



# **Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 30: 1884**

by

*Charles Spurgeon*

## About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 30: 1884* by Charles Spurgeon

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## Knowledge. Worship. Gratitude.

A Sermon

(No. 1763)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“So that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.”—Romans 1:20, 21

THOSE who boast of their knowledge betray their ignorance. Knowledge is not a possession to be proud of, since it brings with it so great a responsibility that a nurse might as well be proud of watching over a life in peril. Knowledge may become good or ill according to the use which is made of it. If men know God, for instance, and then glorify him as God, and are thankful, their knowledge has become the means of great blessing to them; but if they know God, and fail to glorify him, their knowledge turns to their condemnation. There is a knowledge which does not puff up the mind, but builds up the soul, being joined with holy love. Did not our Lord say, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent”? But for men to know God, and not to glorify him as God, and to be unthankful, is according to our text, no benefit to them: on the contrary, it becomes a savour of death unto them, because it leaves them without excuse. Our Saviour could plead for some, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” But what plea is to be used for those who know what they do, and yet do evil; who know what they ought to do, and do it not? These have the light, and close their eyes; or, to use another figure, they have the light, and use it to sin by. They take the golden candlestick of the sanctuary into their hands, and by its help they perform their evil deeds the more dexterously, and run in the way of wickedness the more swiftly. Accursed is that man who heaps to himself knowledge till he becomes wise as Solomon, and then prostitutes it to base ends by using it to aggrandize his wealth, to pamper his appetites, to bolster his unbelief, or to conceal his vices. A man may by knowing more become all the more a devil. His growing information may only increase his condemnation. It is clear, then, that knowledge is not a possession of such unmingled good that we may grow vain of it; better far will it be if the more we know the more we watch and pray. Go on and read, young man. Go on and study with the utmost diligence. The more of knowledge you can acquire the better; but take care that you do not, like Sardanapalus, heap up your treasures to be your own funeral pile. Do not by a rebellious pride curdle the sweet milk of knowledge, and sour your precious blessing into an awful curse. It is soon done, but not so soon undone. It was the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil the eating of which brought all this evil upon us which ye see this day. Ye may eat of that tree still, if so it please you; but if ye taste not of the tree of life at the same time, your knowledge shall only open to you the gates of hell. Knowledge of itself alone is as land which may either become a blooming garden or a howling wilderness. It is a sea out of which you shall bring pearls or dead men’s bones. Life and death, heaven and hell, are here: if it was said of old, “Take heed what you hear,” I also say, “Take heed what you know.”

The people mentioned by Paul in our text fell into two great evils, or rather into two forms of one great evil—theism: the atheism of the heart, and the atheism of the life. They knew God, but they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful.

We will first consider *the first sin mentioned here*, and then *the second*. I shall not look at these two evils as if you were Romans, because I know that you are not, but I shall adapt the text to your own case, and speak of these sins, as Englishmen are too apt to commit them. Thirdly, *let us view the consequences*, or, what comes of men not glorifying God, and not being thankful. Then, fourthly, *let us fly from these sins immediately, God helping us*. O Holy Spirit, help the preacher now, for all his help is in thee!

I. At once, then, let us look at this first sin, a sin very common in these days. **THEY KNEW GOD, BUT THEY GLORIFIED HIM NOT AS GOD.** Even in old Rome, with all its darkness, there was some knowledge of God: how can the creature quite forget its Creator? Of course the people had not that spiritual knowledge which the Holy Ghost communicates to the renewed heart, for the carnal mind cannot know God spiritually: its fleshly ideas cannot come near to his holy spirituality. But Paul means that they perceived the eternal power and Godhead of the Great Former of all things; and they might have perceived much more of his divine character and glory if their foolish hearts had not been darkened by their evil passions. When you go among the heathen, whether they are Pantheists or Polytheists, or whatever they may be, there is still a notion in the background of all their mythology of some one great superior being, elevated above those whom they call gods, some serenely just father, preserver, avenger, and rewarder of men. The most debased of mankind are still found to have some measure of knowledge of the great Creator: they hold the truth, though they hold it in unrighteousness. They can as soon shut their eyes to the sun, as completely blind their mind to the fact that there is a God. Some among the heathen no doubt attained to a very considerable knowledge of God, or at least they walked upon the borders of marvellous discoveries of the Godhead. We are greatly surprised at the language of Socrates, and Plato, and Seneca, and others: such men have lately been held up as patterns; but if their lives are studied, they will be found to be sadly defaced with what Paul fitly calls “vile affections.” These were wise men, but the world by wisdom knew not God; they were great thinkers, but a clear revelation of God was not in all their thoughts. They did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and so they remained steeped in loathsome vice which we dare not mention, for it is a shame even to speak of the things which were done of the most enlightened of them in secret. They had knowledge, but they forgot its responsibilities: they knew God, but they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful.

We may now let all the heathen go, for it is more true of us than it is of them, that we know God. Those to whom I am speaking to-night dwell where the name of God is familiar, where the gospel of God sounds like a trumpet in their streets, where the character of God is painted with the finger of light upon the blessed pages of the Bible, and where the Spirit of God takes care that the consciences of men shall be enlightened. We know God, but I am afraid that there are many thousands and millions of our fellow-creatures who glorify him not as God; let us see to it that we do not ourselves belong to the unhappy number.

Those do not glorify God as God *who do not trace all their good things to God*. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,” but many ungrateful hearts forget this truth, and receive the blessings of this life with dumb mouths and cold hearts. In the old time there were those who traced everything they saw to what they called “Chance”; that misformed deity has been laid aside,

and on its pedestal men have set up another idol known as "Nature." Nowadays swarms of people attribute everything that is great and wonderful to "Nature":— they talk for ever of "the beauties of Nature," "the grandeur of Nature," "the laws of Nature;" but God is as little spoken of as if he were not alive. As to laws of Nature, these occupy with moderns much the same place as the deities of Olympus with the ancients. What are laws of Nature but the ordinary ways in which God works? I know of no other definition of them. But these people attribute to them a sort of power apart from the presence of the Creator. One standing up in the street, venting his infidelity, said that we could not do better on Sunday than go abroad and worship Nature. There was nothing that was so refining and elevating to the mind as Nature. Nature did everything. A Christian man in the crowd ventured to ask, "What is Nature?" And the gentleman said, "Well, Nature—well—it is Nature. Don't you know what it is? It is Nature." No further definition was forthcoming; I fear the term is only useful as enabling men to talk of creation without being compelled to mention the Creator. I find nowadays that people talk about "Providence," and yet discard God. Among the vulgar and the ungodly this is another subterfuge to avoid the ascribing of their blessings to the Giver of them. A farmer, whose crops had failed a second time, was consoled by a clergyman, because he suffered from the hand of Providence. "Yes," said he, "that Providence is always treating me shamefully: but there's one above that will stop him." The poor soul had heard of Providence till he thought it an evil power, and hoped that the good God would curb its mischievous influence. This comes of not speaking plainly of God. For what is Providence? Can there be such a thing without the constant working of the Great Provider? Men talk of "Foresight." But is there any foresight without an eye? Is there not some living eye that is watching for our good, some living hand that is following up the eye, and providing our needs? Man does not like to think of his God. He wants to get away into a far country, away from God his Father; and he will adopt any sort of phrase which will help him to clear his language of all trace of God. He longs to have a convenient wall built up between himself and God. The heathen often attributed their prosperity, to "fortune"; some of them talked of "chance;" others discoursed of "fate." Anything is to man's taste rather than blessing the great Father, and adoring the one God. If they prospered, they were "lucky"; this was instead of gratitude to God. They looked into the almanac to find lucky days; this instead of faith in the Most High. They were superstitious, and ask their priest to tell them what would be a fortunate time for commencing an undertaking; this instead of resting upon the goodness of the Lord. Have we not some now who bless their good luck, and still talk about their fortunate stars? God, whom they know they do not honour as God.

Yes, and we have among us men who talk neither of "fortune" nor of "Nature," but of themselves. They are styled "self-made men," and they are very prone to worship the great self who made them: they are never backward in that cult. Their adoration of themselves is constant, reverent, and sincere. "Self-made men," indeed! Infinitely better is it to be a God-made man. If there be anything about us that is worth the having, it must be from him from whom every good gift and every perfect gift has evermore descended; let us therefore give *Him* thanks. There is no other sun for our sky than your sun in the heavens: there is no other source of good but the ever-blessed God, who has made himself known to us, whom with all our hearts we now adore.

But may I not be addressing some who, at this moment, do not bow before God, and bless him for their prosperity? They attribute it to their industry, and to their good luck. Oh, sirs, you come under the head of those who know God, and yet do not glorify him as God; neither are you thankful. The Lord help such to confess this sin, and may his grace wash them clean of it, for indeed it is a

great and heinous sin in the judgment of the Most High. Justice makes a black mark against those who do not ascribe their good things to God, from whom they flow with such sweet constancy of kindness.

But we can also commit that sin, in the next sense, *by not feeling any obligation laid upon us through partaking of the divine bounty*. Are there not many rich men to whom it never occurs to feel bound to serve the Lord who gave them power to get wealth? Are there not many healthy persons, sound of limb, and strong in constitution, who yet do not praise the God who has kept them from sickness and death? Are we any of us sufficiently grateful for our talents, our faculties, our friends, our daily provisions? Do we not all receive a large amount of blessing for which we do not render praise to God? The fact that every mercy brings an obligation with it, and we that receive most ought to render most; for we receive nothing from God without being thereby naturally and of right laid under bonds to return to him the glory due unto his name. We are tenants, whose rent is to be paid in service and praise. It is a very blessed obligation! It is a happy bond to be bound to praise and bless God! Praise is no more a burden to a true heart than song to a bird, or perfume to a flower, or twinkling to a star. Adoration is no taxation. God's revenue of glory comes from myriads of free-will offerings, which gracious spirits delight to present to him all their days. Yet there are some who know God, but they glorify him not as God: they rob him of that which it should be their life to bring. They seem to say that they are their own, and not God's: they may live as they please; they may serve themselves. God is not in all their thoughts; and, as to spending and being spent in the service of him who gave them being, it has not yet crossed their minds. God's complaint concerning them is a just one,—“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doeth not know, my people doeth not consider.” God grant us grace to avoid this cruel provocation, and may we glorify God as God by practically owning the obligation under which his mercy places us.

Many may be met with who know God, but never glorify him as God, because *they never adore him, and worship him, with the love of their hearts*. They go to church or to some place of worship regularly, and sing psalms and hymns, and they may even have family-prayer at home; but their heart has never adored the living God with living love. Their worship has a name to live, but it is dead. They present to the Lord all the eternal harvest of worship, but the corn is gone, only the straw and the husk are there. And what is the value of your husky prayers? your prayers without a kernel, made up of the straw of words, and the chaff of formality? What is the value of professions of loyalty from a rebel? What is the worth of professed friendship to God when your heart is at enmity against him? Is it not a mockery of God to present to him a sacrifice “where not the heart is found”? When the Lord has to say—They come as my people, and they sit as my people, and they sing as my people, but their heart is far from me,—can he take any pleasure in them? May not God thus complain of many? Oh, let it not be so with you! I know that there are some here against whom that charge would lie if we preferred it—that they know God, but they do not glorify him as God, for they do not love him. The name and service of God are much on their tongues, but they do not delight in him, they do not hunger and thirst after him, they do not find prayer and praise to be their very element, but such service as they render is merely lip-service, the unwilling homage of bond-slaves, and not the delighted service of those who are the children of God. Oh, my brethren, if we accept Jehovah as the living God, let us give him the utmost love of our souls. Will you call a man brother, and then treat him like a dog? Dare you call God your God, and then act towards

him as though he were not worthy of a thought. With what joy does David cry, "I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds"! This is the kind of spirit with which to deal with the Lord. Oh, to rejoice in God all the day, and to make him our exceeding joy! Thus, and thus only, do we glorify him as God. Without the fire of love no incense will ever rise from the censer of praise. If we do not delight in God we do not fitly adore God.

There is another way of not glorifying God as God, and that is by *never recognizing his omnipresence*. Have we not among us those who on Sunday feel some kind of reverence of God, but during the six days of the week are godless? When they are in a place of worship they have some sense of God's being there; if they do not fear and tremble, yet they behave with decency and respect; but in other places they dare to act as if they were out of range of God. Do they fancy that God is not in that secret chamber where they follow out their passions? Do they imagine that he is not in that ribald company where they make mirth of sacred things? Do they imagine that out of man's sight is also out of God's sight? Do not some men so act and live as if God were either dead, or else were blind or deaf, utterly oblivious to everything that is done on the face of the earth? How blind must they be, who think God blind! May we never fall into this absurdity! May we feel that we cannot anywhere consent to sin for God is there. The whole earth is God's house: shall we abuse the King in his own palace? The skies are the roof of his temple, and beneath God's blue sky we ought not to find a place to sin in. Nowhere in time is there space for evil, nor in the universe is there room for sin. Yet, alas, how few recognize, "Thou God seest me," as being a death-blow to sin? "They know God, but they glorify him not as God," but think that he is absent either in person or in mind, and that in some great secret places they can hide away from him, and with impurity follow their own desires.

Are there not some again, and many, who do not admit the true glory of God because *the idea of his sovereignty is very horrible to them*? I lay this charge against many professing Christians—that their God is not the God of the Bible, and that they have no notion of Jehovah, the true God. The one God of heaven and earth is Jehovah—that God who said of old, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Certain professed followers of Jesus will not have this God, but they make to themselves a god who is under some degree of obligation to his sinful creatures, of whom they say that he is bound to treat all alike. These are guilty of robbing Divinity of its most majestic attribute, namely, sovereignty. They are for dictating to the King of kings, and tying the hands of infinite compassion, lest the supreme will of God should have too much liberty. I know of no such God as that: the God I worship can never do other than right, yet is he under no bond to his creatures, but ordereth all things according to the counsel of his own will. I believe that if the Lord had denied me mercy, I had so sinned that I could never have impugned his justice. When I see him save a sinner, I look not at it as a deed which he was bound to do, but as a spontaneous act, free as the air, full of his own goodness which arises entirely from himself. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." I, for one, am perfectly satisfied with everything that God does, whether of power, justice, or mercy. My heart says, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." I could have sung the song of Moses at the Red Sea, when all Egypt was drowned, and found in the drowning of the foe a deep background of joy, because I should have seen in it the carrying out of the divine will, the reign of righteousness, and the avenging of cruel tyranny. I make bold to say that I would have praised God as the waves went over Pharaoh; for the Lord did it, and he did right. I would have cried with Moses, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the

horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” I expect to be among the number, though some seem as if they would decline the service, who shall for ever bless God for all his dealings with mankind—the stern as well as those that seem more tender. The Lord God, even Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, is the God whom I worship. I do not know this new god that has lately come up, who they say is all tenderness and has none of the stern attributes of righteousness and wrath. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and in him my soul delights. Let him sway his sceptre even as he pleases. His will be done on earth even as it is in heaven. Again will we say Hallelujah, when all his everlasting purposes shall have been fulfilled, and the wicked shall be punished, and the righteous raised to their Father’s throne. To know God, and to glorify him as God, is to regard him as supreme, ungoverned, the Arbiter of all things, whose will is law. I believe in God on his throne, God giving no account of his matters, but doing his own pleasure as God over all. Short of this I could not glorify him as God.

There are some others who know God, who fail to glorify him as God, because *they do not trust him*. In revelation God has presented himself as the object of trust to his creatures, and he has promised that all who trust in him shall be forgiven their transgressions through the atonement of his Son, Jesus Christ. Such as trust him he declares shall be saved; and he sends out a messenger of mercy to all mankind, proclaiming—“He that believeth in him is not condemned.” He bids sinners come and trust under the shadow of his wing; and he declares that none that come to him will be ever cast out. Revealing himself in Christ Jesus, he pleads with guilty men. Asking nothing of them, he entreats them to accept his mercy, which he freely presents to them without money and without price. Making no distinction in the gospel-call, he bids men come to him, saying, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth; for I am God, and besides me there is none else.” When proud man replies, “No, I shall trust in myself, trust in my own works, trust in my own prayers, but I shall not trust in Christ,” then he knows God, but he glorifies him not as God, and when he perishes he will be without excuse. What kind of God is that whom we will not trust? How do we honour him when we refuse to believe him? Do we accept his Godhead, and yet refuse his mercy? This cannot be.

The counts are many against men, but this one more must be mentioned—many know God, but they never glorify him as God *by submitting themselves to him, and yielding up their members to be instruments of his glory*. If I glorify God as God, then I desire to obey God’s commandments, to spread his glory, to magnify his name. I desire in all things to please him, if indeed I treat him as God should be treated. If I know God, and yet live for my own profit, for my own honour, for my own comfort, then I do not glorify God as God. Oh, sirs, when the Lord is glorified as God, we yield ourselves to his control without a murmur. He may take what he will away from us, and we say, “It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.” He may remove every comfort from us, and cover us with sore boils and blains, but we shall sit down with Job upon the dunghill, and say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Knowing him as God will make us submissive to suffer, and quick to act. We shall feel the force of Elijah’s cry, “If the Lord be God, follow him.” We shall rouse ourselves to the utmost energy to serve him when he stands before us as really God. If we serve man and are faithful, we do the best we can for our master; but if God be our Master, oh, what service we are bound to render to him! What enthusiasm ought to be kindled in our breast by the belief that we are God’s servants! “I am thy servant,” is our happy claim, our honoured challenge. This it is that makes a man of a man, and something

more than man. Oh, to learn this lesson, and to practise it! To glorify God as God will make us akin to angels! Even you Christians may feel that this is much beyond you yet, but towards it you must ever fly. I shrink before my Lord in speaking of him, but I desire what I have not yet attained—that I may truly glorify him as my Lord and my God.

II. Now we come to consider the second sin. May the word which I may have to say about it, be blessed to many of my hearers by the power of the Holy Spirit! The second sin is “NEITHER WERE THANKFUL.” Did you know, dear friends, that unthankfulness was such a sin as this? Have you ever thought of it in this light before—that men were without excuse because when they knew God they were not thankful? Unthankfulness is a sin for which there is no excuse if it be attended with knowledge. I fear there are thousands who *call* themselves Christians, who are not thankful, and yet they never thought themselves very guilty on that account. Yet you see these sinners were without excuse, because they were guilty of a great sin before God, and that sin was unthankfulness. I tremble both for myself and you when I see want of thankfulness thus set in the front rank of sins.

How is it that we may be thankful?

I answer, first, *there is in some a want of gratitude for mercies possessed.* They receive many blessings without making a note of them, or even seeming to know that they have them. Their daily mercies seem to come in always at the back door, where the servants take them in, and never tell their master or mistress that they have arrived. They never receive their mercies at the front door with grateful acknowledgments; but they still continue dumb debtors, daily owing more, but making no attempt at a return. The Lord continues to bless them in things temporal, to keep them in health and strength, ay, and to give them the means of grace and spiritual opportunities; and they live as if these things were so commonplace that they were not worth thanking God for. Many professors are of that kind—recipients of countless mercies, but destitute of such common thankfulness as even beast might manifest. From them God hears no song of gratitude, no chirp of praise, though birds would charm the woodlands with their minstrelsy: these are worse than the dumb driven cattle, or the fishes in the brook, which do at least leap up, and mean their Maker’s praise.

Some show this unthankfulness in another way, for *they always dwell most on what they have not got.* They have manna, and that is angels’ food; but then they have no fish, and this is a ready theme for grumbling. They talk very loudly of “the fish we did eat in Egypt,” and lament those ample feasts provided by the muddy Nile. Moreover, they have none of those delightful vegetables—the leeks, and the garlic, and the onions. They have none of these rank luxuries, and therefore again they murmur, and call the manna “light bread.” They put this complaint over and over again to Moses, till Moses must have been sick of them and their garlic. They said that they could not get leeks, and cucumbers, and onions, and that they were therefore most hardly done by, and would not much longer put up with it. Thankless rebels! And have I not known some of God’s servants say that they enjoy much of the presence of their Lord, but they have no riches; and so they are not among the favoured ones. Over their poverty they fetch a deep groan. Some live in the presence of God, so they tell us, and they are full of divine delights, but yet they are greatly afflicted with aches and pains, and all the dolours of rheumatism, and therefore they murmur. I admit that rheumatism is a dreadful pain enough, but at the same time to dwell always on the dark side of things, and to forget our mercies, is a sad instance of ingratitude. We are few of us as thankful as we ought to be; and there are some people who are not thankful at all, for instead of a song

concerning their mercies, their life is one long dirge for their miseries. Must we always hear the sackbut? Is the harp never to give forth a joy-note?

Some show their unthankfulness by *fretting under their supposed ills*. They know from Scripture that even their afflictions are working for their good, yet they do not rejoice in the prospect, or feel any gratitude for the refining process through which the Lord is passing them. Heaven and perfection are left unsung, but the present processes are groaned over without ceasing. Their monotonous note is always this pain, this loss, this burden, this uncomfortable sensation, this persecution from the world, this unkindness from the saints, and so on; all this goes to show that, though they know God, they do not glorify him as God, neither are they thankful.

We can be guilty of unthankfulness, also, by *never testifying to the goodness of God*. A great many people come in and out of your houses; do you ever tell them about God's goodness to you? Did you ever take up a single ten minutes with the tale of the Lord's lovingkindness to you? Oh, what backwardness there is to testify to God as God, and to all his goodness and love! Our mouths are full of anything rather than the goodness of the Lord. Shame on our wicked lips!

Some fail, also, in their *singing of God's praises*. I love to be singing in my heart, if I may not sing with my tongue. Is it not a good thing for you house-wives, when you are about the house, to sing over everything? I remember a servant that used to sing at the washtub, and sing in the kitchen; and when some one asked her why she was always singing, she said that if it did not do anything else it kept bad thoughts out of her mind. There is a great deal in that; for bad thoughts are bad tenants, who pay no rent and foul the house. I knew a dear old Methodist preacher, who is now in heaven, who when he came downstairs of a morning was always tooting a bit of a hymn over, and he did the same in the barn, and the field. I have passed him in the street, and noted his happy melody: indeed he was always singing. He never took much notice of anybody, so as to be afraid of being overheard. Whether people heard him or not did not make much difference to him. He was singing to the Lord, not to them; and so he went on singing. I do not think he had much of a voice, or an ear for music, but his soul was made up of praise, and that is better than a musical education. God does not criticize our voice, but he accepts our heart. Oh, to be singing the praises of God every minute of our lives, and never ceasing therefrom! Do you not think that many fail in this respect? They are not preparing for heaven, where all is praise, or they would take up the joyful employment at once.

It is plain that many are not thankful to God, for they *never praise him with their substance*. Yet when the Jew was thankful, he took care to give a portion to the house of the Lord: before he would eat of his corn, he would send his sheaf to the sanctuary. If we are grateful to God, we shall feel that the first thing to do is to give of our substance an offering of thanksgiving to the Most High. But this does not strike some people, whose religion is so spiritual that they cannot endure to hear of money, and they faint at the sound of a collection. Their thankfulness rises to singing a hymn occasionally, but it never goes as far as giving a button to the cause of God. I am afraid their thankfulness is not worth more than what they pay to express it: that is to say, nothing at all. God deliver us from such a state of heart as that; and may we never, in any of these senses, be found amongst those professors, of whom it is said that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful.

III. Listen to me now carefully for two or three minutes while, in the third place, I mention, very briefly and solemnly, what was **THE RESULT OF THIS**.

They knew God, but they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful. And the first result of it was that *they fell into vain imaginings*. If we do not glorify God, the true God, we shall soon be found setting up another god. This vain-imagination business is being done quite as extensively now as in Paul's days. Depart from the inspiration of the Bible, and from the infallibility of the Spirit of God who wrote it, and where will you go? Well I cannot tell you where you will go. One wanders into one vain imagination, and one into another, till the dreamers are on all sides. I expect to see a new doctrine every day of the week now. Our thinkers have introduced an age of inventions, wherein everything is thought of but the truth of God. We do not want these novelties. We are satisfied with the word of God as we find it. But if we do not glorify God as God, and are not thankful to him for all his teachings, then away you go into vain imaginings.

And what next? Well, *away goes the mind of man into all sorts of sins*. The chapter describes unnatural lusts and horribly fierce passions. Men that are not satisfied and thankful—men that have no fear of God before their eyes—it were a shame for us to think, much more to speak, of what they will do. A heart that cannot feed at God's table will riot somewhere. He that is not satisfied with the cup that God has filled will soon be a partaker of the cup of devils. An unthankful spirit is, at bottom, an atheistic spirit. If God were God to us, we should not be unthankful to him. If God were glorified in our hearts, and we were thankful for everything that he did, we should walk in holiness, and live in submission. And if we do not thus behave ourselves, the tendency will be for us to go from bad to worse, and from worse to very worst. This has been done on a large scale by nations, whose downward course of crime began with want of thankfulness to God. It is done on a smaller scale by individuals, to whom departure from God is the beginning of a vicious career. Get away from God, and where have you gone? If you do not love him, and delight in him, whither will you stray? May the Lord tether us fast to himself, and even nail us to the cross.

It seems that these people, of whom Paul wrote, fell into all kinds of bitterness, such as envy, murder, deceit, malignity, whispering, backbiting, hating of God. They became spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, and so forth. Well, if your spirit is not sweetened by the adoration and the love of God, it will grow bitter. If love does not reign, hate will rule. Look at unthankful people. Hear them talk. Nobody's character is safe. There is no neighbour whom they will not slander. There is no Christian man whom they will not misrepresent. The very angels of God would not be safe from suspicion if they lived near to people of that kind. But when you glorify God as God, and are thankful for everything—when you can take up a bit of bread and a cup of cold water, and say with the poor Puritan, "What, all this, and Christ too?"—then are you happy, and you make others happy. A godly preacher, finding that all that there was for dinner was a potato and a herring, thanked God that he had ransacked sea and land to find food for his children. Such a sweet spirit breeds love to everybody, and makes a man go through the world cheerfully. If you give way to the other order of feeling, and do not glorify God, but quarrel with him, and have no thankfulness for his mercies, then you will suck in the spirit of the devil, and you will get into Satan's mind, and be of his temper, and by-and-by his works you will do. Oh, brothers and sisters, dread unthankfulness! Perhaps you did not think that it was so bad, but it is horrible! God help you to escape from it!

IV. And that you may escape from it, let us finish up by this exhortation. LET US FLY BY THE HELP OF GOD'S SPIRIT FROM THESE TWO SINS. *Let us glorify God, as God, every one of us.*

“Oh,” says one, “I am full of sin.” Come and glorify God, then, by confessing it to him. “Oh, but I am not pardoned.” Come and glorify him by accepting pardon through the blood of his dear Son. “Oh, but I am of an evil heart.” Come and glorify him by telling him so, and asking his Spirit to renew you in your mind. Come, yield yourself to his sweet gospel. May his blessed Spirit incline you so to do. Come, take him now to be your God. Have you forgotten him? Remember him. Have you neglected him? Seek him. Have you offended him? Mourn before him. Say, “I will arise, and go unto my Father.” Your Father waits to receive you. Glorify him as God.

And then, next, let us begin to *be very thankful*, if we have not been so before. Let us praise God for common mercies, for they prove to be uncommonly precious when they are once taken away. Bless God that you were able to walk here, and are able to walk home again. Bless God for your reason: bless him for your existence. Bless God for the means of grace, for an open Bible, for the throne of grace, for the preaching of the Word. You that are saved must lead the song. “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” Bless him for his Son. Bless him for his Spirit. Bless him for his Fatherhood. Bless him that you are his child. Bless him for what you have received. Bless him for what he has promised to give. Bless him for the past, the present, and the future. Bless him in every way, for everything, at all times, and in all places. Let all that is within you bless his holy name. Go your way rejoicing. May his Spirit help you so to do!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 1:1-22.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—103 (First version), 1032, 699.

6:10

## A Heavenly Pattern for Our Earthly Life

A Sermon

(No. 1778)

Preached on Wednesday Morning, April 30th, 1884, By

C. H. SPURGEON,

At Exeter-Hall

*Being the Annual Sermon of the Baptist Missionary Society.*

“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”—Matthew 6:10.

OUR Father’s will shall certainly be done, for the Lord “doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.” Let us adoringly consent that it shall be so, desiring no alteration therein. That “will” may cost us dear; yet let it never cross our wills: let our minds be wholly subjugated to the mind of God. That “will” may bring us bereavement, sickness, and loss; but let us learn to say, “It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.” We should not only yield to the divine will, but acquiesce in it so as to rejoice in the tribulation which it ordains. This is a high attainment, but we set ourselves to reach it. He that taught us this prayer used it himself in the most unrestricted sense. When the bloody sweat stood on his face, and all the fear and trembling of a man in anguish were upon him, he did not dispute the decree of the Father, but bowed his head and cried, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” When we are called to suffer bereavements personally, or when, as a holy brotherhood, we see our best men taken away, let us know that it is well, and say most sincerely, “The will of the Lord be done.”

God knows what will best minister to his gracious designs. To us it seems a sad waste of human life that man after man should go to a malarious region, and perish in the attempt to save the heathen: but infinite wisdom may view the matter very differently. We ask why the Lord does not work a miracle, and cover the heads of his messengers from the death shaft? No reason is revealed to us, but there is a reason, for the will of the great Father is the sum of wisdom. Reasons are not made known to us, else were there no scope for our faith; and the Lord loves that this noble grace should have ample room and verge enough. Our God wastes no consecrated life: he has made nothing in vain: he ordains all things according to the counsel of his will, and that counsel never errs. Could the Lord endow us with his own omniscience, we should not only consent to the deaths of his servants, but should deprecate their longer life. The same would also be true of our own living or dying. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints”; and therefore we are sure that he does not afflict us by bereavement without a necessity of love. We must still see one missionary after another cut down in his prime; for there are arguments with God, as convincing with him as they are obscure to us, which require that by heroic sacrifice the foundations of the African church should be laid. Lord, we do not ask thee to explain thy reasons to us. Thou canst screen us from a great temptation by hiding thyself; for if even now we sin by asking reasons, we might soon go further, and provoke thee sorely by contending against thy reasons. He who demands a reason of God is not in a fit state to receive one. In the case of the honoured men whom the Lord has removed from us this year, there is assuredly no loss to the great cause as it is viewed by the eye of God. See the great stones and costly stones laboriously brought from the quarry to the edge of the sea!

Can it be possible that these are deliberately thrown into the deep? It swallows them up! Wherefore is so much labour thrown away? These living stones might surely have been built into a temple for the Lord; why should the waves of death engulf them? Yet more are sought for, and still more: will the hungry abyss never cease to devour? Alas, that so much precious material should be lost! It is not lost. No, not a stone of it. Thus the Lord layeth the foundation of his harbour of refuge among the people. "Mercy shall be built up for ever." In due time massive walls shall rise out of the deep, and we shall no longer ask the reason for the losses of early days.

Peace be to the memories of the heroic dead! Men die that the cause may live. "Father, thy will be done." With this prayer upon our lips let us bend low in child-like submission to the will of the great Jehovah, and then gird up our loins anew to dauntless perseverance in our holy service. Though more should be taken away next year, and the next, yet we must pray on, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

My heart is grieved for the death of beloved hartley, and those noble men who preceded him to "the white man's grave." I had seen *him* especially, for it had been a joy to assist him for three years in preparing for missionary service. Alas! the preparation led to small visible results. He left us, he landed, and he died. Surely the Lord means to make further use of him; if he did not make him a preacher to the natives, he must intend that he should preach to us. I may say of each fallen missionary, "He being dead yet speaketh." "Faithful unto death," they inspire us by their example. Dying without regret in the cause of such a Master, they remind us of our own indebtedness to him. Their spirits rising to his throne are links between this Society and the glorified assembly above. Let not our thoughts go downward to their graves, but rise upward to their thrones. Does not our text point with a finger of flame from earth to heaven? Do not the dear departed ones mark a line of light between the two worlds?

If the prayer of our text had not been dictated by the Lord Jesus himself, we might think it too bold. Can it ever be that this earth, a mere drop of a bucket, should touch the great sea of life and light above and not be lost in it? Can it remain earth and yet be made like to heaven? Will it not lose its individuality in the process? This earth is subject to vanity, dimmed with ignorance, defiled with sin, furrowed with sorrow; can holiness dwell in it as in heaven? Our Divine Instructor would not teach us to pray for impossibilities; he puts such petitions into our mouths as can be heard and answered. Yet certainly this is a great prayer; it has the hue of the infinite about it. Can earth be tuned to the harmonies of heaven? Has not this poor planet drifted too far away to be reduced to order and made to keep rank with heaven? Is it not swathed in mist too dense to be removed? Can its grave-clothes be loosed? Can thy will, O God, be done in earth as it is in heaven? It can be, and it must be; for a prayer wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit is ever the shadow of a coming blessing, and he that taught us to pray after this manner did not mock us with vain words. It is a brave prayer, which only heaven-born faith can utter; yet it is not the offspring of presumption, for presumption never longs for the will of the Lord to be perfectly performed.

I. May the Holy Spirit be with us, while I first lead you to observe that **THE COMPARISON IS NOT FAR FETCHED**. That our present obedience to God should be like to that of holy ones above is not a strained and fanatical notion. It is not far-fetched, *for earth and heaven were called into being by the same Creator*. The empire of the Maker comprehends the upper and the lower regions. "The heaven, even the heavens are the Lord's"; and "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." He sustaineth all things by the word of his power both in heaven above and in the earth beneath. Jesus reigneth both among angels and men, for he is the Lord of all. If, then, heaven and

earth were created by the same God, and are sustained by the same power, and governed from the same throne, we believe that the same end will be subserved by each of them, and that both heaven and earth shall tell out the glory of God. They are two bells of the same chime, and this is the music that peals forth from them: "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah!" If earth were of the devil and heaven were of God, and two self-existent powers were contending for the mastery, we might question whether earth would ever be as pure as heaven; but as our ears have twice heard the divine declaration, "Power belongeth unto God," we expect to see that power triumphant, and the dragon cast out from earth as well as heaven. Why should not every part of the great Creator's handiwork become equally radiant with his glory? He that made can remake. The curse which fell upon the ground was not eternal; thorns and thistles pass away. God will bless the earth for Christ's sake even as once he cursed it for man's sake.

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." *It was so once.* Perfect obedience to the heavenly upon this earth will only be a return to the good old times which ended at the gate of Eden. There was a day when no gulf was digged between earth and heaven; there was scarce a boundary line, for the God of heaven walked in Paradise with Adam. All things on earth were then pure, and true, and happy. It was the garden of the Lord. Alas, that the trail of the serpent has now defiled everything. Then earth's morning song was heard in heaven, and heaven's hallelujahs floated down to earth at eventide. Those who desire to set up the kingdom of God are not instituting a new order of things; they are restoring, not inventing. Earth will drop into the old groove again. The Lord is king: and he has never left the throne. As it was in the beginning so shall it be yet again. History shall, in the divinest sense, repeat itself. The temple of the Lord shall be among men, and the Lord God shall dwell among them. "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven."

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." *It will be so at the last.* I shall not venture far into prophecy. Some brethren are quite at home where I should lose myself. I have scarcely yet been able to get out of the gospels and the epistles; and that deep book of Revelation, with its waters to swim in, I must leave to better instructed minds. "Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of that book;" to that blessing I would aspire, but I cannot yet make claim to interpret it. This much, however, seems plain,—there is to be "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." This creation, which now "groaneth and travaileth in pain," in sympathy with man, is to be brought forth from its bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Blessed be the Lord Jesus, when he brought his people out of their bondage, he did not redeem their spirits only, but their bodies also: hence their material part is the Lord's as well as their spiritual nature, and hence again this very earth which we inhabit shall be uplifted in connection with us. The creation itself shall be delivered. Materialism, out of which there has been once made a vesture for the Godhead in the person of Christ, shall become a fit temple for the Lord of hosts. The New Jerusalem shall come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride is prepared for her husband. We are sure of this. Therefore unto this consummation let us strive mightily, praying evermore, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Meanwhile, remember also that *there is an analogy between earth and heaven*, so that the one is the type of the other. You could not describe heaven except by borrowing the things of earth to symbolize it; and this shows that there is a real likeness between them. What is heaven? It is Paradise, or a garden. Walk amid your fragrant flowers and think of heaven's bed of spices. Heaven is a kingdom: thrones, and crowns, and palms are the earthly emblems of the heavenlies. Heaven is a

city; and there, again, you fetch your metaphor from the dwelling-places of men. It is a place of "many mansions"—the homes of the glorified. Houses are of earth, yet is God our dwelling-place. Heaven is a wedding-feast; and even such is this present dispensation. The tables are spread here as well as there; and it is our privilege to go forth and bring in the hedge-birds and the highwaymen, that the banqueting-hall may be filled. While the saints above eat bread in the marriage supper of the Lamb, we do the like below in another sense.

Between earth and heaven there is but a thin partition. The home country is much nearer than we think. I question if "the land that is very far off" be a true name for heaven. Was it not an extended kingdom on earth which was intended by the prophet rather than the celestial home? Heaven is by no means the far country, for it is the Father's house. Are we not taught to say, "Our Father which art in heaven"? Where the Father is the true spirit of adoption counts itself near. Our Lord would have us mingle heaven with earth by naming it twice in this short prayer. See how he makes us familiar with heaven by mentioning it next to our usual food, making the next petition to be, "Give us this day our daily bread." This does not look as if it should be thought of as a remote region. Heaven, is at any rate, so near that in a moment we can speak with him that is King of the place, and he will answer to our call. Yea, before the clock shall tick again you and I may be there. Can that be a far-off country which we can reach so soon? Oh, brothers, we are within hearing of the shining ones; we are well-nigh home. A little while and we shall see our Lord. Perhaps another day's march will bring us within the city gate. And what if another fifty years of life on earth should remain, what is it but the twinkling of an eye?

Clear enough is it that the comparison between the obedience of earth and that of heaven is not far-fetched. If heaven and heaven's God be, in truth, so near to us, our Lord has set before us a homely model taken from our heavenly dwelling-place. The petition only means—let all the children of the one Father be alike in doing his will.

II. Secondly, THIS COMPARISON IS EMINENTLY INSTRUCTIVE. Does it not teach us that *what* we do for God is not everything, but *how* we do it is also to be considered? The Lord Jesus Christ would not only have us do the Father's will, but do it after a certain model. And what an elevated model it is! Yet is it none too elevated, for we would not wish to render to our heavenly Father service of an inferior kind. If none of us dare say that we are perfect, we are yet resolved that we will never rest until we are. If none of us dare hope that even our holy things are without a flaw, yet none of us will be satisfied while a spot remains upon them. We would give to our God the utmost conceivable glory. Let the mark be as high as possible. If we do not as yet reach it, we will aim higher and yet higher. We do not desire that our pattern should be lowered, but that our imitation should be raised.

"Thy will *be done* in earth, as it is in heaven." Mark the words "*be done*," for they touch a vital point of the text. God's will is *done* in heaven. How very practical! On earth his will is often forgotten, and his rule ignored. In the church of the present age there is a desire to be doing something for God, but few enquire what he wills them to do. Many things are done for the evangelizing of the people which were never commanded by the great Head of the Church, and cannot be approved of by him. Can we expect that he will accept or bless that which he has never commanded? Will-worship is as sin in his sight. We are to do his will in the first place, and then to expect a blessing upon the doing of that will. My brethren, I am afraid that Christ's will on earth is very much more discussed than done. I have heard of brethren spending days in disputing upon a precept which their dispute was breaking. In heaven they have no disputes, but they do the will of God

without discord. We are best employed when we are actually doing something for this fallen world, and for the glory of our Lord. “Thy will be done”: we must come to actual works of faith and labours of love. Too often we are satisfied with having approved of that will, or with having spoken of it in words of commendation. But we must not stay in thought, resolve, or word; the prayer is practical and business-like, “Thy will be *done* in earth, as it is in heaven.” An idle man stretched himself on his bed when the sun had risen high in heaven, and as he rolled over, he muttered to himself that he wished this were hard work, for he could do any quantity of it with pleasure. Many might wish that to think and to speak were to *do* the will of God; for them they would have effected it very thoroughly. Up yonder there is no playing with sacred things: they do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Would God his will were not alone preached and sung below, but actually *done* as it is in heaven.

In heaven the will of God is done *in spirit*, for they are spirits there. It is done *in truth* with undivided heart, and unquestioned desire. On earth, too often, it is done and yet not done; for a dull formality mocks real obedience. Here obedience often shades off into dreary routine. We sing with the lips, but our hearts are silent. We pray as if the mere utterance of words were prayer. We sometimes preach living truth with dead lips. It must no longer be so. Would God we had the fire and fervour of those burning ones who behold the face of God. We pray in that sense, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” I hope there is a revival of spiritual life among us, and that, to a large extent, our brotherhood is instinct with fervour; but there is room for far more zeal. Ye that know how to pray, go down upon your knees, and with the warm breath of prayer arouse the spark of spiritual life until it becomes a flame. With all the powers of our innermost being, with the whole life of God within us, let us be stirred up to do the will of the Lord on earth as it is done in heaven.

In heaven they do God’s will *constantly, without failure*. Would God it could be so here! We are aroused to-day, but we fall asleep tomorrow. We are diligent for one hour, but sluggish the next. This must not be, dear friends. We must be steadfast, unmovable—always abounding in the work of the Lord. We need to pray for sacred perseverance, that we may imitate the days of heaven upon the earth by doing the Lord’s will without a break.

They do God’s will in heaven *universally, without making a selection*. Here men pick and choose—take this commandment to be obeyed, and lay that commandment by as non-essential. We are, I fear, all tinctured, more or less, with this odious gall. A certain part of obedience is hard, and therefore we try to forget it. It must no longer be so; but whatsoever Jesus saith unto us we must do. Partial obedience is actual disobedience. The loyal subject respects the whole law. If anything be the will of the Lord, we have no choice in the matter, the choice is made by our Lord. Let us pray that we may neither misunderstand the Lord’s will, nor forget it, nor violate it. Perhaps we are, as a company of believers, ignorantly omitting a part of the Lord’s will, and this may have been hindering our work these many years; possibly there is something written by the pen of inspiration which we have not read, or something read that we have not practised; and this may hold back the arm of the Lord from working. We should often make diligent search, and go through our churches to see wherein we differ from the divine pattern. Some goodly Babylonish garment or wedge of gold may be as an accursed thing in the camp, bringing disaster to the Lord’s armies. Let us not neglect anything which our God commands lest he withhold his blessing.

His will is done in heaven *instantly, and without hesitation*. We, I fear, are given to delays. We plead that we must look the thing round about. “Second thoughts are best,” we say, whereas the first thoughts of eager love are the prime production of our being. I would that we were obedient

at all hazard, for therein lies the truest safety. Oh, to do what God bids us, as God bids us, on the spot, and at the moment! It is not ours to debate, but to perform. Let us dedicate ourselves as perfectly as Esther consecrated herself when she espoused the cause of her people, and said, "If I perish, I perish." We must not consult with flesh and blood, or make a reserve for our own selfishness, but at once most vigorously follow the divine command.

Let us pray the Lord that we may do his will on earth as it is done in heaven; that is, *joyfully, without the slightest weariness*. When our hearts are right, it is a glad thing to serve God, though it be only to unloose the latches of our Master's shoes. To be employed by Jesus in service which will bring us no repute, but much reproach, should be our delight. If we were altogether as we should be, sorrow for Christ's sake would be joy: ay, we should have joy right along, in dark nights as well as in bright days. Even as they are glad in heaven, with a felicity born of the presence of the Lord, so should we be glad, and find our strength in the joy of the Lord.

In heaven the will of the Lord is done *right humbly*. There perfect purity is set in a frame of lowliness. Too often we fall into self-gratulation, and it defiles our best deeds. We whisper to ourselves, "I did that very well." We flatter ourselves that there was no self in our conduct, but while we are laying that flattering unction to our souls, we are lying, as our self-contentment proves. God might have allowed us to do ten times as much, had he not known that it would not be safe. He cannot set us upon the pinnacle, because our heads are weak, and we grow dizzy with pride. We must not be permitted to be rulers over many things, for we should become tyrants if we had the opportunity. Brother, pray the Lord to keep thee low at his feet, for in no other place canst thou be largely used of him.

The comparison being thus instructive, I pray that we may be the better for our meditation upon it. I do not find it an easy thing even to describe the model; but if we essay to copy it: "this is the work; this is the difficulty." Unless we are girded with the divine strength we shall never do the will of God as it is done in heaven. Here is a greater labour than those of Hercules, bringing with it victories nobler than those of Alexander. To this the unaided wisdom of Solomon could not attain; the Holy Ghost must transform us, and lead the earthly in us captive to the heavenly.

III. Thirdly, I beg you to notice, dear friends, that **THIS COMPARISON** of holy service on earth to that which is in heaven, **IS BASED UPON FACTS**. The facts will both comfort and stimulate us. Two places are mentioned in the text which seems very dissimilar, and yet the likeness exceeds the unlikeness—earth and heaven.

Why should not saints do the will of the Lord on earth as their brethren do it in heaven? What is heaven but the Father's house, wherein there are many mansions? Do we not abide in that house even now? The Psalmist said, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee." Have we not often said of our Bethels, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven"? The spirit of adoption causes us to be at home with God even while we sojourn here below. Let us therefore do the will of God at once.

We have the same fare on earth as the saints in heaven, for "the Lamb in the midst of the throne doth feed them:" he is the Shepherd of his flock below, and daily feeds us upon himself. His flesh is meat indeed, his blood is drink indeed. Whence come the refreshing draughts of the immortals? The Lamb doth lead them to living fountains of waters; and doth he not even here below say to us, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink"? The same river of the water of life which makes glad the city of our God above, also waters the garden of the Lord below.

Brethren, we are in the same company below as they enjoy above. Up there they are with Christ, and here he is with us, for he hath said—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." There is a difference as to the brightness of his presence; but not as to the reality of it. Thus you see we are partakers of the same privileges as the shining ones within the city gates. The church below is a chamber of the one great house, and the partition which separates it from the church above is a mere veil, of inconceivable thinness. Wherefore should we not do the Lord's will on earth as it is done in heaven?

"But heaven is a place of peace," says one; "there they rest from their labours." Beloved, our estate here is not without its peace and rest. "Alas," cries one, "I find it far otherwise." I know it. But whence come wars and fightings but of our fretfulness and unbelief? "We which have believed do enter into rest." That is not in all respects a fair allegory which represents us as crossing the Jordan of death to enter into Canaan. No, my brethren, believers are in Canaan now; how else could we say that the Canaanite is still in the land? We have entered upon the promised heritage, and we are warring for the full possession of it. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. I for one do not feel like a lone dove flying over waters dark, seeking rest for the sole of her foot. No, I have found my Noah: Jesus has given me rest. There is a difference between the best estate of earth and the glory of heaven, but the rest which every soul may have that learns to conquer its will, is most deep and real. Brethren, having rest already, and being participators of the joy of the Lord, why should we not serve God on earth as they do in heaven?

"But we have not their victory," cries one, "for they are more than conquerors." Yes, and "our warfare is accomplished." We have prophetic testimony to that fact. Moreover, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." In the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord giveth us the victory, and maketh us to triumph in every place. We are warring; but we are of good cheer, for Jesus has overcome the world, and we also overcome by his blood. Ever is this our war-cry, "Victory! Victory!" The Lord will tread Satan under our feet shortly. Why should we not do the Lord's will on earth as it is done in heaven?

Heaven is the place of fellowship with God, and this is a blessed feature in its joy; but in this we are now participators, for "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." The fellowship of the Holy Ghost is with us all; it is our joy and our delight. Having communion with the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are uplifted and sanctified, and it is becoming that by us the will of the Lord should be done on earth as it is in heaven.

"Up there," says a brother, "they are all accepted, but here we are in a state of probation." Did you read that in the Bible? for I never did. A believer is in no state of probation; he has passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation. We are already "accepted in the Beloved," and that acceptance is so given as never to be reversed. The Redeemer brought us up out of the horrible pit of probation, and he has set our feet on the rock of salvation, and there he has established our goings. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." Wherefore should we not, as the accepted of the Lord, do his will on earth as it is in heaven?

"Ay," saith one, "but heaven is the place of perfect service; 'for his servants shall serve him.'" But is not this the place, in some respects, of a more extensive service still? Are there not many things which perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do? If we had choice of a sphere in which we could serve God with widest range, we should choose not heaven but earth. There are no slums and over-crowded rooms in heaven to which we can go with help, but there are plenty of them here.

There are no jungles and regions of malaria where missionaries may prove their unreserved consecration by preaching the gospel at the expense of their lives. In some respects this world has a preference beyond the heavenly state as to the extent of doing the will of God. Oh, that we were better men, and then the saints above might almost envy us! If we did but live as we should live, we might make Gabriel stoop from his throne and cry, "I wish I were a man!" It is ours to lead the van in daily conflict with sin and Satan, and at the same time ours to bring up the rear, battling with the pursuing foe. God help us, since we are honoured with so rare a sphere, to do his will on earth as it is done in heaven.

"Ay," say you, "but heaven is the place of overflowing joy." Yes, and have you no joy even now? A saint who lives near to God is so truly blessed that he will not be much astonished when he enters heaven. he will be surprised to behold its glories more clearly; but he will have the same reason for delight as he possesses to-day. We live below the same life which we shall live above, for we are quickened by the same Spirit, are looking to the same Lord, and rejoicing in the same security. Joy! Do you not know it? Your Lord says, "That my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." You will be larger vessels in heaven, but you will not be fuller; you will be brighter, doubtless, but you will not be cleaner than you are when the Lord has washed you and made you white in his own blood. Do not be impatient to go to heaven. Nay, do not have a wish about it. Set very loose by the things of earth; yet count it a great privilege to have a long life in which to serve the Lord on earth. Our mortal life is but a brief interval between the two eternities, and if we judged unselfishly, and saw the needs of earth, we might almost say, "Give us back the antediluvian periods of human life, that through a chiliad we might serve the Lord in suffering and in reproach, as we cannot do in glory." This life is the vestibule of glory. Array yourselves in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, for this is the court-dress of earth and heaven. Manifest at once the spirit of saints, or else you will never abide with them. Now begin the song which your lips shall carol in Paradise, or else you will never be admitted to the heavenly choirs; none can unite in the music but those who have rehearsed it here below.

IV. Lastly, THIS COMPARISON, which I feel I can so feebly bring out, of doing the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven, OUGHT TO BE BORNE OUT BY HOLY DEEDS. Here is the urgency of the missionary enterprise. God's will can never be intelligently done where it is not known; therefore, in the first place, *it becomes us as followers of Jesus to see to it that the will of the Lord is made known* by heralds of peace sent forth from among us. Why has it not been already published in every land? We cannot blame the great Father, nor impute the fault to the Lord Jesus. The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, nor the mercy of God restrained. Is it not probably true that the selfishness of Christians is the main reason for the slow progress of Christianity? If Christianity is never to spread in the world at a more speedy rate than the present, it will not even keep pace with the growth of the population. If we are going to give to Christ's kingdom no larger a percentage than we have usually given, I suppose it will require about an eternity-and-a-half to convert the world; or, in other words, it will never be done. The progress made is so slow, that it threatens to be like that of the crab, which is always described in the fable as going backward. What do we give, brethren? What do we do? A friend exhorts me to say that the Baptist Missionary Society ought to raise a million a-year. I have my doubts about *that*; but he proposes that we should, at least, try to do so for one year. There is nothing like having a high mark to aim at. A million a-year seems hugely too much by the general consent of you all, and yet I am not sure. What amount of property is now held by Baptists? The probable estimate of money now in the hands of baptized

believers in the United Kingdom might make us ashamed that a million is not put down at once. Far more than that is spent by a similar number of Englishmen upon strong drink. We do not know how much wealth lies in the custody of God's stewards; and some of them are not likely to let us know until we read it in the paper, and then we shall discover that they died worth so many hundreds of thousands. The world counts men to be worth what they hoard; but in truth they were not worth much, or else they could not have retained so much from the work of the Lord when it was needed for the spread of the gospel. As a denomination we are improving a little. We are improving a *little*. I was obliged to repeat that sentence, and place the emphasis in the right place. We may not congratulate ourselves: considerable room for improvement yet remains: the income of the Society might be doubled and no one oppressed in the process. It is not for us to say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven: but, Lord. Thou hast many ways and means of accomplishing that will; I pray thee do it, but let me not be asked to help on the work." No, when I utter this prayer, if I am sincere I shall be searching my stores to see what I can give to make known the truth. I shall be enquiring whether I cannot personally speak the saving word. I shall not decline to give because the times are very hard, neither shall I fail to speak because I am of a retiring disposition. An opportunity is a golden gift. Now, do not offer the prayer of the text if you do not mean it. Better omit the petition than play the hypocrite with it. You who fail to support missions when it is in your power to do so should never say, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," but leave out that petition for fear of mocking God.

Our text, dear friends, leads me to say that as God's will must be known that it may be done, *it must be God's will that we should make it known*; because God is love, and the law under which he has placed us is that we love. What love of God dwelleth in that man who denies to a benighted heathen that light without which he will be lost? Love is a grand word to talk of, but it is nobler as a principle to be obeyed. Can there be love of God in that man's heart who will not help to send the gospel to those who are without it? We want to bless the world; we have a thousand schemes by which to bless it, but if ever God's will is done in earth as it is done in heaven it will be an unmixed and comprehensive blessing. Join the Peace Society by all means, and be forgiving and peaceable yourself; but there is no way of establishing peace on the earth except by God's will being done in it, and that can only be done through the renewing of men's hearts by the gospel of Jesus Christ. By all manner of means let us endeavour so to control politics, as Christian men, that oppression shall not remain in the earth; but, after all, there will be oppression unless the gospel is spread. This is the one balm for all earth's wounds. They will bleed still until the Christ shall come to bind them up. Oh, let us then, since this is the best thing that can be, show our love to God and man by spreading his saving truth.

The text says, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Suppose any one of you had come from heaven. It is but a supposition; but let it stand for a minute: suppose that a man here has come fresh from heaven. Some would be curious to see what his bodily form would be like. They would expect to be dazzled by the radiance of his countenance. However, we will let that pass. We want to see how he would live. Coming newly from heaven, how would he act? Oh, sirs, if he came here to do the same as all men do on earth, only after a heavenly sort, what a father he would be, what a husband, what a brother, what a friend! I would sit down and let him preach this morning, most assuredly; and when he had done preaching, I would go home with him, and have a chat. I should be very careful to observe what he would do with his substance. His first thought would be, if he had a shilling, to lay it out for God's glory. "But," says one, "I have to go to shop with my shilling."

Be it so, but when you go say, "Oh! Lord, help me to lay it out to thy glory." There should be as much piety in buying your necessaries as in going to a place of worship. I do not think this man coming fresh from heaven would say, "I must have this luxury; I must have this goodly raiment; I must have this grand house." But he would say, "How much can I save for the God of heaven? How much can I invest in the country I came from?" I am sure he would be pinching and screwing to save money to serve God with; and he himself, as he went about the streets, and mingled with ungodly men and women, would be sure to find out ways of getting at their consciences and hearts; he would be always trying to bring others to the felicity he had enjoyed. Think that over, and live *so*—so as he did who really did come down from heaven. For after all, the best rule of life is, what would Jesus do if he were here to-day, and the world still lying in the wicked one? If Jesus were in your business, if he had your money, how would he spend it? For that is how *you* ought to spend it. Now think, my brother, you will be in heaven very soon. Since last year a great number have gone home: before next year many more will have ascended to glory. Sitting up in those celestial seats, how shall we wish that we had lived below? It will not give any man in heaven even a moment's joy to think that he gratified himself while here. It will give him no reflections suitable to the place to remember how much he amassed, how much he left behind to be quarrelled over after he was gone; he will say to himself, "I wish I had saved more of my capital by sending it on before me, for what I saved on earth was lost, but what I spent for God was really laid up where thieves do not break through and steal."

Oh, brothers, let us live as we shall wish we had lived when life is over; let us fashion a life which will bear the light eternal. Is it life to live otherwise? Is it not a sort of fainting fit, a coma, out of which life may not quite have gone, but all that is worth calling life has oozed away? Unless we are striving mightily to honour Jesus, and bring home his banished, we are dead while we live. Let us aim at a life which will outlast the fires which shall try every man's work.

If I may have moved any person here to resolve, "I will so live," I have not spoken in vain. I have at least stirred myself with the intense desire to cast off the mere outsides and husks of life, and to ripen the real kernel of my being. Thy will by me be done on earth, as yet, my Lord, I hope to do it in the skies. May I begin here a life worthy to be perpetuated in eternity. God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

## Though He Were Dead

A Sermon

(No. 1799)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, September 14th, 1884, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?”—John 11:24-26.

MARTHA is a very accurate type of a class of anxious believers. They do believe truly, but not with such confidence as to lay aside their care. They do not distrust the Lord, or question the truth of what He says, yet they puzzle their brain about “How shall this thing be?” and so they miss the major part of the present comfort which the word of the Lord would minister to their hearts if they received it more simply. *How?* and *why?* belong unto the Lord. It is His business to arrange matters so as to fulfil His own promises. If we would sit at our Lord's feet with Mary, and consider what He has promised, we should choose a better part than if we ran about with Martha, crying, “How can these things be?”

Martha, you see, in this case, when the Lord Jesus Christ told her that her brother would rise again, replied, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” She was a type, I say, of certain anxious believers, for she *set a practical bound to the Saviour's words*. “Of course there will be a resurrection, and then my brother will rise with the rest.” She concluded that the Saviour could not mean anything beyond that. The first meaning and the commonest meaning that suggests itself to her must be what Jesus means. Is not that the way with many of us? We had a statesman once, and a good man too, who loved reform; but whenever he had accomplished a little progress, he considered that all was done. We called him at last “Finality John,” for he was always coming to an ultimatum, and taking for his motto “Rest, and be thankful.” Into that style Christian people too frequently drop with regard to the promises of God. We limit the Holy one of Israel as to the meaning of His words. Of course they mean so much, but we cannot allow that they intend more. It were well if the spirit of progress would enter into our faith, so that we felt within our souls that we had never beheld the innermost glory of the Lord's words of grace. We often wonder that the disciples put such poor meanings upon our Lord's words, but I fear we are almost as far off as they were from fully comprehending all His gracious teachings. Are we not still as little children, making little out of great words? Have we grasped as yet a tithe of our Lord's full meaning, in many of His sayings of love? When He is talking of bright and sparkling gems of benediction, we are thinking of common pebble-stones in the brook of mercy; when He speaketh of stars and heavenly crowns, we think of sparks and childish coronals of fading flowers. Oh that we could but have our intellect cleared; better still, could have our understanding expanded, or, best of all, our faith increased, so as to reach to the height of our Lord's great arguments of love!

Martha also had another fault in which she was very like ourselves: she *laid the words of Jesus on the shelf*, as things so trite and sure that they were of small practical importance. “Thy brother

shall rise again." Now, if she had possessed faith enough, she might truthfully have said, "Lord, I thank Thee for that word! I expect within a short space to see him sitting at the table with Thee. I put the best meaning possible upon Thy words, for I know that Thou art always better than I can think Thee to be; and therefore I expect to see my beloved Lazarus walk home from the sepulchre before the sun sets again." But no, she lays the truth aside as a matter past all dispute, and says, "I know that my brother shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." A great many precious truths are laid up by us like the old hulks in the Medway, never to see service any more, or like aged pensioners at Chelsea, as relics of the past. We say "Yes, quite true, we fully believe that doctrine." Somehow it is almost as bad to lay up a doctrine in lavender as it is to throw it out of the window. When you so believe a truth as to put it to bed and smother it with the bolster of neglect, it is much the same as if you did not believe it at all. An official belief is very much akin to infidelity. Some persons never question a doctrine: that is not their line of temptation; they accept the gospel as true, but then they never expect to see its promises practically carried out; it is a proper thing to believe, but by no means a prominent, practical factor in actual life. It is true but it is mysterious, misty, mythical, far removed from the realm of practical common sense. We do with the promises often as a poor old couple did with a precious document, which might have cheered their old age had they used it according to its real value. A gentleman stepping into a poor woman's house saw framed and glazed upon the wall a French note for a thousand francs. He said to the old folks, "How came you by this?" They informed him that a poor French soldier had been taken in by them and nursed until he died, and he had given them that little picture when he was dying as a memorial of him. They thought it such a pretty souvenir that they had framed it, and there it was adorning the cottage wall. They were greatly surprised when they were told that it was worth a sum which would be quite a little fortune for them if they would but turn it into money. Are we not equally unpractical with far more precious things? Have you not certain of the words of your great Lord framed and glazed in your hearts, and do you not say to yourselves, "They are so sweet and precious"? and yet you have never turned them into actual blessing—never used them in the hour of need. You have done as Martha did when she took the words, "Thy brother shall rise again," and put round about them this handsome frame, "in the resurrection at the last day." Oh that we had grace to turn God's bullion of gospel into current coin, and use them as our present spending money.

Moreover, Martha made another blunder, and that was *setting the promise in the remote distance*. This is a common folly, this distancing the promises of the Most High. "In the resurrection at the last day"—no doubt she thought it a very long way off, and therefore she did not get much comfort out of it. Telescopes are meant to bring objects near to the eye, but I have known people use the mental telescope in the wrong way: they always put the big end of it to their eye, and then the glass sends the object further away. Her brother was to be raised that very day: she might so have understood the Saviour, but instead of it she looked at His words through the wrong end of the glass, and said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Brethren, do not refuse the present blessing. Death and heaven, or the advent and the glory, are at your doors. A little while and He that will come shall come, and will not tarry. Think not that the Lord is slack concerning His promise. Do not say in your heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming"; or dream that His words of love are only for the dim future. In the ages to come marvels shall be revealed, but even the present hour is bejewelled with loving-kindness. To-day the Lord has rest, and peace, and joy to give to you. Lose not these treasures by unbelief.

Martha also appears to me to have *made the promise unreal and impersonal*. “Thy brother shall rise again”; to have realized that would have been a great comfort to her, but she mixes Lazarus up with all the rest of the dead. “Yes, he will rise in the resurrection at the last day; when thousands of millions shall be rising from their graves, no doubt Lazarus will rise with the rest.” That is the way with us; we take the promise and say, “This is true to all the children of God.” If so it is true to us; but we miss *that* point. What a blessing God has bestowed upon the covenanted people! Yes, and you are one of them; but you shake your head, as if the word was not for you. It is a fine feast, and yet you are hungry; it is a full and flowing stream, but you remain thirsty. Why is this? Somehow the generality of your apprehension misses the sweetness which comes of personal appropriation. There is such a thing as speaking of the promises in a magnificent style, and yet being in deep spiritual poverty; as if a man should boast of the wealth of old England, and the vast amount of treasure in the Bank, while he does not possess a penny wherewith to bless himself. In your case you know it is your own fault that you are poor and miserable, for if you would but exercise an appropriating faith you might possess a boundless heritage. If you are a child of God all things are yours, and you may help yourself. If you are hungry at this banquet it is for want of faith: if you are thirsty by the brink of this river it is because you do not stoop down and drink. Behold, God is your portion: the Father is your shepherd, the Son of God is your food, and the Spirit of God is your comforter. Rejoice and be glad, and grasp with the firm hand of a personal faith that royal boon which Jesus sets before you in His promises.

I beg you to observe how the Lord Jesus Christ in great wisdom dealt with Martha. In the first place, He did not grow angry with her. There is not a trace of petulance in His speech. He did not say to her, “Martha, I am ashamed of you that you should have such low thoughts of me.” She thought that she was honouring Jesus when she said,—“I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee.” Her idea of Jesus was that He was a great prophet Who would ask of God and obtain answers to His prayers; she has not grasped the truth of His own personal power to give and sustain life. But the Saviour did not say, “Martha, these are low and grovelling ideas of your Lord and Saviour.” He did not chide her, though she lacked wisdom,—wisdom which she ought to have possessed. I do not think God’s people learn much by being scolded; it is not the habit of the great Lord to scold His disciples, and therefore they do not take it well when His servants take upon themselves to rate them. If ever you meet with one of the Lord’s own who falls far short of the true ideal of the gospel, do not bluster and upbraid. Who taught you what you know? He that has taught you did it of His infinite love and grace and pity, and He was very tender with you, for you were doltish enough; therefore be tender with others, and give them line upon line, even as your Lord was gentle towards you. It ill becomes a servant to lose patience where his Master shows so much.

The Lord Jesus, with gentle spirit, proceeded to teach her more of the things concerning Himself. More of Jesus! More of Jesus! That is the sovereign cure for our faults. He revealed Himself to her, that in Him she might behold reasons for a clearer hope and a more substantial faith. How sweetly fell those words upon her ear: “I am the resurrection and the life”! Not “I can get resurrection by my prayers,” but “I am, myself, the resurrection.” God’s people need to know more of what Jesus is, more of the fullness which it has pleased the Father to place in Him. Some of them know quite enough of what they are themselves, and they will break their hearts if they go on reading much longer in that black-letter book: they need, I say, to rest their eyes upon the person of their Lord, and to spy out all the riches of grace which lie hidden in Him; then they will pluck up courage,

and look forward with surer expectancy. When our Lord said, "I am the resurrection and the life," He indicated to Martha that resurrection and life were not gifts which He must seek, nor even boons which He must create; but that He Himself was the resurrection and the life: these things were wherever He was. He was the author, and giver, and maintainer of life, and that life was Himself. He would have her to know that He was Himself precisely what she wanted for her brother. She did know a little of the Lord's power, for she said, "If Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," which being very kindly interpreted might mean, "Lord, Thou art the life." "Ah, but," saith Jesus, "you must also learn that I am the resurrection! You already admit that if I had been here Lazarus would not have died; I would have you further learn that I being here your brother shall live though he has died; and that when I am with my people none of them shall die for ever, for I am to them the resurrection and the life." Poor Martha was looking up into the sky for life, or gazing down into the deeps for resurrection, when the Resurrection and the Life stood before her, smiling upon her, and cheering her heavy heart. She had thought of what Jesus might have done if He had been there before; now let her know what He *is* at the present moment.

Thus I have introduced the text to you, and I pray God the Holy Spirit to bless these prefatory observations; for if we learn only these first lessons we shall not have been here in vain. Let us construe promises in their largest sense, let us regard them as real, and set them down as facts. Let us look to the Promisor, even to Jesus the Lord, and not so much to the difficulties which surround the accomplishment of the promise. In beginning the divine life let us look to Jesus, and in afterwards running the heavenly race let us still be looking unto Jesus, till we see in Him our all in all. When both eyes look on Jesus we are in the light; but when we have one eye for Him, and one eye for self, all is darkness. Oh, to see Him with all our soul's eyes!

Now, I am going to speak as I am helped of the Spirit; and I shall proceed thus—first, by asking you to *view the text as a stream of comfort to Martha and other bereaved persons*; and, secondly, to *view it as a great deep of comfort to all believers*.

I. First, I long for you to VIEW THE TEXT AS A STREAM OF COMFORT TO MARTHA AND OTHER BEREAVED PERSONS.

Observe, in the beginning, that *the presence of Jesus Christ means life and resurrection. It meant that to Lazarus*. If Jesus comes to Lazarus, Lazarus must live. Had Martha taken the Saviour's words literally, as she should have done, as I have already told you, she would have had immediate comfort from them; and the Saviour intended her to understand them in that sense. He virtually says, "I am to Lazarus the Power that can make him live again; and I am the Power that can keep him in life. Yea, I am the resurrection and the life." A statement so understood would have been very comfortable to her. Nothing could have been more so. It would there and then have abolished death so far as her brother was concerned. Somebody says, "But I do not see that this is any comfort to us, for if Jesus be here, yet it is only a spiritual presence, and we cannot expect to see our dear mother, or child, or husband raised from the dead thereby." I answer that our Lord Jesus is able at this moment to give us back our departed ones, for He is still the resurrection and the life. But let me ask you whether you really wish that Jesus would raise your departed ones from the dead. You say at first, "Of course I do wish it"; but I would ask you to reconsider that decision; for I believe that upon further thought you will say, "No, I could not wish it." Do you really desire to see your glorified husband sent back again to this world of care and pain? Would you have your father or mother deprived of the glories which they are now enjoying in order that they might help you in the struggles of this mortal life? Would you discrown the saints? You are not so cruel. That dear

child, would you have it back from among the angels, and from the inner glory, to come here and suffer again? You would not have it so. And to my mind it is a comfort to you, or should be, that it is not within your power to have it so; because you might be tempted in some selfish moment to accept the doubtful boon. Lazarus could return, and fit into his place again, but scarcely one in ten thousand could do so. There would be serious drawbacks in the return of those whom we have loved best. Do you cry, "Give back my father! Give me back my friend"? You know not what you ask. It might be a cause of regret to you as long as they lingered here, for you would each morning think to yourself, "Beloved one, I have brought you out of heaven by my wish. I have robbed you of infinite felicity to gratify myself." For my own part, I had rather that the Lord Jesus should keep the keys of death than that He should lend them to me. It would be too dreadful a privilege to be empowered to rob heaven of the perfected merely to give pleasure to imperfect ones below. Jesus would raise them now if He knew it to be right; I do not wish to take the government from His shoulder. It is more comfortable to me to think that Jesus Christ could give them back to me, and would if it were for His glory and my good. My dear ones that lie asleep could be awakened in an instant if the Master thought it best; but it would not be best, and therefore even I would hold His skirt, and say, "Tread softly, Master! Do not arouse them! I shall go to them, but they shall not return to me. It is not my wish they should return: it is better that they should be with Thee where Thou art, to behold Thy glory." It does not seem to me, then, dear friend, that you are one whit behind Martha: and you ought to be comforted while Jesus says to you, "I am even now the resurrection and the life."

Furthermore, here is comfort which we may each one safely take, namely, that *when Jesus comes the dead shall live*. The Revised Version has it, "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live." We do not know when our Lord will descend from heaven, but we do know the message of the angel, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." The Lord will come; we may not question the certainty of His appearing. When He cometh, all His redeemed shall live with Him. The trump of the archangel shall startle the happy sleepers, and they shall wake to put on their beauteous array; the body transformed and made like unto Christ's glorious body shall be once more wrapt about them as the vesture of their perfected and emancipated spirits. Then our brother shall rise again, and all our dear ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus the Lord will bring with Him. This is the glorious hope of the church, wherein we see the death of death, and the destruction of the grave. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Then we are also told that *when Jesus comes, living believers shall not die*. After the coming of Christ there shall be no more death for His people. What does Paul say? "Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all *die*, but we shall all be changed." Did I see a little school-girl put up her finger? Did I hear her say, "Please, sir, you made a mistake." So I did; I made it on purpose. Paul did not say, "We shall not all die," for the Lord had already said, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never *die*"; Paul would not say that any of us should die, but he used his Master's own term, and said, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." When the Lord comes there will be no more death; we who are alive and remain (as some of us may be—we cannot tell) will undergo a sudden transformation—for flesh and blood, as they are, cannot inherit the kingdom of God—and by that transformation our bodies shall be made meet to be "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." There shall be no more death then. Here, then, we have two sacred handkerchiefs with which to wipe the eyes of mourners: when Christ cometh the dead shall live;

when Christ cometh those that live shall never die. Like Enoch, or Elias, we shall pass into the glory state without wading through the black stream, while those who have already forded it shall prove to have been no losers thereby. All this is in connection with Jesus. Resurrection with Jesus is resurrection indeed. Life in Jesus is life indeed. It endears to us resurrection, glory, eternal life, and ultimate perfection, when we see them all coming to us in Jesus. He is the golden pot which hath this manna, the rod which beareth these almonds, the life whereby we live.

But further, I have not made you drink deep enough of this stream yet,—I think our Saviour meant that *even now His dead are alive*. “He that believeth on me, though he die, but yet they live. They are not in the grave, they are for ever with the Lord. They are not unconscious, they are with their Lord in Paradise. Death cannot kill a believer, it can only usher him into a freer form of life. Because Jesus lives, His people live. God is not the God of the dead but of the living: those who have departed have not perished. We laid the precious body in the cemetery, and we set up stones at the head and foot; but we might engrave on them the Lord’s words, “She is not dead, but sleepeth.” True, and unbelieving generation may laugh us to scorn, but we scorn their laughing.

Again, *even now His living do not die*. There is an essential difference between the decease of the godly and the death of the ungodly. Death comes to the ungodly man as a penal infliction, but to the righteous as a summons to his Father’s palace: to the sinner it is an execution, to the saint an undressing. Death to the wicked is the King of terrors: death to the saint is the end of terrors, the commencement of glory. To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing. Death is ours; it is set down in the list of our possessions among the “all things”, and it follows life in the list as if it were an equal favour. No longer is it death to die. The name remains, but the thing itself is changed. Wherefore, then, are we in bondage through fear of death? Why do we dread the process which gives us liberty? I am told that persons who in the cruel ages had lain in prison for years suffered much more in the moment of the knocking off of their fetters than they had endured for months in wearing the hard iron; and yet I suppose that no man languishing in a dungeon would have been unwilling to stretch out his arm or leg, that the heavy chains might be beaten off by the smith. We should all be content to endure that little inconvenience to obtain lasting liberty. Now, such is death—the knocking off of the fetters; yet the iron may never seem to be so truly iron as when that last liberating blow of grace is about to fall. Let us not mind the harsh grating of the key as it turns in the lock; if we understand it aright it will be as music to our ears. Imagine that your last hour is come! The key turns with pain for a moment; but, lo, the bolt is shot! The iron gate is open! The spirit is free! Glory be unto the Lord for ever and ever!

II. I leave the text now as a stream of comfort for the bereaved, for I wish you to VIEW IT AS A GREAT DEEP OF COMFORT FOR ALL BELIEVERS. I cannot fathom it, any more than I could measure the abyss, but I can invite you to survey it by the help of the Holy Ghost.

Methinks, first, this text plainly teaches that *the Lord Jesus Christ is the life of His people*. We are dead by nature, and you can never produce life out of death: the essential elements are wanting. Should a spark be lingering among the ashes, you may yet fan it to a flame; but from human nature the last spark of heavenly life is gone, and it is vain to seek for life among the dead. The life of every Christian is Christ. He is the beginning of life, being the Resurrection: when He comes to us we live. Regeneration is the result of contact with Christ: we are begotten again unto living hope by His resurrection from the dead. The life of the Christian in its commencement is in Christ alone; not a fragment of it is from himself, and the continuance of that life is equally the same; Jesus is not only the resurrection to begin with, but the life to go on with. “I have life in myself,” saith one.

I answer—not otherwise than as you are one with Christ: your spiritual life in every breath it draws is in Christ. If you are regarded for a moment as separated from Christ, you are cast forth as a branch and are withered. A member severed from the head is dead flesh and no more. In union to Christ is your life. Oh that our hearers would understand this! I see a poor sinner look into himself, and look again, and then cry, “I cannot see any life within!” Of course you cannot; you have no life of your own. “Alas,” cries a Christian, “I cannot find anything within to feed my soul with!” Do you expect to feed upon yourself? Must not Israel look up for the manna? Did one of all the tribes find it in his own bosom? To look to self is to turn to a broken cistern which can hold no water. I tell you you must learn that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Harken to that great “I”—that infinite EGO! This must cover over and swallow up your little *ego*. “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” What are you? Less than nothing, and vanity; but over all springs up that divine, all-sufficient personality, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Take the two first words together, and they seem to me to have a wondrous majesty about them—“I AM!” Here is Self-Existence. Life in Himself! Even as the Mediator, the Lord Jesus tells us that it is given Him to have life in Himself, even as the Father hath life in Himself (John 5:26). *I am* fills the yawning mouth of the sepulchre. He that liveth and was dead and is alive for evermore, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, declares, “*I am* the resurrection and the life.” If, then, I want to live unto God, I must have Christ; and if I desire to continue to live unto God I must continue to have Christ; and if I aspire to have that life developed to the utmost fullness of which it is capable, I must find it all in Christ. He has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly. Anything that is beyond the circle of Christ is death. If I conjure up an experience over which I foolishly dote, which puffs me up as so perfect that I need not come to Christ now as a poor empty-handed sinner, I have entered into the realm of death, I have introduced into my soul a damning leaven. Away with it! Away with it! Everything of life is put into this golden casket of Christ Jesus: all else is death. We have not a breath of life anywhere but in Jesus, Who ever liveth to give life. He saith, “Because I live, ye shall live also,” and this is true. We live not for any other reason—not because of anything in us or connected with us, but only because of Jesus. “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

Now, further, in this great deep to which we would conduct you, *faith is the only channel by which we can draw from Jesus our life*. “I am the resurrection, and the life: *he that believeth in Me*”: that is it. He does not say, “He that loves me,” though love is a bright grace, and very sweet to God: He does not say, “He that serves me,” though every one that believes in Christ will endeavour to serve Him: but it is not put so: He does not even say, “He that imitates me,” though every one that believes in Christ must and will imitate Him; but it is put, “He that believeth in me.” Why is that? Why doth the Lord so continually make faith to be the only link between Himself and the soul? I take it, because faith is a grace which arrogates nothing to itself, and has not operation apart from Jesus, to Whom it unites us. You want to conduct the electric fluid, and, in order to this, you find a metal which will not create any action of its own; if it did so, it would disturb the current which you wish to send along it. If it set up an action of its own, how would you know the difference between what came of the metal and what came of the battery? Now, faith is an empty-handed receiver and communicator; it is nothing apart from that upon which it relies, and therefore it is suitable to be a conductor for grace. When an auditorium has to be erected for a speaker in which he may be plainly heard, the essential thing is to get rid of all echo. When you have no echo, then you have a perfect building: faith makes no noise of its own, it allows the Word to speak. Faith

cries, "*Non nobis Domine!* Not unto us! Not unto us! Christ puts His crown on faith's head, exclaiming, "Thy faith hath saved thee;" but faith hastens to ascribe all the glory of salvation to Jesus only. So you see why the Lord selects faith rather than any other grace, because it is a self-forgetting thing. It is best adapted to be the tubing through which the water of life runs, because it will not communicate a flavour of its own, but will just convey the stream purely and simply from Christ to the soul. "He that believeth in me."

Now notice, *to the reception of Christ by faith there is no limit.* "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever"—I am deeply in love with that word "whosoever." It is a splendid word. A person who kept many animals had some great dogs and some little ones, and in his eagerness to let them enter his house freely he had two holes cut in the door, one for the big dogs and another for the little dogs. You may well laugh, for the little dogs could surely have come in wherever there was room for the larger ones. This "whosoever" is the great opening, suitable for sinners of every size. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Has any man a right to believe in Christ? The gospel gives every creature the right to believe in Christ, for we are bidden to preach it to every creature, with this command, "Hear, and your soul shall live." Every man has a right to believe in Christ, because he will be damned if he does not, and he must have a right to do that which will bring him into condemnation if he does it not. It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," and that makes it clear that I, whoever I may be, as I have a right to endeavour to escape from damnation, have a right to avail myself of the blessed command, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and live." Oh that "whosoever," that hole in the door for the big dog! Do not forget it! Come along with you, and put your trust in Christ. If you can only get linked with Christ you are a living man; if but a finger touches His garment's hem you are made whole. Only the touch of faith, and the virtue flows from Him to you, and He is to you the resurrection and the life.

I desire you to notice that *there is no limit to this power.* Before I was ill this time, and even since, I have had to deal with such a swarm of despairing sinners, that if I have not pulled them up they have pulled me down. I have been trying to speak very large words for Christ when I have met with those disconsolate ones. I hear one say, "How far can Christ be life to a sinner? I feel myself to be utterly wrong, I am altogether wrong; there is nothing right about me: though I have eyes I cannot see, though I have ears I do not hear; if I have a hand I cannot use it, if I have a foot I cannot run with it—I seem altogether wrong." Yes, but if you believe in Christ, though you were still more wrong—that is to say, though you were dead, which is the wrongest state in which a man's body can be,—though you were dead yet shall you live. You look at the spiritual thermometer, and you say, "How low will the grace of God go? will it descend to summer heat? will it touch the freezing point? will it go to zero?" Yes, it will go below the lowest conceivable point,—lower than any instrument can indicate: it will go below the zero of death. If you believe in Jesus, though you are not only wrong, but dead, yet shall you live.

But, says another, "I feel so weak. I cannot understand, I cannot lay hold of things; I cannot pray. I cannot do anything. All I can do is feebly to trust in Jesus." All right! Though you had gone further than that, and were so weak as to be dead, yet should you live. Though the weakness had turned to a dire paralysis, that left you altogether without strength, yet it is written, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "Oh, Sir," says one, "I am so unfeeling." Mark you, these generally are the most feeling people in the world. "I am sorry every day because I cannot be sorry for my sin"—that is the way they talk; it is very absurd, but still very real to them. "Oh,"

cries one, "the earth shook, the sun was darkened, the rocks rent, the very dead came out of their graves at the death of Christ.

"Of feeling all things show some sign  
But this unfeeling heart of mine."

Yet if thou believest, unfeeling as thou art, thou livest; for if thou wert gone further than numb-ness to deadness, yet if thou believest in Him thou shalt live.

But the poor creature fetches a sigh, and cries, "Sir, it is not only that I have no feeling, but I am become objectionable and obnoxious to everybody. I am a weariness to myself and to others. I am sure when I come to tell you my troubles you must wish me at Jericho, or somewhere else far away." Now, I admit that such a thought *has* occurred to us sometimes when we have been very busy, and some poor soul has grown prosy with rehearsing his seven-times-repeated miseries; but if you were to get more wearisome still, if you were to become so bad that people would as soon see a corpse as see you, yet remember Jesus says, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

"Oh, sir, I have no hope; my case is quite hopeless!" Very well; but if you had got beyond that, so that you were dead, and could not even know you had no hope, yet if you believed in Him you should live. "Oh, but I have tried everything, and there is nothing more for me to attempt. I have read books, I have spoken to Christians, and I am nothing bettered." No doubt it is quite so; but if you had even passed beyond that stage, so that you could not try anything more, yet if you did believe in Jesus you should live. Oh, the blessed power of faith! Nay, rather say the matchless power of Him Who is the resurrection and the life; for though the poor believer were dead, yet shall he live! Glory be to the Lord Who works so wonderfully.

To conclude, if you once do believe in Christ, and come to live, there is this sweet reflection for you, "*Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*" Our Arminian friends say that you may be a child of God to-day and a child of the devil to-morrow. Write out that statement, and place at the bottom of it the name "Arminius," and then put the scrap of paper into the fire: it is the best thing you can do with it, for there is no truth in it. Jesus says, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Here is a very literal translation—"And every one who lives and believes on me, in no wise shall die forever." This is from "The Englishman's Greek New Testament," and nothing can be better. The believer may pass through the natural change called death, as far as his body is concerned; but as for his soul it cannot die, for it is written, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life." "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." These are not "ifs" and "buts," and faint hopes; but they are dead certainties, nay, living certainties, out of the mouth of the living Lord Himself. You get the life of God in your soul, and you shall never die. "Do you mean that I may do as I like, and live in sin?" No, man, I mean nothing of the sort; what right have you to impute such teaching as that to me? I mean that you shall not love sin and live in it, for that is death; but you shall live unto God. Your likes shall be so radically changed that you shall abhor evil all your days, and long to be holy as God is holy; and you shall be kept from transgression, and shall not go back to wallow in sin. If in some evil hour you back-slide, yet shall you be restored; and the main current of your life shall be from the hour of your regeneration towards God, and holiness, and heaven. The angels that rejoiced over you when you repented made no mistake; they shall go on to rejoice till they welcome you amidst the everlasting songs and

Hallelujahs of the blessed at the right hand of God. Believest thou this? Come, poor soul, believest thou this? Who are you? That does not matter, you can get into the “whosoever.” That ark will hold all God’s Noahs. What is any man that he should have the filth of another man’s drains poured into his ear? No, no: confess to God, but not to man unless you have wronged him, and confession of the wrong is due to him.

“Ah,” saith one, “you don’t know what I am.” No, and I don’t want to know what you are; but if you are so far gone that there seems to be not even a ghost of a shade of a shadow of a hope anywhere about you, yet if you believe in Jesus you shall live. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is worthy to be trusted. Throw yourself upon Him, and He will carry you in His bosom. Cast your whole weight upon His atonement; it will bear the strain. Hang on Him as the vessel hangs on the nail, and seek no other support. Depend upon Christ with all your might just as you now are, and as the Lord liveth you shall live, and as Christ reigneth you shall reign over sin, and as Christ cometh to glory you shall partake of that glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 11:1-27.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—414, 839, 327.

## The Parable of the Lost Sheep

A Sermon

(No. 1801)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, September 28th, 1884, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance”—Luke 15:4-7.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ while he was here below was continually in the pursuit of lost souls. He was seeking lost men and women, and it was for this reason that he went down among them, even among those who were most evidently lost, that he might find them. He took pains to put himself where he could come into communication with them, and he exhibited such kindness toward them that in crowds they drew near to hear him. I dare say it was a queer-looking assembly, a disreputable rabble, which made the Lord Jesus its centre. I am not astonished that the Pharisee, when he looked upon the congregation, sneered and said, “He collects around him the pariahs of our community, the wretches who collect taxes for the foreigner of God's free people; the fallen women of the town, and such-like riffraff make up his audiences; he, instead of repelling them, receives them, welcomes them, looks upon them as a class to whom he has a peculiar relationship. He even eats with them. Did he not go into the house of Zaccheus, and the house of Levi, and partake of the feasts which these low people made for him?” We cannot tell you all the Pharisees thought, it might not be edifying to attempt it; but they thought as badly of the Lord as they possibly could, because of the company which surrounded him. And so, he deigns in this parable to defend himself;—not that he cared much about what they might think, but that they might have no excuse for speaking so bitterly of him. He tells them that he was seeking the lost, and where should he be found but among those whom he is seeking? Should a physician shun the sick? Should a shepherd avoid the lost sheep? Was he not exactly in his right position when there “drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him”?

Our divine Lord defended himself by what is called an *argumentum ad hominem*, an argument to the men themselves; for he said, “What man *of you*, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not go after that which is lost, until he find it?” No argument tells more powerfully upon men than one which comes close home to their own daily life, and the Saviour put it so. They were silenced, if they were not convinced. It was a peculiarly strong argument, because in their case it was only a sheep that they would go after, but in his case it was something infinitely more precious than all the flocks of sheep that ever fed on Sharon or Carmel; for it was the soul of man which he sought to save. The argument had in it not only the point of peculiar adaptation, but a force at the back of it unusually powerful for driving it home upon every honest mind. It may be opened out in this fashion,—“If you men would each one of you go after a lost sheep, and follow in its track

until you found it, how much more may I go after lost souls, and follow them in all their wanderings until I can rescue them?" The going after the sheep is a part of the parable which our Lord meant them to observe: the shepherd pursues a route which he would never think of pursuing if it were only for his own pleasure; his way is not selected for his own ends, but for the sake of the stray sheep. He takes a track up hill and down dale, far into a desert, or into some dark wood, simply because the sheep has gone that way, and he must follow it until he finds it. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a matter of taste and pleasure, would never have been found among the publicans and sinners, nor among any of our guilty race: if he had consulted his own ease and comfort he would have consorted only with pure and holy angels, and the great Father above; but he was not thinking of himself, his heart was set upon the lost ones, and therefore he went where the lost sheep were; "for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The more steadily you look at this parable the more clearly you will see that our Lord's answer was complete. We need not this morning regard it exclusively as an answer to Pharisees, but we may look at it as an instruction to ourselves; for it is quite as complete in that direction. May the good Spirit instruct us as we muse upon it.

I. In the first place, I call attention to this observation: THE ONE SUBJECT OF THOUGHT to the man who had lost his sheep. This sets forth to us the one thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, when he sees a man lost to holiness and happiness by wandering into sin.

The shepherd, on looking over his little flock of one hundred, can only count ninety-nine. He counts them again, and he notices that a certain one has gone: it may be a white-faced sheep with a black mark on its foot: he knows all about it, for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." The shepherd has a photograph of the wanderer in his mind's eye, and now he thinks but little of the ninety and nine who are feeding in the pastures of the wilderness, but his mind is in a ferment about the one lost sheep. This one idea possesses him: "a sheep is lost!" This agitates his mind more and more—"a sheep is lost." It masters his every faculty. He cannot eat bread; he cannot return to his home; he cannot rest while one sheep is lost.

To a tender heart a lost sheep is a painful subject of thought. It is a sheep, and therefore utterly *defenseless* now that it has left its defender. If the wolf should spy it out, or the lion or the bear should come across its track, it would be torn in pieces in an instant. Thus the shepherd asks his heart the question—"What will become of my sheep? Perhaps at this very moment a lion may be ready to spring upon it, and, if so, it cannot help itself!" A sheep is not prepared for fight, and even for flight it has not the swiftness of its enemy. That makes its compassionate owner the more sad as he thinks again—"A sheep is lost, it is in great danger of a cruel death." A sheep is of all creatures the most *senseless*. If we have lost a dog, it may find its way home again; possibly a horse might return to its master's stable; but a sheep will wander on and on, in endless mazes lost. It is too foolish a thing to think of returning to the place of safety. A lost sheep is lost indeed in countries where lands lie unenclosed and the plains are boundless. That fact still seems to ring in the man's soul—"A sheep is lost, and it will not return, for it is a foolish thing. Where may it not have gone by this time? Weary and worn, it may be fainting; it may be far away from green pastures, and be ready to perish with hunger among the bare rocks or upon the arid sand." A sheep is *shiftless*; it knows nothing about providing for itself. The camel can scent water from afar, and a vulture can espy its food from an enormous distance; but the sheep can find nothing for itself. Of all wretched creatures a lost sheep is one of the worst. If anybody had stepped up to the shepherd just then, and said, "Good sir, what aileth you? you seem in great concern;" he would have replied, "And well I

may be, for a sheep is lost." "It is only one, sir; and I see you have ninety-nine left." "Do you call it nothing to lose one? You are no shepherd yourself, or you would not trifle so. Why, I seem to forget these ninety-nine that are all safe, and my mind only remembers that one which is lost."

What is it which makes the Great Shepherd lay so much to his heart the loss of one of his flock? What is it that makes him agitated as he reflects upon that supposition—"if he lose one of them"?

I think it is, first, because of *his property in it*. The parable does not so much speak of a hired shepherd, but of a shepherd proprietor. "What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them." Jesus, in another place, speaks of the hireling, whose own the sheep are not, and therefore he flees when the wolf comes. It is the shepherd proprietor who lays down his life for the sheep. It is not a sheep alone, and a lost sheep, but it is one of his own lost sheep that this man cares for. This parable is not written about lost humanity in the bulk—it may be so used if you please—but in its first sense it is written about Christ's own sheep; as also is the second parable concerning the woman's own money; and the third, not concerning any prodigal youth, but the father's own son. Jesus has his own sheep, and some of them are lost; yea, they were all once in the same condition; for "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." The parable refers to the unconverted, whom Jesus has redeemed with his most precious blood, and whom he has undertaken to seek and to save: these are those other sheep whom also he must bring in. "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." The sheep of Christ are his long before they know it—his even when they wander; when they are brought into the fold by the effectual working of his grace they become manifestly what they were in covenant from of old. The sheep are Christ's, first, because he chose them from before the foundations of the world—"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." His, next, because the Father gave them to him. How he dwells upon that fact in his great prayer in John 17: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." We are the Lord's own flock, furthermore, by his purchase of us; he says: "I lay down my life for the sheep." It is nearly nineteen centuries ago since he paid the ransom price, and bought us to be his own; and we shall be his, for that purchase-money was not paid in vain. And so the Saviour looks upon his hands, and sees the marks of his purchase; he looks upon his side, and sees the token of the effectual redemption of his own elect unto himself by the pouring out of his own heart's blood before the living God. This thought, therefore, presses upon him, "One of my sheep is lost." It is a wonderful supposition, that is contained in this parable—"if he lose one of them." What! lose one whom he loved before ever the earth was? It may wander for a time, but he will not have it lost for ever, that he cannot bear. What! lose one whom his Father gave him to be his own? Lose one whom he has bought with his own life? He will not endure the thought. That word—"if he lose one of them" sets his soul on fire. It shall not be. You know how much the Lord has valued each one of his chosen, laying down his life for his redemption. You know how dearly he loves every one of his people: it is no new passion with him, neither can it grow old. He has loved his own and must love them to the end. From eternity that love has endured already, and it must continue throughout the ages, for he changeth not. Will he lose one of those so dearly loved? Never; never. He has eternal possession of them by a covenant of salt, wherein the Father has given them to him: this it is that in great measure stirs his soul so that he thinks of nothing but this fact,—One of my sheep is lost.

Secondly, he has yet another reason for this all-absorbing thought, namely, *his great compassion* for his lost sheep. The wandering of a soul causes Jesus deep sorrow; he cannot bear the thought of its perishing. Such is the love and tenderness of his heart that he cannot bear that one of his own should be in jeopardy. He can take no rest as long as a soul for whom he shed his blood still abides under the dominion of Satan and under the power of sin; therefore the Great Shepherd neither night nor day forgets his sheep: he must save his flock, and he is straitened til it be accomplished.

He has a deep sympathy with each stray heart. He knows the sorrow that sin brings, the deep pollution and the terrible wounding that comes of transgression, even at the time; and the sore heart and the broken spirit that will come of it before long; so the sympathetic Saviour grieves over each lost sheep, for he knows the misery which lies in the fact of being lost. If you have ever been in a house with a mother and father, and daughters and sons, when a little child has been lost, you will never forget the agitation of each member of the household. See the father as he goes to the police-station, and calls at every likely house; for he must find his child or break his heart. See the deep oppression and bitter anguish of the mother; she is like one distracted until she has news of her darling. You now begin to understand what Jesus feels for one whom he loves, who is graven on the palms of his hands, whom he looked upon in the glass of his foreknowledge, when he was bleeding his life away upon the tree; he hath no rest in his spirit til his beloved is found. He has compassion like a God, and that doth transcend all the compassion of parents or of brothers,—the compassion of an infinite heart brimming over with an ocean of love. This one thought moves the pity of the Lord—“if he lose one of them.”

Moreover, the man in the parable had a third relation to the sheep, which made him possessed with the one thought of its being lost,—*he was a shepherd to it*. It was his own sheep, and he had therefore for that very reason become its shepherd; and he says to himself, “If I lose one of them my shepherd-work will be ill-done.” What dishonour it would be to a shepherd to lose one of his sheep! Either it must be for want of power to keep it, or want of will, or want of watchfulness; but none of these can appertain to the Chief Shepherd. Our Lord Jesus Christ will never have it said of him that he has lost one of his people, for he glories in having preserved them all. “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.” The devil shall never say that Jesus suffered one whom his Father gave him to perish. His work of love cannot in any degree become a failure. His death in vain! No, not in jot or tittle. I can imagine, if it were possible, that the Son of God should live in vain; but to die in vain! It shall never be. The purpose that he meant to achieve by his passion and death he shall achieve, for he is the Eternal, the Infinite, the Omnipotent; and who shall stay his hand, or baffle his design? He will not have it. “If he lose one of them,” says the passage; imagine the consequence. What scorn would come from Satan! What derision would he pour upon the Shepherd! How hell would ring with the news, “He hath lost one of them.” Suppose it to be the feeblest; then would they cry, “He could keep the strong, who could keep themselves.” Suppose it to be the strongest; then would they cry, “He could not even keep one of the mightiest of them, but must needs let him perish.” This is good argument, for Moses pleaded with God, “What will the Egyptians say?” It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones shall perish, neither is it for the glory of Christ that one of his own sheep should be eternally lost.

You see the reason for the Lord’s heart being filled with one burning thought; for first, the sheep is his own; next, he is full of compassion; and then again, it is his office to shepherd the flock.

All this while the sheep is not thinking about the shepherd, or caring for him in the least degree. Some of you are not thinking at all about the Lord Jesus. You have no wish nor will to seek after him! What folly! Oh, the pity of it, that the great heart above should be yearning over you to-day, and should fall to rest because you are in peril, and you, who will be the greater loser, for you will lose your own soul, are sporting with sin, and making yourself merry with destruction. Ah, me! how far you have wandered! How hopeless would your case be if there were not an Almighty Shepherd to think upon you.

II. Now we come to the second point, and observe THE ONE OBJECT OF SEARCH. This sheep lies on the shepherd's heart, and he must at once set out to look for it. He leaves the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness and goes after that which is lost until he find it.

Observe here that it is *a definite search*. The shepherd goes after the sheep, and after nothing else; and he has the one particular sheep in his mind's eye. I should have imagined, from the way in which I have seen this text handled, that Christ, the Shepherd, went down into the wilderness to catch anybody's sheep he could find. Many were running about, and he did not own any one of them more than another, but was content to pick up the one that he could first lay hold upon; or rather, that which first came running after him. Not so is the case depicted in the parable. It is his own sheep that he is seeking, and he goes distinctly after that one. It is his sheep which was lost,—a well-known sheep; well known not only to himself, but even to his friends and neighbours,—for he speaks to them as if it was perfectly understood which sheep it was that he went to save. Jesus knows all about his redeemed, and he goes definitely after such and such a soul. When I am preaching in the name of the Lord, I delight to think that I am sent to individuals with the message of mercy. I am not going to draw the bow at a venture at all; but when the Divine hands are put on mine to draw the bow, the Lord takes such aim that no arrow misses its mark; into the very centre of the heart the word finds its way; for Jesus goes not forth at a peradventure in his dealings with men. He subdues the will and conquers the heart, making his people willing in the day of his power. He calls individuals and they come. He says, "Mary," and the response is, "Rabboni." I say, the man in the parable sought out a distinct individual, and rested not til he found it; so does the Lord Jesus in the movements of his love go forth at no uncertainty; he does not grope about to catch whom he may, as if he played at Blindman's-buff with salvation, but he seeks and saves the one out of his own sheep which he has his eye upon in its wanderings. Jesus knows what he means to do, and he will perform it to the glory of the Father.

Note that this is *an all-absorbing search*. He is thinking of nothing but his own lost sheep. The ninety-and-nine are left in safety; but they are left. When we read that he leaves them in the wilderness we are apt to think of some barren place; but that is not intended: it simply means the open pasturage, the steppe, the prairie: he leaves them well provided for, leaves them because he can leave them. For the time being he is carried away with the one thought that he must seek and save the lost one, and therefore he leaves the ninety-and-nine in their pasture. "Shepherd, the way is very rocky!" He does not seem to know what the way is, his heart is with his lost sheep. "Shepherd, it is a heavy climb up yon mountainside." He does not note his toll; his excitement lends him the feet of the wild goat; he stands securely where at other times his foot would slip. He looks around for his sheep and seems to see neither crag nor chasm. "Shepherd, it is a terrible path by which you must descend into yonder gloomy valley." It is not terrible to him: his only terror is lest his sheep should perish; he is taken up with that one fear, and nothing else. He leaps into danger, and escapes

it by the one strong impulse which bears him on. It is grand to think of the Lord Jesus Christ with his heart set immovably upon the rescue of a soul which at this moment is lost to him.

It is *an active search too*; for observe, he goes after that which is lost, until he finds it; and he does this with *a personal search*. He does not say to one of his underlings, "Here, hasten after that sheep which was lost, and bring it home." No, *he* follows it himself. And if ever there is a soul brought from sin to grace, it is not by us poor ministers working alone, but it is by the Master himself, who goes after his own sheep. It is glorious to think of him still personally tracking sinners, who, though they fly from him with a desperateness of folly, yet are still pursued by him—pursued by the Son of God, by the Eternal Lover of men—pursued by him until he finds them.

For notice *the perseverance of the search*: "until he find it." He does not stop til he has done the deed. You and I ought to seek after a soul, how long? Why, until we find it; for such is the model set before us by the Master. The parable says nothing about his not finding it; no hint of failure is given; we dream not that there may be a sheep belonging to him which he will never find. Oh, brethren, there are a great many whom you and I would never find; but when Jesus is after his own lost sheep, depend upon it such is his skill, so clearly does he see, and so effectually does he intervene, that he will surely bring them in. A defeated Christ I cannot conceive of. It is a personal search, and a persevering search, and *a successful search*, until he finds it. Let us praise and bless his name for this.

Observe that when the shepherd does find it, there is a little touch in the parable not often noticed,—he does not appear to put it back into the fold again: I mean, we do not find it so written, as a fact to be noted. I suppose he did so place it ultimately; but for the time being he keeps it with himself rather than with its fellows. The next scene is the shepherd at home, saying, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." It looks as if Jesus did not save a soul so much to the church as to himself, and though the saved are in the flock, the greatest joy of all is that the sheep is with the shepherd. This shows you how thoroughly Christ lays himself out that he may save his people. There is nothing in Christ that does not tend toward the salvation of his redeemed. There are no pullbacks with him, no half-consecrated influences which make him linger. In the pursuit of certain objects we lay out a portion of our faculties; but Jesus lays out all his powers upon the seeking and saving of souls.

The whole Christ seeks after each sinner; and when the Lord finds it, he gives himself to that one soul as if he had but that one soul to bless. How my heart admires the concentration of all the Godhead and manhood of Christ in his search after each sheep of his flock.

III. Now, we must pass on very briefly to notice a third point. We have had one subject of thought and one object of search; now we have ONE BURDEN OF LOVE. When the seeking is ended, then the saving appears,—"When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." Splendid action this! How beautifully the parable sets forth the whole of salvation. Some of the old writers delight to put it thus: in his incarnation he came after the lost sheep; in his life he continued to seek it; in his death he laid it upon his shoulders; in his resurrection he bore it on its way, and in his ascension he brought it home rejoicing. Our Lord's career is a course of soul-winning, a life laid out for his people; and in it you may trace the whole process of salvation.

But now, see, the shepherd finds the sheep, and he lays it on his shoulders. It is *an uplifting action*, raising the fallen one from the earth whereon he has strayed. It is as though he took the sheep just as it was, without a word of rebuke, without delay or hesitancy, and lifted it out of the slough or the briers into a place of safety. Do you not remember when the Lord lifted you up from

the horrible pit? When he sent from above, and delivered you, and became your strength? I shall never forget that day. What a wonderful lift it was for me when the Great Shepherd lifted me into newness of life. The Lord said of Israel, "I bare you on eagles' wings;" but it is a dearer emblem still to be born upon the shoulders of the incarnate Lord.

This laying on the shoulders was *an appropriating act*. He seemed to say, "You are my sheep, and therefore I lay you on my shoulders." He did not make his claim in so many words, but by a rapid action he declared it: for a man does not bear away a sheep to which he has no right: this was not a sheep-stealer, but a shepherd-proprietor. He holds fast the sheep by all four of its legs, so that it cannot stir, and then he lays it on his own shoulders, for it is all his own now. He seems to say, "I am a long way from home, and I am in a weary desert; but I have found my sheep, and these hands shall hold it." Here are our Lord's own words, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Hands of such might as those of Jesus will hold fast the found one. Shoulders of such power as those of Jesus will safely bear the found one home. It is all well with that sheep, for it is positively and experimentally the Good Shepherd's own, just as it always had been his in the eternal purpose of the Father. Do you remember when Jesus said unto you, "Thou art mine"? Then I know you also appropriated him, and began to sing—

"So I my best Beloved's am,  
And he is mine."

More condescending still is another view of this act: it was *a deed of service to the sheep*. The sheep is uppermost, the weight of the sheep is upon the shepherd. The sheep rides, the shepherd is the burden-bearer. The sheep rests, the shepherd labours. "I am among you as he that serveth," said our Lord long ago. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." On that cross he bore the burden of our sin, and what is more, the burden of our very selves. Blessed be his name, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," and he hath laid us on him, too, and he beareth us. Remember that choice Scripture: "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Soul-melting thought, the Son of God became subservient to the sons of man! The Maker of heaven and earth bowed his shoulders to bear the weight of sinners.

It was a *rest-giving act*, very likely *needful* to the sheep which could go no further, and was faint and weary. It was a full rest to the poor creature if it could have understood it, to feel itself upon its shepherd's shoulders, irresistibly carried back to safety. What a rest it is to you and to me to know that we are born along by the eternal power and Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ! "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." The Christ upbears us to-day: we have no need of strength: our weakness is no impediment, for he bears us. Hath not the Lord said, "I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you"? We shall not even stumble, much less fall to ruin: the shepherd's feet shall traverse all the road in safety. No portion of the way back should cause us fear, for he is able to bear us even to his home above. What a sweet word is that in Deuteronomy: "The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place." Blessed rest of faith, to give yourself up entirely to those hands and shoulders to keep and carry you even to the end! Let us bless and praise the Lord. The shepherd is consecrated to his burden: he bears nothing on his shoulders but his sheep; and the Lord Jesus seemeth to bear no burden but that of his people. He lays out his omnipotence to save his chosen; having redeemed them first with price of blood, he

redeems them still with all his power. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." Oh the glorious grace of our unfailing Saviour, who consecrates himself to our salvation, and concentrates upon that object all that he has and is!

IV. We close by noticing one more matter, which is—THE ONE SOURCE OF JOY. This man who had lost his sheep is filled with joy, but his sheep is the sole source of it. His sheep has so taken up all his thought, and so commanded all his faculties, that as he found all his care centred upon it, so he now finds all his joy flowing from it.

I invite you to notice the first mention of joy we get here: "When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." "That is a great load for you, shepherd!" Joyfully he answers, "I am glad to have it on my shoulders." The mother does not say when she has found her lost child, "This is a heavy load." No; she presses it to her bosom. She does not mind how heavy it is; it is a dear burden to her. She is rejoiced to bear it once again. "He layeth it on his shoulders, *rejoicing*." Remember that text: "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." A great sorrow was on Christ when our load was laid on him; but a greater joy flashed into his mind when he thought that we were thus recovered from our lost estate. He said to himself, "I have taken them up upon my shoulders, and none can hurt them now, neither can they wander to destruction. I am bearing their sin, and they shall never come into condemnation. The penalty of their guilt has been laid on me that it may never be laid on them. I am an effectual and efficient Substitute for them. I am bearing, that they may never bear, my Father's righteous ire." His love to them made it a joy to feel every lash of the scourge of justice; his love to them made it a delight that the nails should pierce his hands and feet, and that his heart should be broken with the absence of his Father, God. Even "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," when the deeps of its woe have been sounded, will be found to have pearls of joy in its caverns. No shout of triumph can equal that cry of grief, because our Lord joyed to bear even the forsaking by his Father for the sin of his chosen whom he had loved from before the foundation of the world. Oh, you cannot understand it except in a very feeble measure! Let us try to find an earthly miniature likeness. A son is taken ill far away from home. He is laid sick with a fever, and a telegram is sent home. His mother says she *must* go and nurse him; she is wretched til she can set out upon the journey. It is a dreary place where her boy lies, but for the moment it is the dearest spot on earth to her. She joys to leave the comforts of her home to tarry among strangers for the love of her boy. She feels an intense joy in sacrificing herself; she refuses to retire from the bedside, she will not leave her charge; she watches day and night, and only from utter exhaustion does she fall asleep. You could not have kept her in England, she would have been too wretched. It was a great, deep, solemn pleasure for her to be where she could minister to her own beloved. Soul, remember you have given Jesus great joy in his saving you. He was for ever with the Father, eternally happy, infinitely glorious, as God over all; yet he must needs come hither out of boundless love, take upon himself our nature, and suffer in our stead to bring us back to holiness and God. "He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." That day the shepherd knew but one joy. He had found his sheep, and the very pressure of it upon his shoulders made his heart light, for he knew by that sign that the object of his care was safe beyond all question.

Now he goes home with it, and this joy of his was then so great that it filled his soul to overflowing. The parable speaks nothing as to his joy in getting home again, nor a word concerning the joy of being saluted by his friends and neighbours. No, the joy of having found his sheep eclipsed all other gladness of heart, and dimmed the light of home and friendship. He turns around to friends and neighbours and entreats them to help him to bear the weight of his happiness. He cries, "Rejoice

with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." One sinner had repented, and all heaven must make holiday concerning it. Oh, brethren, there is enough joy in the heart of Christ over his saved ones to flood all heaven with delight. The streets of Paradise run knee-deep with the heavenly waters of the Saviour's joy. They flow out of the very soul of Christ, and angels and glorified spirits bathe in the mighty stream. Let us do the same. We are friends if we are not neighbours. He calls us to-day to come and bring our hearts, like empty vessels, that he may fill them with his own joy, that our joy may be full. Those of us who are saved must enter into the joy of our Lord. When I was trying to think over this text I rejoiced with my Lord in the bringing in of each of his sheep, for each one makes a heaven full of joy. But, oh to see all the redeemed brought in! Jesus would have no joy if he should lose one: it would seem to spoil it all. If the purpose of mercy were frustrated in any one instance it were a dreary defeat of the great Saviour. But his purpose shall be carried out in every instance. He "shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He shall not fail nor be discouraged. He shall carry out the will of the Father. He shall have the full reward of his passion. Let us joy and rejoice with him this morning!

But the text tells us there was more joy over that one lost sheep than over the ninety-and-nine that went not astray. Who are these just persons that need no repentance? Well, you should never explain a parable so as to make it run on four legs if it was only meant to go on two. There may not be such persons at all, and yet the parable may be strictly accurate. If all of us had been such persons, and had never needed repentance, we should not have given as much joy to the heart of Christ as one sinner does when he repents. But suppose it to mean you and me who have long ago repented—who have, in a certain sense, now no need of repentance, because we are justified men and women—we do not give so much joy to the heart of God, for the time being, as a sinner does when he first returns to God. It is not that it is a good thing to go astray, or a bad thing to be kept from it. You understand how that is: there are seven children in a family, and six of them are all well; but one dear child is taken seriously ill, and is brought near to the gates of death. It has recovered, its life is spared, and do you wonder that for the time being it gives more joy to the household than all the healthy ones? There is more expressed delight about it a great deal than over all those that have not been ill at all. This does not show it is a good thing to be ill. No, nothing of the kind; we are only speaking of *the joy* which comes of recovery from sickness. Take another case: you have a son who has been long away in a far country, and another son at home. You love them both equally, but when the absent son comes home he is for a season most upon your thoughts. Is it not natural that it should be so? Those at home give us joy constantly from day to day, but when the stream of joy has been dammed back by his absence, it pours down in a flood upon his return. Then we have "high days and holy days" and "bonfire nights."

There are special circumstances about repentance and conversion which produce joy over a restored wanderer. There was a preceding sorrow, and this sets off the joy by contrast. The shepherd was so touched with compassion for the lost sheep, that now his sorrow is inevitably turned into joy. He suffered a dreadful suspense, and that is a killing thing; it is like an acid eating into the soul. That suspense which makes one ask, Where is the sheep? Where can it be? is a piercing of the heart. All those weary hours of searching, and seeking, and following are painfully wearing to the heart. You feel as if you would almost sooner know that you never would find it than be in that doubtful state of mind. That suspense when it is ended naturally brings with it a sweet liberty of joy. Moreover, you know that the joy over penitents is so unselfish that you who have been kept by the grace of God for many years do not grieve that there should be more joy over a repenting

sinner than over you. No, you say to yourself, "There is good cause. I am myself among those who are glad." You remember that good men made great rejoicing over you when you first came to Jesus; and you heartily unite with them in welcoming newcomers. You will not act the elder brother, and say, I will not share the joy of my Father. Not a bit of it; but you will enter heartily into the music and dancing, and count it your heaven to see souls saved from hell. I feel a sudden flush and flood of delight when I meet with a poor creature who once lay at hell's dark door, but is now brought to the gate of heaven. Do not you?

The one thing I want to leave with you is how our gracious Lord seems to give himself up to his own redeemed. How entirely and perfectly every thought of his heart, every action of his power, goes toward the needy, guilty, lost soul. He spends his all to bring back his banished. Poor souls who believe in him have his whole strength engaged on their behalf. Blessed be his name! Now let all our hearts go forth in love toward him, who gave all his heart to work our redemption. Let us love him. We cannot love him as he loved us as to measure; but let us do so in like manner. Let us love him with all our heart and soul. Let us feel as if we saw nothing, knew nothing, loved nothing save Jesus crucified. As we filled all *his* heart let him fill all our hearts!

Oh, poor sinner, here to-day, will you not yield to the Good Shepherd? will you not stand still as he draws near? Will you not submit to his mighty grace? Know that your rescue from sin and death must be of him, and of him alone. Breathe a prayer to him,—“Come, Lord, I wait for thy salvation! Save me, for I trust in thee.” If thou dost thus pray, thou hast the mark upon thee of Christ's sheep, for he saith, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” Come to him, for he comes to you. Look to him for he looks to you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 15:1-24.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—387, 403, 388.

## Obadiah; or, Early Piety Eminent Piety

A Sermon

(No. 1804)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, October 19th, 1884, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth.”—1 Kings 18:12.

I SUSPECT that Elijah did not think very much of Obadiah. He does not treat him with any great consideration, but addresses him more sharply than one would expect from a fellow-believer. Elijah was the man of action—bold, always to the front, with nothing to conceal; Obadiah was a quiet believer, true and steadfast, but in a very difficult position, and therefore driven to perform his duty in a less open manner. His faith in the Lord swayed his life, but did not drive him out of the court. I notice that even after Elijah had learned more of him at this interview, he speaks concerning God's people as if he did not reckon much upon Obadiah, and others like him. He says, “They have thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” He knew very well that Obadiah was left, who, though not exactly a prophet, was a man of mark; but he seems to ignore him as if he were of small account in the great struggle. I suppose it was because this man of iron, this prophet of fire and thunder, this mighty servant of the Most High, set small store by anybody who did not come to the front and fight like himself: I know it is the tendency of brave and zealous minds somewhat to undervalue quiet, retired piety. True and accepted servants of God may be doing their best under great disadvantages, against fierce opposition, but they may scarcely be known, and may even shun the least recognition; therefore men who live in the fierce light of public life are apt to underestimate them. These minor stars are lost in the brilliance of the man whom God lights up like a new sun to flame through the darkness. Elijah flashed over the sky of Israel like a thunderbolt from the hand of the Eternal, and naturally he would be somewhat impatient of those whose movements were slower and less conspicuous. It is Martha and Mary over again, in some respects.

The Lord does not love that his servants, however great they are, should think lightly of their lesser comrades, and it occurs to me that he so arranged matters that Obadiah became important to Elijah when he had to face the wrathful king of Israel. The prophet is bidden to go and show himself to Ahab, and he does so; but he judges it better to begin by showing himself to the governor of his palace, that he may break the news to his master, and prepare him for the interview. Ahab was exasperated by the terrible results of the long drought, and might in his sudden fury attempt to kill the prophet, and so he is to have time for consideration, that he may cool down a little.

Elijah has an interview with Obadiah, and bids him go and say to Ahab, “Behold Elijah.” It may sometimes be the nearest way to our object to go a little round about. But it is remarkable that Obadiah should thus be made useful to a man so much his superior. He who never feared the face of kings nevertheless found himself using as his helper a far more timid individual. The Lord may put you, my dear brother, who are so eminent, so useful, so brave, perhaps, so severe, into a position in which the humbler and more retiring believer, who has not half the grace, nor half the courage that you have, may, nevertheless, become important to your mission; and when he does this he

would have you learn the lesson, and learn it well, that the Lord has a place for all his servants, and that he would not have us despise the least of them, but value them, and cherish the good that is in them. The head must not say to the foot, I have no need of thee. Those members of the mystical body which are weakest are yet necessary to the whole fabric. The Lord does not despise the day of small things, neither will he have his people do so. Elijah must not deal harshly with Obadiah. I would that Obadiah had had more courage: I wish that he had testified for the Lord, his God, as openly as Elijah did; but still every man in his own, order, to his own master every servant must stand or fall. All lights are not moons, some are only stars; and even one star differeth from another star in glory. God hath his praise out of the least known of the holy characters of Scripture; even as the night hath its light out of those glimmering bodies which cannot be discerned as separate stars, but are portions of nebulous masses in which myriads of far-off lights are melted into one.

We learn further from the narrative before us, that God will never leave himself without witnesses in this world. Aye, and he will not leave himself without witnesses in the worst places of the world. What a horrible abode for a true believer Ahab's court must have been! If there had been no sinner there but that woman Jezebel, she was enough to make the palace a sink of iniquity. That strong-minded, proud, Sidonian Queen twisted poor Ahab round her fingers just as she pleased. He might never have been the persecutor he was if his wife had not stirred him up; but she hated the worship of Jehovah intensely, and despised the homeliness of Israel in comparison with the more pompous style of Sidon. Ahab must yield to her imperious demands, for she would brook no contradiction, and when her proud spirit was roused she defied all opposition. Yet in that very court where Jezebel was mistress, the chamberlain was a man who feared God greatly. Never be surprised to meet with a believer anywhere. Grace can live where you would never expect to see it survive for an hour.

Joseph feared God in the court of Pharaoh, Daniel was a trusted counsellor of Nebuchadnezzar, Mordecai waited at the gate of Ahasuerus, Pilate's wife pleaded for the life of Jesus, and there were saints in Caesar's household. Think of finding diamonds of the first water on such a dunghill as Nero's palace. Those who feared God in Rome were not only Christians, but they were examples to all other Christians for their brotherly love and generosity. Surely there is no place in this land where there is not some light: the darkest cavern of iniquity has its torch. Be not afraid; you may find followers of Jesus in the precincts of Pandemonium. In the palace of Ahab you meet an Obadiah who rejoices to hold fellowship with despised saints, and quits the levees of a monarch for the hiding places of persecuted ministers.

I notice that these witnesses for God are very often persons converted in their youth. He seems to take a delight to make these his special standard-bearers in the day of battle. Look at Samuel! When all Israel became disgusted with the wickedness of Eli's sons the child Samuel ministered before the Lord. Look at David! When he is but a shepherd boy he wakes the echoes of the lone hills with his psalms and the accompanying music of his harp. See Josiah! When Israel had revolted it was a child, Josiah by name, that broke down the altars of Baal and burned the bones of his priests. Daniel was but a youth when he took his stand for purity and God. The Lord hath to-day—I know not where—some little Luther on his mother's knee, some young Calvin learning in our Sunday-school, some youthful Zwingli singing a hymn to Jesus. This age may grow worse and worse; I sometimes think it will, for many signs look that way; but the Lord is preparing for it. The days are dark and ominous; and this eventide may darken down into a blacker night than has been known before; but God's cause is safe in God's hands. His work will not tarry for want of men.

Put not forth the hand of Uzzah to steady the ark of the Lord; it shall go safely on in God's predestined way. Christ will not fail nor be discouraged. God buries his workmen, but his work lives on. If there be not in the palace a king who honors God, there shall yet be found there a governor who fears the Lord from his youth, who shall take care of the Lord's prophets, and hide them away till better days shall come. Wherefore be of good courage, and look for happier hours. Nothing of real value is in jeopardy while Jehovah is on the throne. The Lord's reserves are coming up, and their drums beat victory.

Concerning Obadiah I wish to speak with you this morning. His piety is the subject of discourse, and we wish to use it for stimulating the zeal of those who teach the young.

I. First, we shall notice that Obadiah possessed EARLY PIETY—"I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." Oh that all our youth who may grow up to manhood and womanhood may be able to say the same. Happy are the people who are in such a case!

How Obadiah came to fear the Lord in youth we cannot tell. The instructor by whom he was led to faith in Jehovah is not mentioned. Yet we may reasonably conclude that he had believing parents. Slender as the ground may seem to be, I think it is pretty firm, when I remind you of *his name*. This would very naturally be given him by his father or his mother, and as it signifies "the servant of Jehovah." I should think it indicated his parents' piety. In the days when there was persecution everywhere against the faithful, and the name of Jehovah was in contempt because the calves of Bethel and the images of Baal were set up everywhere, I do not think that unbelieving parents would have given to their child the name of "The servant of Jehovah" if they themselves had not felt a reverence for the Lord. They would not idly have courted the remarks of their idolatrous neighbors, and the enmity of the great. In a time when names meant something, they would have called him. "The child of Baal," or "The servant of Chemosh," or some other name expressive of reverence to the popular gods, if the fear of God had not been before their eyes. The selection of such a name betrays to me their earnest desire that their boy might grow up to serve Jehovah, and never bow his knee before the abhorred idols of the Sidonian Queen. Whether this be so or not, it is quite certain that thousands of the most intelligent believers owe their first bent towards godliness to the sweet associations of home. How many of us might well have borne some such a name as that of Obadiah; for no sooner did we see the light than our parents tried to enlighten us with the truth. We were consecrated to the service of God before we knew that there was a God. Many a tear of earnest prayer fell on our infant brow and sealed us for heaven; we were nursed in the atmosphere of devotion; there was scarce a day in which we were not urged to be faithful servants of God, and entreated while we were yet young to seek Jesus and give our hearts to him. Oh, what we owe, many of us, to the providence which gave us such a happy parentage! Blessed be God for his great mercy to the children of his chosen!

If he had no gracious parents, I cannot tell how Obadiah came to be a believer in the Lord in those sad days, unless he fell in with some kind teacher, tender nurse, or perhaps good servant in his father's house, or pious neighbor, who dared to gather little children round about him and tell of the Lord God of Israel. Some holy woman may have instilled the law of the Lord into his young mind before the priests of Baal could poison him with their falsehoods. No mention is made of anybody in connection with this man's conversion in his youth, and it does not matter: does it? You and I do not want to be mentioned if we are right-hearted servants of God. Not unto us be the glory. If souls are saved, God has the honor of it. He knows what instrument he used, and as he knows it, that is enough. The favor of God is fame enough for a believer. All the blasts of fame's

brazen trumpet are but so much wasted wind compared with that one sentence from the mouth of God, "well done, good and faithful servant." Go on, dear teachers: since you are called to the sacred ministry of instructing the young, do not grow weary of it. Go on, though you may be unknown, for your seed sown in the darkness shall be reaped in the light. You may be teaching an Obadiah, whose name shall be heard in future years; you are providing a father for the church, and a benefactor for the world. Though your name be forgotten, your work shall not be. When that illustrious day shall dawn, compared with which all other days are dim, when the unknown shall be made known to the assembled universe, what you have spoken in darkness shall be declared in the light.

If it was not in this way that Obadiah was brought to fear the Lord in his youth, we may think of methods such as the Lord deviseth for the bringing in of his banished. I have been very pleased lately, when I have been seeing enquirers, to talk with several young persons who have come out from utterly worldly families. I put to them the question, "Is your father a member of a Christian church?" The answer has been a shake of the head. "Does he attend a place of worship?" "No, sir, I never knew him to go to one." "Your mother?" "Mother does not care about religion." "Have you any brother or sister like-minded with yourself?" "No, sir." "Have you any single relative who knows the Lord?" "No, sir." "Were you brought up by anyone who led you to attend the means of grace and urged you to believe on the Lord Jesus?" "No, sir, and yet from my childhood I have always had a desire to know the Lord." Is it not remarkable that it should be so? What a wonderful proof of the election of grace! Here is one taken out of a family while all the rest are left; what say you to this? Here is one called in early childhood and prompted by the secret whispers of the Spirit of God to seek after the Lord while all the rest of the family slumber in midnight darkness. If that is your case, dear friend, magnify the sovereignty of God and adore him as long as you live, for "he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy."

Still, I take it, the major part of those who come to know the Lord in their youth are persons who have had the advantage of godly parents and holy training. Let us persevere in the use of those means which the Lord ordinarily uses, for this is the way of wisdom and duty.

This early piety of Obadiah's *had special marks of genuineness about it*. The way in which he described it is, to my mind, very instructive, "I thy servant *fear the Lord* from my youth." I hardly remember in all my life to have heard the piety of children described in ordinary conversation by this term, though it is the common word of the Scriptures. We say, "The dear child loved God." We talk of their "being made so happy," and so forth, and I do not question the rightness of the language; still, the Holy Spirit speaks of "the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom;" and David says, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Children will get great joy through faith in the Lord Jesus; but that joy, if true, is full of lowly reverence and awe of the Lord. Joy may be the sweet fruit of the Spirit, but it also may be an excitement of the flesh; for you remember that they upon the stony ground, which had not much depth of earth, received the word with joy, and the seed sprang up immediately; but as they had no root, they withered when the sun was risen with burning heat. We cannot consider the exhilaration with which hearts receive the novelty of the gospel to be the very best and surest sign of grace. Again, we are pleased with children when we see in them much knowledge of the things of God, for in any case such knowledge is most desirable; yet it is not conclusive evidence of conversion. Of course that knowledge may be a divine fruit; if they are taught of the Spirit of God it is indeed well with them: but as it is more than possible that we ourselves may know the Scriptures and understand the whole theory of the gospel and yet may not be saved, the like may be true in the case of our youth. The

fear of God which is so often neglected is one of the best evidences of sincere piety. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us. When either child or adult has the fear of God before his eyes, this is the finger of God. By this we do not mean the servile fear which worketh dread and bondage, but that holy fear which pays reverence before the majesty of the Most High, and has a high esteem of all things sacred, because God is great, and greatly to be praised. Above all things young people need a dread of doing wrong, tenderness of conscience, and anxiety of spirit to please God. Such a principle is a sure work of grace, and a surer proof of the work of the Holy Ghost than all the joy a child can feel, or all the knowledge it can acquire. I ask all teachers of the young to look well to this. There is a growing flightiness about the religion of the present day which makes me tremble. I cannot endure the religion which swims only in boiling water and breathes only in heated air. To me the whisper of the Spirit has no relationship to a brass band, much less does godliness treat the great God and the Holy Saviour as matters for irreverent clamor. The deep-seated fear of the Lord is what is wanted, whether in old or young: it is better to tremble at the word of the Lord, and to bow before the infinite majesty of divine love, than to shout oneself hoarse. O that we had more of the stern righteousness: of the Puritans, or of the inner feeling of the olden Friends. Men nowadays put on their shoes and stamp and kick, and few seem to feel the power of that command, given of old to Moses, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The truth of God is not meant to inflate us, but to humble us before the throne. Obadiah had early piety of the right kind.

Beloved, you do not need that I should at this point speak to you at large upon *the advantages of early piety*. I will, therefore, only sum them up in a few sentences. To be a believer in God early in life is to be saved from a thousand regrets. Such a man shall never have to say that he carries in his bones the sins of his youth. Early piety helps us to form associations for the rest of life which will prove helpful, and it saves us from those which are harmful. The Christian young man will not fall into the common sins of young men, and injure his constitution by excesses. He will be likely to be married to a Christian woman, and so to have a holy companion in his march towards heaven. He will select as his associates those who will be his friends in the church and not in the tavern; his helpers in virtue, and not his tempters to vice. Depend upon it, a great deal depends upon whom we choose for our companions when we begin life. If we start in bad company, it is very hard to break away from it. The man brought to Christ early in life has this further advantage, that he is helped to form holy habits, and he is saved from being the slave of their opposites. Habits soon become a second nature; to form new ones is hard work; but those formed in youth remain in old age. There is something in that verse,—

“‘Tis easier work if we begin  
To serve the Lord betimes  
But sinners who grow old in sin  
Are hardened in their crimes.”

I am sure it is so. Moreover, I notice that, very frequently, those who are brought to Christ whilst young grow in grace more rapidly and readily than others do. They have not so much to unlearn, and they have not such a heavy weight of old memories to carry. The scars and bleeding sores which come of having spent years in the service of the devil are missed by those whom the Lord brings into his church before they have wandered far into the world.

As to early piety in its bearing upon others, I cannot too highly commend it. How attractive it is! Grace looks loveliest in youth. That which would not be noticed in the grown-up man, strikes

at once the most careless observer when seen in a child. Grace in a child has a convincing force: the infidel drops his weapon and admires. A word spoken by a child abides in the memory, and its artless accents touch the heart. Where the minister's sermon fails, the child's prayer may gain the victory. Moreover, religion in children suggests encouragement to those of riper years; for others seeing the little one saved say to themselves, "Why should not we also find the Lord?" By a certain secret power it opens closed doors, and turns the key in the lock of unbelief. Where nothing else could win a way for truth, a child's love has done it. It is still true, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." Go on, go on, dear teachers, to promote this most precious of all things beneath the sky, true religion in the heart—especially in the heart of the young.

I have taken up, perhaps, too much time upon this early piety, and therefore I will only give you hints, in the next place, as to its results:

II. Youthful piety leads on to PERSEVERING PIETY. Obadiah could say, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." Time had not changed him: whatever his age may have been, his religion had not decayed. We are all fond of novelty, and I have known some men go wrong as it were for a change. It is not burning quick to the death in martyrdom that is the hard work; roasting before a slow fire is a far more terrible test of firmness. To continue gracious during a long life of temptation is to be gracious indeed. For the grace of God to convert a man like Paul, who is full of threatenings against the saints, is a great marvel, but for the grace of God to preserve a believer for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, is quite as great a miracle, and deserves more of our praise than it usually commands. Obadiah was not affected by the lapse of time; he was found to be when old what he was when young.

Nor was he carried away by the fashion of those evil times. To be a servant of Jehovah was thought to be a mean thing, old-fashioned, ignorant; a thing of the past; the worship of Baal was the "modern thought" of the hour. All the court walked after the God of Sidon, and all the courtiers went in the same way. My lord worshipped Baal, and my lady worshipped Baal, for the queen worshipped Baal; but Obadiah said, "I thy servant fear Jehovah from my youth." Blessed is the man who cares nothing for the fashion, for it passeth away. If for a while it rageth towards evil, what hath the believing man to do but to abide steadfastly by the right? Obadiah was not even affected by the absence of the means of grace. The priests and Levites had fled into Judah, and the prophets had been killed or hidden away, and there was no public worship of Jehovah in Israel. The temple was far away at Jerusalem; therefore he had no opportunity of hearing anything that could strengthen him or stimulate him; yet he held on his way. I wonder how long some professors would keep up their profession if there were no places of worship, no Christian associations, no ministrations of the word; but this man's fear of the Lord was so deep that the absence of that which is usually wanted for the sustenance of piety did not cause him to decline. May you and I personally feed upon the Lord Jesus in the secret of our souls, so that we may flourish even though we should be far removed from a profitable ministry. May the Holy Ghost make us steadfast, unmovable evermore.

Added to this, there were the difficulties of his position. He was chamberlain of the palace. If he had pleased Jezebel and worshipped Baal he might have been much easier in his situation, for he would have enjoyed her royal patronage; but there he was, governor in Ahab's house, and yet fearing Jehovah. He must have had to walk very delicately, and watch his words most carefully. I do not wonder that he became a very cautious person, and was a little afraid even of Elijah, lest he

was giving him a commission which would lead to his destruction. He came to be extremely prudent, and looked on things round about so as neither to compromise his conscience nor jeopardise his position. It wants an uncommonly wise man to do that, but he who can accomplish it is to be commended. He did not run away from his position, nor retreat from his religion. If he had been forced to do wrong, I am sure he would have imitated the priests and Levites and have fled into Judah, where the worship of Jehovah continued; but he felt that without yielding to idolatry he could do something for God in his advantageous position, and therefore he determined to stop and fight it out. When there is no hope of victory you may as well retire; but he is the brave man who when the bugle sounds retreat does not hear it, who puts his blind eye to the telescope and cannot see the signal to cease firing, but just holds his position against all odds, and does all the damage he can to the enemy. Obadiah was a man who did in truth "hold the fort," for he felt that when all the prophets were doomed by Jezebel it was his part to stay near the tigress and save the lives of at least a hundred servants of God from her cruel power. If he could not do more he would not have lived in vain if he accomplished so much. I admire the man whose decision was equal to his prudence, though I should greatly fear to occupy so perilous a place. His course was something like walking on the tight rope with Blondin. I should not like to try it myself, nor would I recommend any of you to attempt a feat so difficult. The part of Elijah is much safer and grander. The prophet's course was plain enough; he had not to please, but to reprove Ahab; he had not to be wary, but to act in a bold outspoken manner for the God of Israel. How much the greater man he seems to be when the two stand together in the scene before us. Obadiah falls on his face and calls him "My lord Elijah;" and well he might, for morally he was far his inferior. Yet I must not fall into Ellijah's vein myself lest I have to pull myself up with a sharp check. It was a great thing for Obadiah that he could manage Ahab's household with Jezebel in it, and yet, for all that, win this commendation from the Spirit of God, that *he feared the Lord greatly*.

He persevered, too, notwithstanding his success in life; and that I hold to be much to his credit. There is nothing more perilous to a man than to prosper in this world and become rich and respectable. Of course we desire it, wish for it, strive for it; but how many in winning it have lost all, as to spiritual wealth! The man used to love the people of God, and now he says, "they are a vulgar class of persons." So long as he could hear the gospel he did not mind the architecture of the house, but now he has grown aesthetic, and must have a spire, gothic architecture, a marble pulpit, priestly millinery, a conservatory in the church, and all sorts of pretty things. As he has filled his pocket he has emptied his brains, and especially emptied his heart. He has got away from truth and principle in proportion as he has made an advance in his estate. This is a mean business, which at one time he would have been the first to condemn. There is no chivalry in such conduct; it is dastardly to the last degree. God save us from it; but a great many people are not saved from it. Their religion is not a matter of principle, but a matter of interest: it is not the pursuit of truth, but a hankering after society, whatever that may mean; it is not their object to glorify God, but to get rich husbands for their girls: it is not conscience that guides them, but the hope of being able to invite Sir John to dinner with them, and of dining at the hall in return. Do not think I am sarcastic: I speak in sober sadness of things which make one feel ashamed. I hear of them daily, though they do not personally affect me, or this church. This is an age of meannesses disguised under the notion of respectability. God send us men of the stuff of John Knox, or, if you prefer it, of the adamant metal of Elijah, and if these should prove too stiff and stern we could even be content with such

men as Obadiah. Possibly these last might be harder to produce than Elijahs: with God all things are possible.

III. Obadiah with his early grace and persevering decision became a man of EMINENT PIETY, and this is the more remarkable considering what he was and where he was. Eminent piety in a Lord High Chamberlain of Ahab's court! This is a wonder of grace indeed. This man's religion was intense within him. If he did not make the open use of it that Elias did, he was not called to such a career; but it dwelt deep within his soul and others knew it. Jezebel knew it, I have no doubt whatever. She did not like him, but she had to endure him, she looked askance at him, but she could not dislodge him. Ahab had learned to trust him and could not do without him, for he probably furnished him with a little strength of mind. Possibly Ahab liked to retain him just to show Jezebel that he could be obstinate if he liked and was still a man. I have noticed that the most yielding husbands like to indulge in some notion that they are not quite governed by their spouses, and it is possible that on this account Ahab retained Obadiah in his position. At any rate, there he was, and he never yielded to Ahab's sin, nor countenanced his idolatry. Account for it how you may, it is a singular circumstance that in the center of rebellion against God there was one whose devotion to God was intense and distinguished. As it is horrible to find a Judas among the apostles, so it is grand to discover an Obadiah among Ahab's courtiers. What grace must have been at work to maintain such a fire in the midst of the sea, such godliness in the midst of the vilest iniquity!

And his eminent piety was very *practical*; for when Jezebel was slaying the prophets he hid them away from her—one hundred of them. I do not know how many servants of the Lord any of you support, but I have not the privilege of knowing any gentleman who sustains a hundred ministers; this man's hospitality was on a grand scale. He fed them with the best he could find for them, and risked his life for them by hiding them away in caves from the search of the queen. He not only used his purse but staked his life when a price was set upon these men's heads. How many among us would place our lives in jeopardy for one of the Lord's servants? At any rate, Obadiah's fear of the Lord brought forth precious fruit, and proved itself to be a powerful principle of action.

His godliness was such, too, that it was recognised by the believers of the day. I feel sure of that, because Obadiah said to Elijah, "Was it not told my lord how I hid the Lord's prophets?" Now, Elijah was the well-known head and leader of the followers of Jehovah throughout that whole nation, and Obadiah was a little astonished that somebody had not told the great prophet about his deed; so that though his generous act may have been concealed from Jezebel and the Baalites, it was well known among the servants of the living God. He was well reported of among those whose good report is worth having; it was whispered about among them that they had a friend at court, that the chamberlain of the palace was on their side. If anybody could rescue a prophet he could, and therefore the prophets of God felt secure in giving themselves up to his care; they knew that he would not betray them to bloodthirsty Jezebel. Their coming to him and confiding in him shows that his faithfulness was well known and highly esteemed. Thus he was strong enough in grace to be a leader recognized by the godly party.

He himself evidently knew Elijah, and did not disdain at once to pay him the utmost reverence. The prophet of God, who was at that moment hated of all men because of the judgment which had been indicted by his means, and was the special object of the king's pursuit, was honored by this gracious man. Early piety is likely to become eminent piety; the man who is likely to fear God greatly is the man who serves God early. You know the old proverb, "He that would thrive must rise at five." It is as applicable to religion as to anything else. He that would thrive with God must

be with God early in his days. He who would make great progress in the heavenward race must not lose a moment. Let me urge young people to think of this, and give their hearts to God even now.

Sunday-school teachers, you may be training to-day the men who will keep the truth alive in this land in years to come, the men who will take care of God's servants and be their best allies, the men and women who will win souls to Christ. Go you on with your holy work. You do not know whom you have about you. You might well imitate the tutor who took his hat off to the boys in his school because he did not know what they would turn out to be. Think very highly of your class: you cannot tell who may be there, but assuredly you may have among them these who shall be pillars in the house of God in years to come.

IV. Obadiah's early religion became COMFORTABLE PIETY to him afterwards. When he thought Elijah was about to expose him to great danger he pleaded his long service of God, saying, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth"; just as David, when he grew old, said, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works; now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not." It will be a great comfort to you, young people, when you grow old to look back upon a life spent in the service of God. You will not trust in it, you will not think that there is any merit in it, but you will bless God for it. A servant who has been with his master from his youth ought not to be turned adrift when he grows grey. A right-minded master respects the person who has served him long and well. Suppose you had living in the family an old nurse who had nursed you when you were a child, and had lived to bring up your children, would you turn her into the street when she was past her work? No; you will do your best for her; if it is in your power you will keep her out of the workhouse. Now, the Lord is much more kind and gracious than we are, and he will never turn off his old servants. I sometimes cry—

"Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,  
But train me for thy will;  
For even I, in fields so broad,  
Some duties may fulfill;  
And I will ask for no reward,  
Except to serve thee still."

I anticipate the time when I shall not be able to do all I do now. You and I may look forward a little to the nearing period when we shall pass from middle life to declining years, and we may be assured that our Lord will take care of us to the last. Let us do our diligence to serve him while we have health and strength, and we may be sure that he is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labor of love. It is not the way of him. "Having loved his own which were in the world he loved them to the end." That was said of his Son, and it may be said of the Father also. Oh, believe me, there is no better crutch on which an old man can lean than the fact of God's love to him when he was young. You cannot have a better outlook to your window when your eyes begin to fail than to remember how you went after the Lord in the days of your youth, and devoted your vigor to his service.

Dear young people, if any of you are living in sin I do pray you to recollect that if you are seeking the pleasures of this world to-day you will have to pay for it by-and-by. Rejoice in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee therein; but for all this the Lord will bring thee into judgment. If thy childhood be vanity, and thy youth be wickedness, thy after-days will be sorrow. Oh, that thou wouldest be wise and offer to Christ thy flower in its bud with all its beauty upon it. Thou

canst not be too soon holy, for thou canst not be too soon happy. A truly merry life must begin in the great Father's house.

And you, teachers, go on teaching the young the ways of God. In these days the State is giving them secular instruction all the day long, six days in the week; and religious teaching is greatly needed to balance it, or we shall soon become a nation of infidels. Secular teaching is all very well and good; we never stand in the way of any sort of light: but teaching that has not religion blended with it will simply help men to be bigger rascals than they would be without it. A rogue with a jemmy is bad enough, but a rogue with a pen and a set of cooked accounts robs a hundred for the other's one. Under our present plans children will grow up with greater capacity for mischief, unless the fear of the Lord is set before them, and they are taught in the Scriptures and the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Instead of relaxing Sabbath-school efforts, we shall be wise to increase them greatly.

As to you that have grown old in sin, I cannot talk to you about early piety; but there is a passage of Scripture which ought to give you great hope. Remember how the householder went out at the third, the sixth, the ninth, and at last at the eleventh hour, and found some still standing in the market-place idle. It was late, was it not? Very late. But, blessed be God, it was not too late. They had but one hour left, but the master said, "Go, work in my vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give thee." Now you eleventh-hour people, you people of sixty, sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five, eighty—I would go on to one hundred if I thought you were here of that age—you still may come and enlist in the service of the gracious Lord, who will give you your penny at the close of the day even as he will give to the rest of the laborers. The Lord bring you to his feet by faith in Christ. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Kings, 18:1-16; Psalm 71.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—145, 1015, 693.

## A Summary of Experience and a Body of Divinity

A Sermon

(No. 1806)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, October 26th, 1884, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”—1 Thessalonians 1:9-10.

IN Thessalonica the conversions to the faith were remarkable. Paul came there without prestige, without friends, when he was in the very lowest condition; for he had just been beaten and imprisoned at Philippi, and had fled from that city. Yet it mattered not in what condition the ambassador might be; God, who worketh mighty things by weak instruments, blessed the word of his servant Paul. No doubt when the apostle went into the synagogue to address his own countrymen he had great hopes that, by reasoning with them out of their own scriptures, he might convince them that Jesus was the Christ. He soon found that only a few would search the Scriptures and form a judgment on the point; but the bulk of them refused, for we read of the Jews of Berea, to whom Paul fled from Thessalonica, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Paul must have felt disappointed with his own countrymen; indeed, he had often cause to do so. His heart was affectionately warm toward them, but their hearts were very bitter towards him, reckoning him to be a pervert and an apostate. But if he seemed to fail with the Jews, it is evident that he was abundantly successful with the Gentiles. These turned from their idols to serve the living God, and their turning was so remarkable that the Jew's charged Paul and Silas with turning the world upside down.

In those days there was a good deal of practical atheism abroad, and therefore the wonder was not so much that men left their idols, as that they turned unto the living God. It became a matter of talk all over the city, and the Jews in their violence helped to make the matter more notorious; for the mobs in the street and the attack upon the house of Jason all stirred the thousand tongues of rumour. Everybody spoke of the sudden appearance of three poor Jews, of their remarkable teaching in the synagogue, and of the conversion of a great multitude of devout Greeks, and of the chief women not a few. It was no small thing that so many had come straight away from the worship of Jupiter and Mercury to worship the unknown God, who could not be seen, nor imaged; and to enter the kingdom of one Jesus who had been crucified. It set all Macedonia and Achaia wondering; and as with a trumpet blast it aroused all the dwellers in those regions. Every ship that sailed from Thessalonica carried the news of the strange ferment which was moving the City; men were caring for religion and were quitting old beliefs for a new and better faith. Thessalonica, situated on one of the great Roman roads, and center of a large trade, thus became a center for the gospel. Wherever there are true conversions there will be more or less of this kind of sounding forth of the gospel. It was especially so at Thessalonica; but it is truly so in every church where the Spirit of God is

uplifting men from the dregs of evil, delivering them from drunkenness, and dishonesty, and uncleanness, and worldliness, and making them to become holy and earnest in the cause of the great Lord. There is sure to be a talk when grace triumphs. This talk is a great aid to the gospel: it is no small thing that men should have their attention attracted to it by its effects; for it is both natural and just that thoughtful men should judge of doctrines by their results; and if the most beneficial results follow from the preaching of the word, prejudice is disarmed, and the most violent objectors are silenced.

You will notice that in this general talk the converts and the. hers were greatly mixed up:—"For they themselves show of us manner of entering in we had unto you." I do not know that it is possible for the preacher to keep himself distinct from those who profess to be converted by him. He is gladly one with them in love to, their souls, but he would have it remembered that he cannot be responsible for all their actions. Those who profess to have been converted under any ministry have it in their power to damage that ministry far more than any adversaries can do. "There!" says the world, when it detects a false professor, "this is what comes of such preaching." They judge unfairly, I know; but most men are in a great hurry, and will not examine the logic of their opponents; while many others are so eager to judge unfavorably, that a very little truth, or only a bare report, suffices to condemn both the minister and his doctrine. Every man that lives unto God with purity of life brings honor to the gospel which converted him, to the community to which he belongs, and to the preaching by which he was brought to the knowledge of the truth; but the reverse is equally true in the case of unworthy adherents. Members of churches, will you kindly think of this? Your ministers share the blame of your ill conduct if ever you disgrace yourselves. I feel sure that none of you wish to bring shame and trouble upon your pastors, however careless you may be about your own reputations. Oh, that we could be freed from those of whom Paul says, "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." When these are in a church they are its curse. The Thessalonians were not such: they were such a people that Paul did not blush to have himself implicated in what they did. He was glad to say that the outsiders "show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven."

Quitting this line of thought, I would observe that these two verses struck me as being singularly full. Oceans of teaching are to be found in them. A father of the church in the first ages was wont to cry, "I adore the infinity of Holy Scripture." That remark constantly rises from my lips when I am studying the sacred Word. This book is more than a book,—it is the mother of books, a mine of truth, a mountain of meaning. It was an ill-advised opinion which is imputed to the Mahommedans at the destruction of the Alexandrian Library, when they argued that everything that was good in it was already in the Koran, and therefore it might well be destroyed. Yet it is true with regard to the inspired Word of God, that it contains everything which appertains to eternal life. It is a revelation of which no man can take the measure, it compasses heaven and earth, time and eternity. The best evidence of its being written by an Infinite mind is its own infinity. Within a few of its words there lie hidden immeasurable meanings, even as perfume enough to sweeten leagues of space may be condensed into a few drops of otto of roses.

The first part of my text contains *a summary of Christian experience*; and the second part contains *a body of divinity*. Here is ample room and verge enough. It is not possible to exhaust such a theme.

I. The first part of the text contains A SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE; “What manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.” Here we have in miniature the biography of a Christian man.

It begins, first, with *the entering in of the word*,—“What manner of entering in we had unto you.” When we preach the word you listen, and, so far, the word is received. This is a very hopeful circumstance. Still, the hearing with the outward ear is comparatively a small matter; or, at least, only great because of what may follow from it. The preacher feels even with some who listen with attention that he is outside the door; he is knocking, and he hopes that he is heard within; but the truth is not yet received, the door remains shut, an entrance is not granted, and in no case can he be content to speak with the person outside the door; he desires an entrance for the Word. All is fruitless until Christ entereth into the heart. I have seen the following: the door has been a little opened, and the man inside has come to look at the messenger, and more distinctly to hear what he may have to say; but he has taken care to put the door on the chain, or hold it with his hand, for he is not yet ready to admit the guest who is so desirous of entertainment. The King’s messenger has sometimes tried to put his foot within when the door has stood a little open, but he has not always been successful, and has not even escaped from a painful hurt when the door has been forced back with angry violence. We have called again and again with our message, but we have been as men who besieged a walled city, and were driven from the gates; yet we had our reward, for when the Holy Spirit sweetly moved the hard heart the city gates have opened of their own accord, and we have been received joyfully. We have heard the hearty cry, “Let the truth come in! Let the gospel come in! Let Christ come in! Whatever there is in him we are willing to receive; whatever he demands we are willing to give; whatever he offers us we are glad to accept. Come and welcome! The guest-chamber is prepared. Come and abide in our house for ever!”

The truth has its own ways of entrance; but in general it first affects the understanding. The man says, “I see it: I see how God is just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. I see sin laid on Christ that it may not be laid on me, and I perceive that if I believe in Jesus Christ my sins are put away by his atonement.” To many all that is wanted is that they should understand this fundamental truth; for their minds are prepared of God to receive it. Only make it plain and they catch at it as a hungry man at a piece of bread. They discover in the gospel of our Lord Jesus the very thing for which they have been looking for years, and so the truth enters by the door of the understanding.

Then it usually commences to work upon the conscience, conscience being the understanding exercised upon moral truth. The man sees himself a sinner, discovering guilt that he was not aware of; and he is thus made ready to receive Christ’s pardoning grace. He sees that to have lived without thinking of God, without loving God, without serving God was a great and grievous crime: he feels the offensiveness of this neglect. He trembles; he consents unto the law that it is good, and he allows that, if the law condemns him, he is worthy to be condemned.

When it has thus entered into the understanding and affected the conscience, the word of God usually arouses the emotions. Fear is awakened, and hope is excited. The man begins to feel as he never felt before. His whole manhood is brought under the heavenly spell; his very flesh doth creep in harmony with the amazement of his soul. He wonders and dreads, weeps and quivers, hopes and

doubts; but no, emotion is asleep; life is in all. When a tear rises to his eye he brushes it away, but it is soon succeeded by another. Repentance calls forth one after another of these her sentinels. The proud man is broken down; the hard man is softened. The love of God in providing a Saviour, the unsearchable riches of divine grace in passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin,—these things amaze and overwhelm the penitent. He finds himself suddenly dissolved, where aforetime he was hard as adamant for the word is entering into him, and exercising its softening power.

By-and-by the entrance is complete; for the truth carries the central castle of Mansoul, and captures his heart. He who once hated the gospel now loves it. At first he loves it, hoping that it may be his, though fearing the reverse; yet owning that if it brought no blessing to himself, yet it was a lovable and desirable thing. By-and-by the man ventures to grasp it, encouraged by the word that bids him lay hold on eternal life. One who in digging his land finds a treasure, first looks about for fear lest some one else should claim it; anon he dares to examine his prize more carefully, and at length he bears it in his bosom to his own home. So is it with the gospel; when a man finds it by the understanding, he soon embraces it with his heart; and, believe me, if it once gets into the heart, the arch-enemy himself will never get it out again. Oh, that such an entrance with the gospel might commence the spiritual life of all here present who are as yet unsaved.

What comes next? Well, the second stage is *conversion*. “They themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how *ye turned* from idols to serve the living and true God.” There came a turning, a decided turning. The man has come so far in carelessness, so far in sin and unbelief; but now he pauses, and he deliberately turns round, and faces in that direction to which hitherto he had turned his back. Conversion is the turning of a man completely round, to hate what he loved and to love what he hated. Conversion is to turn to God decidedly and distinctly by an act and deed of the mind and will. In some senses we are *turned*; but in others, like these Thessalonians, we *turn*. It is not conversion to think that you will turn, or to promise that you will turn, or resolve that you will turn, but actually and in very deed to turn, because the word has had a true entrance into your heart. You must not be content with a reformation; there must be a revolution: old thrones must fall, and a new king must reign. Is it so with you?

These Thessalonians turned from their idols. Do you tell me that you have no idols? Think again, and you will not be quite so sure. The streets of London are full of fetich worship, and almost every dwelling is a joss-house crammed with idols. Why, multitudes of men are worshipping not calves of gold, but gold in a more portable shape. Small circular idols of gold and silver are much sought after. They are very devoutly worshipped by some, and great things are said concerning their power. I have heard the epithet of “almighty” ascribed to an American form of these idols. Those who do not worship gold may yet worship rank, name, pleasure, or honour. Most worship self, and I do not know that there is a more degrading form of worship than for a man to put himself upon a pedestal and bow down thereto and worship it. You might just as well adore cats and crocodiles with the ancient Egyptians as pay your life’s homage to yourselves. No wooden image set up by the most savage tribe can be more ugly or degrading than our idol when we adore ourselves. Men worship Bacchus still. Do not tell me they do not: why, there is a temple to him at every street corner. While every other trade is content with a shop or a warehouse, this fiend has his palaces, in which plentiful libations are poured forth in his honour. The gods of unchastity and vice are yet among us. It would be a shame even to speak of the things which are done of them in secret. The lusts of the flesh are served even by many who would not like to have it known. We have gods many and lords many in this land. God grant that we may see, through the preaching of the gospel,

many turning from such idols. If you love anything better than God you are idolaters: if there is anything you would not give up for God it is your idol: if there is anything that you seek with greater fervour that is your idol, and conversion means a turning from every idol.

But then that is not enough, for some men turn from one idol to another. If they do not worship Bacchus they become teetotalers, and possibly they worship the golden calf, and become covetous. When men quit covetousness they sometimes turn to profligacy. A change of false gods is not the change that will save: we must turn unto God, to trust, love, and honor him, and him alone.

After conversion comes *service*. True conversion causes us “to serve the living and true God.” To serve him means to worship him, to obey him, to consecrate one’s entire being to his honour and glory, and to be his devoted servant.

We are, dear friends, to serve the “living” God. Many men have a dead God still. They do not feel that he hears their prayers, they do not feel the power of his Spirit moving upon their hearts and lives. They never take the Lord into their calculations; he never fills them with joy, nor even depresses them with fear; God is unreal and inactive to them. But the true convert turns to the living God, who is everywhere, and whose presence affects him at every point of his being. This God he is to worship, obey, and serve.

Then it is added, to serve the *true* God; and there is no serving a true God with falsehood. Many evidently serve a false god, for they utter words of prayer without their hearts, and that is false prayer, unfit for the true God, who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. When men’s lives are false and artificial they are not a fit service for the God of truth. A life is false when it is not the true outcome of the soul, when it is fashioned by custom, ruled by observation, restrained by selfish motives, and governed by the love of human approbation. What a man does against his will is not in truth done by himself at all. If the will is not changed the man is not converted, and his religious life is not true. He that serves the true God acceptably does it with delight; to him sin is misery, and holiness is happiness. This is the sort of service which we desire our converts to render: we long to see rebels become sons. Oh the sacred alchemy of the Holy Spirit, who can turn men from being the slaves of sin to become servants of righteousness!

Carefully notice the order of life’s progress: the entering in of the word produces conversion, and this produces service. Do not put those things out of their places. If you are converts without the word entering into you, you are unconverted; and if professing to receive the word you are not turned by it, you have not received it. If you claim to be converted, and yet do not serve God, you are not converted; and if you boast of serving God without being converted, you are not serving God. The three things are links which draw on each other.

A fourth matter follows to complete this Christian biography, namely, *waiting*—“To wait for his Son from heaven.” That conversion which is not followed up by waiting is a false conversion, and will come to nothing. We wait, dear brethren, in the holy perseverance of faith; having begun with Christ Jesus our Lord we abide in him; we trust, and then we wait. We do not look upon salvation as a thing which requires a few minutes of faith, and then all is over; salvation is the business of our lives. We receive salvation in an instant, but we work it out with fear and trembling all our days. He that is saved continues to be saved, and goes on to be saved from day to day, from every sin and from every form of evil. We must wait upon the Lord, and renew the strength of the life which he has imparted. As a servant waiteth on her mistress, or a courtier upon his king, so must we wait upon the Lord.

This waiting also takes the shape of living in the future. A man who, waits is not living on the wages of today, but on the recompenses of a time which is yet to come; and this is the mark of the Christian, that his life is spent in eternity rather than in time, and his citizenship is not of earth but of heaven. He has received a believing expectancy which makes him both watch and wait. He expects that the Lord Jesus will come a second time, and that speedily. He has read of his going up into heaven, and he believes it; and he knows that he will so come in like manner as he went up into heaven. For the second advent he looks with calm hope: he does not know when it may be, but he keeps himself on the watch as a servant who waits his lord's return. He hopes it may be today, he would not wonder if it were tomorrow, for he is always looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Son of God. The coming of the Lord is his expected reward. He does not expect to be rewarded by men, or even to be rewarded of God with temporal things in this life, for he has set his affection upon things yet to be revealed, things eternal and infinite. In the day when the Christ shall come, and the heavens which have received him shall restore him to our earth, he shall judge the world in righteousness, and his people with his truth, and then shall our day break and our shadows flee away. The true believer lives in this near future; his hopes are with Jesus on his throne, with Jesus crowned before an assembled universe.

The convert has come to this condition, he is assured of his salvation. See how he has been rising from the time when he first held the door ajar! He is assured of his salvation; for Paul describes him as one who is delivered from the wrath to come; and therefore he looks with holy delight to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Once he was afraid of this, for he feared that he would come to condemn him; but now he knows that when the Lord appears his justification will be made plain to the eyes of all men. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father." And so he cries, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" He would hasten rather than delay the appearing of the Lord. He groans in sympathy with travailing creation for the manifestation of the sons of God. He cries with all the redeemed host for the day of the Saviour's glory. He could not do this were he not abundantly assured that the day would not seal his destruction, but reveal his full salvation.

Here, then, you have the story of the Christian man briefly summed up, and I think you will not find a passage of merely human writing which contains so much in so small a compass. It has unspeakable wealth packed away into a narrow casket. Do you understand it? Is this the outline of your life? If it is not, the Lord grant that his word may have an entrance into you this morning, that you may now believe in Jesus Christ and then wait for his glorious appearing.

II. I shall want you to be patient with me while I very briefly unfold the second half of this great roll. Here even to a greater degree we have *mullum in parvo*, much in little; A BODY OF DIVINITY packed away in a nutshell. "To wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

To begin my body of divinity, I see here, first, *the Deity of Christ*. "To wait for his Son." "His Son." God has but one Son in the highest sense. The Lord Jesus Christ has given to all believers power to become the sons of God, but not in the sense in which he, and he alone, is the Son of God." Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" "When he bringeth in the First-begotten into the world he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him." The Eternal Filiation is a mystery into which it is better for us never to pry. Believe it; but how it is, or how it could be, certainly it is not for you or for me to attempt to explain. There is one "Son of the Highest," who is "God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before all

worlds," whom we with all our souls adore, and own to be most truly God; doing so especially every time in the benediction we associate him with the Father and with the Holy Spirit as the one God of blessing.

Side by side with this in this text of mine is *his humanity*. "His son, whom he raised from the dead." It is for man to die. God absolutely considered dieth not; he therefore took upon himself our mortal frame, and was made in fashion as a man; then willingly for our sakes he underwent the pangs of death, and being crucified, was dead, and so was buried, even as the rest of the dead. He was truly man, "of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting": of that we are confident. There has been no discussion upon that point in these modern times, but there was much questioning thereon in years long gone; for what is there so clear that men will not doubt it or mystify it? With us there is no question either as to his Deity, which fills us with reverence; or his manhood, which inspires us with joy. He is the Son of God and the Son of Mary. He, as God, is "immortal, invisible"; and yet for our sakes he was seen of men and angels, and in mortal agony yielded up the ghost. He suffered for our salvation, died upon the cross, and was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea, being verily and truly man.

Notice a third doctrine which is here, and that is *the unity of the Divine Person of our Lord*; for while the apostle speaks of Christ as God's Son from heaven, and as one who had died, he adds, "even Jesus": that is to say, one known, undivided Person. Although he be God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ. There is but one Person of our blessed and adorable Lord: "one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of Person." He is God, he is man; perfect God and perfect man; and, as such, Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man. There have been mistakes about this also made in the church, though I trust not by any one of us here present. We worship the Lord Jesus Christ in the unity of his divine Person as the one Saviour of men.

Furthermore, in our text we perceive a doctrine about ourselves very plainly implied, namely, *that men by nature are guilty*, for otherwise they would not have needed Jesus, a Saviour. They were lost, and so he who came from heaven to earth bore the name of Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins." It is clear, my brethren, that we were under the divine wrath, otherwise it could not be said, "He hath delivered us from the wrath to come." We who are now delivered were once "children of wrath, even as others." And when we are delivered it is a meet song to sing, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." We were guilty, else we had not needed a propitiation by the Saviour's death: we were lost, else we had not needed one who should seek and save that which is lost; and we were hopelessly lost, otherwise God himself would not have shared our nature to work the mighty work of our redemption. That truth is in the text, and a great deal more than I can mention just now.

But the next doctrine, which is one of the fundamentals of the gospel, is that *the Lord Jesus Christ died for these fallen men*. He could not have been raised from the dead if he had not died. That death was painful, and ignominious; and it was also substitutionary: "for the transgression of my people was he stricken." In the death of Christ lay the essence of our redemption. I would not have you dissociate his life from his death, it comes into his death as an integral part of it; for as the moment we begin to live we, in a sense, begin to die, so the Man of Sorrows lived a dying life, which was all preparatory to his passion. He lived to die, panting for the baptism wherewith he was to be baptized, and reaching forward to it. But it was especially, though not only, by his death upon the cross that Jesus put away our sin. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Not even the tears of Christ, nor the labours of Christ could have redeemed us if he had not given himself

for us an offering and a sacrifice. "Die he, or justice must," or man must die. It was his bowing the head and giving up of the ghost which finished the whole work. "It is finished" could not have been uttered except by a bleeding, dying Christ. His death is our life. Let us always dwell upon that central truth, and when we are preaching Christ risen, Christ reigning, or Christ coming, let us never so preach any of them as to overshadow Christ crucified. "We preach Christ crucified." Some have put up as their ensign, "We preach Christ glorified"; and we also preach the same; but yet to us it seems that the first and foremost view of Jesus by the sinner is as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Therefore do we preach first Christ crucified, while at the same time we do not forget that blessed hope of the child of God,—namely, Christ in glory soon to descend from heaven.

The next doctrine I see in my text is *the acceptance of the death of Christ by the Father*. "Where is that?" say you. Look! "Whom he raised from the dead." Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but the Father had a distinct hand therein. God as God gave the token of his acceptance of Christ's sacrifice by raising him from the dead. It is true, as we sometimes sing,

"If Jesus had not paid the debt,  
He ne'er had been at freedom set."

The Surety would have been held in prison to this day if he had not discharged his suretyship engagements, and wiped out all the liabilities of his people. Therefore it is written, "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." In his glorious uprising from the dead lies the assurance that we are accepted, accepted in the Beloved: the Beloved being himself certainly accepted because God brought him again from the dead.

Further on, we have another doctrine, among many more. We have here the doctrine of *our Lord's resurrection*, of which we spake when we mentioned the acceptance of his offering. Christ is risen from the dead. I pray you, do not think of the Lord Jesus Christ as though he were now dead. It is well to dwell upon Gethsemane, Golgotha, and Gabbatha; but pray remember the empty tomb, Emmaus, Galilee, and Olivet. It is not well to think of Jesus as for ever on the cross or in the tomb. "He is not here, but he is risen." Ye may "come and see the place where the Lord lay," but he lies there no longer he hath burst the bands of death by which he could not be holden: for it was not possible that God's holy One could see corruption. The rising of Jesus from the dead is that fact of facts which establishes Christianity upon an historical basis, and at the same time guarantees to all believers their own resurrection from the dead. He is the firstfruits and we are the harvest.

Further, there is here the doctrine of *his ascension*: "to wait for his Son from heaven." It is clear that Jesus is in heaven, or he could not come from it. He has gone before us as our Forerunner. He has gone to his rest and reward; a cloud received him out of sight; he has entered into his glory.

I doubt not our poet is right when he says of the angels—

"They brought his chariot from on high,  
To bear him to his throne;  
Clapped their triumphant wings and cried,  
'The glorious work is done!'"

That ascension of his brought us the Holy Spirit. He "led captivity captive, and received gifts for men," and he gave the Holy Ghost as the largess of his joyous entry to his Father's courts, that man on earth might share in the joy of the Conqueror returning from the battle. "Lift up your heads, ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in," was the song of that bright day.

But the text tells us more: not only that he has gone into heaven, but that *he remains there*; for these Thessalonians were expecting him to come “from heaven,” and therefore he was there. What is he doing? “I go to prepare a place for you.” What is he doing? He is interceding with authority before the throne. What is he doing? He is from yonder hill-top looking upon his church, which is as a ship upon the sea buffeted by many a storm. In the middle watch ye shall see him walking on the waters; for he perceives the straining of the oars, the leakage of the timbers, the rending of the sails, the dismay of the pilot, the trembling of the crew; and he will come unto us, and save us. He is sending heavenly succours to his weary ones; he is ruling all things for the salvation of his elect, and the accomplishment of his purposes. Glory be to his blessed name!

*Jesus is in heaven with saving power, too*, and that also is in the text: “His Son from heaven, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come.” I alter the translation, for it is a present participle in the case of each verb, and should run, “Even Jesus, delivering us from the wrath coming.” He is at this moment delivering. “Wherefore also he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” He is away in heaven, but he is not divided from us; he is working here the better because he is there. He has not separated himself from the service and the conflict here below; but he has taken the post from which he can best observe and aid. Like some great commander who in the day of battle commands a view of the field, and continues watching, directing, and so winning the fight, so is Jesus in the best place for helping us. Jesus is the master of legions, bidding his angels fly hither and thither, where their spiritual help is needed. My faith sees him securing victory in the midst of the earth. My God, my King, thou art working all things gloriously from thy vantage ground, and ere long the groans and strifes of battle shall end in Hallelujahs unto the Lord God Omnipotent! Christ’s residence in the heavens is clearly in the text.

Here is conspicuously set forth *the second coming*, a subject which might well have occupied all our time,—”To wait for his Son from heaven.” Every chapter of this epistle closes with the Second Advent. Do not deceive yourselves, oh ye ungodly men who think little of Jesus of Nazareth! The day will come when you will change your minds about him. As surely as he died, he lives, and as surely as he lives he will come to this earth again! With an innumerable company of angels, with blast of trumpet that shall strike dismay into the heart of all his enemies, Jesus comes! And when he cometh there shall be a time of judgment, and the rising again of the dead, and “Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” He may come tomorrow! We know not the times and the seasons; these things are in the Father’s keeping; but that he comes is certain, and that he will come as a thief in the night to the ungodly is certain too. Lay no flattering unction to your souls as though when he was crucified there was an end of him; it is but the beginning of his dealings with you, though you reject him. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

A further doctrine in the text is that *Christ is a deliverer*—“Jesus delivering us from the wrath coming.” What a blessed name is this! Deliverer! Press the cheering title to your breast. He delivereth by himself bearing the punishment of sin. He has delivered, he is delivering, he always will deliver them that put their trust in him.

But there was something to be delivered from, and that is, *the coming wrath*, which is mentioned here. “Oh,” saith one, “that is a long, way off, that wrath to come!” If it were a long way off it were wise for you to prepare for it. He is unsafe who will be destroyed most certainly, however distant

that destruction may be. A wise man should not be content with looking as an ox doth, as far as his eye can carry him, for there is so much beyond, as sure as that which is seen. But it is not far-off wrath which is here mentioned; the text saith, “who delivereth us from the wrath coming”; that is, the wrath which is now coming; for wrath is even now upon the unbelieving. As for those Jews who had rejected Christ. the apostle says of them in the sixteenth verse of the next chapter, “Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” The siege of Jerusalem, and the blindness of Israel, are a terrible comment upon these words. “Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.” It is said of every one that believeth not in Christ Jesus, that “the wrath of God abideth on him.” “God is angry with the wicked every day.” This wrath abideth upon some of you. It is the joy of believers that they are delivered from this wrath which is daily coming upon unbelievers, and would come upon themselves if they had not been delivered from it by the atoning sacrifice.

There is evidently in the text the doctrine of *a great division* between men and men. “He hath delivered *us*.” All men have not faith, and therefore all men are not delivered from wrath. Today there is such a division; the “condemned-already” and the “justified” are living side by side; but ere long the separation shall be more apparent. While some will go away into everlasting punishment, the people of God will be found pardoned and absolved, and so will be glorified for ever.

Lastly, there is here the doctrine of *assurance*. Some say, “How are you to know that you are saved?” It can be known; it ought to be known. “Surely,” cries one, “it is presumption to say that you are sure.” It is presumption to live without knowing that you are delivered from wrath. Here the apostle speaks of it as a thing well known, that “Jesus delivers us from the wrath coming.” He does not say “if,” or “perhaps,” but he writes that it is so, and therefore he knew it, and we may know it. My brother, you may know that you are saved. “That would make me inexpressibly happy,” cries one. Just so, and that is one of the reasons why we would have you know it this day. God saith, “He that believeth in him hath everlasting life,” and therefore the believer may be sure that he has it. Our message is, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” God make you to escape that dreadful doom! May you be delivered from the wrath which is coming for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts 17:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 1.  
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—485, 483, 484.

## Commendation for the Steadfast

A Sermon

(No. 1814)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“I know thy works: behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”—Revelation 3:8,10.

THIS is a message to the angel of the church at Philadelphia, and it is full of instruction to churches and ministers at this present time “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” The Philadelphian church was not great, but it was good: it was not powerful, but it was faithful. The Spirit says, “Thou hast a little strength.” Every band of believers has some strength: weak as we are in ourselves, the very fact of our possessing faith proves that we have a portion of strength. Still that strength is a matter of degrees and certain churches have a little strength—but only a little. I suppose that the Philadelphian church had but little strength in the following respects:—the number of its members would be small, and it had therefore but little strength for undertaking any extensive enterprize which would call for numerous bands of workers. The brethren needed all their strength concentrated on their home work, for they were few, and the miss of one or two from home evangelization and edification would be greatly felt. A church may have a very short muster-roll, and yet it may be very dear to God, who thinks more of quality than of quantity, more of obedience than of numbers. They had also little strength in the direction of talent. They were not like that famous church at Corinth, where everybody could teach everybody, but where nobody cared to learn of any one. They had but small ability to speak with tongues, or work miracles, or teach the word; but they adhered faithfully to what they had been taught by the apostles of the Lord: they were not brilliant, but they were sound. Churches with few men of learning or eloquence in them may yet be greatly approved of the Lord, who cares more for grace than learning, more for faith than talent. In all probability they were, like most of the churches of that day, possessed of very little pecuniary strength. They could do but little where money would be required. They were a company of poor people with no man of means among them; and there are many such churches that are peculiarly precious to the heart of God, who cares nothing for gold, and everything for sincerity. Possibly they were little, too, in those things which go side by side with grace: I mean in knowledge, and in power to utter what they knew. This was a pity; but as it was their misfortune and not their fault, they were not blamed for it. The Lord does not blame us for having little strength, but for having little love, little faith, little zeal, little consecration.

The Philadelphian saints, like the limpet, which has but little strength, stuck firmly to the rock, and they are commended for it. They had little strength, but they kept God’s word, and they did not deny his name. Possibly if they had felt stronger they might have presumptuously quitted the word of the Lord for the opinions of men, as the Galatians did, and then they would have lost their reward. May every church of the Lord Jesus Christ, whether it have little strength or much, be

concerned to be steadfast in the faith—loyal to King Jesus—firm in the truths which Christ has taught us by the Holy Ghost.

But, dear friends, as this expression was used to the angel of the church at Philadelphia, whom I suppose to be the minister of the church, I do not feel that I shall be doing any violence to the text if I take it in reference to each individual; and I have no doubt that there will be individual Christians present at this time who, though they have but little strength, have kept God's word. If so, they will receive a reward for it, according to the grace of God. They have been firm and steadfast in their confession of the faith once delivered unto the saints, and the Lord who gave them the grace to be so will give them yet more grace as the recompense of their fidelity. We will speak upon the text to-night with a view to that, and we shall notice, first, that there is *a word of praise*: God praises this faithful messenger of the church. Secondly, he gives him *a word of prospect*. He says, "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word." And then, thirdly, we shall speak upon *a word of promise* which is in the text in the tenth verse: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Oh that my words might call out some faithful ones in these evil days. We need pillars in the house of our God. Where are they to be found?

I. First I would remind you that our text has in it A WORD OF PRAISE.

I do not think that we should be so slow as we sometimes are in praising one another. There is a general theory abroad that it is quite right and proper to point out to a brother all his imperfections, for it will be a salutary medicine to him, and prevent his being too happy in this vale of tears. Is it supposed that we shall cheer him on to do better by always finding fault with him? If so, some people ought to be very good by this time, for they have had candid friends in plenty. Find fault with a brother and he will be kept from growing too proud; and he will, no doubt, go forward blessing you very much for your kind consideration in promoting his humility. Remember also that it is so much to the increase of brotherly love to have a clear eye to see the imperfections of our friends. Does anyone in his senses think so? I should suppose that after having given a sufficient trial to that manner of procedure, it would be quite as well at times to try another, and to rejoice in everything which we see of grace in our brethren, and sometimes to thank God in their hearing for what we perceive in them that we are sure is the fruit of the Spirit. If they are what they should be, they will not think so much of our little praises as to be unduly exalted thereby; but they will be sometimes so encouraged as to be nerved to higher and nobler things. If a man deserves my commendation, I am only paying a debt when I give it to him, and it is dishonest to withhold it under the pretence that he would not use the payment rightly. Men who deserve praise can bear it, and some of them even need it. I should not wonder that the kindly words of God's people may be but a rehearsal of that "Well done, good and faithful servant" which will one day sound in their ears; and be a useful rehearsal, too, helping them on their weary way. Good men have many conflicts, let us minister to their comfort. At any rate, the great Head of the church did not think it unwise to say to the church at Philadelphia that he thought well of it because it had kept his word. Let us give honour to whom honour is due, and encourage those who are aiming to do right.

What had these Philadelphian believers done that they should be praised? What they did was this—they kept the word of God: "Thou hast kept my word, and thou hast not denied my name." What does this mean?

Does it not mean, first, that *they had received the word of God*; for if they had not heard it and held it they could not have kept it. It was theirs, they heard it and had no wish to hear anything else. It was theirs, they read it and searched it and made it their own. They hoarded up divine knowledge in their memories, preserved it in their affections, used it in their experience, and practised it in their lives. They were not ashamed of revealed truth, but, on the contrary, they took it for their possession, their heritage, their treasure, their all. I trust that many of us can say that the doctrines of grace are our jewels, our estate, yes, our very life. God has put us in trust with the gospel, and we will sooner part with all that we have than be false to our trust. It is no small privilege so to be taught of the Holy Ghost as to have a taste for the gospel, a deep attachment to the truths of the covenant.

Next, we may be sure that *they loved the word of God*. They had an intense delight in it. They appreciated it: they fed upon it. They stored it up as bees store away honey, and they were as ready to defend it as bees are to guard their stores. They meditated upon it; they sought to understand it; they took delight in everything which came from the mouth of God. Men do not keep things which they consider to be value-less: if men in our day had a higher opinion of the truth they would be more valiant for it. People are always ready to part with that for which they have no esteem, and for this very reason many are quite willing to give up the Bible to critics and philosophers, those footpads and burglars of faith. But he that keeps God's word, we may be sure, is deeply in love with it. Oh, dear child of God, you may be very little in Israel; but if you love the word of God there is a something about you in which God takes delight. He sees you at your Bible-reading, he marks you in your endeavours to get at the meaning of his word, he notes you when you sit down and meditate upon his divine thoughts, and he takes pleasure in your eagerness to know what the will of the Lord is. He says, "I know thy works"; and though you may be one of little influence and little ability, yet he is pleased with you because you are pleased with his word.

More, however, is meant than simply loving the word, though that is no small thing. It means that *they believed it*, believed it most thoroughly, and so kept it. I am afraid that there are great truths in God's word which we do not intelligently believe, but take for granted. We say, "Yes, yes; these doctrines are in the Creed;" and we put them up on the top shelf, and by that very act we lay them aside and do not heartily believe in them for ourselves. We grow very vexed if anybody denies them; but if there is no controversy over them we forget them. Is this wise? We call our opponents heterodox, and our zeal for orthodoxy comes to the front; and yet, after all, it may be that we have never exercised a personal faith about those doctrines, so as to think them out for ourselves. It is a grand thing to work your passage to a truth, to mine your way to the golden ore by digging and clearing. True believers may be likened to those mites in the cheese which eat their way into it, and penetrate into the centre by feeding upon all that lies in their way as they advance. We eat our way into the word of God, we live upon what we learn, tunnelling through the truth with receptive minds. The truth is too great for us ever to absorb it all, but daily and hourly we live upon it. We so believe it, as to treat it as a matter of fact, valuable for everyday use; this is the surest way to keep in, even to the end. Now, dear child of God, as I have said before, you may have but very little strength, you may often be tempted and tried, and cast down; but if you believe the word, there is more for the pleasing of God in a childlike faith than there is in the most glittering profession or in the most showy deeds. Faith is the Koh-i-noor among jewels,—the queen of the virtues. Believe you God's word, and you have wrought a god-like work. Believe it when others contradict it, and you are a conquerer over them all. Believe it when circumstances seem to make it

questionable; believe it when your own heart fails you; believe it when your sin and corruption rise within you like a fountain of foul waters: thus shall you give glory to the God of truth. Still hold on to the promise made to you in the word of God, and to the manifestation of God which is seen in Christ Jesus, and you will be doing your God the honour which he deserves at your hands, and he will say, "I know thy works; for thou hast a little strength, but thou hast kept my word."

Furthermore, in addition to the inner possession and the hearty belief of the truth, we must be *ready to adhere to it at all times*. That, perhaps, is the central thought here,—“Thou hast kept my word.” Why, there are great folk among us that never care to believe according to God’s word at all. They have thought out what they believe; their theology is made out of their own substance, as spiders spin their webs out of their own bowels. But, surely, in everything which concerns the doctrines of our most holy faith, we must make reference to a “Thus, saith the Lord.” It is not what I think; it is not what some greater man may think; it is not what may be the consensus of all the enlightened minds of the period; the decision lies with what the Lord has spoken. God’s thoughts are as high above ours as the heavens are above the earth; dare we drag them down and sit in judgment on them? If the thought of the age happens to be right, well and good; but it is not upon temporary opinion that we rest. Our faith stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. What is taught in Holy Scripture is sure truth to us, and every other statement must bow to it. Chillingworth said what ought to be true, though I am afraid that it is not—“The Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants.” I should like to see a few more of such Protestants. Many say that we ought to keep “abreast of the times,” whatever that may mean; and that there is a certain “spirit of the age,” to which we should be subject. This to me is treason against sovereign truth. I know of one only spirit to whom I desire to be subject, and that is the Spirit of all the ages, who never changes. By his teaching we are not only nineteen centuries behind the present age, but we come in at the back of all the ages of human history. If we have but little strength, we mean to let the times and the spirits go where they like, we shall keep to the Holy Spirit and to his eternal teachings. Supposing that we have not such big heads as some have, and cannot excogitate or multiply sophisms and inventions as they do, it will be no small thing to be commended at the last, in these terms—“Thou hast a little strength, but thou hast kept my word.” Brother, cling to God’s word; cling to infallible and immutable revelation! Whatever novelty comes up, keep to the word of Jesus! Whatever discovery may be made by the wise men of the age, let Christ be wisdom unto you. Regard the new teachers no more than you would the wise men of Gotham, for those who oppose themselves to God’s word are fools. Let them cry “Lo here, or lo there,” but believe them not. Here is your anchorage. The Book is our ultimatum.

“Within this sacred volume lies  
 The mystery of mysteries;  
 Happiest they of human race  
 To whom our God hath given grace  
 To read, to mark, to think, to pray,  
 To know the right, to learn the way;  
 But better they had ne’er been born  
 Who read to doubt, or read to scorn.”

That which is not in Holy Scripture is not to be received as matter of faith in the Christian church; but that which is there is to be received and held with that stern steadfastness, that incorruptible faith, which no more changes than the unchanging truth which it has grasped. Woe

be to the man who is first a Calvinist, then an Arminian, then a Palagian, then a Unitarian; never finding rest for the sole of his foot; keeping nothing because he has nothing to keep. This Philadelphian church had won the commendation, "Thou hast kept my word." Dear hearer, see that you win it too.

And no doubt also it was intended in this sense—that *they had obeyed the word of God*. "Thou hast a little strength:" there are very few of you, but you have been observant of all precepts and ordinances. Some think it a great thing to be members of a popular sect, but when the great curtain rolls up, and all things are seen as they are, and not as they seem, do you not think that that church will be most commended which was truest to the teaching of the Holy Spirit in everything? Christian chivalry should make you feel it better to be a member of a church of six doing the Lord's work conscientiously than to be a member of a church of six millions which has turned aside from it. I could not be in communion with a church whose chief guide and authority is another book than God's word, and whose acknowledged Head is other than the Lord Jesus Christ. I had sooner stand alone than yield with a crowd to an Act of Parliament which was passed to dictate to me the form in which I may worship God. There shall come a day when it will be found that the minorities have generally saved both the world and the church. A straggling few may reckon themselves to be the majority when they stand alone *with* God, for HE counts for more than all the myriads of the earth put together. The faithful, staunch, God-fearing men that would not budge an inch, or change a letter, or shape a syllable, to please all the kings and princes of the earth, shall be found to praise and honour in the day of the Lord's appearing. These are the men that Christ shall stoop from his throne to honour: they that have trifled with his word shall be lightly esteemed: they that have wilfully broken one of the least of his commandments, and have taught men so, shall be least in the kingdom of heaven. Blessed and happy shall he be who followeth the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Blessed shall he be who only wanted to know the Lord's will that he might do it unquestioningly, caring nothing what the will of other people might be in the matter.

I shall put it home to you, dear friends, again. You may have but little strength, but *do you keep God's word?* You may never become more numerous, or more influential; but do let it be true of you, that you have kept God's word. Be students of God's word and adherents of it. Take no notice of anything I say if it cannot be supported by the word of divine truth. Take equally little notice of what any man says, be he orator, thinker, bishop, or whatever he may be. There is no value in all the brass counters which circulate among the many; they are current with the world, but the Kingdom of God does not know them. The words of men are trifling in value; it takes a mass of them to come to the value of a farthing; but any one word of the Lord is worth a mint of gold. If a doctrine be of God, if it has come out of the loving lips of the Lord Jesus, hold it fast, as for dear life. Let men call you bigot, but never mind, hold you on with all your might, and your Lord will smile upon you.

Thus have I explained what the Philadelphians did. They did it under great disadvantages, but that only helped to increase the weight of praise measured out to them. They had little talent, but they kept God's word. Oh, that men who have ten talents would not be so anxious to be original in their teaching! Oh, that they would cease to display their own thought, their own cleverness, and individuality. If you have little talent, it is a pity you have not more; but still it is for your praise if you quit yourselves like men, and stand fast in the faith. It may be, you have little strength of mind; but I hope even then grace enables you to be firm for truth. In other things you may be easily persuaded, and readily talked over; but be you doubly staunch in the things of God. There make your

mark, and put your foot down. Let it be seen that you do not go to be stirred in those vital points, till your friends say of you, "Oh, you can twist William anywhere, but not in his religion. On that point he is a regular Puritan; there is no moving him." May it always be so; even if you have but little strength, see to it that you keep Christ's word.

Possibly you have not much strength as to influence: your sphere may be very narrow, and your power in it very slight. That does not matter; but it does matter that you be faithful to your Lord. If you have kept God's word you may be wielding an influence far beyond what you imagine. Good men in the dark days of Popery found out the truth, but they only lived, perhaps, in some quiet village, or shut up in a monastery, and the most they could do was to write down what they knew and so keep it. We have met with instances where they wrote out part of the word of God, and hid it away in a wall; and afterwards, when the wall was pulled down, the priceless record was discovered and used. Truth does not die through being buried. Some taught the gospel very quietly in their own family circle, and so kept it. Some would get a few copies of the New Testament, and go about and sell them in their baskets; and so they kept the truth. Those men of old time whose influence upon their own age seemed so little, nevertheless prepared the way for those braver spirits who, by-and-by, shone forth like the stars of the morning. Hold fast God's word and never mind what comes of it for the moment; God's seed may not grow in a day, but it will grow. If you only influence one child, who can tell what that child may be? If you only help to strengthen one solitary Christian woman, who knows what may come to pass by her means? We see the telegraph wires, but we do not see what messages they may carry. The ropes hang down in our belfry, but the glorious chime is aloft. We cannot see the big bells, but it is ours to pull the ropes that are near our hand, and do what God bids us to do, and music will come of it somewhere. Above all, if we have but little strength of any kind, let us keep God's word.

Now, why should God's word be kept in this way? What is there to praise about keeping God's word? I answer, because *it is a holy thing* to treasure up God's word. I have gone into the churches on the Continent, and I have seen gold and silver plate in the sacristy, understood to be worth one or two or three millions of money. These were said to be the treasures of the church. Why, these are the treasures of men, and they shall pass away. The solid truth of revelation, the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, a divine experience given to you by that Holy Ghost—all this is the treasure of the church, and you are doing a holy thing when you guard it against every adversary. To this purpose are saints sent into the world—to keep this treasure of the church against all adversaries. Truth is the jewel for which all believers must be ready to die. Solomon made shields of gold, which were borne before the king when he went into the house of the Lord; but Rehoboam took away the shields of gold, and put shields of brass in their place. It is to be feared many are doing the same at this moment. Let us bear our protest: the gold is good enough for us. Do not throw away the best for the sake of getting something that may be newer, but that must be far inferior. I hold one single sentence out of God's word to be of more certainty, and of more power, than all the discoveries of all the learned men of all the ages.

I might have seen the Alexandrian library burned without losing a night's rest, for the mass of its contents must have been mere rubbish; but were there one single verse of the New Testament which it were possible to blot out from human memory and record, one might be willing to lay down his life to save the glorious sentence. The mind of man sends forth pure water and impure, and it is hard to discern between the two; but from the heart of God there wells up, undiluted and unmingled, a stream of living truth which is more for man's benefit than all else out of heaven.

Warriors guard kings, and crowns, and thrones; but the living truth of the living God is infinitely more worthy of our watch. Oh for ten thousand valiant men to stand about the bed of the truth, each man with his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night. Therefore, as it is a holy thing, a heavenly thing, a priceless thing, keep you God's word.

Besides, *it is a wise thing*, for you that have but little strength, to keep God's word. The feebler you are the more closely should you keep to the Scriptures. Remember what Solomon says,—“The conies are a feeble folk,” but he puts them down as wise people, for they have their habitation in the rocks. If a disputer can once get you away from the Bible, he can swallow you alive; but if you will keep to Scripture, and handle this weapon, “It is written; it is written,” the disputer may be the arch-fiend himself, but he cannot possibly get the victory over you. Your wisdom is not to try to gain keenness of mind that you may emulate the critic, but to lay hold upon God's word, and cling to it, for therein shall be your safety and your victory.

Again, dear friends, we ought to hold fast to the truth of God, because, if we have little strength, *it is there that we shall get more strength*. We shall never grow stronger by leaving the eternal word. Nay, but as we cling to God in feebleness, the divine strength of the word is infused into our souls. Besides, God's word is a supporting thing, and he who quits it leaves his chief helper. He that receives it shall live, but without it there is no spiritual life. Therefore let us hold it. If men would take away from us certain dainties which are sweet but which are not needful, we might be content to let them spoil us of such superfluities; but if they come to take away bread and water from the poor and needy, then we cannot have it. For this we must stand up and fight to the death. The word that cometh out of Christ's mouth is the daily manna of our heavenly life, and it behoves every Christian, however feeble or however strong, to keep the word of God with all his might against all comers, since it is his life. I am at this pass, I can sooner die than yield the gospel. I may be a fool, and an old-fashioned bigot, but I am not a turncoat, and I cannot quit the word of the Lord. If I must be the last of the Puritans, I will not be ashamed of it. My Lord will revive his buried truth as sure as he is God: the present madness will cease with its own short hour.

So much, then, with regard to this word of praise.

II. I will not be long on the next point, while I just remind you that there is A WORD OF PROSPECT:—“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word.”

It seems to me to mean just this,—“You have been faithful; therefore I will use you. You have been steadfast; therefore I will employ you.” For a considerable period of human life, it may be, God does not give to all of us a field of usefulness, but he provides a field of trial. There are some to whom he early opens the gate of usefulness, because he sees in them a spirit that will bear the temptation of success; but in many other cases it is questionable whether they could bear promotion, and therefore the Lord permits them to be tried in different ways until he sees that they are found faithful, and then he puts them into his service, and gives them an opportunity of bearing witness for him. Now, dear friend, perhaps hitherto you have been perfectly satisfied with holding the truth with all your might, and being faithful to it in private and in your own daily life. I want to suggest to you that if you have done this for some time the era has now arrived when you may go forward to somewhat more. There are opportunities before you now which were not there before: these are placed before *you* especially because you have been tried, and have been proved faithful. If you will now begin to talk to others about that which you love so well, you will be astonished to find how gladly they will receive it from you. You have been a receiver yourself until now, and that is

well and good; but, now that you have become filled, overflow to others, and let them receive of your joy. "How do I know that they will accept it?" say you. I know it from this fact—that, as a general rule, the man that keeps God's word has an open door before him. If you have been vacillating and shifty and tricky, and have believed everything and nothing, nobody will take any particular notice of what you say, except it be to shut the door against your uncertain prattle. But when they have observed how you stand to the truth, how solid, and how steadfast you are, they will give over disputing with you, and come to inquire what your views really are. People do not care about knocking their heads against brick walls, or fighting against pillars of iron; and when they see that you are firm and unmoved, they will say, "We must let him have his own way." When a man begins his Christian life in a kind of dubious, half-hearted way, his friends do not know whether he is really going to carry it out or not: at any rate, as he endeavours to avoid all persecution, they do not know what to think of him, and they feel encouraged to treat him as one who can be pressed and squeezed at pleasure. If there is a secret entrance to heaven he prefers it; he means to go round about and climb over the wall somewhere, or sneak in at the back gate. This poor creature has no power or influence; he is rather ridiculous than useful. Nobody ever respects him. Nobody cares a button about him. The devil himself does not trouble him much, for he knows that he will do no harm to his kingdom, let him talk as he likes. But the man who says, "I am going straight for glory, and if anybody is in my way so much the worse for him, for I am bound to take the right road;" such a man will find a pretty clear track. Mr. Moody would say, "Make a bee line for heaven." A bee knows the nearest way. and keeps to it with all its force. Let me hear each one of you say, "I am not going to take any corners, or twists, or windabouts; but, straight away, what God bids me to do I am going to do; what he bids me believe I am going to believe; and if there is anything to be suffered for it, all right. I have added it all up, and I count the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt." This is the right kind of resolution. God help you to keep to it. Before you, my brother, the Lord God has set an open door. Go ahead! Do not be afraid. People will be willing to hear what you have to say, and, what is more, people will be converted by what you say, for God has set before you this open door, and no man can shut it. It is amazingly easy to go through a door when it is wide open, and it will be very easy to you—much easier than you think, now that you have been schooled by God's Spirit into steadfastness of character, just to say in God's name, dependent upon God's strength, what he has taught you. You will bring many to Christ, because you yourself abide in Christ.

Come, brother, you did not reckon that such usefulness would ever fall to your lot; did you? Cheer up, and get to work. Wake up to holy energy. In the Sunday-school there are little children that you will be the means of bringing to Christ if you take a class; and out at the street corners there are folks that you will turn to the Saviour if you have but the courage to stand up and preach. Out in the villages, or in the crowded city hearts await you. I say not this of you all, but only of confirmed and faithful ones. If you feel, "I never can give up the Bible; I never can forsake the truths that I have learnt from it: they are stamped on my heart, they are cut into the very centre of my soul," then you are the man who may safely go forth to publish the truth. There is an open door before you which no man can shut. Gird up your loins and enter it. Rush to the front. Victory lies before you. God means to use you. You are a vessel fit for the Master's use, and there never was a vessel fit for his use that he did not use one day or other. The hour needs its man quite as much as the man needs the hour. Take time by the forelock and honour your God. The Lord help you to keep his word, and then to go in for public testimony.

III. Our last point was to be A WORD OF PROMISE; for, according to the tenth verse, it is written, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Those who keep God's word, shall themselves be kept from temptation. The Lord returns into his servants' bosoms that which they render to him: he gives keeping for keeping.

Now, I shall speak for myself and for you, and I know that we can bear witness that this promise is true. One says to me, "Are you not perplexed about the prevalence of modern thought—the new phase of divinity that has come up of late, and the general progress that is being made towards a new theology? Does it not trouble you?" Not a bit. Modern ideas do not affect me in the slightest. If all men that live or ever shall live should throw up the old Calvinism, there remains one that will hold it, for this reason—that he could not hold any other. I must be crushed out of existence before my convictions of the truth of the doctrines of grace in the old-fashioned form can ever be taken from me. I am miserable, wretched, lost if the doctrines of grace be not true. I am joyous, glad, strong, happy if these doctrines be true. I cannot give them up, therefore; and especially because as I read, and the more I read, I perceive these things to be written in the word of God, and therefore I must hold them.

In this church we feel very little of the temptation which tries all the world: very seldom are any of our friends unsettled in their minds, or tormented with these hornets of heresy. "Alas," said one minister to me, "I see some of my best people becoming sceptical; are you not worried by seeing the thoughtful ones drifting off into new views?" "No, not at all." "Why not?" "Because the grace of God keeps our people to their moorings. They know what they believe and they have no desire to change" If a man does not believe the doctrines of grace, he comes to hear me once, and he says, "I am not going there any more." He talks to some of you, and you are so dogmatic, and firmly rooted, he calls you pig-headed, and says it is no use arguing with such bigots; and so he goes to argue somewhere else. This is exactly as we would have it. When a bushel is full of wheat the good corn keeps the chaff out of the measure. This is the Lord's way of delivering those who keep his word: thus he shuts them away from the temptation that comes upon others. He seems to say, "Dear child, since you will not go beyond my written word, you shall not be tempted to go beyond it. I will cause the enemies of the truth to leave you alone. You shall be offensive to them, or they to you, and you shall soon part company." Remember how Mr. Bunyan pictures it. When Talkative came up to gossip with Christian and Hopeful, he chattered away upon all sorts of topics, and they were wearied with him. To get rid of him, Christian said to Hopeful, "Now we will talk a little about experimental godliness and when they began to speak about what they had tasted and handled of divine truth, Mr. Chatterbox dropped behind. He did not like spiritual conversation, neither do any of the breed. The holy pilgrims were not so rude as to tell him to go; they only talked about heavenly things, which he did not understand, and he went of his own accord. I believe that result is sure to follow holy conversation and sound preaching. Keep to the truth, and the modern school will give you a wide berth. But if any of you try the double-shuffle in religion—the plan of trying to believe a little of everything and not much of anything—if you try to hold with the hare and run with the hounds, you will be tempted to deadly error, and it will serve you right. In the temptation you will fall, for indeed you are fallen already. Keep the word of God, and the word of God will keep you. You will be shielded from half the temptations that fret and worry professors if you take your place and keep it against all comers.

Or perhaps the text may mean that if the temptation shall come you shall be preserved from it. The deliberately-formed conviction that the word of God is the standard of our faith, and the unwavering habit of referring everything to it and standing and falling by it, may not deliver us from every error, but they will save us from that which is the nurse and matrix of every error—that is, the habit of trusting to our own understanding, or relying upon the understandings of our fellow-men. I value more a solid confidence in the word of God than even the knowledge that comes out of it; for that faith is a saving habit, a sanctifying habit, in every way a strengthening and confirming and preserving habit. May God grant to us that whatever form of temptation may come upon the face of the earth, we may stand fast for his truth, so that none of us may perish like Judas, the son of perdition.

All this I have spoken to the people of God, but I am not ignorant that there are some here who do not know God's word, nor love it. They have never embraced it, and to them no blessing can come through it. But why should you not receive it? Does it not strike you as being reasonable that, if God has spoken, his creatures ought to believe what he has spoken—that after he has laid down the law there should remain no room for questioning?

“This is the judge that ends the strife,  
When wit and reason fail.”

Come you, then, and search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Christ and let it not be said that you will not come unto him that you might have life. As God bears testimony in his word to his own dear Son, believe that testimony; accept the Saviour whom he has given, and find immediate salvation: find it to-night. Go out of the place saying, “I believe it.” “He that believeth hath everlasting life,” for “this is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” I warrant you if you get faith into your soul, and the word becomes your joy and comfort, you will never let it go. You will sing as we did just now, and as I sang very heartily—

“Let all the forms that men devise  
Assault my soul with treacherous art  
I'll call them vanity and lies,  
And bind the gospel to my heart.”  
So may God bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 17.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—669, 667, 486.

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