that her aim. Love denies herself, sacrifices herself, that she may win victories for God, and bring blessings on her fellow-men. Hers is no easy pathway, and hers shall be no tinsel crown.

II. Secondly, let us survey THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE'S LABOUR. Her labours are fourfold.

First, in *bearing all things*. The word here rendered "bear" might as correctly have been translated "cover." You that have the Revised Version will find in the margin, "Love covereth all things." "Covereth" is the meaning of the word in ordinary Greek, but Paul generally uses the word in the sense of "bear." Our translators, therefore, had to choose between the usual meaning and the Pauline usage, and they selected Paul's meaning, and put it down in the first place as "beareth," giving us in the margin the other sense of "covereth." The two ideas may be blended, if we understand it to mean that love bears all things in silence, concealing injuries as much as possible even from herself.

Let us just think of this word "covers" *in reference to the brethren*. True love refuses to see faults, unless it be that she may kindly help in their removal. Love has no wish to see faults. Noah's younger son discovered and declared the shame of his father, but his other sons took a garment and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father: after this fashion does love deal with the sins of her brethren. She painfully fears that there may be something wrong, but she is loath to be convinced of it: she ignores it as long as she can, and wishes that she could deny it altogether. Love covers; that is, it never proclaims the errors of good men. There are busybodies abroad who never spy out a fault in a brother but they must needs hurry off to their next neighbour with the savoury news, and then they run up and down the street as though they had been elected common criers. It is by no means honourable to men or women to set up to be common informers. Yet I know some who are not half so eager to publish the gospel as to publish slander. Love stands in the presence of a fault, with a finger on her lip. If anyone is to smite a child of God, let it not be a brother. Even if a professor be a hypocrite, love prefers that he should fall by any hand rather than her own. Love covers all injuries by being silent about them, and acting as if they had never been. She sitteth alone, and keepeth silence. To speak and publish her wrong is too painful for her, for she fears to offend against the Lord's people. She would rather suffer than murmur, and so, like a sheep before her shearers, she is dumb under injury.

I would, brothers and sisters, that we could all imitate the pearl oyster. A hurtful particle intrudes itself into its shell, and this vexes and grieves it. It cannot eject the evil, and what does it do but *cover* it with a precious substance extracted out of its own life, by which it turns the intruder into a pearl. Oh, that we could do so with the provocations we receive from our fellow Christians, so that pearls of patience, gentleness, long-suffering, and forgiveness might be bred within us by that which else had harmed us. I would desire to keep ready for my fellow Christians, a bath of silver, in which I could electroplate all their mistakes into occasions for love. As the dripping well covers with its own deposit all that is placed within its drip, so would love cover all within its range with love, thus turning even curses into blessings. Oh that we had such love that it would cover all, and conceal all, so far as it is right and just that it should be covered and concealed.

As to *bearing* all, taking the words as they stand in our version, I wish to apply the text mainly to our trials in seeking the conversion of *the unconverted*. Those who love the souls of men must be prepared to cover much when they deal with them, and to bear much from them in silence. When I begin to seek the conversion of anyone, I must try as much as ever I can to ignore any repulsiveness

that there may be in his character. I know that he is a sinner, else I should not seek his salvation; but if he happens to be one who has fallen very low in the esteem of others, I must not treat him as such, but cover his worst points. You cannot possibly bring the Samaritan woman who has had five husbands into a right state of mind by “wondering that he spake with the woman.” Thus the disciples acted, but not so their Master, for he sat on the well and talked with her, and made himself her willing companion that he might be her gracious Saviour; he ignored her sin so far as to converse with her for her good.

You will not long have begun this holy work before you will discover in the heart you seek to win much ignorance of the gospel. Bear with it, and bring forward the text which sheds light on that darkness, and teach the truth which will remove that error. Ere long you will have to contend with hardness of heart, for when a man knows the truth he is not always willing to receive it. Bear it, and be not vexed. Did you not expect the heart to be hard? Do not you know what business you are upon? You are sent to turn men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. Be not astonished if these things should not prove to be child's play. In addition to this perhaps you will have ridicule poured upon you; your attempts to convert will be converted into jests. Bear it; bear all things! Remember how the multitude thrust out the tongue at your Lord and Master when he was dying, and be not you so proud as to think yourself too good to be laughed at. Still speak concerning Christ, and whatever happens, bear all things. I will not attempt to make a catalogue of your provocations, you shall make one yourself after you have tried to convert men to Christ; but all that you can possibly meet with is included in my text, for it says, “beareth *all things*.” If you should meet with some extraordinary sinner who opens his mouth with cruel speeches such as you have never heard before, and if by attempting to do him good you only excite him to ribaldry and blasphemy, do not be astonished; have at him again, for charity “beareth all things,” whatever they may be. Push on and say, “Yes, all this proves to me how much you want saving. You are my man; if I get you to Christ there will be all the greater glory to God.” O blessed charity, which can thus cover all things and bear all things for Christ's sake.

Do you want an example of it? Would you see the very mirror and perfection of the charity that beareth all things? Behold your divine Lord. Oh, what he has covered! It is a tempting topic, but I will not dwell on it. How his glorious righteousness, his wondrous splendour of love, has covered all our faults and all their consequences, treating us as if he saw no sin in Jacob, neither perversity in Israel. Think what he bore when he came unto his own and his own received him not! What a covering was that when he said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” What a pitying sight of the fearful misery of man our Lord Jesus had when holy tears bedewed those sacred eyes! What a generous blindness to their infamous cruelty he manifested when he prayed for his bloodthirsty enemies. O beloved, you will never be tempted, and taunted, and tried as he was; yet in your own shorter measure may you possess that love which can silently bear all things for the elect's sake and for Christ's sake, that the multitude of the redeemed may be accomplished, and that Christ through you may see of the travail of his soul.

Now let us look at the second of love's great labours. You have heard of the labours of Hercules, but the fabulous hero is far outdone by the veritable achievements of love. Love works miracles which only grace can enable her to perform. Here is the second of them—*love “believeth all things.”* In reference, first, to our fellow Christians, love always believes the best of them. I wish we had more of this faith abroad in all the churches, for a horrid blight falls upon some communities through suspicion and mistrust. Though everything may be pure and right, yet certain weak minds are

suddenly fevered with anxiety through the notion that all is wrong and rotten. This unholy mis-trust is in the air, a blight upon all peace: it is a sort of fusty mildew of the soul by which all sweet perfume of confidence is killed. The best man is suspected of being a designing knave, though he is honest as the day, and the smallest fault or error is frightfully exaggerated, till we seem to dwell among criminals and to be all villains together. If I did not believe in my brethren I would not profess to be one of them. I believe that with all their faults they are the best people in the world, and that, although the church of God is not perfect, yet she is the bride of One who is. I have the utmost respect for her, for her Lord's sake. The Roman matron said "Where my husband is Caias I am Caia"; where Christ is King, she who stands at his right hand is "the queen in gold of Ophir." God forbid that I should rail at her of whom her Lord says, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." True love believes good of others as long as ever it can, and when it is forced to fear that wrong has been done, love will not readily yield to evidence, but she gives the accused brother the benefit of many a doubt. When the thing is too clear, love says, "Yes, but the friend must have been under very strong temptation, and if I had been there I dare say I should have done worse;" or else love hopes that the erring one may have offended from a good though mistaken motive; she believes that the good man must have been mistaken, or he would not have acted so. Love, as far as she can, believes in her fellows. I know some persons who habitually believe everything that is bad, but they are not the children of love. Only tell them that their minister or their brother has killed his wife, and they would believe it immediately, and send out for a policeman: but if you tell them anything good of their neighbour, they are in no such hurry to believe you. Did you ever hear of gossips tittle-tattling approval of their neighbours? I wish the chatterers would take a turn at exaggerating other people's virtues, and go from house to house trumping up pretty stories of their acquaintances. I do not recommend lying even in kindness, but that side of it would be such a novelty that I could almost bear with its evils for a change. Love, though it will not speak an untruth in praise of another, yet has a quick eye to see the best qualities of others, and it is habitually a little blind to their failings. Her blind eye is to the fault, and her bright is for the excellence. Somewhere or other I met with an old legend—I do not suppose it to be literally true, but its spirit is correct. It is said that, once upon a time, in the streets of Jerusalem, there lay a dead dog, and everyone kicked at it and reviled it. One spoke of its currish breed, another of its lean and ugly form, and so forth; but one passed by who paused a moment over the dead dog, and said, "What white teeth it has." Men said, as he went on his way, "That is Jesus of Nazareth." Surely it is ever our Lord's way to see good points wherever he can. Brethren, think as well as you can even of a dead dog. If you should ever be led into disappointments and sorrows by thinking too well of your fellow-men, you need not greatly blame yourself. I met, in Anthony Farrindon's Sermons, a line which struck me. He says the old proverb has it, "*Humanum est errare*," to err is human, but, saith he, when we err by thinking too kindly of others we may say, "*Christianum est errare*," it is Christian to err in such a fashion. I would not have you credulous, but I would have you trustful, for suspicion is a cruel evil. Few fall into the blessed error of valuing their fellow Christians at too high a rate.

In reference to the unconverted this is a very important matter. Love "believeth all things" in their case. She does not believe that the unconverted are converted, for, if so, she would not seek their conversion. She believes that they are lost and ruined by the Fall, but she believes that God can save them. Love believes that the precious blood of Christ can redeem the bondslaves of sin and Satan, and break their iron chains; she believes that the power of the Holy Spirit can change a

heart of granite into a heart of flesh. Love, therefore, believing this, believes also that God can save this sinner by herself, and she therefore begins to speak to him, expecting that the word she speaks will be God's instrument of salvation. When she finds herself sitting next to a sinner, she believes that there was a necessity for her to be there, even as Christ must needs go through Samaria. She saith to herself, "Now will I tell to this poor soul what Christ hath done, for I believe that even out of my poor lips eternal life may flow, and in such a babe as I am God may perfect praise to his own glory." She does not refrain from preaching Christ through fear of failure, but she believes in the great possibilities which lie in the gospel and in the Spirit of God, and so she deals earnestly with the man next her. She believes in her own principles, she believes in the grace of God, she believes in the power of the Spirit of God, she believes in the force of truth, she believes in the existence of conscience, and so she is moved to set about her saving work. She believeth all things.

Brethren, do you want a model of this? Then I beseech you look to your divine Master once again. See him in the morning when the sheep are counted, missing one of them, and so full of faith is he that he can find the lost one, that he leaves the ninety and nine, and cheerfully enters the pathless wilderness. See how he bounds over the mountains! How he descends the ravines! He is seeking his sheep until he finds it, for he is fully assured that he shall find it. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, for his faith is great in the salvation of men, and he goes forth to it believing that sinners shall be saved. I delight in the deep, calm faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. He had no faith in man's goodness, for "he knew what was in man"; but he had great faith in what could be done in men and what could be wrought for them, and for the joy that was set before him in this he endured the cross, despising the shame. He had faith that grand things would come of his salvation—men would be purified, error would be driven out, false-hood would be slain, and love would reign supreme.

Here is the second grand victory of love, she "believeth all things." Herein let us exercise ourselves till we are skilled in it.

Love's third great labour is in "*hoping all things*." Love never despairs. She believes in good things yet to come in her fellow-men, even if she cannot believe in any present good in them. Hope all things about your brethren. Suppose a friend is a member of the church, and you cannot see any clear signs of grace in him, hope all things about him. Many true believers are weak in faith, and the operations of grace are dim in them; and some are placed in positions where the grace they have is much hindered and hampered: let us take these things into consideration. It is hard to tell how little grace may yet suffice for salvation: it is not ours to judge. Hope all things, and if you should be forced to see sad signs in them, which make you fear that they have no grace, yet, remember that some of the brightest believers have had their faults, and grave ones too. Remember yourself, lest you also be tempted. If you cannot hope that these persons are saved at all, hope that they will be, and do all that you can to promote so blessed an end.

Hope all things. If thy brother has been very angry with thee without a cause, hope that thou wilt win him; and set about the task. If thou hast tried and failed, hope to succeed next time, and try again. Hope that though thou hast failed seven times, and he still speaks bitterly, yet in his heart he is really ashamed, or at least that he will be so very soon. Never despair of your fellow Christians.

As to the unconverted, you will never do anything with them unless you hope great things about them. When the good Samaritan found the poor man half dead, if he had not hoped about him he would never have poured in the oil and the wine, but would have left him there to die. Cultivate great hopefulness about sinners. Always hope of them that they will be saved yet: though no good

signs are apparent in them. If you have done your best for them, and have been disappointed and defeated, still hope for them. Sometimes you will find cause for hope in the fact that they begin to attend a place of worship. Grasp at that, and say, "Who can tell? God may bless them." Or if they have long been hearers, and no good has come of it, still hope that the minister will one day have a shot at them, and the arrow shall pierce through the joints of the harness. When you last spoke to them there seemed a little tenderness: be thankful for it, and have hope. If there has been a little amendment in their life, be hopeful about them. Even if you can see nothing at all hopeful in them, yet hope that there may be something which you cannot see, and perhaps an effect has been produced which they are endeavouring to conceal. Hope because you are moved to pray for them. Get other people to pray for them, for as long as they have some one to pray for them their case is not given over. If you get others to pray, there will be another string to your bow. If they are very ill, and you cannot get at them, or they are on their dying beds, still have hope about them, and try to send them a message in some form or other. Pray the Lord to visit and save them; and always keep up your hope about them. Till they are dead let not your hope be dead.

Would you see a model of this? Ah, look at our blessed Lord, and all his hopefulness for US: how, despairing of none, he went after those whom others would have given up. If you ask a proof, remember how he went after *you*. Will you despair of anybody since Christ did not despair of you? Wonders of grace belong to God, and all those wonders have been displayed in many among us. If you and I had been there when they brought the adulterous woman taken in the very act, I am afraid that we should have said, "This is too bad; put her away, she cannot be borne with." But oh, the hopefulness of the blessed Master when even to her he said, "Woman, where are thine accusers? Neither do I condemn thee. Go, and sin no more." What wonderful patience, and gentleness, and hopefulness our Lord displayed in all his converse with the twelve! It was a noble hopefulness in Christ which led him to trust Peter as he did: after he had denied his Master with oaths, our Lord trusted him to feed his sheep and lambs, and set him in the forefront of apostolic service. He has also had compassion on some of us, putting us into the ministry, and putting us in trust with the gospel, for he knew what love would do for us, and he was certain he could yet make something of us to his own glory.

The last victory of love is in *enduring all things*, by which I understand a patient perseverance in loving. This is perhaps the hardest work of all, for many people can be affectionate and patient for a time, but the task is to hold on year after year. I have known some men earnestly check their temper under provocation, and bear a great many slights, but at last they have said, "There is an end to everything: I am not going to put up with it any longer. I cannot stand it." Blessed be God, the love that Christ gives us endureth all things. As his love endured to the end, so does the love which the Spirit works in us endure to the end.

In reference first to our fellow Christians, love holds out under all rebuffs. You mean that I shall not love you, my good man, but I shall love you. You give me the rough side of your tongue, and make me see that you are not a very lovable person, but I can love you notwithstanding all. What? Will you do me a further unkindness? I will oppose you by doing you a greater kindness than before. You said a vile thing about me; I will not hear it, but if it be possible I will say a kind thing of you. I will cover you up with hot coals till I melt you; I will war against you with flames of love till your anger is consumed. I will master you by being kinder to you than you have been unkind to me. What hosts of misrepresentations and unkindnesses there are; but if you go on to be a true Christian you must endure all these. If you have to deal with people who will put up with

nothing from you, take care to be doubly patient with them. What credit is there in bearing with those who bear with you? If your brethren are angry without a cause, be sorry for them, but do not let them conquer you by driving you into a bad temper. Stand fast in love; endure not some things, but all things, for Christ's sake; so shall you prove yourself to be a Christian indeed.

As to your dealing with the unconverted, if ever you go into the field after souls, be sure to carry your gun with you, and that gun is love. You gentlemen who go out shooting partridges and other birds at this time of the year, no doubt find it a pleasant pastime; but for real excitement, joy, and pleasure, commend me to soul-winning. What did our Lord say, "I will make you fishers of men." If you go out fishing for souls you will have to endure all things, for it will come to pass that some whom you have been seeking for a long time will grow worse instead of better. Endure this among the all things. Those whom you seek to bless may seem to be altogether unteachable, they may shut their ears and refuse to hear you; never mind, endure all things. They may grow sour and sullen, and revile you in their anger, but be not put about by them, let them struggle till they are wearied, and meanwhile do you quietly wait, saying to yourself, "I *must* save them." A warder who has to take care of insane persons will frequently be attacked by them, and have to suffer hard blows; but what does he do? Strike the patient and make a fight of it? No, he holds him down and pins him fast; but not in anger, for he pities him too much to be angry with him. Does a nurse with a delirious patient take any notice of his cross words, and grumbling, and outcries? Not she. She says, "I must try to save this man's life," and so with great kindness she "endureth all things." If you were a fireman, and found a person in an upper room, and the house was on fire, would you not struggle with him rather than let him remain in the room and burn. You would say, "I will save you in spite of yourself." Perhaps the foolish body would call you names, and say, "Let me alone, why should you intrude into my chamber?" But you would say, "Never mind my intrusion; I will apologize afterwards for my rudeness, but you must be out of the fire first." I pray God give you this blessed unmannerliness, this sweet casting of all things to the wind, if by any means you may save some.

If you desire to see the mirror and the paragon of persevering endurance, look you there! I wish you could see it. I wish these eyes could see the sight as I have sometimes seen it. Behold the cross! See the patient Sufferer and that ribald multitude: they thrust out the tongue, they sneer, they jest, they blaspheme; and there he hangs, triumphant in his patience, conquering the world, and death and hell by enduring "all things." O love, thou didst never sit on a throne so imperial as the cross, when there, in the person of the Son of God, thou didst all things endure. Oh that we might copy in some humble measure that perfect pattern which is here set before us. If you would be saviours, if you would bless your generation, let no unkindness daunt you; let no considerations of your own character, or honour, or peace of mind keep you back, but of you may it be said, even as of your Lord, "He saved others, himself he could not save."

Have not I shown you four grand battles far excelling all the Waterloos, and Trafalgars, and Almas, and Inkermans on record? Heroes are they that fight and win them, and the Lord God of love shall crown them.

III. I close by noting THE SOURCES OF LOVE'S ENERGY. The time is gone, as I thought it would be, but it has brought us round in a circle to where we started from. The Holy Ghost alone can teach men how to love, and give them power to do so. Love's art is learned at no other school but at the feet of Jesus, where the Spirit of love doth rest on those who learn of him. Beloved, the Spirit of God puts love into us, and helps us to maintain it, thus—first, love wins these victories,

for *it is her nature*. The nature of love is self-sacrifice. Love is the reverse of seeking her own. Love is intense; love is burning; therefore she burneth her way to victory. Love! Look at it in the mother. Is it any hardship to her to lose rest and peace and comfort for her child? If it costs her pain, she makes it pleasure by the ardour of her affection. It is the nature of love to court difficulties, and to rejoice in suffering for the beloved object. If you have fervent love to the souls of men, you will know how true this is.

Next to this, *love has four sweet companions*. There are with her tenderness that “beareth all things,” faith that “believeth all things,” hope that “hopeth all things,” and patience which “endureth all things,” and he that hath tenderness, and faith, and hope, and patience hath a brave quaternion of graces to guard him, and he need not be afraid. Best of all, *love sucks her life from the wounds of Christ*. Love can bear, believe, hope, and endure because Christ has borne, believed, and hoped, and endured for her. I have heard of one that had a twist: they say that he saw something that others never saw, and heard a voice that others never heard, and he became such a strange man that others wondered at him. Oh, that I had more and more of that most solemn twist which comes through feeling a pierced hand laid on my shoulder, and hearing in my ear a sorrowful voice, that selfsame voice which cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” I would see that vision and hear that voice, and then—what then? Why, I must love; I must love; I must love. That would be the soul’s strange bias and sweet twist. Love makes us love; love bought us, sought us, and brought us to the Saviour’s feet, and it shall henceforth constrain us to deeds which else would be impossible. You have heard of men sometimes in a mad fit doing things that ordinary flesh and blood could never have performed. Oh to be distracted from selfishness by the love of Christ, and maddened into self-oblivion by a supreme passion for the Crucified. I know not how otherwise to put my thoughts into words so that they may hint at my burning meaning. May the Lord of love look into your very eyes with those eyes which once were red with weeping over human sin: may he touch your hands with those hands that were nailed to the cross, and impress the blessed nailmarks upon your feet, and then may he pierce your heart till it pour forth a life for love, and flow out in streams of kind desires, and generous deeds, and holy sacrifices for God and for his people. God grant it, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Corinthians 13.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—797, 264, 439.

Mongrel Religion

A Sermon

(No. 1622)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, October 2nd, 1881, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“So these nations feared the Lord and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.”—2 Kings 17:41.

SO DO THEY unto this day,” said the writer of the Book of Kings, who has long since passed away unto his fathers. Were he alive now he might say concerning the spiritual descendants of these Samaritans, “So do they unto this day.” This base union of fearing God and serving other gods is by no means obsolete. Alas, it is too common everywhere, and to be met with where you might least expect it. From generation to generation there have been Mongrel Religionists, who have tried to please both God and the devil, and have been on both sides, or on either side, as their interest led them. Some of these wretched blenders are always hovering around every congregation, and my hope is that I may convince the consciences of some here present that they themselves are guilty, and that of them it might be said, as of these Assyrian immigrants, “They feared the Lord, and served their own gods.” My sermon will by no means be an essay upon an extinct race, but it may be placed among “the present-day papers,” for “so do they unto this day.” He that hath ears to hear, let him hear, and to whomsoever the word shall apply let its rebuke be taken home, and through the teaching of the Holy Spirit may it produce decisive results.

I. I shall first call your attention to THE NATURE OF THIS Mongrel Religion. It had its good and bad points, for it wore a double face. *These people were not infidels.* Far from it: “they feared the Lord.” They did not deny the existence, or the power, or the rights of the great God of Israel, whose name is Jehovah. They had not the pride of Pharaoh who said, “Who is Jehovah that I should obey his voice?” They were not like those whom David calls “fools,” who said in their hearts, “There is no God.” They had faith, though only enough to produce fear. They knew that there was a God; they feared his wrath, and they tried to appease it. So far they were hopeful persons, and under the influence of a feeling which has often led up to better things. It was better to dread God than to despise him; better slavishly to fear than stupidly to forget. We would not have men so foolish as to doubt the existence of God, nor so profane as to defy him. There was something commendable about men of whom it could be said that they feared Jehovah, even though that fear was a selfish and servile one, and was by no means so efficacious upon them as it ought to have been, for it did not cause them to put away their idols.

Another good point about these mixed religionists was that they were *willing to be taught.* As soon as they found that they were not acting rightly towards the God of the land, they sent a petition to their supreme ruler, the king of Assyria, setting forth their spiritual destitution. Church and State were fused in those days, and therefore they applied to their king that he would help them in their religious distress, and he acted to the best of his light; for he sent them one or the priests of the old religion of the land. This man was a Bethelite, one who worshipped God under the symbol of an ox, which the Scripture calls a calf. He was a very slight improvement upon a heathen; but we must

be glad even of small progress. They were quite willing to be taught the manner of the God of the land, and so they installed this priest at Bethel, and gathered about him to know what they should do. We have people around us unto this day who are glad to hear the gospel, and sit with pleasure under our ministry, and if the word be faithfully preached they commend the preacher and give a gratified attention to the things that proceed out of his mouth; and yet they are living in known sin. Albeit they do not practically turn from sin and renounce the service of Satan, yet are they willing to bow with the righteous, to sing their psalms and assent to their prayers, and to accept their confession of faith. They are a teachable sort of people, so far as mere hearing goes but there they stop.

Though these strangers feared Jehovah, and were willing to learn the way of his worship, yet *they stuck to their old gods*. “Ah,” said the Babylonian, “I listen respectfully to what you have to say of this God, of the land; but Succoth-benoth for me; when I go home I shall offer sacrifice to him.” The men of Cuthah said, “Verily this is good doctrine concerning the God of Israel; but the god of our fathers was Nergal, and to him will we cleave”; and the Sepharvites, though they wished to hear of the pure and holy Jehovah, and therefore learned from his law the command, “Thou shalt not kill,” yet still they passed their children through the fire to Moloch, and did not cease from that most cruel of all religious rites. Thus you see that this mangle-mangle religion left the people practically where they were: whatever their fear might be, their customs and practices remained the same. Have you never met with persons of the same mongrel kind? If you have never done so, your class of acquaintances must be superior to mine. At this moment I shall not speak at random, but aim at individual cases; for I know of persons who come to this place of worship with great regularity, and yet they serve their sins, and obey their own vicious passions. They take delight in the services of this house, and yet they are much at home with the god of this world. Some worship a deity quite as horrible as Moloch, whose name in the olden time was Bacchus—the god of the wine-cup and the beer-barrel. They pay their eager devotions at his shrine, and yet they would be numbered with the people of God. They were drunk last night, and yet they are here this morning: possibly they will keep sober to-day; but they will not let many days pass before they will once more stagger before their abominable idol. In all places of worship there are people of this kind. Do not look round to see if there is a person present dressed like a working man, for I have not the poor in my eye at this time. Alas, this vice is to be met with in one rank as well as another, and the person I mean looks quite respectable, and wears broadcloth. Many worshippers of Bacchus do not drink so as to be found drunk and incapable in the street. O no; they go upstairs to their beds in their own houses, so that their condition is not observed; but still they must know that they are verging upon intoxication, if not actually gone. Woe unto such, who, while they pretend to be worshippers of Jehovah, are also worshippers of the beastly god of drunkenness. Is that too harsh a word? I beg the beasts’ pardon for thus slandering them. Alas, there are others who adore the goddess Venus, the queen of lust and uncleanness. I say no more. It is a shame even to speak of things which are done of them in secret. Too often the god is Mammon, who is as degraded a deity as any of them. Such turn religion into a means of gain, and would sell Jesus himself for silver. The sin of Judas is one of which we may say, “So do they unto this day.” Judas is an apostle, he listens to the Master’s words, he preaches at the Master’s command, and he works miracles in the Master’s name; he also keeps the bag and manages the finance for Christ’s little company, and he does it so carefully and economically that what he filches for himself is not missed, and he remains in good repute. Judas professes to serve Jesus, but all the while he is really serving himself, for

secretly he abstracts from the treasury somewhat for his own pocket. "He had the bag and kept that which was put therein." There are such still in the churches of God: they do not actually steal, but they follow Jesus for what they can make or get out of him and his disciples. The symbols of their worship are the loaf and the fish. Now, this is as degrading a form of worship as the adoration of graven images. Gain is the god of many in all congregations: they seek Jesus, not because they care for his words, but because they eat of the loaves. They fear the Lord, but they serve other gods.

Are there not to be found in the world men whose very calling is contrary to the spirit of true godliness? I did know, and may I never know again such an one, a man apparently most devout and gracious, who was a deacon of a church, and passed round the communion cup; and yet over the worst drinking dens in the town where he lived, where the lowest harlots congregated, you would see the man's name, for he was the brewer to whom the houses belonged—houses which had been purposely adapted at his expense for purposes of vice and drunkenness. He took the profits of a filthy traffic, and then served at the Lord's table. I would judge no man, but some cases speak for themselves. God save the man that can pander to the devil, and then bow down, before the Most High. Persons are to be found, without a lantern and candle, who earn their money by ministering at the altars of Belial, and then offer a part of it to the Lord of hosts. Can they come from the place of revelling to the chamber of communion? Will they bring the wages of sin to the altar of God? He who makes money over the devil's back is a hypocrite if he lays his cankered coin at the apostles' feet. "Thy money perish with thee." How some men can rest in their impious pretensions it is not for me to guess; but methinks if their consciences were quickened, it would strike them as being a horrible thing in the land that they should be fearing the Lord, and serving other gods. I knew one who was always at the place of worship, prayer-meetings, and all, and yet he had forsaken the wife of his youth, and was the companion of gamblers, and drunkards, and the unclean. I know another of a much milder type: he is a regular hearer, but he has no sense of true religion. He is a steady, hard-working man, but he lives to hoard money, and neither the poor nor the church of God ever get a penny from him: bowels of compassion he has none. He is a stranger to private prayer, and his Bible is never read; but he never misses a sermon. He never lifts his thoughts above the bench at which he works, or the shop in which he serves, his whole conversation is of the world, and the gain thereof, and yet he has occupied a seat in the meeting-house from his youth up, and has never thought of leaving it except at quarter-days, when he is half a mind to give it up and save the few shillings which it costs him. Oh, sad, sad, sad! I can understand the man who honestly says, "I am living for the world and have no time for religion." I can understand the man who cries, "I love the world and mean to have my fill of it." I can understand the man who says, "I shall not pretend to pray or sing psalms, for I do not care about God or his ways"; but how can I comprehend those who are faithful to the outward part of religion, and profess to receive the truth, and yet have no heart for the love of Jesus, no care for the service of God? Oh, unhappy men, to come so near salvation in appearance, and to be so far off in reality! How can I explain their conduct? Truly, I must leave them among the mysteries of the moral world; for "they fear the Lord and serve their graven images unto this day." So far have we spoken upon the nature of this patched-up religion, this linsey-woolsey piety. May we have none of it.

II. Let us now consider THE MANNER OF ITS GROWTH. However came such a monstrous compound into this world?

Here is the history of it. *These people came to live where the people of God had lived.* The Israelites were most unworthy worshippers of Jehovah; but, still, they were known to others as his

people, and their land was Jehovah's land. If the Sepharvites had stopped at Sepharvaim they would never have thought of fearing Jehovah; if the men of Babylon had continued to live in Babylon they would have been perfectly satisfied with Bel, or Succoth-benoth, or whatever the name of their precious god might be: but when they were fetched out from their old haunts, and brought into Canaan, they came under a different influence, and a new order of things. God would not allow them to go the whole length of idolatry in his land: though he had cast out his people, yet still it was his land, and he would make these heathens know it, and show some little decency in their new abode. Now, it sometimes happens to utter worldlings that they are dropped into the midst of Christian people, and they naturally feel that they must not be different from everybody about them. A kind of fashion is set by the professors among whom they dwell, and they fall into it. If they do not become gracious people themselves they try to look a little like them. Everybody in the village attends a place of worship, and the new comers do the same, though they have no heart to it. They have not the courage of their want of conviction, so they just drift with the current, and as it happens to run in a religious direction they are as religious as the rest. Or it may be they have a godly mother, and their father is a believer, and so they adopt the traditions of the family. They would like to be free to forsake the ways of piety, but they cannot be quite so unkind to those whom they love, and so they yield to the influences which surround them, and become in a measure fearers of God, out of respect to their neighbors or their families. This is a poor reason for being religious.

Something else happened to these Assyrian immigrants which had a stronger influence still. At first they did not fear God, but *the Lord sent lions among them*. Matthew Henry says, "God can serve his own purposes by which he pleaseth, little or big, lice or lions." By the smaller means he plagued the Egyptians, and by the greater these invaders of his land. There is no creature so small or so great but God can employ it in his service and defeat his enemies thereby. When these lions had torn one and another, then the people trembled at the name of the God of the land, and desired to know the manner in which he would be worshipped. Affliction is a wild beast by which God teaches men who act like beasts. This is the growth of mongrelists. First, they are among godly people, and they must, therefore, go a little that way; and next, they are afflicted, and they must now go further still. The man has been ill, he has seen the brink of the grave; he has promised and vowed to attend to good things, in the hope that God would relent and permit him to live. Besides that, the man's extravagance has brought him into difficulties and straits; he cannot go so far or so fast as he formerly did, and hence he inclines to more staid and sober ways. He dares not follow his bent, for he finds vice too expensive, too disreputable, too dangerous. Many a man is driven by fear where he could not be drawn by love. He does not love the Lamb, but he does fear the lions. The rough voices of pain, poverty, shame, and death work a kind of law—work upon certain consciences which are insensible to spiritual arguments. They are forced, like the devils, to believe and tremble. Apprehension does not in their case lead to conversion, but it compels an outward respect for divine things. They argue that if the ills they feel do not reform them they may expect worse. If God begins with lions, what will come next? Therefore, they outwardly humble themselves, and yield homage to the God they dread.

But notice, that *the root of this religion is fear*. There is no love on the right side; that affection is in the opposite scale. Their hearts go after their idols, but to Jehovah they yield nothing but dread. How many there are whose religion consists in a fear of hell, a dread of the consequences of their sin. If there were no hell they would drink up sin as the ox, standing knee-deep in the stream, sucks in the water. If sin were not followed with inconvenient consequences, they would live in it as their

element, as fishes swim in the sea. They are only kept under by the hangman's whip or the jailer's keys. They dread God, and this is but a gentler form of hating him. Ah, this is a poor religion, a religion of bondage and terror. Thank God, dear friends, if you have been delivered from it; but it is sure to be the characteristic of a fusion of fearing God and serving other gods.

One reason why they dropped into this self-contradictory religion was that *they had a trimming teacher*. The king of Assyria sent them a priest: he could not have sent them a prophet, but that was what they really wanted. He sent them a Bethelite, not a genuine servant of Jehovah, but one who worshipped God by means of symbols; and this the Lord had expressly forbidden. If this priest did not break the first commandment by setting up other gods, yet he broke the second by making an image to represent the true God. What saith the Lord? "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." This priest taught them the calf worship, but he winked at their false deities. When he saw them each one bowing before his own idol, he called it a natural mistake, and by no means spake indignantly to them. If one of them worshipped Succoth-benoth, so long as he also brought an offering to Jehovah, he was not so uncharitable as to condemn him. He cried, "Peace, peace," for he was a large-hearted man, and belonged to the Broad Church who believe in the good intentions of all men, and manufacture excuses for all the religions of the age. I know of no surer way of a people's perishing than by being led by one who does not speak out straight, and honestly denounce evil. If the minister halts between two opinions, do you wonder that the congregation is undecided? If the preacher trims and twists to please all parties, can you expect his people to be honest? If I wink at your inconsistencies will you not soon be hardened in them? Like priest, like people. A cowardly preacher suits hardened sinners. Those who are afraid to rebuke sin, or to probe the conscience, will have much to answer for. May God save you from being led into the ditch by a blind guide.

And yet is not a mingle-mangle of Christ and Belial the common religion of the day? Is not worldly piety, or pious worldliness, the current religion of England? They live among godly people, and God chastens them, and they therefore fear him, but not enough to give their hearts to him. They seek out a trimming teacher who is not too precise and plain-spoken, and they settle down comfortably to a mongrel faith, half truth, half error, and a mongrel worship half dead form, and half orthodoxy. God have mercy upon men, and bring them out from the world; for he will not have a compound of world and grace. "Come ye out from among them," saith he, "be ye separate: touch not the unclean thing." "If God be God, serve him: if Baal be God, serve him." There can be no alliance between the two. Jehovah and Baal can never be friends. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." "No man can serve two masters." All attempts at compromise or comprehensiveness in matters of truth and purity are founded on falsehood, and falsehood is all that can come of them. May God save us from such hateful doublemindedness.

Thus have I described the nature and the growth of this cross-bred religion.

III. Thirdly, let us estimate THE VALUE OF THIS RELIGION. What is it worth? First, it must evidently be *feeble* on both sides, because the man who serves Succoth-benoth cannot do it thoroughly if all the while he fears Jehovah; and he who fears Jehovah cannot be sincere if he is worshipping Moloch. The one sucks out the life of the other. Either one or the other alone might breed an intense worshipper; but when there are two deities, it is written, "Their heart is divided, now shall they be found wanting." A man of the world who is out and out in his conduct can make the best of his worldliness: what joy there is in it he gets, what profit there is to be made out of it

be obtains; but if he tries to mix godliness with it he is pouring water on the fire, and hindering himself. On the other hand, if a man goes in for godliness, he will assuredly make something of it, by the blessing of God: if there be any joy, if there be any holiness, if there be any power, the man who is thorough-going wins it; but suppose he is pulled back by his love of sin, then he may possess enough religion to make him miserable, and enough of sin to prevent his salvation; but the two are opposed, and between them he finds no rest. The man is lame on both feet, impotent in both directions. He is like the salt which has lost its savor, neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill, but to be trodden under foot of men.

At first I should think that the mixture of the true with the false at Samaria *looked like an improvement*. I should not wonder but what the priests of Judah were rather glad to bear that the lions had come among the strangers, and that the people wanted to know something about Jehovah. It had a look in the right direction, and consequently the Scripture says that they feared God; but yet this fear of God was so hollow that, if you turn to the thirty-fourth verse, you will read, "They fear not the Lord." Sometimes a verbal contradiction most accurately states the truth. They feared the Lord only in a certain sense; but, inasmuch as they also served other gods, it came to this when summed up, that they did not fear God at all. The man who is religious and also immoral, to put it in short, is irreligious. He who makes a great fuss about godliness and yet acts in an ungodly way, when all comes to all, is an ungodly man. The value of this mixture is less than nothing. It is sin with a little varnish upon it. It is enmity to God with a brilliant colouring of formality: it is standing out against the Most High, and yet with a Judas kiss pretending to pay him homage.

These Samaritans in after years *became the bitterest foes of God's people*. Read the Book of Nehemiah, and you will see that the most bitter opponents of that godly man were those mongrels. Their fear of God was such that they wanted to join with the Jews in building the Temple, and when they found that the Jews would not have them, they became their fiercest foes. No people do so much hurt as those who are like Jack-o'-both-sides. The mixed multitude that came out of Egypt with the Israelites, fell a-lusting. The mischief does not begin with the people of God, but with those who are with them, but not of them. The tares which you cannot root out grow with the wheat, and draw away from it that which should have nourished it. As the clinging ivy will eat out the life of a tree around which it climbs, so will these impostors devour the church if they be left to their own devices. This patchwork religion is of more value to the devil than to anyone else; it is his favourite livery, and I pray you hate it, for it is a garment spotted by the flesh. I believe, dear friends, that those people who have a dread of God, which makes them appear religious, and who yet all the while live in their sins, are most in danger of any people in the world; for there is no getting at them to save them. You preach to sinners, and they say, "He does not mean us, for we are saints." You bring the thunders of the law to bear on the congregation, and they, being inside the church, are not afraid of the tempest. They hide behind their false profession. There is more likelihood of the salvation of a downright outsider than of these pretenders. They hold with the bare and run with the hounds, they fear the Lord and serve other gods, and they will perish in their folly. Their ruin will be all the more terrible because they sin in the light. They have so much conscience that they know what is right and what is wrong, and they deliberately choose to abide with the evil, even though at the same time they do despite to their better selves. Surely they will be banished to the deepest hell who seemed inclined to go towards heaven, but who, nevertheless, presumptuously wrenched off bolts and bars to force their way to destruction. O you religious worldlings, for you there is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

How provoking this adulterated religion must be to God! It is even provoking to God's minister to be pestered with men whose hypocrisies weaken the force of his testimony. Here is a man who is known to be one of my hearers, and yet at the same time he drinks, and speaks lewdly, and acts wickedly. What have I to do with him? His tongue is never still, and he tells everybody that he is a friend of mine, and my great admirer, and then men lay his conduct at my door, and wonder what my doctrine must be. I could almost say, "Sir, be my enemy, for this will harm me less than your friendship." If this grieves his ministers, how provoking must it be to God himself: these people are seen to worship him, and when strangers come into the assembly they spy out these hypocrites, and straightway charge the holy Jesus with all their faults. "See," say they, "there is old So-and-so. He is a great man among them, and yet I saw him come out of the gin-palace more than three sheets in the wind." Thus the holy God is dishonored by these unholy hypocrites. True religion suffers for their falsehood. One may fancy the Lord Jesus saying, "Come now, if you must needs serve the devil, do it; but do not loiter around my gates and boast of being my servants." The holy God must often feel his indignation burn against unholy men and women who intrude into his courts and dare to pass themselves off under his name. I put this very plainly. Some of you do not know how necessary it is to speak plainly in these days. If any of you perish through hypocrisy it shall not be because I did not speak boldly about it. May God the Holy Spirit of his great mercy apply the words where they need to be applied, that those who are fearing God and serving other gods may grieve over their inconsistency, and repent and turn in very deed and truth to the Most High.

IV. I pass briefly to another important point, which is this,—THE CONTINUANCE OF THIS EVIL: for the text says, "As did their fathers, so do they, unto this day." I believe in the final perseverance of the saints: I am almost obliged to believe in the final perseverance of hypocrites; for, really, when a man once screws himself up to play the double, and both to fear God and serve other gods, he is very apt to stick there. It takes a great deal of effort to bring yourself to that degree of wickedness; you must use a great deal of damping of conscience and quenching of the Spirit before you can reach that shameless point, and having once gained that position you are apt to keep it all your life long. "So do they unto this day."

Look, friends. It seems unlikely that a man would willingly continue in such a ridiculous position even for an hour. I call it ridiculous, for it is unreasonable and outrageous to be serving God and Satan at the same time. It is inconsistent and self-contradictory, and yet, though it be so, it is a sad fact that it is a deep pit and the abhorred of the Lord fall therein, seldom to be lifted out of it. Often by the grace of God we see the confirmed sinner plucked like a brand from the burning; but, oh, how seldom do we see the hollow-hearted Pharisee brought out of his delusions. On the anvil of a false profession Satan hammers out the most hardened of hard hearts.

One reason why it can be said of most men—"so do they unto this day," is because it yields them a sort of comfort; at any rate it keeps off the lions. "Why," say they, "it must be the right thing to do, for now we are quiet." While they lived in sin without a pretense of religion, when the minister preached the word powerfully, they went home trembling; now they do not care what he preaches about: the lions roar no longer, not so much as a cub shows itself. Though they do drink a little, though they do use strong language now and then, though they are really unconverted, yet since they have taken a pew at the church, or the chapel, they feel wonderfully easy in their minds. This peace they think to be worth a Jew's eye. It is so soothing and pacifying to the conscience to feel that you mix up with the best of the saints, and are highly esteemed by them. So they wrap it up, and go down to hell with a lie in their right hand.

The worst of it is that not only men themselves do this, but their children and their children's children do the same: "As their fathers did, so do they unto this day." In an out-and-out godly family it is a great joy to see the children springing up to fear God; but these double people, these borderers, see no such desirable succession. Frequently there is an open decline from apparent religion: the sons do not care to go where the old man went at all; nor need we wonder, since it did him so little good. He made all unhappy at home, and none are eager to imitate him. In other cases, where there was kindness at home, the children are apt to try the same plan as their fathers, and mingle a little religion with a great deal of worldliness. They are just as keen and sharp as their worldly sire, and they see on which side their bread is buttered, and therefore they keep up the reputation of religion. A little gilt and paint go a long way, and so they lay it on. They fly the flag of Christ, at any rate, even though the vessel does not belong to his dominion, and is not bound for the port of glory. As vessels sometimes run a blockade under a false flag, so do they reap many advantages from sailing under Christian colors. This detestable iniquity will not die out: it multiplies itself, scattering its own seed on all sides, and so from generation to generation it lives on; whole nations fear the Lord and serve other gods.

The greatest curse, perhaps, that ever visited the world came upon it in this way. Certain vain-glorious preachers desired to convert the world at a stroke, and to make converts without the work of the Spirit. They saw the people worshipping their gods, and they thought that if they could call these by the names of saints and martyrs the people would not mind the change, and so they would be converted. The idea was to Christianize heathenism. They virtually said to idolaters, "Now, good people, you may keep on with your worship, and yet you can be Christians at the same time. This image of the Queen of heaven at your door need not be moved. Light the lamp still; only call the image 'our Lady,' and 'the Blessed Virgin.' Here is another image; don't pull it down, but change its name from Jupiter to Peter." Thus with a mere change of names they perpetuated idolatry: they set up their altars in the groves, and upon every high hill, and the people were converted without knowing it—converted to a baser heathenism than their own. They wanted priests, and, lo, there they were, robed like those who served at the altars of Jove. The people saw the same altars and sniffed the same incense, kept the same holy days and observed the same carnivals as aforesaid, and called everything by Christian names. Hence came what is now called the Roman Catholic religion, which is simply fearing God and serving other gods. Every village has its own peculiar saint, and often its own particular black or white image of the Virgin, with miracles and wonders to sanctify the shrine. This evil wrought so universally that Christianity seemed in danger of extinction from the prevalence of idolatry, and it would have utterly expired had it not been of God, and had he not therefore once more put forth his hand and raised up reformers, who cried out, "There is but one God, and one Mediator between God and man." Brave voices called the church back to her allegiance and to the parity of her faith. As for any of you who are trying to link good and evil, truth and falsehood together, beware of the monstrous birth which will come of such an alliance: it will bring on you a curse from the Most High.

V. I shall now close by saying a few words byway of CURE OF THIS DREADFUL EVIL OF MONGRELISM; this fearing the Lord, and serving other gods. Suppose men were thus fall of duplicity in politics, what would be thought of them? If a war should rage between two nations, what would be thought of the man who professed to serve the Queen, and all the while was playing his cards to win favor with the Queen's enemies. What would he be? A liberal-minded person? A gentleman of broad sympathies? Perhaps so. But also he would be a traitor, and when he was found

out he would be shot. He who in any way tries to serve God and his enemies, is a traitor to God: that is what it comes to. In ordinary politics, if there be two parties, and a man comes forward and says, "I am on your side," and all the while he is doing his best to help the opposition, everybody says that he is a mean fellow. And what meanness it is to say, "I am for Christ," and yet practically to be for his enemies; to cry up holiness, and yet to live in sin; to preach up faith in Christ, and yet to trust in your own merits. This wretched shuffling indicates a meanness of soul from which may God in infinite mercy deliver us. Suppose a man in business said, "Oh, yes, I will be an honest man, but I will at the same time practice a trick or two; I will be as straight as a line, but yet I will be crooked too." Why, he would very soon be known by only one name, and that name a dishonorable one. A merchant cannot be honest and dishonest, a woman cannot be both chaste and unchaste, pure and impure, at the same time; and a man cannot be truly with God and yet with the world; the amalgamation is impossible. Everybody sees through such sham godliness.

Ah, my dear friends, suppose that God were to treat us after the like double fashion; suppose he smiled to-day and cursed to-morrow suppose he said, "You fear me, and so I will give you comfort to-day but inasmuch as you worship other gods, when it comes to the last I will send you to your own gods; you shall go down to hell." You want one course of conduct from God, mercy, tenderness, gentleness, forgiveness; but if you play fast and loose with him, what is this but mocking him? Shall a man mock God? O thou great Father of our spirits, if we poor prodigals return to thee, shall we come driving all the swine in front of us, and bringing all the harlots and citizens of the far country at our heels, and introduce ourselves to thee by saying, "Father, we have sinned, and have come home to be forgiven and to go on sinning"? It were infernal,—I can say no less. Yet some attempt it. Shall any of us come to the blessed Christ upon the cross, and look up to his dear wounds, and say to him, "Redeemer, we come to thee; thou shalt be our Savior, thou shalt deliver us from the wrath to come; but, behold, when we have washed our robes we will defile them again in the filth of the world. Wash us, and we will go back, like the sow, to wallow in the mire. Forgive us, and we will use the immunity which thy mercy grants us, as a further incentive to rebellion"? I can imagine such language as that being used by Satan; but methinks few of you have descended so low as to talk thus. Yet is not that exactly what the man says who professes to be a Christian, and yet wilfully lives in sin?

Lastly, what shall I say of the Holy Spirit? If he does not dwell in our hearts we are lost; there is no hope for us unless he rules within us. And shall we dare to say

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With all thy quickening powers,"

meanwhile I will live in filthiness and selfishness. Come, Holy Spirit, come and dwell with me, and I will hate my brother, I will boil with angry temper, and will be black with malice, so as to make my home miserable. Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove, come dwell within my soul, and I will carry thee to the theater, and the ball-room, and the house of evil name.

I hate to utter such language even for the sake of exposing it; but what must God think of men who do not *say* so, but who *act* so; who, like Balaam, live in sin and yet cry, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." I dare not preach from that very popular text, for it is the mean, selfish wish of a man who even at the last would save his own skin. The old sneak! He wanted to live and serve the devil, and then cry off at the last. Surely he might have said, "I have been a prophet of Satan, and have sold my soul to him; let me die as I have lived." I would wish to live in such a way as I would wish to die. If I would not like to die as I am, then I ought

not to live as I am. If I am in a condition in which I dare not meet my God, may God in mercy fetch me out of the condition at once. Let me be right, and let there be no mistake about it; but do not let me try to be both right and wrong, washed and filthy, white and black, a child of God and a child of Satan. God has separated heaven and hell by a gulf that never can be passed, and he has divided the two characters which shall people those two places by an equally wide gulf. This division can be passed by his grace, but none can inhabit the intermediate space. None can hang between spiritual death and spiritual life, so as to be partly in one and partly in the other. Decide, then, decide. Be one thing or the other. “How long halt ye between two opinions?” Again I say with Elias, upon Carmel, “If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.” But do not mix the worship of the two, for thus you will provoke God, and cause his anger to burn like fire against you. May God bless this word, for his name’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Kings 17:24-41; Psalm 62.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—63, 655, 809.

Baptism—A Burial

A Sermon

(No. 1627)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, October 30th, 1881, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”—Romans 6:3-4.

I SHALL not enter into controversy over this text, although over it some have raised the question of infant baptism or believers' baptism, immersion or sprinkling. If any person can give a consistent and instructive interpretation of the text, otherwise than by assuming believers' immersion to be Christian baptism, I should like to see them do it. I myself am quite incapable of performing such a feat, or even of imagining how it can be done. I am content to take the view that baptism signifies the burial of believers in water in the name of the Lord, and I shall so interpret the text. If any think not so, it may at least interest them to know what we understand to be the meaning of the baptismal rite, and I trust that they may think none the less of the spiritual sense because they differ as to the external sign. After all, the visible emblem is not the most prominent matter in the text. May God the Holy Spirit help us to reach its inner teaching.

I do not understand Paul to say that if improper persons, such as unbelievers, and hypocrites, and deceivers, are baptized they are baptized into our Lord's death. He says “so many of us,” putting himself with the rest of the children of God. He intends such as are entitled to baptism, and come to it with their hearts in a right state. Of them he says, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” He does not even intend to say that those who were rightly baptized have all of them entered into the fullness of its spiritual meaning; for if they had, there would have been no need of the question, “Know ye not?” It would seem that some had been baptized who did not clearly know the meaning of their own baptism. They had faith, and a glimmer of knowledge sufficient to make them right recipients of baptism, but they were not well instructed in the teaching of baptism; perhaps they saw in it only a washing, but had never discerned the burial. I will go further, and say that I question if any of us yet know the fullness of the meaning of either of the ordinances which Christ has instituted. As yet we are, with regard to spiritual things, like children playing on the beach while the ocean rolls before us. At best we wade up to our ankles like our little ones on the sea shore. A few among us are learning to swim; but then we only swim where the bottom is almost within reach. Who among us has yet come to lose sight of shore and to swim in the Atlantic of divine love, where fathomless truth rolls underneath, and the infinite is all around? Oh, may God daily teach us more and more of what we already know in part, and may the truth which we have as yet but dimly perceived come to us in a brighter and clearer manner, till we see all things in clear sunlight. This can only be as our own character becomes more clear and pure; for we see according to what we are; and as is the eye such is that which it sees. The pure in heart alone can see a pure and holy God. We shall be like Jesus when we shall see him as he is,

and certainly we shall never see him as he is till we are like him. In heavenly things we see as much as we have within ourselves. He who has eaten Christ's flesh and blood spiritually is the man who can see this in the sacred Supper, and he who has been baptized into Christ sees Christ in baptism. To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly.

Baptism sets forth the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and our participation therein. Its teaching is twofold. First, think of *our representative union with Christ*, so that when he died and was buried it was on our behalf, and we were thus buried with him. This will give you the teaching of baptism so far as it sets forth a creed. We declare in baptism that we believe in the death of Jesus, and desire to partake in all the merit of it. But there is a second equally important matter and that is *our realized union with Christ* which is set forth in baptism, not so much as a doctrine of our creed as a matter of our experience. There is a manner of dying, of being buried, of rising, and of living in Christ which must be displayed in each one of us if we are indeed members of the body of Christ.

I. First, then, I want you to think of OUR REPRESENTATIVE UNION WITH CHRIST as it is set forth in baptism as a truth to be believed. Our Lord Jesus is the substitute for his people, and when he died it was on their behalf and in their stead. The great doctrine of our justification lies in this, that Christ took our sins, stood in our place, and as our surety suffered, and bled, and died, thus presenting on our behalf a sacrifice for sin. We are to regard him, not as a private person, but as our representative. We are buried with him in baptism unto death to show that we accept him as being for us dead and buried.

Baptism as a burial with Christ signifies, first, *acceptance of the death and burial of Christ as being for us*. Let us do that at this very moment with all our hearts. What other hope have we? When our divine Lord came down from the heights of glory and took upon himself our manhood, he became one with you and with me; and being found in fashion as a man, it pleased the Father to lay sin upon him, even your sins and mine. Do you not accept that truth, and agree that the Lord Jesus should be the bearer of your guilt, and stand for you in the sight of God? "Amen! Amen!" say all of you. He went up to the tree loaded with all this guilt, and there he suffered in our room and stead as we ought to have suffered. It pleased the Father, instead of bruising us, to bruise him. He put him to grief, making his soul an offering for sin. Do we not gladly accept Jesus as our substitute? O beloved, whether you have been baptized in water or not, I put this question to you, "Do you accept the Lord Jesus as your surety and substitute?" For if you do not, you shall bear your own guilt and carry your own sorrow, and stand in your own place beneath the glance of the angry justice of God. Many of us at this moment are saying in our inmost hearts—

"My soul looks back to see
The burdens thou didst bear,
When hanging on the cursed tree,
And hopes her guilt was there."

Now, by being buried with Christ in baptism, we set our seal to the fact that the death of Christ was on our behalf, and that we were in him, and died in him, and, in token of our belief, we consent to the watery grave, and yield ourselves to be buried according to his command. This is a matter of fundamental faith—Christ dead and buried for us; in other words, substitution, suretyship, vicarious sacrifice. His death is the hinge of our confidence: we are not baptized into his example, or his life, but into his death. We hereby confess that all our salvation lies in the death of Jesus, which death we accept as having been incurred on our account.

But this is not all; because if I am to be buried, it should not be so much because I accept the substitutionary death of another for me as because I am dead myself. *Baptism is an acknowledgment of our own death in Christ.* Why should a living man be buried? Why should he even be buried because another died on his behalf? My burial with Christ means not only that he died for me, but that I died in him, so that my death with him needs a burial with him. Jesus died for us because he is one with us. The Lord Jesus Christ did not take his people's sins by an arbitrary choice of God; but it was most natural and fit and proper that he should take his people's sins, since they are his people, and he is their federal head. It behooved Christ to suffer for this reason—that he was the covenant representative of his people. He is the Head of the body, the Church; and if the members sinned, it was meet that the Head, though the Head had not sinned, should bear the consequence of the acts of the body. As there is a natural relationship between Adam and those that are in Adam, so is there between the second Adam and those that are in him. I accept what the first Adam did as my sin. Some of you may quarrel with it, and with the whole covenant dispensation, if you please; but as God has pleased to set it up, and I feel the effect of it, I see no use in my controverting it. As I accept the sin of father Adam, and feel that I sinned in him, even so with intense delight I accept the death and atoning sacrifice of my second Adam, and rejoice that in him I have died and risen again. I lived, I died, I kept the law, I satisfied justice in my covenant Head. Let me be buried in baptism that I may show to all around that I believe I was one with my Lord in his death and burial for sin.

Look at this, O child of God, and do not be afraid of it. These are Grand truths, but they are sure and comforting. You are getting among Atlantic billows now, but be not afraid. Realize the sanctifying effect of this truth. Suppose that a man had been condemned to die on account of a great crime; suppose, further, that he has actually died for that crime, and now, by some wonderful work of God, after having died he has been made to live again. He comes among men again as alive from the dead, and what ought to be the state of his mind with regard to his offence? Will he commit that crime again? A crime for which he has died? I say emphatically, God forbid. Rather should he say, "I have tasted the bitterness of this sin, and I am miraculously lifted up out of the death which it brought upon me, and made to live again: now will I hate the thing that slew me, and abhor it with all my soul." He who has received the wages of sin should learn to avoid it for the future. But you reply, "We never did die so; we were never made to suffer the due reward of our sins." Granted. But that which Christ did for you comes to the same thing, and the Lord looks upon it as the same thing. You are so one with Jesus, that you must regard his death as your death, his sufferings as the chastisement of your peace. You have died in the death of Jesus, and now by strange, mysterious grace you are brought up again from the pit of corruption unto newness of life. Can you, will you, go into sin again? You have seen what God thinks of sin: you perceive that he utterly loathes it; for when it was laid on his dear Son, he did not spare him, but put him to grief and smote him to death. Can you, after that, turn back to the accursed thing which God hates? Surely, the effect of the great grief of the Saviour upon your spirit must be sanctifying. How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? How shall we that have passed under its curse, and endured its awful penalty, tolerate its power? Shall we go back to this murderous, villainous, virulent, abominable evil? It cannot be. Grace forbids.

This doctrine is not the conclusion of the whole matter. The text describes us as *buried with a view to rising*. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death,"—for what object?—"that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk

in newness of life." Be buried in Christ! What for? That you may be dead for ever? No, but that now getting where Christ is, you may go where Christ goes. Behold him, then: he goes, first, into the sepulchre, but next out of the sepulchre; for when the third morning came he rose. If you are one with Christ at all, you must be one with him all through; you must be one with him in his death, and one with him in his burial, then you shall come to be one with him in his resurrection. Am I a dead man now? No, blessed be his name, it is written, "Because I live ye shall live also." True, I am dead in one sense, "For ye are dead"; but yet not dead in another, "For your life is hid with Christ in God"; and how is he absolutely dead who has a hidden life? No; since I am one with Christ I am what Christ is: as he is a living Christ, I am a living spirit. What a glorious thing it is to have arisen from the dead, because Christ has given us life. Our old legal life has been taken from us by the sentence of the law, and the law views us as dead; but now we have received a new life, a life out of death, resurrection-life in Christ Jesus. The life of the Christian is the life of Christ. Ours is not the life of the first creation, but of the new creation from among the dead. Now we live in newness of life, quickened unto holiness, and righteousness, and joy by the Spirit of God. The life of the flesh is a hindrance to us; our energy is in his Spirit. In the highest and best sense our life is spiritual and heavenly. This also is doctrine which is to be held most firmly.

I want you to see the force of this; for I am aiming at practical results this morning. If God has given to you and to me an entirely new life in Christ, how can that new life spend itself after the fashion of the old life? Shall the spiritual live as the carnal? How can you that were the servants of sin, but have been made free by precious blood, go back to your old slavery? When you were in the old Adam life, you lived in sin, and loved it; but now you have been dead and buried, and have come forth into newness of life: can it be that you can go back to the beggarly elements from which the Lord has brought you out? If you live in sin, you will be false to your profession, for you profess to be alive unto God? If you walk in lust, you will tread under foot the blessed doctrines of the Word of God, for these lead to holiness and purity. You would make Christianity to be a by-word and a proverb, if, after all, you who were quickened from your spiritual death should exhibit a conduct no better than the life of ordinary men, and little superior to what your former life used to be. As many of you as have been baptized have said to the world,—We are dead to the world, and we have come forth into a new life. Our fleshly desires are henceforth to be viewed as dead, for now we live after a fresh order of things. The Holy Spirit has wrought in us a new nature, and though we are in the world, we are not of it, but are new-made men, "created anew in Christ Jesus." This is the doctrine which we avow to all mankind, that Christ died and rose again, and that his people died and rose again in him. Out of the doctrine grows death unto sin and life unto God, and we wish by every action and every movement of our lives to teach it to all who see us.

So far the doctrine: is it not a precious one indeed? Oh, if you be indeed one with Christ, shall the world find you polluting yourselves? Shall the members of a generous, gracious Head be covetous and grasping? Shall the members of a glorious, pure, and perfect Head be defiled with the lusts of the flesh and the follies of a vain life? If believers are indeed so identified with Christ that they are his fullness, should they not be holiness itself? If we live by virtue of our union with his body, how can we live as other Gentiles do? How is it that so many professors exhibit a mere worldly life, living for business and for pleasure, but not for God, in God, or with God? They sprinkle a little religion on a worldly life, and so hope to Christianize it. But it will not do. I am bound to live as Christ would have lived under my circumstances; in my private chamber or in my public pulpit, I am bound to be what Christ would have been in like case. I am bound to prove to

men that union to Christ is no fiction, or fanatical sentiment: but that we are swayed by the same principles and actuated by the same motives.

Baptism is thus an embodied creed, and you may read it in these words: "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

II. But, secondly, A REALIZED UNION WITH CHRIST is also set forth in baptism, and this is rather a matter of experience than of doctrine.

1. First, there is, as a matter of actual experience in the true believer, *death*. "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" It must be contrary to all law to bury those who are yet alive. Until they are dead, men can have no right to be buried. Very well, then, the Christian is dead,—dead, first, *to the dominion of sin*. Whenever sin called him aforetime he answered, "Here am I, for thou didst call me." Sin ruled his members, and if sin said, "Do this," he did it, like the soldiers obedient to their centurion; for sin ruled over all the parts of his nature, and exercised over him a supreme tyranny. Grace has changed all this. When we are converted we become dead to the dominion of sin. If sin calls us now, we refuse to come, for we are dead. If sin commands us we will not obey, for we are dead to its authority. Sin comes to us now—oh, that it did not,—and it finds in us the old corruption which is crucified, but not yet dead; but it has no dominion over our true life. Blessed be God, sin cannot reign over us, though it may assail us and work us harm. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under law, but under grace." We sin, but not with allowance. With what grief we look back upon our transgressions! How earnestly do we endeavour to avoid them! Sin tries to maintain its usurped power over us; but we do not acknowledge it as our sovereign. Evil enters us now as an interloper and a stranger, and works sad havoc, but it does not abide in us upon the throne; it is an alien, and despised, and no more honoured and delighted in. We are dead to the reigning power of sin.

The believer, if spiritually buried with Christ, is *dead to the desire of any such power*. "What!" say you, "do not godly men have sinful desires?" Alas, they do. The old nature that is in them lusteth towards sin; but the true man, the real *ego*, desires to be purged of every speck or trace of evil. The law in the members would fain urge to sin, but the life in the heart constrains to holiness. I can honestly say, for my own self, that the deepest desire of my soul is to live a perfect life. If I could have my own best desire, I would never sin again; and though, alas, I do consent to sin so that I become responsible when I transgress, yet my innermost self loathes iniquity. Sin is my bondage, not my pleasure; my misery, not my delight; at the thought of it I cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" In our heart of hearts our spirit cleaves steadfastly to that which is good, and true, and heavenly, so that the real man delights in the law of God, and follows hard after goodness. The main current and true bent of our soul's wish and will is not towards sin, and the apostle taught us no mere fancy when he said, "For he that is dead is freed from sin."

Moreover, in the next place we are dead *as to the pursuits and aims of the sinning and ungodly life*. Brethren, are any of you that profess to be God's servants living for yourselves? Then you are not God's servants; for he that is really born again lives unto God: the object of his life is the glory of God and the good of his fellow-men. This is the prize that is set before the quickened man, and towards this he runs. "I do not run that way," says one. Very well, then you will not come to the desired end. If you are running after the pleasures of the world or the riches of it, you may win the prize you run for, but you cannot win "the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus." I hope that many of us can honestly say that we are now dead to every object in life, except the glory of God

in Christ Jesus. We are in the world, and have to live as other men do, carrying on our ordinary business; but all this is subordinate, and held in as with bit and bridle; our aims are above yon changeful moon. The flight of our soul, like that of an eagle, is above these clouds: though that bird of the sun alights upon the rock, or even descends to the plain, yet its joy is to dwell above, out soaring the lightning, rising over the black head of the tempest, and looking down upon all earthly things. Henceforth our grace-given life speeds onward and upward; we are not of the world, and the world's engagements are not those upon which we spend our noblest powers.

Again, we are dead in this sense, that we are dead *to the guidance of sin*. The lust of the flesh drives a man this way and that way. He steers his course by the question, "What is most pleasant? What will give me most present gratification?" The way of the ungodly is mapped out by the hand of selfish desire: but you that are true Christians have another guide, you are led by the Spirit in a right way. You ask, "What is good and what is acceptable in the sight of the Most High?" Your daily prayer is, "Lord, show me what thou wouldest have me to do?" You are alive to the teachings of the Spirit, who will lead you into all truth; but you are deaf, yea, dead to the dogmas of carnal wisdom, the oppositions of philosophy, the errors of proud human wisdom. Blind guides who fall with their victims into the ditch are shunned by you, for you have chosen the way of the Lord. What a blessed state of heart this is! I trust, my brethren, that we have fully realized it! We know the Shepherd's voice, and a stranger we will not follow. One is our teacher, and we submit our understandings to his infallible instruction.

Our text must have had a very forcible meaning among the Romans in Paul's time, for they were sunk in all manner of odious vices. Take an average Roman of that period, and you would have found in him a man accustomed to spend a large part of his time in the amphitheater, hardened by the brutal sight of bloody shows, in which gladiators slew each other to amuse a holiday crowd. Taught in such a school, the Roman was cruel to the last degree, and withal ferocious in the indulgence of his passions. A depraved man was not regarded as being at all degraded; not only nobles and emperors were monsters of vice, but the public teachers were impure. When those who were regarded as moral were corrupt, you may imagine what the immoral were. "Enjoy yourself; follow after the pleasures of the flesh," was the rule of the age. Christianity was the introduction of a new element. See here a Roman converted by the grace of God! What a change is in him! His neighbours say, "You were not at the amphitheater this morning. How could you miss the sight of the hundred Germans who tore out each other's bowels?" "No," he says, "I was not there; I could not bear to be there. I am totally dead to it. If you were to force me to be there, I must shut my eyes, for I could not look on murder committed in sport!" The Christian did not resort to places of licentiousness; he was as good as dead to such filthiness. The fashions and customs of the age were such that Christians could not consent to them, and so they became dead to society. It was not merely that Christians did not go into open sin, but they spoke of it with horror, and their lives rebuked it. Things which the multitude counted a joy, and talked of exultingly, gave no comfort to the follower of Jesus, for he was dead to such evils. This is our solemn avowal when we come forward to be baptized. We say by acts which are louder than words that we are dead to those things in which sinners take delight, and we wish to be so accounted.

2. The next thought in baptism is *burial*. Death comes first, and burial follows. Now, what is burial, brethren? Burial is, first of all, *the seal of death*; it is the certificate of decease. "Is such a man dead?" say you. Another answers, "Why, dear sir, he was buried a year ago." There have been instances of persons being buried alive, and I am afraid that the thing happens with sad frequency

in baptism, but it is unnatural, and by no means the rule. I fear that many have been buried alive in baptism, and have therefore risen and walked out of the grave just as they were. But if burial is true, it is a certificate of death. If I am able to say in very truth, "I was buried with Christ thirty years ago," I must surely be dead. Certainly the world thought so, for not long after my burial with Jesus I began to preach his name, and by that time the world thought me very far gone, and said, "He stinketh." They began to say all manner of evil against the preacher; but the more I stank in their nostrils the better I liked it, for the surer I was that I was really dead to the world. It is good for a Christian to be offensive to wicked men. See how our Master stank in the esteem of the godless when they cried, "Away with him, away with him!" Though no corruption could come near his blessed body, yet his perfect character was not savoured by that perverse generation. There must, then, be in us death to the world, and some of the effects of death, or our baptism is void. As burial is the certificate of death, so is burial with Christ the seal of our mortification to the world.

But burial is, next, *the displaying of death*. While the man is indoors the passers-by do not know that he is dead; but when the funeral takes place, and he is carried through the streets, everybody knows that he is dead. This is what baptism ought to be. The believer's death to sin is at first a secret, but by an open confession he bids all men know that he is dead with Christ. Baptism is the funeral rite by which death to sin is openly set forth before all men.

Next, burial is *the separateness of death*. The dead man no longer remains in the house, but is placed apart as one who ceases to be numbered with the living. A corpse is not welcome company. Even the most beloved object after a while cannot be tolerated when death has done his work upon it. Even Abraham, who had been so long united with his beloved Sarah, is heard to say, "Bury my dead out of my sight." Such is the believer when his death to the world is fully known: he is poor company for worldlings, and they shun him as a damper upon their revelry. The true saint is put into the separated class with Christ, according to his word, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." The saint is put away in the same grave as his Lord; for as he was, so are we also in this world. He is shut up by the world in the one cemetery of the faithful, if I may so call it, where all that are in Christ are dead to the world together, with this epitaph for them all, "And ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

And the grave is the place—I do not know where to get a word—*of the settledness of death*; for when a man is dead and buried you never expect to see him come home again: so far as this world is concerned, death and burial are irrevocable. They tell me that spirits walk the earth, and we have all read in the newspaper "The Truth about Ghosts," but I have my doubts on the subject. In spiritual things, however, I am afraid that some are not so buried with Christ but what they walk a great deal among the tombs. I am grieved at heart that it should be so. The man in Christ cannot walk as a ghost, because he is alive somewhere else; he has received a new being, and therefore he cannot mutter and peep among the dead hypocrites around him. See what our chapter saith about our Lord: "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." If we have been once raised from dead works we shall never go back to them again. I may sin, but sin can never have dominion over me; I may be a transgressor and wander much from my God, but never can I go back to the old death again. When my Lord's grace got hold of me, and buried me, he wrought in my soul the conviction that henceforth and for ever I was to the world a dead man. I am right glad that I made no compromise, but came right out. I have drawn the sword, and thrown away the scabbard. Tell the world they need not try to fetch us back, for we are spoiled for them

as much as if we were dead. All they could have would be our carcasses. Tell the world not to tempt us any longer, for our hearts are changed. Sin may charm the old man who hangs there upon the cross, and he may turn his leering eye that way, but he cannot follow up his glance, for he cannot get down from the cross: the Lord has taken care to use the mallet well, and he has fastened his hands and feet right firmly, so that the crucified flesh must still remain in the place of doom and death. Yet the true, the genuine life within us cannot die, for it is born of God; neither can it abide in the tombs, for its call is to purity and joy and liberty; and to that call it yields itself.

3. We have come as far as death and burial; but baptism, according to the text, represents also *resurrection*: “That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Now, notice that the man who is dead in Christ, and buried in Christ, is also raised in Christ, and this is a *special work upon him*. All the dead are not raised, but our Lord himself is “the firstfruits of them that slept.” He is the first-begotten from among the dead. Resurrection was a special work upon the body of Christ by which he was raised up, and that work, begun upon the Head, will continue till all the members partake of it, for—

“Though our inbred sins require
Our flesh to see the dust;
Yet as the Lord our Saviour rose,
So all his followers must.”

As to our soul and spirit, the resurrection has begun upon us. It has not come to our bodies yet, but it will be given to them at the appointed day. For the present a special work has been wrought upon us by which we have been raised up from among the dead. Brethren, if you had been dead and buried, and had been lying one night, say, in Woking Cemetery, and if a divine voice had called you right up from the grave when the silent stars were shining on the open heath—if, I say, you had risen right out from the green mound of turf, what a lonely being you would have been in the vast cemetery amid the stilly night! How you would sit down on the grave and wait for morning! That is very much your condition with regard to the present evil world. You were once like the rest of the sinners around you, dead in sin, and sleeping in the grave of evil custom. The Lord by his power has called you out of your grave, and now you are alive in the midst of death. There can be no fellowship here for you; for what communion have the living with the dead? The man out there in the cemetery just quickened would find none among all the dead around him with whom he could converse, and you can find no companions in this world. There lies a skull, but it sees not from the eyeholes; neither is there speech in its grim mouth. I see a mass of bones lying in yon corner: the living one looks at them, but they cannot hear or speak. Imagine yourself there. All that you would say to the bones would be to ask, “Can these dry bones live?” You would be a foreigner in that home of corruption, and you would haste to get away. That is your condition in the world: God has raised you up from among the dead, from out of the company among whom you had your former conversation. Now, I pray you, do not go and scratch into the earth, to tear up the graves to find a friend there. Who would rend open a coffin and cry, “Come, you must drink with me! You must go to the theatre with me”? No, we dread the idea of association with the dead, and I tremble when I see a professor trying to have communion with worldly men. “Come ye out from among them; be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing.” You know what would happen to you if you were thus raised, and were forced to sit close to a dead body newly taken from the grave. You would cry, “I cannot bear it; I cannot endure it”; you would get to the wind side of the horrid corpse.

So with a man that is really alive unto God: deeds of injustice, oppression, or unchastity he cannot endure; for life loaths corruption.

Notice that, as we are raised up by a special work from among the dead, that rising is *by divine power*. Christ is brought again “from the dead by the glory of the Father.” What means that? Why did it not say, “by the power of the Father”? Ah, beloved, glory is a grander word; for all the attributes of God are displayed in all their solemn pomp in the raising of Christ from the dead. There was the Lord’s faithfulness; for had he not declared that his soul should not rest in hell, neither should His Holy One see corruption? Was not the love of the Father seen there? I am sure it was a delight to the heart of God to bring back life to the body of his dear Son. And so, when you and I are raised out of our death in sin, it is not merely God’s power, it is not merely God’s wisdom that is seen, it is “the glory of the Father.” Oh, to think that every child of God that has been quickened has been quickened by “the glory of the Father.” It has taken not alone the Holy Spirit, and the work of Jesus, and the work of the Father, but the very “glory of the Father.” If the tiniest spark of spiritual life has to be created by “the glory of the Father,” what will be the glory of that life when it comes into its full perfection, and we shall be like Christ, and see him as he is! O beloved, value highly the new life which God has given you. Think of it as making you richer than if you had a sea of pearls, greater than if you were descended from the loftiest of princes. There is in you that which it required all the attributes of God to create. He could make a world by power alone, but you must be raised from the dead by “the glory of the Father.”

Notice next, that this life *is entirely new*. We are to “walk in newness of life.” The life of a Christian is an entirely different thing from the life of other men, entirely different from his own life before his conversion, and when people try to counterfeit it, they cannot accomplish the task. A person writes you a letter and wants to make you think he is a believer, but within about half-a-dozen sentences there occurs a line which betrays the imposter. The hypocrite has very neatly copied our expressions, but not quite. There is a freemasonry among us, and the outside world watch us a bit, and by-and-by they pick up certain of our signs; but there is a private sign which they can never imitate, and therefore at a certain point they break down. A godless man may pray as much as a Christian, read as much of the Bible as a Christian, and even go beyond us in externals; but there is a secret which he knows not and cannot counterfeit. The life divine is so totally new that the unconverted have no copy to work by. In every Christian it is as new as if he were the very first Christian. Even though in every one it is the image and superscription of Christ, yet there is a milled edge or a something about the real silver that these counterfeits cannot get a hold of. It is a new, a novel, a fresh, a divine thing.

And, lastly, this life *is an active thing*. I have often wished that Paul had not been so fast when I have been reading him. His style travels in seven-leagued boots. He does not write like an ordinary man. I beg to tell him that if he had written this text according to proper order, it should run, “Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should be raised from the dead.” But see; Paul has got over ever so much ground while we are talking: he has reached to “walking.” The walking includes the living, of which it is the sign, and Paul thinks so fast when the Spirit of God is upon him that he has passed beyond the cause to the effect. No sooner do we get the new life than we become active: we do not sit down and say, “I have received a new life: how grateful I ought to be. I will quietly enjoy myself.” Oh dear, no. We have something to do directly we are alive, and we begin walking, and so the Lord keeps us all our lives in his work; he does not allow us to sit down contented with the mere fact that we live, nor does he allow us to

spend all our time in examining whether we are alive or no; but he gives us one battle to fight, and then another; he gives us his house to build, his farm to till, his children to nurse, and his sheep to feed. At times we have fierce struggles with our own spirit, and fears lest sin and Satan should prevail, till our life is scarce discerned by itself, but it is always discerned by its acts. The life that is given to those who were dead with Christ is an energetic, forceful life, that is evermore busy for Christ, and would, if it could, move heaven and earth and subdue all things unto him who is its Head.

This life Paul tells us is *an unending one*. Once get it, and it will never go from you. “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more.”

Next, it is a life which is *not under the law or under sin*. Christ came under the law when he was here, and he had our sin laid on him, and therefore died; but after he rose again there was no sin laid on him. In his resurrection both the sinner and the Surety are free. What had Christ to do after his rising? To bear any more sin? No, but just to live unto God. That is where you and I are. We have no sin to carry now; it was all laid on Christ. What have we to do? Every time we have the headache, or feel ill, are we to cry out, “This is a punishment for my sin”? Nothing of the kind. Our punishment is all done with, for we have borne the capital sentence, and are dead: our new life must be unto God.

“All that remains for me
Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come
To bear me to the King.”

I have now to serve him and delight myself in him, and use the power which he gives me of calling others from the dead, saying, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” I am not going back to the grave of spiritual death nor to my grave-clothes of sin; but by divine grace I will still believe in Jesus, and go from strength to strength, not under law, not fearing hell, nor hoping to merit heaven, but as a new creature, loving because loved, living for Christ because Christ lives in me, rejoicing in glorious hope of that which is yet to be revealed by virtue of my oneness in Christ.

Poor sinner, you do not know anything about this death and burial, and you never will till you have power to become sons of God, and that he gives to as many as believe on his name. Believe on his name, and it is all yours. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 6.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—775, 762, 646.

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