



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 28: 1882

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 28: 1882* by Charles Spurgeon

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“Love and I”—A Mystery

A Sermon

(No. 1667)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, July 2nd, 1882, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”—John 17:26.

FOR SEVERAL SABBATH MORNINGS my mind has been directed into subjects which I might fitly call the deep things of God. I think I have never felt my own incompetence more fully than in trying to handle such subjects. It is a soil into which one may dig and dig as deep as ever you will, and still never exhaust the golden nuggets which lie within it. I am, however, comforted by this fact, that these subjects are so fruitful that even we who can only scratch the surface of them shall yet get a harvest from them. I read once of the plains of India, that they were so fertile that you had only to tickle them with a hoe and they laughed with plenty, and surely such a text as this may be described as equally fruitful, even under our feeble husbandry. Pearls lie on the surface here as well as in the depth. We have only to search its surface, and stir the soil a little, and we shall be astonished at the plenitude of spiritual wealth which lies before us. Oh, that the Spirit of God may help us to enjoy the blessed truths which are herein set forth! Here is the priceless treasure, but it lies hid till he reveals it to us.

You see, this text is taken out of our Lord's last prayer with his disciples. He did as good as say, “I am about to leave you, I am about to die for you; and for a while you will not see me; but now, before we separate, let us pray.” It is one of those impulses that you have felt yourselves. When you have been about to part from those you love, to leave them perhaps in danger and difficulty, you have felt you could do no less than say, “Let us draw nigh unto God.” Your heart found no way of expressing itself at all so fitting, so congenial, so satisfactory as to draw near unto the great Father and spread the case before him. Now, a prayer from such a one as Jesus, our Lord and Master; a prayer in such a company, with the eleven whom he had chosen, and who had consorted with him from the beginning; a prayer under such circumstances, when he was just on the brink of the brook of Cedron, and was about to cross that gloomy stream and go up to Calvary, and there lay down his life—such a prayer as this, so living, earnest, loving and divine, deserves the most studious meditations of all believers. I invite you to bring hither your best thoughts and skill for the navigation of this sea. It is not a creek or bay, but the main ocean itself. We cannot hope to fathom its depths. This is true of any sentence of this matchless prayer; but for me the work of exposition becomes unusually heavy, because my text is the close and climax of this marvellous supplication: it is the central mystery of all. In the lowest depth there is still a lower deep, and this verse is one of those deeps which still exceed the rest. Oh, how much we want the Spirit of God. Pray for his bedewing: pray that his balmy influences may descend upon us richly now.

You will observe that the last word of our Lord's prayer is concerning *love*. This is the last petition which he offers, “That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” He reaches no greater height than this, namely, that his people be filled with the Father's

love. How could he rise higher? For this is to be filled with all the fulness of God, since God is love, and he that loveth dwelleth in God and God in him. What importance ought you and I to attach to the grace of love! How highly we should esteem that which Jesus makes the crown jewel of all. If we have faith, let us not be satisfied unless our faith worketh by love and purifieth the soul. Let us not be content indeed until the love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. Well did the poet say,

“Only love to us be given,
Lord, we ask no other heaven;”

for indeed there is no other heaven below, and scarcely is there any other heaven above than to reach to the fulness of perfect love. This is where the prayer of the Son of David ends, in praying “that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them.” What a subject! The highest that even our Lord Jesus reached in his noblest prayer. Again with groanings my heart cries, Holy Spirit, help.

I shall this morning try to speak first upon *the food of love*, or what love lives upon; secondly, upon *the love itself*, what kind of love it is; and then, thirdly, upon *the companion of love*. “That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

I. First, THE FOOD OF LOVE to God: what is it? *It is knowledge*. “I have made known unto them thy name, and will make it known.” We cannot love a God whom we do not know: a measure of knowledge is needful to affection. However lovely God may be, a man blind of soul cannot perceive him, and therefore is not touched by his loveliness. Only when the eyes are opened to behold the loveliness of God will the heart go out towards God who is so desirable an object for the affections. Brethren, we must know in order to believe; we must know in order to hope; and we must especially know in order to love. Hence the great desirableness that you should know the Lord, and his great love which passeth knowledge. You cannot reciprocate love which you have never known, even as a man cannot derive strength from food which he has not eaten. Till first of all the love of God has come into your heart, and you have been made a partaker of it, you cannot rejoice in it or return it. Therefore our Lord took care to feed his disciples’ hearts upon the Father’s name. He laboured to make the Father known to them. This is one of his great efforts with them, and he is grieved when he sees their ignorance, and has to say to one of them, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” Study much, then, the word of God: be diligent in turning the pages of Scripture and in hearing God’s true ministers, that the flame of love within your hearts may be revived by the fuel of holy knowledge which you place upon it. Pile on the logs of sandal wood, and let the perfumed fires burn before the Lord. Heap on the handfuls of frankincense and sweet odours of sacred knowledge, that on the altar of your heart there may always be burning the sacred flame of love to God in Christ Jesus.

The knowledge here spoken of is *a knowledge which Jesus gave them*. “I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it.” O beloved, it is not knowledge that you and I pick up as a matter of book learning that will ever bring out our love to the Father: it is knowledge given us by Christ through his Spirit. It is not knowledge communicated by the preacher alone which will bless you; for however much he may be taught of God himself, he cannot preach to the heart unless the blessed Spirit of God comes and takes of the things that are spoken, and reveals them and makes them manifest to each individual heart, so that in consequence it knows the Lord. Jesus said, “O righteous Father, the world hath not

known thee,” and you and I would have been in the same condition, strangers to God, without God and without hope in the world, if the Spirit of God had not taken of divine things and applied them to our souls so that we are made to know them. Every living word of knowledge is the work of the living God. If you only know what you have found out for yourself, or picked up by your own industry apart from Jesus, you know nothing aright: it must be by the direct and distinct teaching of God the Holy Ghost that you must learn to profit. Jesus Christ alone can reveal the Father. He himself said, “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” He that knows not Christ knows not the Father; but when Jesus Christ reveals him, ah! then we do know him after a special, personal, peculiar, inward knowledge. This knowledge brings with it a life and a love with which the soul is not puffed up, but built up. By such knowledge we grow up into him in all things who is our head, being taught of the Son of God.

This knowledge, dear friends, *comes to us gradually*. The text indicates this. “I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it.” As if, though they knew the Father, there was far more to know and the Lord Jesus was resolved to teach them more. Are you growing in knowledge, my brothers and sisters? My labour is lost if you are not growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I hope you know much more of God than you did twenty years ago when first you came to him. That little knowledge which you received by grace when you found “life in a look at the Crucified One” has saved you; but in these after years you have added to your faith knowledge, and to your knowledge experience; you have gone on to know more deeply what you knew before, and to know the details of what you seemed to know in the gross and the lump at first. You have come to look *into* things as well as *upon* things—a look at Christ saves; but oh, it is the look *into* Christ that wins the heart’s love and holds it fast and binds us to him as with fetters of gold. We ought every day to be adding something to this inestimably precious store, that as we are known of God so we may know God, and become thereby transformed from glory unto glory through his Spirit.

Are you not thankful for this blessed word of the Lord Jesus: “I will declare it”: “I will make it known”? He did do so at his resurrection, when he taught his people things they knew not before; but he did so much more after he had ascended up on high when the Spirit of God was given. “He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” And now to-day in the hearts of his people he is daily teaching us something that we do not know. All our experience tends that way. When the Spirit of God blesses an affliction to us, it is one of the Saviour’s illuminated books out of which we learn something more of the Father’s name, and consequently come to love him better: for that is the thing Christ aims at. He would so make known the Father, that the love wherewith the Father hath loved him may be in us, and that he himself may be in us.

This knowledge distinguishes us from the world. It is the mark by which the elect are made manifest. In the sixth verse of this chapter our Lord says: “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.” The world does not know the Father, and cannot know him, for it abides in the darkness and death of sin. Judge yourselves therefore by this sure test, and let the love which grows out of gracious knowledge be a token for good unto you.

Now let me try to show you what the Saviour meant when he said, “I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare.” This knowledge which breeds love is *knowledge of the name of God*. What does he mean by “Thy name.” Now, I do not think I should preach an unprofitable sermon

if I were to stop with the connection and say that the “name” here meant is specially the name used in the twenty-fifth verse: “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee.” This is the name which we most need to know—“righteous Father.” Observe the singular combination. Righteous and yet a Father. “*Righteous*”: to us poor sinners that is a word of terror when first we hear it. “Father,”—oh, how sweet. That is a word of good cheer even to us prodigals; but we are afraid to lay hold upon it, for our sins arise, and conscience protests that God must be righteous, and punish sin. Our joy begins when we see the two united: “righteous Father,”—a Father full of love, and nothing but love, to his people, and yet righteous as a Judge, as righteous as if he were no Father. Dealing out his righteousness with stern severity as the Judge of all the earth must do, and yet a Father at the same time. I do protest that I never did love God at all, nor could I embrace him in my affections, till I understood how he could be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus: how, in a word, he could be the “righteous Father.” That satisfied my conscience and my heart at the same time, for my conscience said, It is well. God hath not put away sin without a sacrifice, and hath not winked at sin nor waived his justice in order to indulge his mercy, but he remains just as he ever was—the same thrice holy God who will by no means spare the guilty. He hath laid the punishment of our sins upon Christ; he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And all this he has done that he might act to us as a Father, and save his own children from the result of their transgressions. He has given his only begotten Son to die in our stead that many sons might be brought to glory through him. It is at the cross we understand this riddle. Here we see the righteous Father. But the world will not learn it, and a large part of the professing church, which is nothing better than the world wrongfully named with Christ’s name, will not learn it. They do anything they can to get away from atonement: love without righteousness is their idol. Substitution is a word that is hard for the world to spell: they cannot abide it. That Christ should suffer in the stead of the guilty, and bear that we might never bear the Father’s righteous wrath,—this they cannot away with. Many pretend to keep the atonement, and yet they tear the bowels out of it. They profess to believe in the gospel, but it is a gospel without the blood of the atonement; and a bloodless gospel is a lifeless gospel, a dead gospel, and a damning gospel. Let those take heed who cannot see God as a righteous Father, for they are numbered amongst the world who know him not. “These have known thee,” saith our Lord. These who have been taught by Christ, and these alone, come to find as much joy in the word “righteous” as in the word “Father”; and blending the two together they feel an intense love to the “righteous Father,” and their hearts rejoice in a holy gospel, a message of mercy consistent with justice, a covenant salvation ordered in all things and sure, because it does no violence to law and does not bind the hands of justice. Beloved, if this revelation of the atoning blood does not make your heart love Jesus, and love the Father, it is because you are not in him; but if you know this secret as to how righteousness and peace have kissed each other, you know the name that wins the affection of believers to God. My own heart is glad and rejoices every hour because I find rest in substitution, safety in the vindication of the law, and bliss in the glory of the divine character.

“Lo! In the grace that rescued man
 His brightest form of glory shines!
 Here, on the cross, ‘tis fairest drawn
 In precious blood and crimson lines.
 “Here I behold his inmost heart,
 Where grace and vengeance strangely join,

Piercing his Son with sharpest smart,
 To make the purchased pleasure mine.
 "Oh, the sweet wonders of that cross,
 Where God the Saviour loved and died!
 Her noblest life my spirit draws
 From his dear wounds and bleeding sides."

Still, I would take the word "name" *in a wider sense*. "I have declared unto them thy name," which signifies "thy character." The word "name" is used as a sort of summary of all the attributes of God. All these attributes are well adapted to win the love of all regenerate spirits. Just think for a minute. God is *holy*. To a holy mind there is nothing in the world, there is nothing in heaven more beautiful than holiness. We read of the beauties of holiness; for to a soul that is purified, holiness is superlatively lovely. Now, beauty wins love, and consequently when Jesus Christ makes known his holy Father, and shows us in his life and in his death the holiness of the Ever-blessed, then our heart is won to the Father. "Oh," say you, "but holiness does not always win love." No, not the love of the defiled hearts that cannot appreciate it; but those who are pure in heart, and can see God, no sooner behold his holiness than they are enamoured of it, and their souls at once delight in their Lord.

Moreover, we learn from our Lord Jesus that God is *good*. "There is none good but one: that is God." How inexpressibly good he is! There is no goodness but what comes from God. His name, "God" is but short for "good," and all the good things that we receive in this life, and for the life to come, are but enlargements of his blessed name. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Blessings enjoyed by us are streams that flow from the fountain head of God's infinite goodness to the sons of men. A man cannot help loving God when once he knows him to be good, for all men love that which they apprehend to be good to them. A man says, "Gold is good; rest is good; fame is good;" and therefore he seeks after these things, and when he comes to know that God is good, oh, then his spirit follows hard after him. He cannot help but love that which he is persuaded is in the highest sense good. The soul that knows the name of the Lord rejoices at the very mention of him.

To sinners like ourselves perhaps the next word may have more sweetness. God is *merciful*; he is ever ready to forgive. Note how the prophet saith, "Who is a God like unto thee, passing by transgression?" He does not say, "Who is a *man* like unto thee?" for none among our race can for a moment be compared with him; but even if the gods of the heathen were gods, none of them could be likened unto the Lord for mercy. Now, when a man knows that he has offended, and yet the person offended readily and freely forgives, why, it wins his love. If he is a right-hearted man he cries, "I cannot again offend one who so generously casts all my offences behind his back." The mercy of God is such a love-winning attribute that, as I told you the other Sunday, twenty-six times in a single psalm the ancient church sang, "His mercy endureth for ever." Free grace and pardoning love sensibly known in the soul will win your hearts unto God for ever, so that you shall be his willing servants as long as you have any being.

But then there is a higher word still. God is *love*, and there is a something about love which always wins love. When love puts on her own golden armour, and bares her sword bright with her own unselfishness, she goeth on conquering and to conquer. Let a man once apprehend that God is love, that this is God's very essence, and he must at once love God. I do not mean merely "apprehend" that God is love in the cold intellect; but when this heart begins to glow and burn with

that divine revelation, then straightway the spirit is joined unto the Lord, and rests with delight in the great Father of spirits. Love knits and binds. Oh to feel more of its uniting power.

Thus have I shown you the manna which love feeds upon, the nectar which it drinks. Everything in God is lovely, and there is no trait in his character that is otherwise than lovely. All the lovelinesses that can be conceived are heaped up in God without the slightest admixture or adulteration. He is love altogether, wholly, and emphatically. Oh, surely our Lord and Master was wise when he fed his people's love upon such meat as this.

II. Brethren, we have as yet only been standing at the furnace mouth: let us now enter into the devouring flame while we speak, in the second place, upon THE LOVE ITSELF.

Observe, first, *what this love is not*. "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be *in* them." Do notice that the prayer is not that the Father's love may be set *upon* them, or moved towards them. God does not love us because we know him, for he loved us before we knew him, even as Paul speaks of "His great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." Jesus has not come to set his Father's love upon the chosen. Oh, no; he did not even die with that object, for the Father's love was upon the chosen from everlasting. "The Father himself loveth you" was always true. Christ did not die to make his Father loving, but because his Father is loving: the atoning blood is the outflow of the very heart of God toward us. So do not make any mistake. Our Lord speaks not of the divine love in itself, but in us. This is not the eternal love of God *towards* us of which we are now reading, but that love *in* us. We are inwardly to feel the love which proceeds from the Father, and so to have it *in* us. We are to have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. It is to be recognized by us, felt in us, made the subject of inward joy; this it is that our Lord wishes to produce, that the love of God may be in us, dwelling in our hearts, a welcome guest, the sovereign of our souls.

And this love is *of a very peculiar sort*. Do let me read the verse again: "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them." It is God's own love in us. The love of the Father towards Jesus springs up like a crystal fountain, and then the sparkling drops fall and overflow, as you have seen the fountains do, and we are the cups into which this overflowing love of God towards Christ Jesus flows, and flows till we too are full. The inward love so much desired for us by our Lord is no emotion of nature, no attachment proceeding from the unregenerate will, but it is the Father's love transplanted into the soil of these poor hearts, and becoming our love to Jesus, as we shall have to show in the next point. But is not this a wonderful thing,—that God's own love to Jesus should dwell in our hearts? And yet it is so. The love wherewith we love Christ, mark you, is God's love to Christ: "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them." "All true love, such as the Father delights in and accepts at our hands, is nothing but his own love, which has come streaming down from his own heart into our renewed minds.

But what can this mean? I must ask you to observe that it includes within itself four precious things.

First, the text means that *our Lord Jesus Christ desires us to have a distinct recognition of the Father's love to him*. He wants the love wherewith the Father loves him to be felt in us, so that we may say, "Yes, I know the Father loved him, for I, who am such a poor, unworthy, and foolish creature, yet love him; and, oh, how his Father must love him." I love him! Ay, by his grace, it were a blessed thing to die for him; but if *I* love him, oh, how must his Father love him who can see all his beauty, and can appreciate every distinct piece of loveliness that is in him! God never

loved anything as he loves Christ, except his people, and they have had to be lifted up to that position by the love which the Father has to his Son. For, first and foremost, the Father and the Son are one: they are one in essence. The Saviour has been with the Father from the beginning, and his delight has been with him, even as the Father testified, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Oh, do try to feel, if you can, the love of the Father to his Son, or else you will not love the Father as you should for the amazing sacrifice which he made in giving Jesus to us. Think what it cost him to tear his Well-Beloved from his bosom and send him down below to be "despised and rejected." Think what it cost him to nail him up to yonder cross, and then forsake him and hide his face from him, because he had laid all our sins upon him. Oh, the love he must have had to us thus to have made his best Beloved to become a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." I want you to get this right into your souls, dear friends. Do not hold it as a dry doctrine, but let it touch your heart. Let it flow into your heart like a boiling stream, till your whole souls become like Icelandic geysers, which boil and bubble up and send their steam aloft into the clouds. Oh, to have the soul filled with the love of the Father towards him who is altogether lovely.

Now, go a step further and deeper. Our text bears a further reading. Remember that *you are to have in your heart a sense of the Father's love to you*, and to recollect that it is precisely the same love wherewith he loves his Son. "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them." Oh, wonder of wonders, I feel more inclined to sit down and meditate upon it than to stand up and talk about it! The love wherewith he loved his Son—such is his love to all his chosen ones. Can you believe it, that you should be the object of God's delight, even as Christ is, because you are in Christ; that you should be the object of the Father's love as truly as Christ is, because he sees you to be part and parcel of the mystical body of his well-beloved Son? Do not tell me that God the Father does not love you as well as he does Christ: the point can be settled by the grandest matter of fact that ever was. When there was a choice between Christ and his people which should die of the two, the Father freely delivered up his own Son that we might live through him. Oh, what a meeting there must have been of the seas of love that day, when God's great love to us came rolling in like a glorious springtide, and his love to his Son came rolling in at the same time. If they had met and come into collision, we cannot imagine the result; but when they both took to rolling together in one mighty torrent, what a stream of love was there! The Lord Jesus sank that we might swim, he sank that we might rise; and now we are borne onward for ever by the mighty sweep of infinite love into an everlasting blessedness which tongues and lips can never fully set forth. Oh, be ravished with this. Be carried away with it; be in ecstasy at love so amazing, so divine: the Father loves you even as he loves his Son; after the same manner and sort he loveth all his redeemed.

But now this goes to a third meaning, and that is that *we are to give back a reflection of this love, and to love Jesus as the Father loves him*. A dear old friend speaking to me the other day in a rapturous tone said, "I love Jesus as the Father loves him." This is true; not equally, but like. Is not this a blessed thought? I said, "O friend, that is a strong thing to say!" "Ah," said he, "but not stronger than Jesus would have it when he prays that 'the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.'" His people love Christ as the Father loves him,—in the same way, though from want of capacity they cannot reach to the same immeasurable force of love. Oh, to throw back on Christ his Father's love. The Father is the sun and we are the moon, but the moonlight is the same light as the sunlight. We can see a difference because reflection robs the light of much of its heat and its brilliance, but it is the same light. The moon has not a ray of light but what came from the sun, and we have not a live coal of love to Christ but what came from the Father. We are

as the moon, shining by reflected light, but Jesus loves the moonlight of our love and rejoices in it. Let us give him all of it: let us try to be as the full moon always, and let us not dwindle down to a mere ring of love, or a crescent of affection; let us render no half-moon love; let us not be half dark and cold, but let us shine on Christ with all the light we can possibly reflect of his father's love, saying in our very soul,

“My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine;

For thee all the follies of sin I resign.”

And then fourthly, *this love of the Father in us is to go beaming forth from us to all around.* When we get the love wherewith the Father loves the Son into our hearts, then it is to go out towards all the chosen seed. He that loveth him that begat loveth also them that are begotten of him. Ay, and your love is to go forth to all the sons of men, seeking their good for God's glory, that they may be brought in to know the same Saviour in whom we rejoice. Oh, if the love of the Father to Christ once enters into a man's soul it will change him; it will sway him with the noblest passion; it will make him a zealot for Christ; it will cast out his selfishness; it will change him into the image of Christ, and fit him to dwell in heaven where love is perfected.

So I conclude this second head by saying that this indwelling of the Father's love in us has the most blessed results. It has an *expulsive* result. As soon as ever it gets into the heart it says to all love of sin, “Get thee hence; there remains no room for thee here.” When the light enters in, the darkness receives immediate notice of ejection; the night is gone as soon as the dawn appears. It has also a *repulsive* power by which it repels the assaults of sin. As though a man did snatch the sun out of the heaven and make a round shield with it, and hold it in the very face of the prince of darkness, and blind him with the light, so doth the love of God the Father repel the enemy. It girds the soul with the armour of light. It repels the devil, the love of the world, the love of sin, and all outward temptations. And then what an *impulsive* power it has. Get the love of Christ into you, and it is as when an engine receives fire and steam, and so obtains the force which drives it. Then have you strengthening, then have you motive power, then are you urged on to this and that heroic deed which, apart from this sublime love, you never would have thought of. For Christ you can live, for Christ you can suffer, for Christ you can die, when once the Father's love to him has taken full possession of your spirit. And, oh, how elevating it is. How it lifts a man up above self and sin; how it makes him seek the things that are above! How purifying it is; and how happy it makes the subject of its influence. If you are unhappy you want more of the love of God. “Oh,” say you, “I want a larger income.” Nonsense. A man is not made happy by money. You will do very well in poverty if you have enough of the love of God. Oh, but if your soul be filled with the love of God, your spirit will be ready to dance at the very sound of his name. You murmur and repine at providence because the fire of your love is burning low. Come, get the ashes together; pray the Spirit of God to blow upon them: beg him to bring fresh fuel of holy knowledge, till your soul becomes like Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, heated seven times hotter. This is the kind of love we should have towards Christ. No blessing can excel it. Oh, Saviour, let thy prayer be fulfilled in me and in all thy dear people this morning, and may the love wherewith the Father hath loved thee be in us.

III. Thirdly, here is THE COMPANION OF LOVE. “I in them.” Look the text a minute and just catch those two words. Here is “love” and “I”—love and Christ come together. Oh, blessed guests! “Love and I,” says Christ; as if he felt he never had a companion that suited him better. “Love” and “I”: Jesus is ever at home where love is reigning. When love lives in his people's hearts,

Jesus lives there too. Does Jesus, then, live in the hearts of his people? Yes; wherever there is the love of the Father shed abroad in them, he must be there. We have his own word for it, and we are sure that Jesus knows where he is.

We are sure that he is where love is; for, first, where there is love there is *life*, and where there is life there is Christ, for he himself says, "I am the life." There is no true life in the believer's soul that is divided from Christ. We are sure of that; so that where there is love there is life, and where there is life there is Christ. Again, where there is the love of God in the heart there is *the Holy Spirit*; but wherever the Holy Spirit is, there is Christ, for the Holy Spirit is Christ's representative; and it is in that sense that he tells us, "Lo, I am with you alway," namely, because the Spirit is come to be always with us. So where there is love there is the Spirit of God, and where there is the Spirit of God there is Christ. So it is always "Love and I."

Furthermore where there is love there is *faith*, for faith worketh by love, and there never was true love to Christ apart from faith; but where there is faith there is always Christ, for if there is faith in him he has been received into the soul. Jesus is ever near to that faith which has himself for its foundation and resting place. Where there is love there is faith, where there is faith there is Christ, and so it is "love and I."

Ay, but where there is the Father's love toward Christ in the heart *God* himself is there. I am sure of that, for God is love. So if there is love within us there must be God, and where God is, there Christ is, for he saith, "I and my Father are one." So you see, where there is love, there must be Jesus Christ, for these reasons and for many others beside.

"I in them." Yes, if I were commanded to preach for seven years from these three words only, I should never exhaust the text, I am quite certain. I might exhaust you by my dulness, and exhaust myself by labour to tell out the sacred secret, but I should never exhaust the text. "I in them." It is the most blessed word I know of. You, beloved, need not go abroad to find the Lord Jesus Christ. Where does he live? He lives within you. "I in them." As soon as ever you pray you are sure he hears you, because he is within you. He is not knocking at your door: he has entered into you, and there he dwells, and will go no more out for ever.

What a blessed sense of power this gives to us. "I in them." Then it is no more "I" in weakness, but, since Jesus dwells in me, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." "I in them." It is the glory of the believer that Christ dwells in him. "Unto you that believe he is precious."

Hence we gather the security of the believer. Brother, if Christ be in me, and I am overcome, Christ is conquered too, for he is in me. "I in them." I cannot comprehend the doctrine of believers falling from grace. If Christ has once entered into them, will he not abide with them? Paul saith, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." To that persuasion I set my hand and seal. Well, then, if Christ is in us, whatever happens to us will happen to him. We shall be losers if we do not get to heaven; but so will he be, for he is in us, and so is a partaker of our condition. If it is an indissoluble union—and so he declares it is—"I in them," then his destiny and ours are linked together; and if he wins the victory we conquer in him: if he sits at the right hand of God we shall sit at the right hand of God with him, for he is in us.

I know not what more to say, not because I have nothing more, but because I do not know which to bring forward out of a thousand precious things; but I leave the subject with you. Go home, and live in the power of this blessed text. Go home, and be as happy as you can be to live, and if you

get a little happier that will not hurt you, for then you will be in heaven. Keep up unbroken joy in the Lord. It is not "I in them" for Sundays, and away on Mondays; "I in them" when they sit in the Tabernacle, and out of them when they reach home. No; "I in them," and that for ever and for ever. Go and rejoice. Show this blind world that you have a happiness which as much outshines theirs as the sun outshines the sparks which fly from the chimney and expire. Go forth with joy and be led forth with peace; let the mountains and the hills break forth before you into singing.

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

"Oh, but I have my troubles." I know you have your troubles, but they are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in you, nor even with your present glory. I feel as if I could not think about troubles, nor sins, nor anything else when I once behold the love of God to me. When I feel my love to Christ, which is but God's love to Christ, burning within my soul, then I glory in tribulation, for the power of God shall be through these afflictions made manifest in me. "I in them." God bless you with the knowledge of this mystery, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 17.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—917, 797, 766.

The Voice Behind Thee

A Sermon

(No. 1672)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, July 23rd, 1882, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”—Isaiah 30:21.

ON the Sabbath before last we spoke concerning “the still small voice.” After the thunder and the fire and the earthquake had passed away, for the Lord was not in them, there came a still small voice unto Elijah, which reached the prophet's heart, and brought him back to his former condition of communion with God. This hopeful morning we shall hear that same “still small voice” actually speaking a warning and teaching word, and we shall see how it operates upon the sinner, reaching both his ear and his heart. God calls to the rebellious, and by his gentle word they are brought to his feet with repentance, turned from their evil wandering, and led in the way of obedience.

The word behind us which is spoken of in the text is mentioned as one among other covenant blessings. No “if” or “but” is joined to it. It is one of those gracious, unconditional promises upon which the salvation of the guilty depends. There are many comforts of the new life which depend upon our own action and behaviour, and these come to us with “ifs”; but those which are vital and essential are secured to the chosen of God without “but” or “peradventure.” It shall be so: God declares it shall, and he has power to carry out every jot and tittle of every promise that he makes to his people. I shall ask you at this good hour mainly to admire the free and sovereign grace of God in making such a promise as this to anybody, and especially in making it to a people whom he speaks of as “a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord.” He severely upbraids them, and then in great patience he says to them, even to them, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you.” God's grace is marvellous in itself, but its most marvellous point is the singular channel in which it chooses to flow: it runs down into the Dead Sea of sin and makes the waters pure.

I. I invite you to notice first of all THE POSITION OF THE WANDERER to whom this special blessing comes. How does God find men when he declares that they shall hear a word behind them? First, he finds them *with their backs turned to him*. This is clear enough, if you remember that the word is to be heard “behind” them. The sinner has gone away from God, and God calls after him from behind. He has turned his back upon his true Friend, his best Friend, his only capable Friend, but that Friend does not therefore change his temper and resent the insult; nay, he is provoked to a love more pleading and persuasive than ever, and calls to him to come into the right way. After having transgressed wilfully and wickedly, the rebel now distinctly turns his back on God and truth; according to the Lord's complaint, “they have turned unto me the back, and not the face.” He turns his back on the law, on the gospel, on mercy, on eternal life. He turns his back on the adoption of the great Father, on pardon bought with the blood of Jesus, on regeneration which can alone be wrought by the Holy Spirit: he turns his back upon holiness, happiness, and heaven. He turns away from sunlight, and wanders down into deeper and yet deeper night, striving to get away from God

and holy influences. Yet the Lord follows him, and with a voice of touching love and tender compassion he calls to him, "This is the way, walk ye in it." The word of warning, instruction, and entreaty follows the wanderer, and with ever-increasing pathos beseeches him to turn and live. Again and again the wise, earnest, personal voice assails his ear, as if love resolved that he should not perish if wooing could win him to life. The wanderer seeks not God, but his God seeks him. Man turns from the God of love, but the love of God turns not away from him.

What matchless grace is this, that God should thus call after sinners when they openly renounce his rule, and flee from his mercy. Oh, if the Lord had turned his back on us, where had we been? If he had given us up to our own devices, and left us to ourselves, then our eternal ruin would want but a few more days and months to consummate itself, and we should be driven for ever from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. Have we not said unto God, "Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of thy ways"? If he had replied to us, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire in hell," it had only been the echo of our own words. When we said to him "Depart," suppose he had turned round and said, "Depart, depart yourselves." But instead of that, while we turn ourselves deliberately away from God, he still calls after us; he will not let us go. We have a freedom of will, but it is by that freedom of will that men are damned, since they will not come unto Christ that they might have life, but they will to follow the devices and desires of their own hearts. Free-will, thus held in chains by evil lustings, becomes the most destructive agency in the world; but, blessed be God, he has freedom of will too, and that freedom of sovereign grace will not have its hands bound nor its lips closed, but it will act and speak in omnipotent love. So when the Lord sees us in the wantonness of our wickedness, dead in trespasses and sins, his great love wherewith he loves us seeks us out, and from the lips of that love come tender accents bidding us return to God, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

Observe that these persons had not only turned their backs on God, but *they were going further and further away from him*. Of course, when you have once turned your back upon the right, the further you travel the more wrong you become. They were not content to be near to God, even with their backs to him, but they hastened away. They are eager and quick to escape from their own mercy. Like the prodigal, they are not satisfied till they get into "a far country": they cannot rest in the same land with their God: they journey with all speed away from the Lord, and the greater the distance that they can set between themselves and their Father the more are they at ease. In forgetting God they find a horrible peace: the peace of death, a peace which will stupefy them into eternal destruction. Now, it is while they are thus going hot foot away from God, further and further every day, madly rushing along the downward road, never satisfied with the sin to which they have attained, flying from God as if he were their terror and would be their destroyer, it is even then that the word sounds behind them and they are startled into thought. They have a powerful voice pleading with them thus,—"Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die, O house of Israel? This is the way, walk ye in it. The way you are now pursuing is not the way to peace and safety; return at once, for this is the way, walk ye in it." Here again I admire the overflowing riches of the grace of God, that he should call men to himself when they are altogether taken up with other things, when every thought, and every word, and every act is in rebellion against him. Paul saith, "Doth God care for oxen?" but here is a far greater wonder, "Doth God care for worthless revolters?" When a chosen man is desperately set on mischief, determined to destroy himself, God is yet more determined to save him. The two determinations meet, and we shall see which of the two will prove itself the stronger one. We soon find that the determination of God overcomes the determination of man. The iron

breaks the northern iron and the steel. "Thus saith the Lord; your covenant with death is broken, and your league with hell is disannulled:" for there was a prior covenant, a covenant of grace made by God himself, which stands fast for ever; and there was a prior league which God made with his Son on our behalf, and that league shall overthrow our league with death and hell. Glory be to God that even when the sinner is still rebellious, and shows no signs of repentance, nor is conscious of any wish to turn from the error of his ways, even then, while his heart is black as night, and his spirit is choke-full with rebellion, God calls to him, "Return, O backsliding children." "They shall hear a voice behind them, saying, This is the way."

More than this, however, is true. They had turned their backs on God, and were going further from him, though they were warned not to do so, and *they were pursuing their course in spite of warning*. Read the twentieth verse: "Thine eyes shall see thy teachers": there they stood, good men, right in the way, entreating their hearers to cease from provoking their God and destroying their own souls. Hear them cry, "Turn ye from your iniquities, for this way leads to death: turn ye, turn ye." They can see their teachers stretching out their hands with eager importunity, pleading even unto boiling tears, persuading them to turn from the way and the wages of sin. Still they push on, as if eternal destruction were a prize to be sought rather than a doom to be dreaded. Was it not so with many of us in the days of our unregeneracy? Mother and father endeavored to block up the evil road: in them our eyes beheld our teachers. How they taught us: how they prayed with us: how they laboured if possible to turn us from the error of our ways! But we persevered with obstinate resolve. It is hard going to hell over a pleading mother, and equally hard to destroy one's self by pushing aside an earnest father's good advice; but we seemed resolved to do so. Then perhaps followed Sunday-school teachers, full of intense love to us; and how they pleaded! How wisely they set the case before us, and how tenderly they pleaded: our eyes did see our teachers, but still our eyes would not see the right way, nor would our hearts desire it; we were determined that we would by hook or by crook land ourselves in hell. Our soul was given to her idols, and after those idols we resolved to go. We loved the wages of iniquity, the pleasures of the flesh, the pride of life, the conceit of self-salvation: we loved anything better than our God; and though our teachers were before us, ready to help and eager to teach we made small account of them. In after-life it may be our teachers were earnest pastors, who could not preach dull, dead sermons, and would not suffer us to sleep ourselves into perdition. They cried aloud and spared not: they were in anguish about us: they gave themselves no rest until we would turn from our iniquities. We could see our teachers, and we had a loving respect for them too, yet we cast their word behind our back: it was of no use to us: we loved iniquity, and that way we would go, come what might of it. Yet even then, when we were despising God's prophets and paying no regard to all the words of warning, the Lord was still loving us, looking after us, and crying after us, and saying, "This is the way; this is the way: walk ye in it. Come back, come back, come back: you are destroying yourselves: return unto your Father and your God." Why did he not throw the reins on our necks, and say, "Let them alone; they are given unto idols: I have hewed them with the prophets, I have ploughed them with men of God, but all has come to nought; they have stiffened their necks, they have hardened their hearts, they have made their forehead like unto an adamant stone; therefore let them reap the result of their transgressions"? But it was not so, for God had made this word an unconditional promise of his covenant, "They shall hear a voice behind them."

One more mark of the ungodly condition of those whom God would call was this, that *they had many ways in which to wander*. Sometimes they roamed to the right hand, at other times they

wandered to the left, but they never turned face about. Hear ye the way to heaven; it is right about face then keep straight on to glory. Nay, but we will turn this way, we will turn that way, we will turn any way except to God. Some men have right-hand sins, respectable iniquities which challenge little censure from their fellows; not black, but whitewashed sins. Such men are not thieves, they are not licentious, they are not drunkards, but their sins take a quieter form; they mock God with their self-righteousness, and insult him with their prayers, which are no prayers, but only pretences and fictions, and not the real prayers of God's elect ones. Others have left-hand sins; they plunge into the sins of the flesh; no vice is too black for them. Only propose to have a little pleasure and they will plunge into any vice to gain it: ay, and almost without pleasure, altogether without present profit, they will sin, as if for sin's own sake. When they have burned their finger in the candle they will after that hold their arm in the fire; when they have brought disease into their bodies by sin they will return to the evil which caused it; when they have beggared their purse by their extravagant lusts yet still they will go on playing the profligate; when they have filled themselves with despair till they are as a bucket running with gall and wormwood, and this has been emptied out for them by God's grace, they will fill it up again, for they are infatuated with sin; they find a delight in it and they will not, they cannot give it up. Shall the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may they that have been accustomed to do evil learn to do well. Alas, such a miracle has not happened to them. They choose all shapes of evil, but the good they will not have. I say their right-hand sins, their left-hand sins, sins of their life, sins of their heart,—they will follow all these eagerly, but unless God by his own omnipotent voice shall call them back they will not come to him, to Jesus, to grace, to holiness, and heaven. Tell it, tell it, tell it; sound it forth beneath the sky for ever and ever, that the Lord does call to himself such wanton wanderers. "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, saith the Lord: Turn, O backsliding children; for I am married unto you." Oh, the pity of God, not only for the miserable, but for the wicked; it surpasses thought. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly." Favour to the guilty is the choicest of favour. We come not to preach salvation to the righteous—for where shall we find them?—but we proclaim it to the unrighteous and to the ungodly. "The whole have no need of a physician; but they that are sick"; and Christ has come after the sick, calling, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Oh, if anything will touch the heart it should be this word of free grace, this fact that God doth bid men return to him. Mercy is full of patience; it bears and forbears, and still it cries, "This is the way, walk ye in it"; oh, who would be so cruelly ungrateful as to close his ear against its pleadings?

Thus I have spoken sufficiently upon the position of the wanderer.

II. Now, for a little while, we will dwell upon THE CALL OF MERCY. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee."

Notice, it is a call that is *altogether undesired*, and comes unsought to the man who has gone astray. He hears the inward call whose voice is "Return:" he looks for a moment, and then puts his foot down to pursue his journey. "Never," he says, "will I alter my course," and he boldly hastens on, though before him lie death and hell. As he is persevering in his ruinous course the same word again bids him "Return." He hears the admonition, but still he pushes on; he must not and will not return from the way of evil. If he could reach a spot where such disturbing voices would never trouble him how gladly would he hasten towards it. Hence so many altogether forsake the place of worship: they prefer the stagnant pool of stupid obstinacy to the sweet river of the water of life. So far from desiring to be warned, if they could voyage to a distant Tarshish, where voices of warning would never reach them more, it would be a delightful journey; and if ship could be taken, they

would, like Jonah, pay the fare to the shipmaster, and secure a berth in the next vessel. I have heard of one in the backwoods of America who was unloading his furniture, and while doing so up rode a Methodist minister. "Confound you," said he, "I have moved half-a-dozen times to get away from you Methodist fellows: I am never comfortable where you are. I will put the things on the cart again, and find a spot where I shall be free from you." On they went to another clearing, but when they reached it the first thing that happened, before the man took up his lodging, was the appearance of a Methodist minister. "Where shall I go to get away from you Methodist preachers?" "There is nowhere I know of," said the minister, "that you can go, for I am afraid if you go to hell you will find some of them there, for preachers have been lost. The very best thing you can do is to yield at once, and let me hold a service to-night in your camp." That was sound advice; and so some of you will be pestered and worried as long as you live if you will not come to Christ. Omnipotence has servants everywhere, and these are all charged to warn you of your peril. I knew one who would not go to a place of worship, and turned every Bible out of his house; but he found a copy of the holy Book in his house, and as he cursed and swore he learned that it was the property of a daughter whom he loved too much to scold, and he was obliged to let the sacred volume rest where she had placed it. A Bible in a house where it is forbidden to be read is a splendid power for good, as he soon discovered. In a house where it is outwardly honoured the Bible may have little influence, but if it gets where it must not be allowed, everybody reads it. If you can make God's Word to be forbidden fruit, Eve will feed on it, and Adam will follow her. Thus the grace of God came into the house, and it would never be expelled. Down by Mitcham, when the lavender is growing, if you take a house there you will discern a smell of lavender; you may shut the windows and close the doors, but when any persons enter a whiff of lavender enters with them, you cannot help it; and if you live where the gospel is preached at all you will be sure to hear it, and made to know of it. It is God's intention that you should. It is a voice that comes unasked and undesired, but come it does.

"A word behind thee"; it is *the voice of an unseen caller* whose existence has been almost forgotten. It is not the teachers that speak in this powerful way. The teachers you have seen with your eyes, and they have done you no good; but someone calls whom you never saw and never will see till he sits on the throne of judgment at the last great day; but still he utters a word which cannot be kept out of your ears. It will come to you mysteriously at all sorts of hours crying, "Return, return, return." It will sound often at dead of night, and make the chambers of conscience ring with its notes. I have known it to wake a man out of his slumbers: I have known it sound in his dreams till he dreamed of hell, and woke up and felt the torment in his own conscience. Though he has done all he could, has been off to the theatre, to the gay party, to the entertainment, to deeper sin, yet still even there the word has haunted him. I recollect one who in this very city plunged into all manner of gaiety to try to get rid of this word, yet God met him in a play; words were used in the performance which touched his conscience, and he fled from the playhouse as from a burning building, fell on his knees, and sought and found the Saviour. This call of mercy is the word of a hidden One: you cannot see who it is that speaks, yet you cannot shut your ears to his admonitions nor refuse reverence to his warnings.

This voice *pursues and overtakes the sinner*. Do you see him running,—with all his might rushing to his own destruction? The word comes, at first, rather feebly—"Return." He scarcely looks back, but on he flies. Lo, the voice follows. He runs faster from it to show his determination to carry out his own will. The voice still follows him, saying, "Return." Then he stops a minute,

but being desperately enamoured of his transgressions, he again takes to his heels to fly away from God; still the word pursues his footsteps, and in pleading accents cries,—“Return, return, return, return;” till at last he is constrained to sit down and listen to the word which comes from he knows not where. He cannot understand how and why it comes so home to him, but it is a fulfillment of the promise; it is the word behind him saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

That voice when it comes to sinners is generally *most opportune*, for according to the text they are to hear this voice behind them when they turn to the right hand or to the left. A man may go steadily plodding on in his course of ungodliness and hear no such word of pleading, but how often it has happened that there has been a temptation of a more than usually forceful character, and the traveller was about to turn to the right, and then, at that precise moment, he has heard the word of God behind him giving him warning. His feet had almost gone; his steps had well-nigh slipped, but the word of the Lord upheld him, and he went not into the deadly sin. Or it may be it is what I have described as a left-handed sin: the man was carried on to an action which, if he had actually performed it, would have involved his sure destruction; but just as he was about to turn down Deadman’s Lane there came a voice behind him, “Return, return.” Often it is so, and even if the man does not return and seek the right way, but keeps steadily on as carelessly as ever, still he is slackening his speed, and he dares not take that left-hand turning into gross sin which he would have followed if the word had not checked him. Even where the Spirit of God does not save a man it keeps him from many a sin; and when men rebel against the light and will not yield to it, yet still that light has a restraining influence over them of which they may be unconscious. Those who watch them know that if that bit and bridle had not been supplied by the word they would have gone to an excess of riot which would have been dangerous to others as well as totally destructive to themselves. Blessed be God for the opportuneness of the word of mercy. Men delay to come, but God does not delay to call.

And you see, to close this second point, that it is *absolutely necessary* that the potent word should be spoken and should be heard. For the man had seen his teachers, but they had not wrought him any good. How often the Lord seems to put us ministers right up in the corner with our faces to the wall, till we are little in the eyes of our hearers and little in our own eyes. He does so with me, and while I can glorify his name and bless him abundantly for the many that are brought to Christ, yet I never take the slightest congratulation to myself about it, for what am I but the driest and most barren stick that there is in all my Master’s garden apart from his watering? If sinners had nothing to save them but us poor preachers, not one of them would be brought up from death and hell. Sinners would laugh at us as simpletons if God were not with us: they do so as it is, and I do not wonder at it, because there is enough in us that deserves to be laughed at. They are ready to despise us, and we cannot be broken-hearted if they do, for we ourselves used in former days to despise the servants of God, and if we do not do so now, it is because the grace of God has made a change in us: we cannot expect better treatment than we ourselves rendered to better men when they pleaded with us. The word behind us is needful, that “still small voice” which no mortal man can speak, but only God himself, that inward monition of the conscience, that touching language of the heart which is as much beyond the power of man as to make a world or breath life into an image of clay. Therefore pray ye mightily to the blessed Spirit that he may breathe on men and save them, and that the word of God may still follow and pursue them till they turn from the way of transgression.

I leave that point. You have seen the position of the rambler, and the grace of God in the call of mercy.

III. But what was THE WORD OF THAT CALL? It is stated at full length, "This is the way, walk ye in it." That is the word of the call. It contains within itself, first, *specific instruction*. "This is the way." There is a kind of preaching which has nothing specific, definite, and positive in it: it is a bit of cloud-land, and you may make what you like out of it—God's grace or man's merit, faith in Christ or faith in self. You need to be your own instructor, and then like the child looking into the fire you will see whatever your own eye chooses to create. Too much preaching is of a kind so mixed that it reminds me of the showman when his visitors asked, "Which is Wellington and which is Napoleon?" "Whichever you please," said he; "you have paid your money and you may take your choice." So it seems to be with many preachers as to doctrine. You may have what kind of doctrine you like so long as you pay your pew-rent. "Cleverly put," cries one, when he had heard a smart sermon. Is not that enough? I answer, it is not enough: we want the sure testimony of revelation, sealed in the heart by the Holy Ghost. Cleverness is not God's way of blessing men. Conjectures and loose opinions are not worth the breath which is expended in expressing them. The Lord lays down a definite pathway, and he says, "This is the way." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved; this is the way. Repent and be converted, every one of you; this is the way. To leave sin, to quit self, to trust in Christ: this is the way." Something definite is laid down before those who desire to be taught of God, and they are told what is to be done, what is to be received, what is to be given up. "This is the way." Definite instruction is given. This may not suit the Broad School, but it is exactly what the anxious seeker needs.

This definite instruction may also be said to be a *special correction*. When the voice behind says, "This is the way," it does as good as say that the opposite path is not the way; for there is only one way to heaven, and there never will be two; and when men hear a voice saying, "This is the way," it does in effect remind them that the opposite is not the way. If ye are going the reverse of the right way, turn ye from it, and ye shall live. How much we ought to bless God that the gospel comes in as a corrective, kills the false and introduces us to the true. May falsehood be slain within us, and truth reign there for ever. May we leave all other roads, since the Lord has said of one road only, "This is the way."

It is also a word of *sure confirmation*. "This is the way." When that is heard many times,—“This is the way,” “This is the way,” “This is the way;” when, according to our hymn,

“We hear our Saviour say,
'Come hither, soul, I am the Way,'”

if we have already believed it to be the way we are strengthened in that conviction. Hearing the mysterious word declaring again and again, "This is the way," men grow to believe the truth of God's word, and out of that by-and-by there is begotten a living faith in a living Saviour. Oh, this is a great mercy, to hear the same thing many times, to hear the voice proclaim again and again, "This is the way," "This is the way." "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ, the righteous." May the repetitions of the Spirit effectually preserve us from the deadly shadow of doubt, and fix us as a nail in a sure place.

This is followed up by a word of *personal direction*. "Walk ye in it." Do not merely hear about it, but "walk ye in it." Be not content to be critics, thinkers, and considerers, but become doers of the word. "This is the way,"—here is the doctrine: "Walk ye in it,"—there is the practice. Well is it when the Lord by his Spirit speaks to the runaway sinner and tells him what he is to do and to

believe; then he makes the way and the walk to be vividly present,—“This is the way, walk ye in it” without delay.

This takes the form of *encouraging permission*. Some think they may not come to Christ. They actually ask the question, “May I believe in him? Is there salvation for me?” Why, saith the text, “This is the way.” Do not sit looking at it: “walk ye in it.” “But I am so big a sinner.” “Christ is the way; walk ye in it.” There is room enough for big sinners in Jesus. “But I have been so long coming.” Never mind: this is the way, “walk ye in it.” Never mind if you have been seventy years coming if you have come to the way at last, “Walk ye in it.” “But I am afraid my feet are so polluted that I shall stain the way:” “This is the way, walk ye in it.” You are not told to stand on one side and wait till something shall happen to you which shall persuade you to come, but here is the king’s highway, walk ye in it. Walking is the simplest of all exercises. There is no great artistic skill required in order to walk, but walking is all that is wanted. Come to Christ,—come to him anyhow. Oh soul, tumble to him somehow; trust him as best you can: and if you cannot do it without question, trust him because you must trust him, since you have nobody else to trust to. Throw yourself into Jesus’ arms; swoon away on the bosom of Christ. It is the essence of faith, to die into the life of God in Christ Jesus. This is the message which comes behind many a runaway sinner,—“This is the way, walk ye in it.”

IV. According to our text success is promised to the word. “Thine ears *shall hear* a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.” Notice, THE SUCCESS OF THE WORD,—*thine ears shall hear*. God not only gives us something to hear, but he gives us ears to hear with. Oh, the mercy of God! he spreads the table, and then he gives the appetite; he furnishes the garments, and he gives us the sense of nakedness, and so leads us to put them on. Everything that is wanted to bear a man from the gates of hell to the gates of heaven free-grace provides. Nothing is left out: the catalogue is complete: he that sends the tidings also opens the ears. “Thine ears shall hear.” This is *effectual grace*. Teachers cannot make men hear. They can appeal to the external ear, and after that they have no more that they can do; but God can make men hear. Without violating the freedom of their wills he can get at their hearts, at their consciences, at their understandings, and he can press the truth home to their souls. When the Lord does it, it is done. When we do it, it is often so done that afterwards it is undone, but verily I know that what God doeth shall be for ever. All that is of nature’s spinning will be unravelled one day; but when God spins, it will last throughout eternity.

I take it when we read here, “Thine ears shall hear,” it means first, that the message of divine love shall come to the man’s mind so as to *create uneasiness* in it. He is jauntily traversing the road to destruction: he has chosen the path, and he delights in it. It often looks to him to be a flowery way, a pleasant road. So he walks on, and he would be very happy but for that word behind him crying, “Turn ye! turn ye! turn ye!” Just as he was turning down that glade in the wood to the right, where all the flowers of spring are found in profusion, that call troubled him again! He would sooner have seen a serpent hissing in the pathway, or heard a lion roar from the thicket, than have heard that word. The man says, “I never can be quiet: I can see other people going to amusements and pleasures, and they heartily enjoy themselves; but the fact is, the more amusement I have the less I am amused, and I am never more miserable than when everybody else is laughing. Why am I thus?” He thinks he is hardly done by, and is the special object of God’s hatred. Everybody else is jolly, but he is gloomy. They can look on the wine when it is red, when it moveth itself aright, when it giveth its colour in the cup; and so could he once look into the rosy depths, but now he sees that

serpent at the bottom of it, and he is afraid to touch it lest the draught should turn to venom in his veins. He almost curses the arrangements of heaven which have made him so ill at ease. He wishes he had never heard the parson preach the sermon which bothered him so; he wishes he had never had a godly mother at all, that he might have gone straight away into sin, and have been as merry as a cricket; but now there is that voice again behind him, boring its way into his tingling ears. For a moment he had forgotten it, but there it comes again—"Turn! turn! turn! turn!" He stops his ears; but it bombards his soul with worse than cannon balls; as if the word of God pounded him with shells, he hears the thunders of the cannonade,—“Return! Return! Return!” What can he do? He longs to escape from the divine rebuke. The word has made him quiver and quake. So far so good. We shall see next what will happen to him.

After a while there gets to be a *desire* in his heart. It is only a faint and spasmodic desire,—nothing very strong or constant—but there it is, and it cannot be quenched. “I wish I could get right somehow: for in my present condition I am in an evil case; I am sailing in the wrong boat; I wish I could land somewhere, and take the return boat and get to my home. I do not feel at all easy; I wish I knew what to do to be saved. I do know it somehow, for I have heard it every Sabbath day, but yet I do not understand it; I cannot get hold of it; I wish I could, for I am anxious to be forgiven, to be renewed in the spirit of my mind, to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus.” “Do you know,” he says to someone, “that voice I could not bear, that used to wake me up at nights, that kept me out of pleasure? There is a kind of music in it now; I like to hear it: I wish I heard it so that it had an effect upon me, for I am afraid I shall go down to the pit, and be lost under accumulated responsibilities for having neglected the call of divine love. Oh, help me to come to Christ, for I am anxious to reach him, but I feel as if I could not come. I do not feel as I ought. I am told to believe, but I do not know what it means, or I cannot do it.

“I would but can’t believe,

Then all would easy be.

I would but cannot, Lord, relieve:

My help must come from thee.”

He is getting on all right, friends. We shall have a better bulletin concerning him directly. He is wonderfully improving: a great deal of the fever of pride has gone out of the man; we shall have him yet in perfect health. He could not rest because he heard too much of the word behind him, and now he cannot rest because he cannot hear enough of it: he desires that it may penetrate his soul and change him from darkness to light.

What shall happen next? As that voice continues to sound, it pulls him up, and *leads to resolve*. The word of the Lord has put a bit into his mouth and a bridle between his jaws; he does not dare go any further; he sits down to consider. I think I saw him on his knees too, and he is resolved if heaven is to be had he will have it; if mercy is to be found he will find it; he will rake the world over, but he will gain the pearl of great price. I think I heard him say he would not go to sleep till he found Jesus. I am glad he has come to that pass. Friend, you are just like the prodigal when he said, “I will arise and go to my father”; only take care you do not end in resolutions. Let it be said of you as of that same prodigal, “He arose, and came to his father”; for all our resolutions are not worth the making unless they be most earnestly and speedily carried into effect. Observe the effect of the word behind the wanderer. Cannot you see the man who was running so fast? He has pulled up. He sees a line drawn across his path, and he must not go over it. He feels that if he goes further he may never have another call of mercy, and this makes him pause. Did not we sing this morning,

“Soon that voice will cease its calling”?

The man is anxious to obey while he may. He is not yet resolved to go back, but he dares not go further.

Watch him, for the voice is calling again, and he is every now and then turning his ear round as if he wanted to hear it. “Return, return, return.” He smites upon his breast and cries, “Would God I could return; I will return, for I cannot perish; I cannot let things go as once I did; I cannot leave everything to take its own way while I take my chance. No, I must have Christ or else I die, and I must have him soon, or else I shall seal my eternal destiny, and prove a castaway for ever. O God, call again, call again; keep on calling, till I come; for lo, my spirit answers, ‘Draw me, and I will run after thee.’ When thou saidst unto me, ‘Seek ye my face,’ my heart said unto thee, ‘Thy face, Lord, will I seek.’”

What will be the last stage of this inner work? Since the man dares not go any further in this wrong way, what is he to do? He cannot turn to the right or to the left, for God has hedged up his way with thorns. Now, listen to what he will say, “I will return unto my first husband, for it was better with me then than now.” This poor soul looks on him whom he pierced. He did not know he was piercing his Redeemer; but now he sees it all, and while his eyes begin to stream with tears, he turns unto this Christ upon the cross, and finds life while looking at him. See him get up and feel as if he did not know what to do with himself as he cries,

“Blest cross; blest sepulchre; blest rather be

The man that here did shed his blood for me.”

Now he enquires, “Which is my way? Speak, sweet voice; speak, sweet voice; tell me which is my way.” And now the voice moves and speaks in front of him; for shepherds go before their sheep. The man looks and sees the Crucified One with pierced hands and feet leading the way, and he delights to follow him: ay, and he shall follow him until at the last he shall see his face in glory everlasting. Redeemed by blood and rescued by power eternal, and brought home to the great Shepherd’s fold, to go no more out for ever, the sinner shall be filled with gladness. Listen, then, listen, ye that have turned your backs on God! Infinite mercy woos you, boundless compassion entreats you to be saved. Turn ye; turn as you are, all black and filthy and bemired; tarry not to mend or wash, but come to Jesus all unholy and unclean, without a single sound speck upon your leprous frame, utterly lost and ruined. Christ died for such as you. I say again, tarry not to improve yourselves, but come now, while mercy’s voice incites you, while the Holy Ghost not only entreats, but sweetly constrains. Come and welcome, sinners, come. The Lord bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah 30.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—909, 496, 497.

Brought Up from the Horrible Pit

A Sermon

(No. 1674)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, August 13th, 1882, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord."—Psalm 40:1-3.

THIS PASSAGE HAS BEEN USED with great frequency as the expression of the experience of the people of God, and I think it has been very rightly so used. It is a very accurate picture of the way in which sinners are raised up from despair to hope and salvation, and of the way in which saints are brought out of deep troubles, and made to sing of divine love and power. Yet I am not certain that the first verse could be truthfully uttered by all of us; I question, indeed, whether any of us could thus speak. Could we say—"I waited patiently for the Lord." Think ye, brethren, might it not read—"I waited impatiently for the Lord," in the case of most of us? All the rest may stand true, but this would need to be modified. We could hardly speak in our own commendation if we considered our conduct in the matter of patience, for that is, alas, still a scarce virtue—upon the face of the earth. If we read the psalm through we shall see that it was not written exclusively to describe the experience of God's people. Secondarily we may regard it as David's language, but in the first instance a greater than David is here. The first Person who uttered these words was the Messiah, and that is quite clear if you read the psalm through; for we fall upon such language as this: "Sacrifice and offering, Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened; burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, come I in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." We need not say with the Ethiopian, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other?" For we are led at once by the plainest indications to see that He is not speaking of Himself, but of our Lord and if we needed confirmation of this we get it in Hebrews 10, where Paul expressly quotes this passage as referring to the Lord Jesus. To Him, indeed, alone of all men can it with accuracy be applied. So this morning I shall have to show that this text of ours is most fit to be the language of the Lord, our representative and covenant Head. When I have shown this, you will then see how we can use the self-same expressions, because we are in Him. Each believer becomes a mirror in which is reflected the experience of our Lord; but it would be ill for us to be so taken up with the mere reflection as to forget the express image by which this experience is formed in us.

I shall ask you, then, at this time, to observe our divine Lord when in His greatest trouble. Notice, first, *our Lord's behavior*—"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry": then consider, secondly, *our Lord's deliverance*, expressed by the phrase, "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay," and so forth: then let us think, thirdly, of *the Lord's reward* for it—"many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord":—that is His great end and object, and in it He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. We shall close, fourthly, by

perceiving *the Lord's likeness* in all His saved ones; for they also are brought up from the pit of destruction, and a new song is put into their mouths. He is not ashamed to call them brethren, since in each one of them his own experience is repeated though upon a smaller scale.

I. First, let us think of OUR LORD'S BEHAVIOR. "I waited patiently for the Lord." Here we greatly need the teaching of the Holy Ghost; may it be given us abundantly. First, our Lord's conduct when He was under the smarting rod was that of *waiting*. He waited upon the Lord all His life, and this waiting became more conspicuous in His passion and death. He went down into Gethsemane, and there He prayed earnestly; but with sweet submission; for He said, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Complete submission was the essential spirit of His prayer. He rose up from prayer all crimson with His bloody sweat, and He went to meet His foes, delivering Himself up voluntarily to be led as a sheep to the slaughter. He did not unsheathe the sword as Peter did; much less did He flee, like His disciples, but He waited upon the will of the Most High, enduring all things till the Father should give Him deliverance. When they took Him before Annas and Caiaphas, and Pilate and Herod, hurrying Him from bar to bar, how patiently He kept silence, though false witnesses appeared against Him. Like a sheep before her shearers He was dumb, submitting Himself without a struggle. In the omnipotence of patience He held His Peace even from good, because it was so written of Him. When they led Him away to crucifixion through the streets of Jerusalem He did not even encourage the lamentations of the sympathizing women who surrounded him; but in His wondrous patience He said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me." He did not refuse to bear His cross, or to let the cross bear Him. He did not complain of contempt and contumely, since these were appointed Him. When they nailed Him to the tree, and there He hung in the burning sun, tortured, fevered, agonizing, the words that escaped Him were those of murmuring and repining, but those of pity, pain, patience, and submission. Till He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost, He bowed His whole being to His Father's will, waiting His time and pleasure. He steadily took a long draft at the appointed cup, and drained it to the bitter end. His eyes were unto the Lord as the eyes of servants are to the hands of their masters; He waited in service, in hope, in resignation, and in confidence. He knew that God would help Him and deliver Him, He knew that His head would be raised on high above the sons of men; but still He waited for the Father's time, and meanwhile made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and as a servant yielded all His strength to the work which was given Him to do. He was willing in the hour of His passion to be treated as the scum and scorn of all mankind, nor did He hurry the hour when all the shame and scorn should blossom into glory and honor. He went down in His waiting even to the utmost of self-denial, and truly proved that He came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. Never man served and waited like this man.

Our text adds to this word "waited" the word "patiently." "I waited *patiently*." If you would see patience, look not at Job on the dunghill, but look at Jesus on the cross. Job, the most patient of men, was assuredly impatient at the same time; but this blessed Lord of ours gave Himself up completely, and showed not the slightest sign of repining. Not a speck of impatience can be detected in the crystal stream of our Lord's submission. His soul was all melted, and it all flowed into the mold of the Father's will: no dross was in or about Him, nothing which refused to melt and to run into the mold. One would have supposed that He would have spoken an angry word to Judas, who betrayed Him; instead of which He gently asked of Him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" It would not have seemed wonderful if He had upbraided the Jews who so falsely accused Him, or the rulers who so unjustly treated Him; but here is the patience of the saintly One, He was perfect

master of His own Spirit. His answer to His murderers was the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." So meek and lowly in heart was He that to men He gave no sharp replies: His answers were all steeped in gentleness; take for example His word to the high priest: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" They sat down around the cross and mocked Him, jeered at Him, insulted over Him, and made mirth even of His cries and prayers; but He did not utter a single word of rebuke, much less did He leap from the cross to dash His mockers in pieces, and prove by their destruction that He was indeed the mighty Son of God. "I waited patiently," saith He. No thought or word or deed of impatience can be charged upon Him; waiting, He waited, and waited still. We are in such a hurry when we are in trouble; we hasten to escape from it at once; every minute seems an hour, and every day an age. "Help me speedily, my God!" is the natural cry of the child of God under the rod; but our Saviour was in no ill haste to get from the chastisement which came upon Him for our sakes: He was at leisure in His woe. So thoroughly was He resolved to do His Father's will that even on the morning of His resurrection He arose with deliberation, and quitted the grave in order, folding His grave—clothes and laying the napkin by itself. He steadily persevered in all His work of holiness and sorrow of sacrifice, never accepting deliverance till His work was done. Patiently He endured to have His ear bored to the door-post, to have His head encircled with thorns, His cheeks disdained with spittle, His back furrowed with the lash, His hands and feet nailed to the wood, and His heart pierced with the spear. In His body on the tree patience was written out in crimson characters.

Now, this was needful for the completeness of His atonement. No expiation could have been made by an impatient Saviour. Only a perfect obedience could satisfy the law; only an unblemished sacrifice could put away our sins. There must not, therefore, be about our Substitute a trace of resistance to the Father's will, nor as a sacrifice must He struggle against the cords, or turn His head away from the sacrificial knife. In truth, His was a willing, patient doing and suffering of the divine will. "He *gave* His back to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting." "I waited patiently for the Lord," saith He; and you know, brethren, how true was the declaration.

But while the Saviour thus waited, and waited patiently, we must not forget that He waited *prayerfully*, for the text speaks of a cry which He lifted up, and of God's inclining Himself to it. That patience which does not pray is obstinacy. A soul silent to God is apt to be sullen rather than submissive. A stoical patience hardens itself against grief, and asks no deliverance; but that is not the patience which God loves, it is not the patience of Christ. He used strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death. Let Gethsemane tell of that wrestling which infinitely excelled the wrestling of Jacob: Jabbok is outdone by Kedron. His was a wrestling, not to sweat alone, but unto sweat of blood: he sweats who works for bread, the staff of life; but He sweats blood who works for life itself. What prayers those must have been under such a fearful physical, mental, and spiritual agony which were so fervent that they brought an angel from the throne, and yet so submissive that they are the model of resignation. He agonized as earnestly as if He sought His own will, and yet He wholly resigned Himself to the Father, saying, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God." Our Lord was always praying: there never was a moment in His life in which He was not in full communion with God, unless we except the period when He cried, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" He did often go aside to pray a more special prayer, but yet even when He spoke to the people, even when He faced His foes, His soul was still in constant fellowship with His Father. But ah, when He came between the upper and

the nether millstones, when this good olive was ground in the olive press, and all the oil of His life was extracted from Him, then it was that His strong crying and tears came up before the Lord His God, and He was heard in that He feared.

Now, brothers and sisters, look at your pattern, and see how far short you have come of it. At least, I will remember with regret how far short I have come of it. Have we waited? Have we not been in too great a hurry? Has it not been too much our desire that the Lord might make His will like our will rather than make our will like His? Have you not had a will of your own sometimes, and a strong will too? Have you not been as the bullock unaccustomed to the yoke? Have you not kicked against the pricks? You have not waited, but you have worried. Can we say that we waited patiently? Oh, that patience! Every man thinks he has it until he needs it, but only let his tender point be touched, and you will see how little patience he possesses. It is the fire which tires our supposed resignation, and under that process much of our palace of patience burns like wood, hay, and stubble. Old crosses fit the shoulder, but let a new cross be laid upon us and we writhe under it. Suffering is the vocation of a Christian, but most of us come short of our high calling. Our Lord Jesus has joined together reigning and suffering, for we read of "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ"; He was the royal example of patience, but what are we? Remember, again, that Jesus prayed importunately while He waited: "being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly." Have we not at times restrained prayer? Have we not pleaded as an excuse for our feeble petitions the very facts which ought to have been a spur to our earnestness? "I felt too ill to pray." Coldest thou not pray for health with all the more fervency? "I felt too burdened to pray." Shouldst thou not pray for help to bear thy burden? Can we ever safely say to ourselves, "I may be excused from supplication now, for my sorrow is great." Talk not so. Here is thy balm and benediction, thy comfort and thy cordial: here is thy strength and succor, thy constancy and confidence. Even in the midnight of the soul let us arise and pour out our hearts like water before the Lord. O tried believer, get thee to thy knees, and from above the mercy-seat the glory of the Lord shall shine forth upon thee. Pray even as Jesus did, and as all His saints have done, so shall you in patience possess your soul. In due time the Lord inclined to the afflicted suppliant, listening to his moaning from the bottom of the pit; of this it is high time for us to speak. Yet let us not leave this first point till we learn from the example of our Lord that patience is seen in waiting as well as in suffering. To bear a great weight for an hour or two is nothing compared with carrying a load for many a day. Patience knows its letters, but waiting reads the page, and praying rehearses it in the ears of God. Let us add to our patience waiting, and to waiting prayer.

II. We come, secondly, to consider OUR LORD'S DELIVERANCE. In due time, when patience had had her perfect work, and prayer had at last prevailed, our suffering Lord was brought up again from the deeps of sorrow. His deliverance is set forth under two images.

First, it is represented as a *bringing up out of a horrible pit*. It is a terribly suggestive metaphor. I have been in the dungeon in Rome in which, according to tradition, Peter and Paul were confined (though, probably, they were never there at all). It was indeed a horrible pit, for originally it had no entrance but a round hole in the rock above; and when that round hole at the top was blocked with a stone, not a ray of light nor a particle of fresh air could possibly enter. The prisoners were let down into the cavern, and there they were left. When once the opening was closed they were cut off from all communication with their fellow men. No being has ever been so cruel to man as man. Man is the worst of monsters to his kind, and his cruel inventions are many. He has not been content to leave his fellows their natural liberty, but he built prisons and dug pits in which to

shut up his victims. At first they would place a man in a dry well merely for custody and confinement, or they would drop him into some hollow cavern in the earth in which corn or treasure had been concealed; but afterwards with greater ingenuity of malice they covered over the top of these pits so that the prisoners could not be partakers of God's bountiful air, or the merciful light of the sun, or the silver sheen of the moon. Covered all over and shut in, the captives were buried alive. Even in modern times we have seen what they call *oubliettes*, or dungeons in which prisoners were immured, to be forgotten as dead men out of mind, buried so as never to come forth again. Such unfortunates as were doomed to enter these tombs of living men bade farewell to hope. They were inhabitants of oblivion, dwellers in the land of death shade, to remain apart from their kind, cut off from memory. These worst of dungeons may illustrate our text—"He brought me up also out of a horrible pit."

In the original we get the idea of a crash, as when some mailed warrior in the midst of the battle stumbles into a pit, and there he lies bruised and broken: and there is the thought of the fall of waters rushing strangely, furiously, mysteriously. The Hebrew hath it, "The pit of noises," or as some render it, "the pit of destruction." Such was the condition of our dear Redeemer when He was bearing our sin and suffering in our stead.

Just notice, first, that our Lord was like a man put into a pit, and so made to be *quite alone*. Imagine yourself now confined in one of those caverns, with the big stone rolled over the mouth of it. There would be neither hearing nor answering. Now will you know the dread solemnity of silence. You may speak, but no gentle whisper of sympathy will reach your ears in return; you may cry again and again and make the dungeon's dome echo to your voice, but you are speaking as to brass—no man cares for your soul. You are alone; alone in a fearful solitude. Thus it happened to our Saviour. All His disciples forsook Him and fled, and what was infinitely worse, His God forsook Him too. He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Can any man tell me all that was meant by that infinite lament?

Of course, a prisoner in such a pit as that was *in total darkness*. He could not see the walls which enclosed him, nor so much as his own hand. No beam of sunlight ever wandered into that stagnant air; the captive would have to grope for the pitcher of water and the morsel of bread which a cruel mercy would allot to him. Our Lord was in the dark; midnight brooded over His spirit. He said—"Now is my soul troubled." "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." His was a pit of gloom, the region of the shadow of death, a land of darkness as darkness itself

When a man is shut up in a pit he is, of course, *full of distress*. If you were, any of you, to go into one of the solitary cells of our own jails, I warrant you a short sojourn in it would be quite enough. These cells some years ago were thought to be wonderful cures for all sort of evil dispositions in men, but probably they have oftener destroyed reason than conquered depravity. Go in, if you dare. Ask the warder to shut to the door, and leave you in the dark all alone, that you may try the solitary system for yourself. No, I should not advise you to try it even for five minutes, for you might even in that short pace inflict such an injury upon your nervous system as you would never recover. I believe that many of the gentler ones here would be quite unable to bear total darkness and solitude even for the shortest space. In the grim gloom the soul is haunted with phantom fears, while horror peoples the place which is empty of human beings; the heart is worried with evil imaginations, and pierced with arrows of distress; grief takes hold of the spirit, and alarm conquers hope. In our Lord's case, the grief and sorrow which He felt can never be described, nor need it be conceived. It was something tantamount to the miseries of damned souls. The holy Jesus

could not feel the exact misery which takes hold on abandoned rebels, but He did suffer what was tantamount to that at the judgment—seat of God. He gave a *quid pro quo*, a something which in God's esteem, reckoning the dignity of His mighty person, stood instead of the sinner's eternal suffering. He felt woe upon woe, night blackening night. Do not try to realize His agony; He wills that you should note, for He has trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there we're none with Him, as if to show that none could understand His sorrows, and that we can do no more than speak of His "unknown sufferings."

But I must add, to complete the figure, that shut up in such a pit there might be a great tumult above, like to the tramping of armed hosts, or there might be a rush of waters underneath the captive deep in earth's bowels. He could not tell what the noise was, nor whence it came; and hence he would often be in terrible fear while he sat alone in the thick darkness. Our Lord had His fears, for we read that He was heard in that He feared. Torrents of sin rushed near Him; floods of wrath were heard around Him, and cataracts of grief fell upon Him. Besides, there was a mystery about this anguish which intensified it—a mystery not to be written or explained. Our Redeemer's spirit was cast down within Him far beyond anything that is common to men; in that horrible pit, that pit of destruction, He lay with none to pity or sustain.

But, Oh, change the strain, and sing unto the Lord awhile, as we read the verse, "He brought me up out of a horrible pit." The Lord Jesus Christ was lifted up from all sorrow of spirit at that moment when He said so bravely, "It is finished," and though He died yet was He lifted up from death, as it is written, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." His Spirit ascended to God, and by-and-by, when the third day had blushed with morning light, His body rose from the tomb, to ascend in due time to glory. He came up out of the pit of the grave, delivered from all fear of corruption, pain, or defeat. Now His sorrow is ended, and His brow is clear from care. His visage is marred no more: He bears the scars which do but illumine His hands and feet with splendor, but

No more the bloody spear,
The cross and nails no more,
For hell itself shakes at his name,
And all the heavens adore.

Sing ye unto the Lord, ye saints of His, as ye behold your Master brought up again from among the sorrowful, the despised, the deserted, the dead.

A second figure is, however, used here to express our Lord's grief and deliverance from it—"Out of the miry clay." Travelers tell us that wherever pits are still used as dungeons, they are damp, foul and utterly loathsome; for they are never cleansed, however long the prisoner may have been there, or however great the number of victims shut up within them. You know what the prisons of Europe were in Howard's days, they were even worse in the East in periods further back. The imprisoned wretch often found himself sinking in more; he found no rest, no hope of comfort, and when extricated he needed a hand to drag him out of the thick clay. Our blessed Lord and Master found Himself when He was suffering for us where everything appeared to give way beneath Him; His spirits sank, His friends failed Him, and His heart melted like wax. Every comfort was taken from Him. His blessed manhood found nothing upon this earth upon which it could stay itself, for He had been made sin for us, made a curse for us, and so every foundation of comfort departed from Him. He was deprived of visible support, and reduced to a sad condition. As a man who has fallen into a slough cannot stir so as to recover himself, so was it with our Redeemer, who says in

the Psalms—"I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing." Some morasses are so destructive that, if a man should once fall into them, he might give up his life for lost unless some one came that way to drag him out. So did the Saviour sink in the miry clay of our sin and misery until the Lord Almighty lifted Him out. The clay of sorrow clung to Him; it held to Him while He was performing the great work of our redemption. But the Lord brought Him up out of it. There is no mire upon His garments now: his feet no longer sink, He is not held by the bands of death, He slides not into the grave again. He was dragged down, as it were, by hearing our sin, but that is over, and He hath ascended on high: He hath led captivity captive, and received gifts from men. All honor be unto Him, and to His Father who delivered Him.

As we read our text we pursue this story of our Master's deliverance, and we are told that *He was brought up* out of the lowest deeps. Say the words or sing them as you choose—"He brought me up." God upraised His obedient Son from the depths into which He had descended on our account. He was brought up, like Jonah who went to die bottom of the mountains, and yet was landed safely on the shore. He was brought up like Joseph, who rose from a pit to a palace; like David, who was led up from the sheepfold to the kingdom. "The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! His glory is great in thy salvation: honor and majesty hast thou laid upon him. For thou hast made him most blessed forever: Thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance."

Then we are told *He was set on a rock*, and oh, the glory of our blessed Lord in this matter, for now He stands on a firm foundation in all that He does for us. Judgment and truth confirm His ways, and the Judge of all the earth approves His doings. Christ has no sandy foundation for His work of mercy or His word of comfort. When He saves He has a right to save: when He puts away sin He does it on indisputable grounds: when He helps and delivers His people He does it according to law, according to the will of the Highest. As Justifier, Preserver, and Perfecter of His people, He stands upon a rock. This day I delight to think of my Lord as settling His church with Himself upon the immutable foundations of the covenant, on the decree of God, on the purpose of the Father, on His own work, and on the promise of God that He would reward Him in that work. Well may we say that His feet are upon a rock, for He is Himself, by another figure, the Rock of ages, the Rock of our salvation.

And now the *goings of our glorious Christ are established*. When He goes out to save a sinner, He knows that He can do it, and has a right to do it. When He goes up to His Father's throne to make intercession for sinners, His goings are established, and the desire of His heart is given Him. When He comes in among His church, or marches forth with his people to the ends of the earth, His goings are established. "For the king trusteth in the Lord, and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved." He shall surely come a second time without sin unto salvation, for so has the Father decreed: His glorious goings are as surely established as were those of His labor and suffering. We shall never be without a Saviour: we shall never have a fallen or a vanquished Saviour; for His goings are established for continuance, certainty, and victory. Such honor have all His saints; for "the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord"; and again, "none of his steps shall slide."

Best of all, there is *a new, song in the mouth of our Well-beloved*. It is grand to think of Jesus singing. Read the twenty-second Psalm, and you will find Him doing it, as also in the Hebrews: "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Toward the end of His earthly career you hear Him bursting into song. Was not that a grand occasion just before His passion, when He was

going out to die; we read that “after supper they sang a hymn.” If we had been bound to die that night, as He was, we should rather have wept or prayed than sang. Not so our Lord. I do not know what psalm they sang: probably a part of the great Hallel, usually sung after the Passover, which consists of those Psalms at the end of the book which are so full of praise. I believe the Saviour Himself pitched the tune and led the strain. Think of Him singing when near His hour of agony! Going to scorn and mockery, singing! Going to the thorn-crown and the scourge, singing! Going to death, even the death of the cross, singing! For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame! But now, what must that new song be which He leads in heaven? “They sang, as it were, a new song before the throne”; but it is He that leads the heavenly orchestra. How greatly He excels Miriam, the sister of Moses, when she took her timbrel and led forth the women in their dances, saying, “Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” This is called “the song of Moses, the servant of God and of the Lamb”; so I gather that the Lamb’s new song is after the same triumphant fashion: it is the substance of that which Moses’ song foreshadowed. In Christ Jesus the Lord our God has led captivity captive. Let us praise Him on the high sounding cymbals. Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously. The powers of darkness are destroyed; sin, death, and hell are drowned in the atoning blood: the depths have covered them: there is not one of them left. Oh, “sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.” “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”

III. Such is the exalted condition of our Lord at this hour; let us turn and look upon THE LORD’S REWARD. The Lord’s reward for having gone down into the horrible pit, and having gunk in the miry clay for us, is this—that “Many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord. “*Many!*” Not all mankind, but “many” shall look to Jesus and live. Alas! Vast numbers continue in unbelief, but “many” shall believe and live; and the Lord’s “many” means very many. As I was thinking over my text, I thought, “I hope there will be some at the Tabernacle this morning that belong to the I many who shall see and fear and trust in the Lord.” “Many *shall*” for the Lord hath promised it. But, Lord, they will not. “But they shall,” says God. Oh, but many refuse. “But they shall,” says God and He hath the key of men’s hearts, and power over their judgments and their wills. “Many shall.” Do you, oh ye unbelievers, think that Jesus shall die in vain? Oh, sinners, if you will not have Christ, others will. You may despise Him, but He will be none the less glorious. You may reject His salvation but He shall be none the less mighty to save. He is a king, and ye cannot pluck a single jewel from His crown. If you are so foolish as to provoke His iron rod so that He shall break you in shivers with it, yet He will be glorious in the sight of God, and He will save His own. Notwithstanding your hardness of heart, be this known unto you, oh House of Israel, that “many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord.”

What shall the many do? They shall “*see*.” Their eyes shall be opened, and they shall see their Lord in the horrible pit, and in the miry clay, and as they look they shall see that He was there for them. What joy this will create in their spirits! If they do not see the Lord Jesus as their Substitute they shall, at any rate, be made to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin. If when Jesus only takes imputed sin, and has no sin of His own, yet He must be cast into the horrible pit and sink in the miry clay; then what will become of men who have their own sins about them, provoking the fierce anger of the Lord? If God thus smites His well—beloved, oh sinner, how will He smite you! Beware, ye that forget Him, lest He tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you. By the suffering Surety all covered with His own gore, I do beseech you, provoke not God; for if His

Only—Begotten must suffer so, you must suffer yet more if you break His law, and next reject His gospel.

“Many shall see.” Do you wonder that it is added, “and shall *fear*?” It makes men fear to see a bleeding Christ, and to know that they crucified Him. It makes men fear, however, with a sweet filial fear that is akin to hope, when they see that Jesus died for sinner, the Just for the unjust, to bring them to God. Oh, when they see the Lord of love acting as a scapegoat, and bearing their sins away into the wilderness of forgetfulness, they begin to hate their evil ways, and to have a reverent fear of God; for so saith the Scripture, “there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.”

But best of all—and this is the chief point—they come to “*trust* in the Lord.” They build their hope of salvation upon the righteousness of God as manifested in Christ Jesus. Oh, I would to God that some of you would trust Him at once. Beloved friend, are you trying to be saved by your own works? That is a delusion. Are you hoping to be saved by your own feelings? That is a lie. But you can be saved, you shall be saved: if you will trust yourself with that blessed One who was alone in the dark pit of noises for the sake of sinners, and slipped in the miry clay for the ungodly, you shall assuredly be saved from wrath through Him. Trust Him, and as surely as He liveth you shall be saved; for he that trusteth in Him cannot perish. God’s truthfulness were gone if the believer could be lost. Hath He not said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” The throne of God must rock and reel before the cross.

IV. Fourthly, let us see THE LORD’S LIKENESS in His people. This whole passage, as I said in the beginning, has often been used by individual believers as a description of their own deliverance. It is a true picture, because we are made like unto our Head, and all the brethren are partakers of that which the Head has endured. Do I speak to any of my Master’s servants in sore trouble? Dear friends, are you made to wait, though your trial is sharp and severe? Is it so that your prayer has not yet been answered? Then remember the waiter’s place was once occupied by the Lord Jesus, for He says, “I waited patiently.” If the Lord keeps you waiting for a certain blessing year after year do not despair. He will give it at length if it be truly for your good, for He hath said, “no good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly.” He kept His Son waiting, and He may very well keep you in like posture, for how long did you delay, and cause the Lord of grace to wait on you! “Blessed are they that wait for Him.” I have seen people very uppish when they have called on a public man and have had to wait a little; they feel that they ought not to be kept in the lobby, but suppose some young man said to them, “I am his own son, and yet I have been waiting an hour.” Then they are more patient. So when God keeps you waiting do not be proud, and say, “Wherefore should I wait for the Lord any longer?” but remember “It is good for a man both to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God.” Jesus waited—“waited patiently.” Seek to be like Him, and in patience possess your soul. “I cannot see how I am to be delivered.” Wait. “Ah, this is such a heavy burden.” Wait. “But I am ready to die under this terrible load.” Wait! Wait on! Though He tarry, wait for Him: He is worth waiting for. “Wait” is a short word, but it takes a deal of grace to spell out its full meaning, and still more grace to put it in practice. Wait: wait. “Oh, but I have been unfortunate.” Wait. “But I have believed a promise, and it has not been fulfilled.” Wait; for you wait in blessed company: you may hear Jesus saying, “I waited patiently.” Blessed be His name, He is teaching us to do the same by His gracious Spirit.

Next, the Lord may send you, His dear child, a very heavy sorrow: you may fall into the horrible pit, and see no light, no comfort, and no one may be able to cheer you or help you. Some that have a touch of despondency in their nature have been brought so low as almost to despair of life. They

have sat in darkness and seen no light: they have felt the walls of their prison and have not discovered a crack or cranny through which escape was possible: they have looked up, and even then they have seen nothing to console them. Ah, well, here is a word I commend to you—the Saviour says it: “He brought me up.” The Lord God can and will bring up His troubled ones. You will have to write in your dairy one of these days. “He brought me up.” I was in the dark, I was in the dungeon, but “He brought me up.” I can personally say this with gladsome gratitude, for He hath brought me up,” again and again. My heart is glad as I reflect upon my past deliverances. I have often wondered why I so often shut up in prison, and bound as with fetters of steel; but I cease to wonder when I think of the many among you who are called to wear the like bonds. This is my portion, that I may be a witness-bearer for my God, and that I may be able to speak to the experiences of God’s tempted people, and tell how graciously the Lord delivers His servants who trust in Him. Faith shall never be shamed or confounded, world without end. God can and will hasten to the rescue of the faithful. I set to my seal also that “He brought me up”; and, beloved brother in tribulation, He will bring *you* up; only rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.

“Ah,” say you, “But I do not know how to stand, for I sink as in miry clay, through faintness of heart: I cannot find the slightest foothold for my hope.” No, you are sinking in the miry clay like your Master; but in answer to prayer the Lord will bring you up out of your hopeless state, and He will set your feet upon a rock and establish your goings, and give you joy, and peace, and delight. Wherefore see, and fear, and trust in God, and give glory to His blessed name.

Lastly, do I address any seeking one who finds no rest for the sole of his foot? Dear friend, are you sinking in the deep mire of your guilt? The Lord can pardon you, for “the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” Are you shut up by conscience in the prison-house under a just sense of deserved wrath? Jesus will give you immediate rest if you come to Him. Do you feel as if you cannot kneel to pray, for your very knees slip in the mire of doubt? Remember, Jesus makes intercession for the transgressors. Do you seem as if, every time you move, you are burying your hope, and slipping deeper and deeper into ruin? The Lord hath plenteous redemption. Do not despair. You cannot not deliver yourself, but God can deliver you: you cannot stand of yourself, but God can make you to stand. You cannot go to Him nor go abroad among your fellow-men with comfort, but the Lord can make you to run in His ways. You shall yet go forth with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Only see Christ, and fear and trust your God, and you too shall sing unto Jehovah your deliverer, and this shall be your song:—

He raised me from a horrid pit,
 Where mourning long I lay,
 And from my bonds released my feet,
 Deep bonds of miry clay.
 Firm on a rock he made me stand,
 And taught my cheerful tongue
 I praise the wonders of his hand
 In a new thankful song.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 40.

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