



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 32: 1886

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 32: 1886* by Charles Spurgeon

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The Blood of Sprinkling

A Sermon

(No. 1888)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, February 28th, 1886, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."—Hebrews 12:24, 25.

WE ARE JOYFULLY REMINDED by the apostle that we are *not* come to Mount Sinai and its overwhelming manifestations. After Israel had kept the feast of the Passover, God was pleased to give his people a sort of Pentecost, and more fully to manifest himself and his law to them at Sinai. They were in the wilderness, with the solemn peaks of a desolate mountain as their center; and from the top thereof, in the midst of fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and with the sound of a trumpet, God spake with them. "The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel." We are not come to the dread and terror of the old covenant, of which our apostle saith in another place, "The covenant from the Mount Sinai gendereth unto bondage" (Galatians 4:24.) Upon the believer's spirit there rests not the slavish fear, the abject terror, the fainting alarm, which swayed the tribes of Israel; for the manifestation of God which he beholds, though not less majestic, is far more full of hope and joy. Over us there rests not the impenetrable cloud of apprehension; we are not buried in a present darkness of despair; we are not tossed about with a tempest of horror; and, therefore, we do not exceedingly fear and quake. How thankful we should be for this! Israel was privileged even in receiving a fiery law from the right hand of Jehovah; but we are far more favored, since we receive "the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

Our apostle next tells us what we *are* come to. I suppose he speaks of all the saints after the death and resurrection of our Lord and the descent of the Holy Ghost. He refers to the whole church, in the midst of which the Holy Spirit now dwells. We are come to a more joyous sight than Sinai, and the mountain burning with fire. The Hebrew worshipper, apart from his sacrifices, lived continually beneath the shadow of the darkness of a broken law; he was startled often by the tremendous note of the trumpet, which threatened judgment for that broken law; and thus he lived ever in a condition of bondage. To what else could the law bring him? To convince of sin and to condemn the sinner is its utmost power. The believer in the Lord Jesus Christ lives in quite another atmosphere. He has not come to a barren crag, but to an inhabited city, Jerusalem above, the metropolis of God. He has quitted the wilderness for the land which floweth with milk and honey, and the material mount which might be touched for the spiritual and heavenly Jerusalem. He has entered into fellowship with an innumerable company of angels, who are to him, not cherubim with flaming swords to keep men back from the tree of life, but ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. He is come to the joyous assembly of all pure intelligences who have met, not in trembling, but in joyous liberty, to keep the feast with their great Lord and King. He thinks

of all who love God throughout all worlds, and he feels that he is one of them; for he has come to "the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven." Moreover, he has come "to God the Judge of all," the umpire and rewarder of all the chosen citizens who are enrolled by his command, the ruler and judge of all their enemies. God is not to them a dreadful person who speaks from a distance; but he is their Father and their Friend, in whom they delight themselves, in whose presence there is fullness of joy for them. Brethren, our fellowship is with the Father, our God. To him we have come through our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, in the power of the Spirit of God we realize the oneness of the church both in heaven and earth, and the spirits of just men made perfect are in union with us. No gulf divides the militant from the triumphant; we are one army of the living God. We sometimes speak of the holy *dead*; but there are none such: they live unto God; they are perfected as to their spirits even now, and they are waiting for the moment when their bodies also shall be raised from the tomb to be again inhabited by their immortal souls. We no longer shudder at the sepulcher, but sing of resurrection. Our condition of heart, from day to day, is that of men who are in fellowship with God, fellowship with angels, fellowship with perfect spirits.

We have also come to Jesus, our Savior, who is all and in all. In him we live; we are joined unto him in one spirit; he is the Bridegroom of our souls, the delight of our hearts. We are come to him as the Mediator of the new covenant. What a blessed thing it is to know that covenant of which he is the Mediator! Some in these days despise the covenant; but saints delight in it. To them the everlasting covenant, "ordered in all things, and sure," is all their salvation and all their desire. We are covenanted ones through our Lord Jesus. God has pledged himself to bless us. By two immutable things wherein it is impossible for him to lie, he has given us strong consolation, and good hope through grace, even to all of us who have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus. We are happy to live under the covenant of grace, the covenant of promise, the covenant symbolized by Jerusalem above, which is free, and the mother of us all.

Then comes the last thing of all, mentioned last, as I shall have to show you, for a purpose. We have come "to *the blood of sprinkling*." On that first day at Sinai no blood of sprinkling was presented, but afterwards it was used by divine order to ratify the national covenant which the tribes made with Jehovah at the foot of the hill. Of that covenant the Lord says, "which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them." *He* never brake his covenant, but *they* brake it; for they failed to keep that condition of obedience without which a covenant founded upon works falls to the ground. We have come to the blood of sprinkling which has fallen upon a covenant which never shall be broken; for the Lord hath made it to endure though rocks and hills remove. This is called by the Holy Ghost "a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." We are come to the covenant of grace, to Jesus the Mediator of it, and to his blood, which is the seal of it. Of this last we are going to speak at this time—"The blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel."

I shall need this morning to occupy all the time with what I regard as only the first head of my discourse. *What is it?* "The blood of sprinkling." It will be our duty afterwards to consider *where we are*—"we are come unto this blood;" and, thirdly, to remember *what then?* "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh."

I. FIRST, WHAT IS IT? What is this "blood of sprinkling?" In a few words, "the blood of sprinkling" represents the pains, the sufferings, the humiliation, and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, which he endured on the behalf of guilty man. When we speak of the blood, we wish not

to be understood as referring solely or mainly to the literal material blood which flowed from the wounds of Jesus. We believe in the literal fact of his shedding his blood; but when we speak of his cross and blood we mean those sufferings and that death of our Lord Jesus Christ by which he magnified the law of God; we mean what Isaiah intended when he said, "He shall make his soul an offering for sin;" we mean all the griefs which Jesus vicariously endured on our behalf at Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha, and specially his yielding up his life upon the tree of scorn and doom. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." "Without shedding of blood there is no remission;" and the shedding of blood intended is the death of Jesus, the Son of God.

Remember that his sufferings and death were not apparent only, but true and real; and that they involved an incalculable degree of pain and anguish. To redeem our souls cost our Lord an exceeding sorrowfulness "even unto death;" it cost him the bloody sweat, the heart broken with reproach, and specially the agony of being forsaken of his Father, till he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Our Mediator endured death under the worst possible aspects, bereft of those supports which are in all other cases of godly men afforded by the goodness and faithfulness of God. His was not merely a natural death, but a death aggravated by supernatural circumstance, which infinitely intensified its woe. This is what we mean by the blood of Christ, his sufferings, and his death.

These were voluntarily undertaken by himself out of pure love to us, and in order that we might thereby be justly saved from deserved punishment. There was no natural reason on his own account why he should suffer, bleed, and die. Far from it,—"He only hath immortality." But out of supreme love to us, that man might be forgiven without the violation of divine rectitude, the Son of God assumed human flesh, and became in very deed a man, in order that he might be able to offer in man's place a full vindication to the righteous and unchangeable law of God. Being God, he thus showed forth the wondrous love of God to man by being willing to suffer personally rather than the redeemed should die as the just result of their sin. The matchless majesty of his divine person lent supreme efficacy to his sufferings. It was a man that died, but he was also God, and the death of incarnate God reflects more glory upon law than the deaths of myriads of condemned creatures could have done. See the yearning of the great God for perfect righteousness: he had sooner die than stain his justice even to indulge his mercy. Jesus the Lord, out of love to the Father and to men, undertook willingly and cheerfully for our sakes to magnify the law, and bring in perfect righteousness. This work was so carried out to the utmost, that not a jot of the suffering was mitigated, nor a particle of the obedience foregone: "he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Now he hath finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness: for he has offered such an expiation that God is just, and the justifier of him that believeth. God is at once the righteous Judge, and the infinitely loving Father, through what Jesus hath suffered.

Brethren, though I have said that there was no reason why the Son of God should bleed and die on his own account, yet towards us there was a reason. Our Lord from of old in the eternal covenant was constituted the head and representative of all who were in him; and so, when the time came, he took the place, bore the sin, and suffered the penalty of those whom the Father gave him from before the foundations of the world. He is as much the representative man as the first Adam was the representative man; and as in Adam the sin was committed which ruined us, so in the second Adam the atonement was made which saves us. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." There was no other person so fit to undertake the enterprise of our redemption as this

second man, who is the Lord from heaven. He properly, but yet most generously and spontaneously, came and shed his precious blood, in the room and place and stead of sinners, to bring the guilty near to God.

But the text does not merely speak of the blood *shed*, which I have explained to you, but of "the blood of *sprinkling*." This is the atonement applied for divine purposes, and specially applied to our own hearts and consciences by faith. For the explanation of this sprinkling we must look to the types of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the blood of sprinkling meant a great many things; in fact, I cannot just now tell you all that it signified. We meet with it in the Book of Exodus, at the time when the Lord smote all the first-born of Egypt. Then the blood of sprinkling meant *preservation*. The basin filled with blood was taken, and a bunch of hyssop was dipped into it, and the lintel and the two side-posts of every house tenanted by Israelites were smeared with the blood; and when God saw the blood upon the house of the Israelite, he bade the destroyer pass that family by, and leave their first-born unharmed. The sprinkled blood meant preservation: it was Israel's passover and safeguard.

The sprinkled blood very frequently signified the *confirmation* of a covenant. So it is used in Exodus 24., which I read to you just now. The blood was sprinkled upon the book of the covenant, and also upon the people, to show that the covenant was, as far as it could be, confirmed by the people who promised, "All that the Lord hath said will we do." The blood of bulls and of goats in that case was but a type of the sacrificial blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The lesson which we learn from Exodus 24: is that the blood of sprinkling means the blood of ratification or confirmation of the covenant, which God has been pleased to make with men in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since Jesus died, the promises are Yea and Amen to all believers, and must assuredly be fulfilled. The covenant of grace had but one condition, and that condition Jesus has fulfilled by his death, so that it has now become a covenant of pure and unconditional promise to all the seed.

In many cases the sprinkling of the blood meant *purification*. If a person had been defiled, he could not come into the sanctuary of God without being sprinkled with blood. There were the ashes of a red heifer laid up, and these were mixed with blood and water; and by their being sprinkled on the unclean, his ceremonial defilement was removed. There were matters incident to domestic life, and accidents of outdoor life, which engendered impurity, and this impurity was put away by the sprinkling of blood. This sprinkling was used in the case of recovery from infectious disease, such as leprosy; before such persons could mingle in the solemn assemblies, they were sprinkled with the blood, and thus were made ceremonially pure. In a higher sense this is the work of the blood of Christ. It preserves us, it ratifies the covenant, and wherever it is applied it makes us pure; for "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." We have our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience; for we have come unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

The sprinkling of the blood meant, also, *sanctification*. Before a man entered upon the priesthood the blood was put upon his right ear, and on the great toe of his right foot, and on the thumb of his right hand, signifying that all his powers were thus consecrated to God. The ordination ceremony included the sprinkling of blood upon the altar round about. Even thus hath the Lord Jesus redeemed us unto God by his death, and the sprinkling of his blood hath made us kings and priests unto God for ever. He is made of God unto us sanctification, and all else that is needed for the divine service.

One other signification of the blood of the sacrifice was *acceptation and access*. When the high priest went into the most holy place once a year, it was not without blood, which he sprinkled upon the ark of the covenant, and upon the mercy-seat, which was on the top thereof. All approaches to

God were made by blood. There was no hope of a man drawing near to God, even in symbol, apart from the sprinkling of the blood. And now to-day our only way to God is by the precious sacrifice of Christ; the only hope for the success of our prayers, the acceptance of our praises, or the reception of our holy works, is through the ever-abiding merit of the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost bids us enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; there is no other way.

There were other uses besides these, but it may suffice to put down the sprinkling of the blood as having these effects, namely, that of preservation, satisfaction, purification, sanctification, and access to God. This was all typified in the blood of bulls and of goats, but actually fulfilled in the great sacrifice of Christ.

With this as an explanation, I desire to come still closer to the text, and view it with great care; for to my mind it is singularly full of teaching. May the Holy Spirit lead us into the truth which lies herein like treasure hid in a field!

First. *The blood of sprinkling is the center of the divine manifestation under the gospel.* Observe its innermost place in the passage before us. You are privileged by almighty grace to come first to Mount Zion, to climb its steep, to stand upon its holy summit, and to enter the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. In those golden streets, surrounding the hallowed shrine, you behold an innumerable company of angels. What a vision of glory! But you must not rest here; for the great general assembly, the festal gathering, the solemn convocation of the enrolled in heaven, is being held, and all are there in glad attire, surrounding their God and Lord. Press onward to the throne itself, where sits the Judge of all, surrounded by those holy spirits who have washed their robes, and, therefore, stand before the throne of God in perfection.

Have you not come a long way? Are you not admitted into the very center of the whole revelation? Not yet. A step further lands you where stands your Savior, the Mediator, with the new covenant. Now is your joy complete; but you have a further object to behold. What is in that innermost shrine? What is that which is hidden away in the holy of holies? What is that which is the most precious and costly thing of all, the last, the ultimatum, God's grandest revelation? The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot—the blood of sprinkling. This comes last; it is the innermost truth of the dispensation of grace under which we live. Brethren, when we climb to heaven itself, and pass the gate of pearl, and wend our way through the innumerable hosts of angels, and come even to the throne of God, and see the spirits of the just made perfect, and hear their holy hymn, we shall not have gone beyond the influence of the blood of sprinkling; nay, we shall see it there more truly present than in any other place beside. "What!" say you, "the blood of Jesus in heaven?" Yes. The earthly sanctuary, we are told, was purified with the blood of bulls and of goats, "but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." (Hebrews 9:23) When Jesus entered once for all into the holy place, he entered by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for us: so saith the apostle in the ninth chapter of this epistle. Let those who talk lightly of the precious blood correct their view ere they be guilty of blasphemy; for the revelation of God knows no lower deep, this is the heart and center of all. The manifestation of Jesus under the gospel is not only the revelation of the Mediator, but especially of his sacrifice. The appearance of God the Judge of all, the vision of hosts of angels and perfect spirits, do but lead up to that sacrifice which is the source and focus of all true fellowship between God and his creatures. This is the character which Jesus wears in the innermost shrine where he reveals himself most clearly to those who are nearest to him. He looks like a lamb that has been slain. There is no sight of him which is more full, more glorious, more complete, than the vision

of him as the great sacrifice for sin. The atonement of Jesus is the concentration of the divine glory; all other revelations of God are completed and intensified here. You have not come to the central sun of the great spiritual system of grace till you have come to the blood of sprinkling—to those sufferings of Messiah which are not for himself, but are intended to bear upon others, even as drops when they are sprinkled exert their influence where they fall. Unless you have learned to rejoice in that blood which taketh away sin, you have not yet caught the key-note of the gospel dispensation. The blood of Christ is the life of the gospel. Apart from atonement you may know the skin, the rind, the husk of the gospel; but its inner kernel you have not discovered.

I next ask you to look at the text and observe that *this sprinkling of the blood*, as mentioned by the Holy Ghost in this passage, *is absolutely identical with Jesus himself*. Read it. "To Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not *him* that speaketh." He saith it is the blood that speaketh; and then he proceeds to say, "See that ye refuse not *him* that speaketh." This is a very unexpected turn, which can only be explained upon the supposition that Jesus and the blood are identical in the writer's view. By what we may call a singularity in grammar, in putting *him* for *it*, the Spirit of God intentionally sets forth the striking truth, that the sacrifice is identical with the Savior. "We are come to the Savior, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh; see that ye refuse not *him*." Beloved friends, there is no Jesus if there is no blood of sprinkling; there is no Savior if there is no sacrifice. I put this strongly, because the attempt is being made nowadays to set forth Jesus apart from his cross and atonement. He is held up as a great ethical teacher, a self-sacrificing spirit, who is to lead the way in a grand moral reformation, and by his influence to set up a kingdom of moral influence in the world. It is even hinted that this kingdom has never had prominence enough given to it because it has been overshadowed by his cross. But where is Jesus apart from his sacrifice? He is not there if you have left out the blood of sprinkling, which is the blood of sacrifice. Without the atonement, no man is a Christian, and Christ is not Jesus. If you have torn away the sacrificial blood, you have drawn the heart out of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and robbed it of its life. If you have trampled on the blood of sprinkling, and counted it a common thing, instead of putting it above you upon the lintel of the door, and all around you upon the two side-posts, you have fearfully transgressed. As for me, God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, since to me that cross is identical with Jesus himself. I know no Jesus but he who died the just for the unjust. You can separate Jesus and the blood materially; for by the spear-thrust, and all his other wounds, the blood was drawn away from the body of our Lord; but spiritually this "blood of sprinkling" and the Jesus by whom we live, are inseparable. In fact, they are one and indivisible, the self-same thing, and you cannot truly know Jesus, or preach Jesus, unless you preach him as slain for sin; you cannot trust Jesus except you trust him as making peace by the blood of his cross. If you have done with the blood of sprinkling, you have done with Jesus altogether; he will never part with his mediatorial glory as our sacrifice, neither can we come to him if we ignore that character. Is it not clear in the text that Jesus and the blood of sprinkling are one? What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. Note this right carefully.

Thirdly, observe that *this "blood of sprinkling" is put in close contact with "the new covenant."* I do not wonder that those who are lax in their views of the atonement have nothing honorable to say concerning the covenants, old or new. The doctrine of the covenants is the marrow of divinity; but these vain-glorious spirits affect to despise it. This is natural, since they speak slightingly of

the atonement. What covenant is there without blood? If it be not ratified, if there be no sacrifice to make it sure, then is it no covenant in the sight of God or of enlightened men. But, O beloved, ye who know your Lord, and follow on to know him yet better, to you the covenant of promise is a heritage of joy, and his atonement is most precious as the confirmation of it. To us the sacrificial death of our Lord is not *a* doctrine, but *the* doctrine, not an outgrowth of Christian teaching, but the essence and marrow of it. To us Jesus in his atonement is Alpha and Omega, in him the covenant begins and ends. You see how it was confirmed by blood. If it be a man's covenant, if it be confirmed, it standeth; but this is God's covenant, confirmed with promises, oaths and blood, and it stands fast for ever and ever. Every believer is as much interested in that covenant as was Abraham the father of believers; for the covenant was made with Abraham and his spiritual seed; and in Christ it is confirmed to all that seed for ever by his most precious blood. That, also, is evident enough in the text: fail not to consider it well.

But, fourthly, I want you to notice that according to the text *the blood is the voice of the new dispensation*. Observe that on Sinai there was "the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more." You look, therefore, under the new dispensation, for a voice, and you do not come to any till you reach the last object in the list, and there see "the blood of sprinkling that speaketh." Here, then, is the voice of the gospel; it is not the sound of a trumpet, nor the voice of words spoken in terrible majesty; but the blood speaks, and assuredly there is no sound more piercing, more potent, more prevailing. God heard the voice of Abel's blood and visited Cain with condign punishment for killing his brother; and the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cries in the ears of God with a voice which is ever heard. How can it be imagined that the Lord God should be deaf to the cry of his Son's sacrifice? Lo, these many ages the blood has cried—"Forgive them! Forgive them! Accept them! Deliver them from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom!"

The blood of sprinkling has a voice of instruction to us even as it has a voice of intercession with God. It cries to us, "See the evil of sin! See how God loveth righteousness! See how he loveth men! See how impossible it is for you to escape from the punishment of sin except by this great sacrifice in which the love and the justice of God equally appear! See how Jehovah spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all."

What a voice there is in the atonement!—a voice which pleads for holiness and love, for justice and grace, for truth and mercy. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh."

Do you not hear it? If you take away the blood of sprinkling from the gospel, you have silenced it. It has no voice if this be gone. "Oh," they say, "the gospel has lost its power!" What wonder when they have made it a dumb gospel! How can it have power when they take away that which is its life and speech? Unless the preacher is evermore preaching this blood, and sprinkling it by the doctrine of faith, his teaching has no voice either to rouse the careless or to cheer the anxious. If ever there should come a wretched day when all our pulpits shall be full of modern thought, and the old doctrine of a substitutionary sacrifice shall be exploded, then will there remain no word of comfort for the guilty or hope for the despairing. Hushed will be for ever those silver notes which now console the living, and cheer the dying; a dumb spirit will possess this sullen world, and no voice of joy will break the blank silence of despair. The gospel speaks through the propitiation for sin, and if that be denied, it speaketh no more. Those who preach not the atonement exhibit a dumb and dummy gospel; a mouth it hath, but speaketh not; they that make it are like unto their idol.

Let me draw you nearer still to the text. Observe, that *this voice is identical with the voice of the Lord Jesus*; for it is put so. "The blood of sprinkling that speaketh. See that ye refuse not *him* that speaketh." Whatever the doctrine of the sacrifice of Jesus may be, it is the main teaching of Jesus himself. It is well to notice that the voice which spoke from Sinai was also the voice of Christ. It was Jesus who delivered that law the penalty of which he was himself to endure. He that read it out amidst the tempest was Jesus. Notice the declaration—"Whose voice then shook the earth." Whenever you hear the gospel, the voice of the precious blood is the voice of Jesus himself, the voice of him that shook the earth at Sinai. This same voice shall by-and-by shake, not the earth only, but also heaven. What a voice there is in the blood of sprinkling, since indeed it is the voice of the eternal Son of God, who both makes and destroys! Would you have me silence the doctrine of the blood of sprinkling? Would any one of you attempt so horrible a deed? Shall we be censured if we continually proclaim the heaven-sent message of the blood of Jesus? Shall we speak with bated breath because some affected person shudders at the sound of the word "*blood?*" or some "cultured" individual rebels at the old-fashioned thought of sacrifice? Nay, verily, we will sooner have our tongue cut out than cease to speak of the precious blood of Jesus Christ. For me there is nothing worth thinking of or preaching about but this grand truth, which is the beginning and the end of the whole Christian system, namely, that God gave his Son to die that sinners might live. This is not the voice of the blood only, but the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. So saith the text, and who can contradict it?

Further, my brethren, from the text I learn another truth, namely, that *this blood is always speaking*. The text saith not "the blood of sprinkling that spoke," but "that speaketh." It is always speaking, it always remaineth a plea with God and a testimony to men. It never will be silenced, either one way or the other. In the intercession of our risen and ascended Lord his sacrifice ever speaketh to the Most High. By the teaching of the Holy Ghost the atonement will always speak in edification to believers yet upon the earth. It is the blood that speaketh, according to our text, this is the only speech which this dispensation yields us. Shall that speech ever be still? Shall we decline to hear it? Shall we refuse to echo it? God forbid. By day, by night, the great sacrifice continues to cry to the sons of men, "Turn ye from your sins, for they cost your Savior dear. The times of your ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, since he is able to forgive and yet be just. Your offended God has himself provided a sacrifice; come and be sprinkled with its blood, and be reconciled once for all." The voice of this blood speaks wherever there is a guilty conscience, wherever there is an anxious heart, wherever there is a seeking sinner, wherever there is a believing mind. It speaketh with sweet, familiar, tender, inviting voice. There is no music like it to the sinner's ear: it charms away his fears. It shall never cease its speaking so long as there is a sinner yet out of Christ; nay, so long as there is one on earth who still needs its cleansing power because of fresh backslidings. Oh, hear ye its voice! Incline your ear and receive its blessed accents: it says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

This part of my discourse will not be complete unless I bid you notice that we are expressly told that *this precious blood speaks "better things than that of Abel."* I do not think that the whole meaning of the passage is exhausted if we say that Abel's blood cries for vengeance, and that Christ's blood speaks for pardon. Dr. Watts puts it:—

"Blood has a voice to pierce the skies:

'Revenge!' the blood of Abel cries;

But the dear stream when Christ was slain
Speaks peace as loud from ev'ry vein."

That is quite true; but I conceive that it is not all the sense, and perhaps not even *the* sense here intended. Revenge is scarcely a good thing; yet Abel's blood spake good things, or we should hardly read that Christ's blood speaks "better things." What does the blood of Abel speak? The blood of Abel speaks to a complete and believing obedience to God. It shows us a man who believes God, and, notwithstanding the enmity of his brother, brings to God the appointed sacrifice of faith, strictly following up, even to the bitter end, his holy obedience to the Most High. That is what the blood of Abel says to me; and the blood of Jesus says the same thing most emphatically. The death of Jesus Christ was the crown and close of a perfect life, it was a fit completion of a course of holiness. In obedience to the Great Father, Jesus even laid down his life. But if this be all the blood of Jesus speaks, as some say that it is, then it does not speak better things than the blood of Abel; for it only says the same things in a louder voice. The martyrdom of any saint has a voice for obedience to God as truly as the martyrdom of Jesus; but the death of our Lord says far more, infinitely more, than this: it not only witnesses to complete obedience, but it provides the way by which the disobedient may be forgiven and helped to obedience and holiness. The cross has a greater, deeper, gladder gospel for fallen men than that of a perfect example which they are unable to follow.

The blood of Abel said this, too—that he was not ashamed of his faith, but witnessed a good confession concerning his God, even to the death; he put his life in his hand, and was not ashamed to stand at the altar of God, and avow his faith by obediently offering the ordained sacrifice. Now, I grant you that the blood of Jesus also declares that he was a faithful and true witness, who willingly sealed his witness with his blood. He proved by shedding his blood that he could not be turned aside from truth and righteousness, even though death stood in his way; but if that is all that the blood of sprinkling speaketh, it saith no better things than the blood of Abel. "Be faithful unto death," is the voice of Abel as well as of Jesus. Jesus must have said more than this by his blood-shedding.

The blood of Abel said good things; that is implied in the fact that the blood of Jesus Christ says better things; and no doubt the blood of Abel rises to the dignity of teaching self-sacrifice. Here was a man, a keeper of sheep, who by his mode of life laid out his life for the good of those committed to his charge; and at the last, in obedience to God, he yielded himself up to die by a brother's hand. It was the first draught of a picture of self-sacrifice. Our Lord Jesus Christ also made a complete self-sacrifice. All his life long he gave himself to men. He lived never for himself. The glory of God and the good of men were united in one passion which filled his whole soul. He could say, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." His death was the completion of his perfect self-sacrifice. But if that were all, the blood of Jesus saith no better thing than Abel's death saith, though it may say it more emphatically.

Our Lord's blood saith "better things than that of Abel;" and what doth it say? It saith, "There is redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace." "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes we were healed." "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." The voice of the blood is this, "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Now, my brethren, these are better things than Abel's blood could say, and they are what the blood of Jesus speaks to every

one upon whom it is sprinkled by faith. It must be applied to each one of us by faith, or it says nothing to us. But when it falls on each believing individual, it saith to him words of blessing which pacify his conscience and delight his soul.

The apostle says that "Ye are come to the blood of sprinkling." Is it so? Has that blood of sprinkling ever been applied to you? Do you feel it? Are you preserved? Are you cleansed? Are you brought nigh to God? Are you sanctified unto God's service by the atoning sacrifice? If so, then go you out, and in firm confidence that never can be shaken, make your glory in the blood of sprinkling. Tell every sinner whom you meet that if the Lord Jesus wash him he shall be whiter than snow. Preach the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God and then sing of it. Recollect that wondrous threefold song in the fifth chapter of the Revelation, where, first of all, the elders and living creatures round about the throne, sing a new song, saying, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Then ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands of angels take up the strain and cry, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." Nor is this all; for the apostle tells us, "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." See you not that they all extol the Lord Jesus in his sacrificial character as the Lamb slain? I have scant patience with those who dare to put this great truth into the background, and even sneer at it or misrepresent it of set purpose. Sirs, if you would be saved you must have the blood of Jesus sprinkled upon you. He that believeth not in Christ Jesus, in Jesus the atoning sacrifice, must perish. The eternal God must repulse with infinite disgust the man who refuses the loving sacrifice of Jesus. Inasmuch as he counted himself unworthy of this wondrous sacrifice, this marvellous expiation there remaineth no other sacrifice for sin, and nothing for him but that eternal blackness and darkness and thunder which were foreshadowed at Sinai. Those who refuse the atonement which wisdom devised, which love provided, and which justice has accepted, have signed their own death-warrant, and none can wonder that they perish. The Lord lead us to glory in Christ crucified. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus 20:1-21; 24:1-8.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—236, 279, 291.

* For this line of thought I am much indebted to a chapter in an admirable book, entitled "Every-day Life," by C. H. Waller, M. A. Shaw and Co.

The Blood of Sprinkling (Second Sermon.)

A Sermon
(No. 1889)

Delivered on Lord's-day Evening, February 28th, 1886, by
C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Ye are come . . . to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh."—Hebrews 12:24, 25.

IN THE FORMER part of this sermon the text grew upon me so largely that it was quite impossible to express all its meaning. In as condensed a manner as possible I explained what was meant by "the blood of sprinkling," and I also enlarged upon the high position which this precious blood occupies in the gospel dispensation; but I was obliged to leave for this second occasion two practical questions which the text is sure to raise if it be carefully thought upon.

The doctrinal portion of our meditation was greatly blest to our hearts, for God the Holy Ghost refreshed us thereby: may he now fulfill his sacred office with equal power, by revealing the things of Christ to us in a way which shall cause self-examination, and arouse us to give more earnest heed than ever to the voice of him that speaketh from heaven. No theme can excel in value and excellence that of the precious blood of Jesus. Unless the Holy Spirit shall prepare our hearts, even with such a topic as this before us, we shall be nothing profited; but if he will show these choice truths unto us, we shall be comforted, quickened, edified, and sanctified by them.

It is a considerable disadvantage to some of you that you have not heard the former part of the sermon; but I hope you will read it at your leisure, and then, if you read this in connection with it, the whole subject will be before you. Not that I can set it all out in words: I only mean that it will be before you as the ocean is before us when we sit on the beach, or as the heavens are before us when we gaze upon Arcturus with his sons. Finite language fails to convey the infinite; and if ever there was a text which deserved to be called infinite, it is that which is now before us.

Having touched, as with a swallow's wing, the surface of our great theme under the first division of the sermon, I have now to speak with you upon the second, which is this: *Where are we with reference to this blood of sprinkling?* The text says, "Ye are come." We are not come to Mount Sinai, but we are come to Mount Zion; to angels and their God; to saints and their Mediator, and to the blood of sprinkling. This having had its share of our thoughts, we are to conclude with the question, *What then?* If we have come to this blood of sprinkling, what then? The answer is, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Let us give to the wondrous truths revealed to us by the sacrifice of Jesus the most earnest heed, that our souls may hear and live. May the Holy Spirit enable us to hear the heavenly voice at this hour! "Faith cometh by hearing; may it come at this time by our reverently hearing the voice of the blood of sprinkling!"

II. My business under the second head of my discourse is to answer the question, **WHERE ARE WE?** I have to explain what is meant by the expression which is found in the twenty-second verse of the chapter "Ye are come." Link the twenty-second verse with this twenty-fourth, and read, "Ye are come to the blood of sprinkling."

Well, first, ye are *come to the hearing of the gospel of the atoning sacrifice*. The Israelites left Egypt, and, having passed the Red Sea, they entered the desert, and at length came to the mount of God, even to Sinai, that terrible mountain. In the valley around that throne of God they were gathered together in their thousands. What a sight that vast multitude must have been! Probably two millions or more were encamped before the mount. Then, "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from Mount Paran; and he came with ten thousands of his saints; from his right hand went a fiery law for them." Israel crouched in the valley below, subdued by the terrible majesty of the scene, and overawed by the trumpet voice which pealed forth from the midst of the thick darkness. The Lord spake with them, but their uncircumcised ears could not bear his glorious voice, and they entreated that Moses might act as mediator, and speak in God's stead.

You and I have not come to such a terrible sight at this hour. No quivering mountain smokes before you, no terrible lightnings appall you, no thunders distress you.

"Not to the terrors of the Lord,
The tempest, fire, and smoke;
Not to the thunder of that word
Which God on Sinai spoke:
"But we are come to Sion's hill
The city of our God,
Where milder words declare his will,
And spread his love abroad."

Among the great things which you are called upon to consider under the gospel is "the blood of sprinkling." Count yourselves happy that you are privileged to hear of the divinely appointed way of reconciliation with God. You are come to hear, not of your sin and its doom, not of the last judgment and the swift destruction of the enemies of God; but of love to the guilty, pity for the miserable, mercy for the wicked, compassion for those who are out of the way. You are come to hear of God's great expedient of wisdom, by which he, by the same act and deed, condemns sin, and lets the sinner live; honors his law, and yet passes by transgression, iniquity, and sin. You are come to hear, not of the shedding of your own blood, but of the shedding of his blood who, in his infinite compassion, deigned to take the place of guilty men—to suffer, that they might not suffer, and die, that they might not die. Blessed are your ears, that they hear of the perfect sacrifice! Happy are your spirits, since they are found where free grace and boundless love have set forth a great propitiation for sin! Divinely favored are you to live where you are told of pardon freely given to all who will believe on the name of the Lord Jesus, as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. You hear at this hour not law, but gospel; not the sentence of judgment, but the proclamation of grace. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." It is no small thing for the kingdom of God to have come so nigh unto you. Awake to a sense of your privilege: you do not sit in heathen midnight, nor in Popish gloom, nor in Jewish mist; but day has dawned on you: do not refuse the light.

In a better sense, going a little further, we have not only come to the blood of sprinkling by hearing about it, but we have come to it because *the great God now deals with us upon methods which are founded and grounded upon the atoning sacrifice of Christ*. If God were to deal with us upon the terms laid down at Sinai, he need not be long in finding the "two or three witnesses" to prove that we have broken his law. We should be ourselves compelled to plead guilty; no witnesses

would be required. Truly, he hath not dealt with us after our sins. We are so faulty that we can draw no comfort from the prospect of judgment by law; we appeal to mercy alone; for on any other ground our case is hopeless. "This do, and thou shalt live" is a covenant which brings us no ray of comfort; for its only word to us is that thunderbolt—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

By the works of the law none can be justified, for by that law we are all condemned. Read the Ten Commandments, and pause at each one, and confess that you have broken it either in thought, or word, or deed. Remember that by a glance we may commit adultery, by a thought we may be guilty of murder, by a desire we may steal. Sin is any want of conformity to perfect holiness, and that want of conformity is justly chargeable upon every one of us. Yet the Lord does not, under the gospel dispensation, deal with us according to law. He does not now sit on the throne of judgment, but he looks down upon us from the throne of grace. Not the iron rod, but the silver scepter, is held over us. The long-suffering of God rules the age, and Jesus the Mediator is the gracious Lord-lieutenant of the dispensation. Instead of destroying offending man from off the face of the earth, the Lord comes near to us in loving condescension, and pleads with us by his Spirit, saying, "You have sinned, but my Son has died. In him I am prepared to deal with you in a way of pure mercy and unmingled grace."

O sinner, the fact that you are alive proves that God is not dealing with you according to strict justice, but in patient forbearance; every moment you live is another instance of omnipotent long-suffering. It is the sacrifice of Christ which arrests the axe of justice, which else must execute you. The barren tree is spared because the great Dresser of the vineyard, who bled on Calvary, intercedes and cries, "Let it alone this year also." O my hearer, it is through the shedding of the blood and the mediatorial reign of the Lord Jesus that you are at this moment on praying ground and pleading terms with God! Apart from the blood of atonement you would now be past hope, shut up for ever in the place of doom. But see how the great Father bears with you! He stands prepared to hear your prayer, to accept your confession of sin, to honor your faith, and to save you from your sin through the sacrifice of his dear Son.

Through our Lord Jesus sovereign grace and infinite love find a free way to the most undeserving of the race. Through the divine sacrifice the Lord saith, "Come now and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Thus the rebel is treated as a child, and the criminal as a beloved one. Because of yonder death on Calvary's cruel tree, God can invite guilty men to come to him, and he can receive them to the bosom of his love. O my dear hearers, do remember this! I am not sent to scold you, but to woo you, not sent to thunder at you, but to let the soft cleansing drops from the heart of Jesus fall upon you. I beg you not to turn away, as men may well do when the tidings are heavy; but hearken diligently, for the message is full of joy. You are now in the house of prayer, addressed by one of the Lord's ambassadors, and the tidings are of peace through a propitiation which God himself has provided and accepted. We cry not to you, "Prepare for vengeance;" but we proclaim, "a God ready to pardon." We do not threaten that he will no more have mercy upon you; but we tell you that he waiteth to be gracious. If I had to say, "You have provoked him past bearing, and he now means to destroy you," what a miserable man should I be! How could I bring such evil tidings to my fellow-creatures? Then would it have been woe to me that my mother bare me for so hard a fate. Thank God, it is not so. By virtue of the blood of sprinkling the language of boundless love is heard among our apostate race, and we are entreated to acquaint ourselves with God, and be at peace.

No, my hearer, the day of grace is not over: you are not come to Sinai. No, you are not yet condemned past all hope; for you are still within reach of Jesus the Mediator. There is forgiveness. The fountain which was opened of old for sin and for uncleanness is open still. If you have sinned like David, if you will but accept the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, I am able to speak to you as Nathan did to the guilty king, and say, "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." At any rate, God is dealing with you now on gospel terms; he sits on Zion, not on Sinai; he pronounces invitations of grace, and does not utter the stern sentence of justice.

Further, there is a far more effectual way of coming to the blood of sprinkling than this—*when by faith that blood is sprinkled upon our souls*. This is absolutely needed: the blood *shed* must become to each one of us the blood *sprinkled*. "How can I know," says one, "that the blood of Christ is upon me?" Dost thou trust thyself with Christ? Dost thou believe that he made an atonement on the cross; and wilt thou venture thy eternal destiny upon that fact, *trusting* in what Jesus did, and in that alone? If thou dost thus trust, thou shalt not trust in vain. Dost thou apply thy heart to the precious blood of Jesus? Then that precious blood is applied to thy heart. If thine heart bleeds for sin, bring it to the bleeding heart of Jesus, and it shall be healed. I showed, in the early part of this discourse, that the blood sprinkled on the lintel and the two side-posts of the door preserved the Israelites on the night of the Passover: it shall also preserve you. The blood sprinkled upon the defiled made them ceremonially clean: it shall cleanse you. Have I not often quoted those blessed words: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin?" That blood put upon the sons of Aaron dedicated them to God; and if it be applied to you, it shall consecrate you to God, and you shall become the accepted servant of the Most High. Oh, what a blessed thing to know assuredly that we have come to the blood of sprinkling by a true and humble faith! Canst thou say that thou dost alone rely on Jesus for salvation? Canst thou call heaven and earth to witness that thou hast no other confidence? Then remember the word of the Lord: "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life. He that believeth in him is not condemned." "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Are not these words full of strong assurance? Indeed, we have not come to Mount Sinai, the place of trembling; but to Zion, the place which is beautiful for situation, the joy of the earth; the vision of peace, the home of infinite blessedness. Conscience no longer thunders at you for your sins, for your sins are gone. The expiation has covered them: the sprinkling of the blood has put them all away. Your iniquities are cast into the depths of the sea; God has cast them behind his back. The handwriting of ordinances that was against you Christ has taken away, nailing it to his cross, as a record in which there is no more condemning force. The debt is paid, the bill is receipted. Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? O beloved! it is a most blessed thing to come to the blood of sprinkling.

"The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Savior's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view."

The act of faith, whereby we accept and trust in the Lord Jesus as our Mediator and Sacrifice, is the true and effectual coming to the blood of sprinkling. May none of us forget thus to come! He is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, and those who come to him shall be led into full salvation. Have you thus come? If you have not, why do you delay? He saith, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Come to him, for he is calling you; come to him, even as you now are, and he will receive you without fail.

Further, to come to this blood of sprinkling means *thankfully to enjoy all that comes to us through the blood of sprinkling*. I have intruded upon this somewhat already. Brothers and sisters, if you have come to the blood of sprinkling, believe in the full pardon which God has given you, and in your consequent peace with God. It is a blessed word in the Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." Do you believe in the forgiveness of sins? I have seen some of the children of God who have believed in Jesus, but it has been with a faith which did not realize the full blessing promised to it; for they were as troubled about their sins as if they had never been forgiven. Now, a man who receives a free pardon from the Queen, and goes his way out of prison, rejoices in that pardon as a reality, and therefore walks abroad without fear. You must believe in the pardon of God as a reality, and act accordingly. If he has absolved you for Jesus' sake, then you are absolved. Why tremble like a guilty wretch waiting for the verdict? Why talk about fearing divine wrath? If you are pardoned, the deed of grace is done, and can never be undone; for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance on his part. His remission of sin is a clear gaol delivery, a sure plea, a full quittance.

"Oh! how sweet to view the flowing
Of our Lord's atoning blood,
With divine assurance knowing
He has made my peace with God!"

I want every child of God in his inmost soul to come to the blood of sprinkling by full assurance of his justification, and then to go on to enjoy constant access to the mercy-seat, and communion with the Lord God. We may now with holy boldness speak with God in prayer, for the mercy-seat is sprinkled with the blood. O pardoned one, be not backward to enjoy thy liberty of fellowship! Thou art clean through the blood, and therefore thou mayest enter into the closest communion with the divine Father; thou art consecrated by the blood, and therefore thou mayest abound in the service of thy God. Treat thy God as a child should treat a father, and be not so awed by his majesty as to be cast down and distressed because of past sin, seeing it is pardoned. Take the good that God provides thee; enjoy the peace the blood has bought thee; enter into the liberty that thy ransom price has ensured thee. Do not stand in feelings, and fears, and dreams; but come unto this blood of sprinkling, and rest there, and be filled with joy and peace through believing. With such a ransom found for thee, dream not of going down into the pit, but ascend with gladness into the hill of the Lord, and stand in his holy place.

I think, once more, that this coming to the blood of sprinkling means also that *we feel the full effect of it in our lives*. The man who knows that Jesus shed his blood for him, and has had that blood applied to his conscience, becomes a sin-hating man, consecrated to him who has cleansed him. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." I believe that there is no fruitful source of virtue like faith in the precious blood of Jesus. I hope your conduct will always support me in this assertion. Those who are debtors for salvation to their dying Lord should be the most holy of men. You people who think that you will get to heaven by some other way than by "the blood of sprinkling" have no sure bonds to hold you to holiness. You trust partly to your own works, and partly to what Jesus has done. Well, you do not owe him much, and therefore you will not love him much, and therefore you will not feel bound to live strict, holy, gracious lives. But the man who knows that his many sins are all washed away through the blood of Jesus, and that thus he is saved, he is the man who

will serve the Lord with all his heart. He who has received a finished righteousness and complete salvation is under boundless obligations of gratitude, and the force of these obligations will urge him to a consecrated life. Over him the supreme power of gratitude will exert its sacred influence, and he will be not only carefully obedient, but ardently zealous in the service of his Redeemer. We know it is so, and we mean to prove it by our daily conduct. Brethren, I would have you exhibit more and more the influence of the precious blood in sanctifying your lives. Are there not Christians who hold the doctrine of the atoning blood, and yet are no better than others? Alas! it is so. But it is one thing to hold a doctrine, and another thing for that doctrine to take hold upon your heart and influence your life. Oh, if we believed practically what we believe professionally, what manner of persons should we be in all holy conversation and godliness! Hear me, my brother, and answer the appeals I make to thee as in the presence of the Lord. Blood-bought; canst thou live for thyself? Blood-washed; canst thou defile thy garments? Marked with the King's own name, in the King's own blood; how canst thou yield thyself to other rulers? God grant that we may come unto the blood of sprinkling till it shall purify our nature, and fill us with an all-consuming enthusiasm for him whose heart was pierced for us!

I ask you, then, to put the question closely home, "Have I come unto this blood of sprinkling? If not, why should I not come at once?" I read the other day an imaginary story, which describes the need of looking well to this great business. Receive it as a parable:—A little daughter of the house of Israel, had heard the commandment concerning the Passover night, and as she lay ill in her bed she cried, "Father, have you sprinkled the blood upon the lintel and the two side-posts?" Her father answered, "Not yet, my child. It shall be done." The daughter was distressed, and filled with fear. After waiting a little while she again cried, "Father, father, have you sprinkled the blood upon the door?" He answered carelessly, "Child, I have told Simeon to sprinkle it, and I have no doubt it is done." "But, father," cried she, "it is near midnight, and the destroying angel will soon be abroad; are you *sure* that the blood is over the door? Jehovah our God hath said that we must sprinkle the blood upon the lintel and the two side-posts, or else the destroyer will not pass over us. Father, are you sure it is done?" The father passed over her enquiry: he had been eating of the lamb with his friends, and thought that this was sufficient; he did not care to give too much prominence to the ghastly idea of blood. He was of a liberal mind, and would not believe that a merciful God would smite his household for so small an omission.

Then his daughter arose from her bed, made strong by the God of Israel. Nothing would content her until she had been outside into the street, and seen for herself whether the saving mark was over the door of her father's house. It was almost midnight, but by the light of the moon she looked, and no blood-mark was there! How great was her distress! "Father," she cried, "make haste and bring the basin." There it stood, filled with blood; for the Paschal Lamb had been slain. The father, at her entreaty, dashed the hyssop into it, struck the lintel and the two side-posts and shut the door, and as he did so, the midnight hour arrived. They were saved so as by fire. The daughter's obedient care and reverence of the Lord had warded off the sword of the destroyer. Oh that the holy anxiety of some one now present would work the like blessing for other households! Ask, dear child, ask the question, "Father, have you come to the blood of sprinkling? Is the blood of the Lamb above your head, between you and God? Is it on both sides of you, when you come in and go out?" O soul, be thus anxious about thyself, and rest not till thou hast by faith been purged with hyssop, and cleansed by the blood of the one sacrifice for sin.

III. The last part of our subject is this: WHAT THEN? According to our text, the blood of Jesus is the voice of the new dispensation. It is the blood which speaks, and it speaks better things than the blood of Abel. What then is our duty? How doth the apostle express our obligation? "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh."

I would have a quarter of an hour's very quiet talk with you, without excitement or quibbling debate. Lend me your ears, for I speak in all love for your souls. I want, dear friends, that this great truth of atonement which I so often preach may have a fair hearing, and not be left to lie among the number of forgotten things.

Do not refuse the voice of Jesus by cold indifference. God was made flesh, and dwelt among men, and in due time he took upon himself our sin, and suffered for it in his own body on the tree, that sin might be put away by the sacrifice of himself. By his death upon the cross our Lord made atonement for the sin of man, and those who believe in him are delivered from evil and its consequences. The main point is that Jesus died for us, the just for the unjust. His atoning blood has a voice: "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." The text says: See to it; look to it; make sure of it; be careful about it. Do not miss the salvation of your Lord through neglect; for he who dies by neglecting the healing medicine will as surely perish as he who stabs himself. Be in earnest to accept the Savior: I beseech you so to do, for I am afraid that many refuse him that speaketh, because they never think of him, or of his sacrifice. It seems to me that if I were a young man I would give this matter very early notice. However deeply I might be engaged in business, I should feel that my first concern ought to be to set myself right with God. Other matters would be sure to drop into order if I could be right with the Lord of all. If I heard it said that salvation came by the blood of Christ, I think I should pull myself together and resolve to understand this singular statement. I would not let it go by me, but would endeavor to reach the bottom of it, and practically understand it. I would meditate much upon teaching so wonderful as this—that the Son of God in man's stead honored the justice of God by death, and so put away sin.

When I was a youth I had a great longing to begin life on right principles: I longed to find deliverance from sin. I would wake up with the sun in summer time to read my Bible, and such books as Bunyan's "Grace Abounding," Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted," Alleine's "Alarm," and Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul." In these books I tried to spell out the way of salvation; but the chief thing I longed to know was, "How can man be just with God? How can God be just with man, and yet put away his sin?" Do you not think that these questions are of high importance? I beg that they may not have the cold shoulder from you. Give this question due space. I know that a great many things demand your attention nowadays; but I claim for this, which is the innermost revelation of God that it should have an early and earnest hearing. God incarnate in Christ Jesus bleeding and dying for human sin is a marvel of love too great to be passed over without thought. I pray you, therefore, "refuse not him that speaketh." Do not say, "I pray thee, have me excused." I do not suppose that you will become an infidel or act as a blasphemer towards this grand truth. I will not accuse you of denying the fact of the atonement; but my great fear is lest you should be indifferent to it. If it be so, that God himself has come to earth to bleed and die to save guilty man, it is the greatest, gladdest news that ever came to our poor erring race, and every member of that race should receive it with hopeful attention.

When you resolve to study the doctrine, *do not approach it with prejudice through misapprehension.* Those that hate the gospel of Christ are very busy in caricaturing the doctrine of the atonement. They assert that we preach that God was not merciful by nature, but must needs be

appeased by the blood of his own Son. They charge us with saying that Jesus by his death made God loving. We distinctly teach the very opposite of that statement. What we do say is this, that God is infinitely loving—that, in fact, God is love; but that love does not cause him to be unjust or unholy; for *that* in the long run would not be love. God is the Judge of all the earth, and he must do right. The Lord, as the great moral governor, if he makes a law, and threatens a penalty, must execute that penalty, or else his law will lose its authority. If the penalty threatened be not executed, there is a tacit acknowledgment that it was threatened in error. Could you believe in a fallible God? The Lord has made a law which is perfect, and just, and good. Would you rather be without law? What reasonable person desires anarchy? He has backed up that law with a threatening. What is the use of a law if to break it involves no evil consequences? A government that never punishes offenders is no government at all. God, therefore, as moral ruler, must be just, and must display his indignation against wrong and evil of every kind. It is written on the conscience of men that sin must be punished. Would you have it go unpunished? If you are a just man, you would not. To meet the case, therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ, by himself bearing the penalty of death, has honored the divine law. He has shown to all intelligences that God will not wink at sin, that even his infinite mercy must not come in the way of his justice. This is the doctrine: do not listen to those who twist and pervert it. It is the love of God which has provided the great atonement by which, in a judgment better than ours, the law finds a glorious vindication, and the foundation of moral government is strengthened. Do consider this matter, and judge it fairly, with candid minds. We do assure you from God's Word that apart from the atonement of our Lord Jesus you can never be saved either from the guilt or power of evil. You will find no peace for your conscience that is worth having, no thorough and deep peace, except by believing in this atoning sacrifice; neither will you meet with a motive strong enough to rescue you from the bonds of iniquity. Therefore "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Hear, and your soul shall live. Cavil, and you will die in your sins.

Do not refuse the voice of the Lord Jesus by rejecting the principle of expiation. If God is content with this principle, it is not for us to raise objection. The Lord God is infinitely more concerned to fix matters on a right foundation than ever we can be, and if he feels that the sacrifice of Jesus meets the case at all points, why should we be dissatisfied with it? If there were a flaw in the proceedings his holy eyes would see it. He would not have delivered up his own Son to die unless that death would perfectly fulfill the design intended by it. A mistake so expensive he would never have perpetrated. Who are you to raise the question? If God is satisfied, surely you should be? To refuse the atonement because we are too wise to accept so simple a method of mercy is the utmost height of folly. What! will ye refuse him that speaketh because the present phase of human madness dares to dispute the divine way of human redemption? I pray you, do not so.

Once more. *Do not refuse this voice of mercy by preferring your own way of salvation.* You have, no doubt, a way of salvation in your own mind, for few men have given up all hope. Perhaps your chosen hope is that you will be saved by doing your best. Alas! no man does his best; and the best acts of a rebel must be unaccepted of his king. So long as he is a rebel his acts are those of a rebel, and of no esteem with his prince. Perhaps your hope lies in saying so many prayers, and going to church, or attending chapel; or you are so unwise as to trust to a minister or priest. Now, we beseech you, hear the witness of God which he has given us in this book, and learn that other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ the righteous. There is one salvation, and there can be no other; all other hopes are lying vanities, and arrogant insults to Jesus.

God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation for sin. There is no other propitiation, or atonement, or way of acceptance; and if you reject this way, you must die in your sins.

I cannot help it if you do not like this teaching, although I shall be grieved if you refuse it. I can only tell you the truth, and leave it with your own hearts. Do not wilfully refuse it. When I meet you face to face in that last day, to which we all must come, I shall not be clear of your blood unless I tell you what is assuredly the truth—that in the precious blood of Christ is the only cleansing from sin, and the only acceptance with God. By believing in Jesus, as slain for you, you shall be saved; but do what you may, pray as you may, fast as you may, give alms as you may, you shall not enter heaven by any other road. The way to glory is by the way of the cross. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." Look to him whom you have pierced, and mourn for your sins. Look not to any other, for no other is needed, no other is provided, no other can be accepted. Jesus is the sole messenger of the covenant of life and peace. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh."

"See that ye *refuse* not." Then there is a choice about it. If you had never heard the gospel, you could not have refused it; but now that you have heard the message, it lies within your power, and it is an awfully dangerous power, to refuse him that speaketh. Oh, can you, will you, dare you refuse my bleeding Savior—refuse the Lord of love? I see him now. The thorn-crown is about his brow. He is hanging on his cross expiring in unutterable pangs! Can you refuse him while he presents such a spectacle of sacrifice? His eyes are red with weeping; have you no tears for such sorrow? His cheeks are all distained with the brutal soldiers' spittle: have you no love and homage for him? His hands are fastened to the wood—his feet the same: and there he hangs to suffer in the sinner's stead. Will you not yield yourselves to him? I could joyfully bow before that cross-foot to kiss his dear feet distained with blood. What a charm he has for me! And you—do you refuse him?

He is no mere man. It is God himself who hangs upon the cross. His body is that of a man, but it is in union with the Godhead. He who died at Calvary is God over all, and this makes his death so effectual. He whom you have offended, in order to be justly able to pardon you, hangs there and dies for you: and do you turn your back on him? O sirs, if you be wise you will come, as I said I fain would come, and kiss those bleeding feet, and look up and say, "My Lord, I am reconciled to thee—how could I be otherwise? My enmity is dead. How can I be an enemy to him that died for me? In shame, and scorn, and misery, Jesus dies that I may live. O Lord Jesus, thou hast wrought in me, not reconciliation merely, but full submission and hearty love. I joy to sink myself in thee, and to be thine for ever." See that ye refuse not my Lord. May the sweet Spirit who loves the cross, and, like a dove, hovers round it now, descend upon you all who hear my message! May the Holy Ghost apply the blood of sprinkling to you; and may you feel that, instead of refusing him that speaketh, you rejoice in his name!

When the text says, "See that ye refuse not," it tacitly and pleadingly says, "See that ye accept him." Dear hearers, I trust you will receive my Lord into your hearts. When we read of refusing, or receiving, we perceive an action of the will. Jesus must be willingly received: he will not force himself upon any man. Whosoever accepts Jesus is himself accepted of Jesus. Never was there a heart willing to receive him to whom Jesus denied himself. Never! But you must be willing and obedient. Grace works this in you; but in you this must be. Till the heart entertains Jesus gladly nothing is done. All that is short of a willing hearing of Jesus, and a willing acceptance of his great atonement, is short of eternal life. Say, wilt thou have this Savior, or dost thou decline his love? Wilt thou give him a cold refusal? Oh, do not so; but, on the contrary, throw open the doors of thy heart, and entreat thy Lord and Savior to come in.

I do not wonder that the Israelites asked that they might no longer hear the voice of thunder from the top of Sinai; it was too terrible for human ear; but you have no such excuse if you refuse him that speaketh; for Jesus speaks in notes more sweet than music, more tender than a mother's sonnet to her babe. Let me remind you, that he was wont to say, "come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." He declared that all manner of sin and of blasphemy should be forgiven unto men. He stood and cried, on the last day of the feast, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." I am telling you no fables; for Christ, who was born at Bethlehem and died on Calvary, by his own blood which he shed for many, assures you that there is forgiveness for every man of you who, confessing his sin, will come and put his trust in him.

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh;" for though you hear only my poor feeble voice pleading with you, with an honest, loving heart at the back of it, yet God the Holy Ghost is speaking, and Jesus Christ himself is speaking to you. Refuse me if you please, but do not refuse my Lord. The blood of Jesus says, "I was poured out for the guilty. I was shed to manifest divine love. I am sprinkled to cleanse from sin." Each drop as it falls creates peace of heart. Stand where that blood is falling. Let it sprinkle you.

Thus the blood speaks. Will you not answer, "Lord, we come to thee, for thou hast drawn us. Thy wounds have wounded our hearts. Thy death has killed our enmity. Sprinkle us unto thyself. Bedew us with thy blood. Let us be accepted in the Beloved?" Amen. So may God hear us!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews 10.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—302, 294, 580, 288.

See "The Blood of Sprinkling," No. 1,888.

Our Lord's Prayer for His People's Sanctification

A Sermon

(No. 1890)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, March 7th, 1886, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."—John 17:17.

OUR LORD JESUS prayed much for his people while he was here on earth. He made Peter the special subject of his intercession when he knew that he was in extraordinary danger. The midnight wrestlings of the Son of man were for his people. In the sacred record, however, much more space is taken up by our Lord's intercessions as he nears the end of his labors. After the closing supper, his public preaching work being ended, and nothing remaining to be done but to die, he gave himself wholly unto prayer. He was not again to instruct the multitude, nor to heal the sick, and in the interval which remained, before he should lay down his life, he girded himself for special intercession. He poured out his soul in life before he poured it out unto death.

In this wonderful prayer, our Lord, as our great High Priest, appears to enter upon that perpetual office of intercession which he is now exercising at the right hand of the Father. Our Lord ever seemed, in the eagerness of his love, to be anticipating his work. Before he was set apart for his life-work, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon him, he must needs be about his Father's business; before he finally suffered at the hands of cruel men, he had a baptism to be baptized with, and he was straitened till it was accomplished; before he actually died, he was covered with a bloody sweat, and was exceeding sorrowful even unto death; and in this case, before he in person entered within the veil, he made intercession for us. He never tarries when the good of his people calls for him. His love hath wings as well as feet: it is true of him evermore, "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind." O beloved, what a friend we have in Jesus! so willing, so speedy to do for us all that we need. Oh that we could imitate him in this, and be quick of understanding to perceive our line of service, and eager of heart to enter upon it.

This chapter, which ought to be universally known as the Lord's Prayer, may be called the holy of holies of the word of God. Here we are admitted to that secret place where the Son of God speaks with the Father in closest fellowship of love. Here we look into the heart of Jesus, as he sets out in order his desires and requests before his Father on our behalf. Here inspiration lifts her veil, and we behold truth face to face. Our text lies somewhere near the middle of the prayer; it is the heart of it. Our Lord's desire for the sanctification of his people pervades the whole prayer; but it is gathered up, declared, and intensified in the one sentence that I have read to you: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." How invaluable must the blessing of sanctification be when our Lord, in the highest reach of his intercession, cries: "Sanctify them!" In sight of his passion, on the night before his death, our Savior lifts his eyes to the great Father, and cries in his most plaintive tones, "Father, sanctify them." The place whereon we stand is holy ground, and the subject whereof we speak demands our solemn thought. Come, Holy Spirit, and teach us the full meaning of this prayer for holiness!

First, I call your attention to *what it is the Savior asks*—"sanctify them;" and then, *for whom he asks it*—it is for those whom his Father had given him. Thirdly, we shall note *of whom he asks it*: he asks this sanctification of God the Father himself, for he alone it is who can sanctify his people. Lastly, we will enquire *how is this blessing to be wrought?*—"Sanctify them through thy truth;" and our Lord adds an explanatory sentence, which was a confession of his own faith towards the word of the Lord, and an instruction to our faith in the same matter. "Thy word is truth."

I. At the beginning, then, consider WHAT HE ASKED. What is this inestimable blessing which our Savior so earnestly requests at the Father's hand? He first prays, "Holy Father, keep them;" and again, "Keep them from the evil;" but this negative blessing of preservation from evil is not enough: he seeks for them positive holiness, and therefore he cries, "sanctify them." The word is one of considerable range of meaning: I am not able to follow it through all its shades, but one or two must suffice.

It means, first, *dedicate them to thy service*; for such must be the meaning of the word further down, when we read, "For their sakes I sanctify myself." In the Lord's case it cannot mean purification from sin, because our Savior was undefiled; his nature was unblemished by sin, and his actions were unspotted. No eye of man, nor glance of fiend, could discover fault in him, and the search of God only resulted in the declaration that in him God was well pleased. Our Lord's sanctification was his consecration to the fulfillment of the Divine purpose, his absorption in the will of the Father. "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." In this sense our interceding Lord asks that all his people may by the Father be ordained and consecrated unto holy service. The prayer means, "Father, consecrate them to thine own self; let them be temples for thine indwelling, instruments for thy use." Under Jewish law the tribe of Levi was chosen out of the twelve, and ordained to the service of the Lord, instead of the firstborn, of whom the Lord had said, "All the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself." (Numbers 8:17.) Out of the tribe of Levi one family was taken and dedicated to the priesthood. Aaron and his sons are said to have been sanctified. (Leviticus 8:30.) A certain tent was sanctified to the service of God, and hence it became a sanctuary; and the vessels that were therein, whether they were greater, like the altar, and the holy table, and the ark of the covenant, or whether they were of less degree, like the bowls and the snuff-dishes of the candlestick, were all dedicated or sanctified. (Numbers 7:1.) None of these things could be used for any other purpose than the service of Jehovah. In his courts there was a holy fire, a holy bread, and a holy oil. The holy anointing oil, for instance, was reserved for sacred uses. "Upon man's flesh it shall not be poured;" and again, "Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people." These sanctified things were reserved for holy purposes, and any other use of them was strictly forbidden. Bulls and lambs and sheep and turtle-doves, and so forth, were given by devout offerers, brought to the holy place, and dedicated unto God; henceforth they belonged to God, and must be presented at his altar. This is one part of the meaning of our Lord's prayer. He would have each of us consecrated unto the Lord, designated and ordained for divine purposes. We are not the world's, else might we be ambitious; we are not Satan's, else might we be covetous; we are not our own, else might we be selfish. We are bought with a price, and hence we are his by whom the price is paid. We belong to Jesus, and he presents us to his Father, and begs him to accept us and sanctify us to his own purposes. Do we not most heartily concur in this dedication? Do we not cry, "Father, sanctify us to thy service?" I am sure we do if we have realized our redeemed condition.

Beloved brethren, if the sprinkling of the blood, of which we spake last Sabbath-day, has really taken effect upon us, we belong, from this time forth, unto him that died for us, and rose again. We regard ourselves as God's men, the liveried servants of the great King—that livery the robe of righteousness. We were as sheep going astray, but we have now returned unto the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls; and henceforth we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. If any should ask, "To whom belondest thou?" we answer, "I belong to Christ." If any enquire, "What is thine occupation?" we reply with Jonah, "I fear God." We are not now at our own disposal, neither can we hire ourselves out to inferior objects, mercenary aims, or selfish ambitions; for we are engaged by solemn contract to the service of our God. We have lifted up our hand unto the Lord, and we cannot draw back. Neither do we wish to withdraw from the delightful compact and covenant; we desire to keep it even unto the end. We seek no liberty to sin, nor license for self; rather do we cry, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Sanctify us, O Lord. Let us know, and let all the world know, that we are thine, because we belong to Christ."

In addition to this, those who belonged to God, and were dedicated to his service, were *set apart and separated from others*. There was a special service for the setting-apart of priests; certain rites were performed at the sanctifying of dedicated places and vessels. You remember with what solemn service the Tabernacle was set up, and with what pomp of devotion the Temple itself was set apart for the divine service. The Sabbath-day, which the Lord hath sanctified, is set apart from the rest of time. To man it is a *dies non*, because it is the Lord's-day. The Lord would have those who are dedicated to him to be separated from the rest of mankind. For this purpose he brought Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and Israel out of Egypt. "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." The Lord saith of his chosen, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise." Before long this secret purpose is followed by the open call: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." The church of Christ is to be a chaste virgin, wholly set apart for the Lord Christ: his own words concerning his people are these, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

By the election of grace from before the foundation of the world this distinction commences, and the names are written in heaven. Thereupon follows a redemption peculiar and special, as it is written; "These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb." This redemption is followed by effectual calling wherein men are made to come forth from the old world into the kingdom of Christ. This is attended with regeneration, in which they receive a new life, and so become as much distinguished from their fellow-men as the living are from the dead. This separating work is further carried on in what is commonly known as sanctification, whereby the man of God is removed farther and farther from all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and is changed from glory unto glory, into an ever-growing likeness of his Lord, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled separate from sinners."

Those who are sanctified in this sense have ceased to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers; they have ceased to run with the multitude to do evil; they are not conformed to this present evil world; they are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth. The more assuredly this is true of them the better. There are some, in these apostate days, who think that the church cannot do better than to come down to the world to learn her ways, follow her maxims, and acquire her "culture." In fact, the notion is that the world is to be conquered by our conforming to it. This is as contrary to Scripture as the light is to the darkness. The more distinct the line between him that

feareth God and him that feareth him not, the better all round. It will be a black day when the sun itself is turned into darkness. When the salt has lost its savor, and no longer opposes putrefaction, the world will rot with a vengeance. That text is still true, "Ye are of God, little children, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." The seed of the woman knows no terms with the serpent brood but continual war. Our Lord saith that in this matter he came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword. "Because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." If the church seeks to cultivate the friendship of the world, she has this message from the Holy Ghost by the pen of the apostle James: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." He charges all who would please the world with the black and filthy crime of spiritual adultery. The heart which ought to be given to Christ and purity must not wander forth wantonly to woo the defiled and polluted things of this present evil world. Separation from the world is Christ's prayer for us.

Put these two things together, dedication to God and separation unto him, and you are nearing the meaning of the prayer. But, mark you, it is not all separation that is meant; for, as I told you in the reading there are some who "separate themselves," and yet are sensual, not having the Spirit. Separation for separation's sake savours rather of Babel than of Jerusalem. It is one thing to separate from the world, and another thing to be separate from the church. Where we believe that there is living faith in Jesus, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, we are not called to division, but to unity. For actual and manifest sin we must separate ourselves from offender—; but we err if we carry on this separation where it is not authorized by the word of God. The Corinthians and Galatians were far from being perfect in life, and they had made many mistakes in doctrine, yea, even upon vital points; but inasmuch as they were truly in Christ, Paul did not command any to come out of those churches, and to be separate therefrom; but he exhorted them to prove each man his own work, and he labored to bring them all back to the one and only gospel, and to a clearer knowledge of it. We are to be faithful to truth; but we are not to be of a contentious spirit, separating ourselves from those who are living members of the one and indivisible body of Christ. To promote the unity of the church, by creating new divisions, is not wise. Cultivate at once the love of the truth and the love of the brethren. The body of Christ will not be perfected by being rent. Truth should be the companion of love. If we heartily love even those who are in some measure in error, but who possess the life of God in their souls, we shall be the more likely to set them right. Separation from the world is a solemn duty, indeed it is the hard point, the crux and burden of our religion. It is not easy to be filled with love to men and yet for God's sake, and even for their own sake, to be separated from them. The Lord teach us this.

At the same time, this word "sanctification" means what is commonly understood by it, namely, *the making of the people of God holy*. "Sanctify them," that is, work in them a pure and holy character. "Lord, make thy people holy," should be our daily prayer. I want you to notice that this word here used in the Greek is not that which is rendered "Purify;" but it has another shade of meaning. Had it meant "purify," it would hardly have been used in reference to our Lord as it is in the next verse.

It has a higher meaning than that. O brethren, if you are called Christians, there must be no room for doubt as to the fact that you are purged from the common sins and ordinary transgressions of mankind, else are you manifestly liars unto God, and deceivers of your own souls. They that are not moral, they that are not honest, they that are not kind, they that are not truthful, are far from

the kingdom. How can these be the children of God who are not even decent children of men? Thus we judge, and rightly judge, that the life of God cannot be in that man's soul who abides wilfully in any known sin, and takes pleasure therein. No; purification is not all. We will take it for granted that you who profess to be Christians have escaped from the foul pollution of lust and falsehood; if you have not done so, humble yourselves before God, and be ashamed; for you need the very beginnings of grace. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh." But sanctification is something more than mere morality and respectability; it is not only deliverance from the common sins of men, but also from the hardness, deadness, and carnality of nature: it is deliverance from that which is of the flesh at its very best, and admittance into that which is spiritual and divine. That which is carnal cometh not into communion with the spiritual kingdom or Christ: we need that the spiritual nature should rise above that which is merely natural. This is our prayer—Lord, spiritualize us; elevate us; make us to dwell in communion with God; make us to know him whom flesh and blood cannot reveal or discern. May the Spirit of the living God have full sovereignty over us and perfect in us the will of the Lord, for this is to be sanctified.

Sanctification is a higher word than purification; for it includes that word and vastly more: it is not sufficient to be negatively clean; we need to be adorned with all the virtues. If ye be merely moral, how does your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees? If ye pay your lawful debts, give alms to the poor, and observe the rites of your religion, what do ye more than others whom ye yourselves reckon to be in error?

Children of God should exhibit the love of God, they should be filled with zeal for his glory, they should live generous, unselfish lives, they should walk with God, and commune with the Most High. Ours should be a purpose and an aim far higher than the best of the unregenerate can understand. We ought to reach unto a life and a kingdom of which the mass of mankind know nothing, and care less. Now, I am afraid that this spiritual sense of the prayer is one that is often forgotten. Oh that God's Holy Spirit might make us to know it by experimentally feeling it in ourselves! May "Holiness to the Lord" be written across the brow of our consecrated humanity!

Beloved, this prayer of our Lord is most necessary, for without sanctification how can we be saved, since it is written, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord?" How can we be saved from sin if sin has still dominion over us? If we are not living holy, godly, spiritual lives, how can we say that we are redeemed from the power of evil?

Without sanctification we shall be unfit for service. Our Lord Jesus contemplated the sending of each one of us into the world even as the Father sent him into the world; but how can he give a mission to unsanctified men and women? Must not the vessels of the Lord be clean?

Without sanctification we cannot enjoy the innermost sweets of our holy faith. The unsanctified are full of doubts and fears; and what wonder? The unsanctified often say of the outward exercise of religion, "What a weariness it is!" and no wonder, for they know not the internal joys of it, having never learned to delight themselves in God. If they walk not in the light of the Lord's countenance, how can they know the heaven below which comes of true godliness? Oh, it is a prayer that needs to be prayed for me, for you, for this church, and for the whole church of God! "Father, sanctify them through thy truth."

II. Now I want you to notice, in the second place, **FOR WHOM THIS PRAYER WAS OFFERED**. It was not offered for the world outside. It would not be a suitable prayer for those who are dead in sin. Our Lord referred to the company of men and women who were already saved, of whom he said that they had kept God's Word: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." They

were therefore sanctified already in the sense of being consecrated and set apart for holy purposes; and they were also sanctified in a measure already in the sense of being made holy in character; for the immediate disciples of our Lord, with all their errors and deficiencies, were holy men. It was for the apostles that Jesus thus prayed; so that we may be sure that the most eminent saints need still to have this prayer offered for them: "Sanctify them through thy truth." Though, my sisters, you may be Deborahs, worthy to be called mothers in Israel, yet you need to be made more holy. Though, my brethren, you may be true fathers in God, of whom the Scripture saith truly that we have "not many," yet you still need that Jesus should pray for you: "Sanctify them through thy truth."

These chosen ones were sanctified, but only to a degree. Justification is perfect the moment it is received, but sanctification is a matter of growth. He that is justified, is justified once for all by the perfect work of Jesus, but he that is sanctified by Christ Jesus must grow up in all things into him who is the Head. To make us holy is a life work, and for it we should seek the divine operation every hour; for "he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God." We would rise to the utmost pitch of holy living, and never content ourselves with present attainments. Those who are most pure and honorable have yet their shortcomings and errors to mourn over. When the Lord turns the light strong upon us, we soon see the spots upon our raiment; it is indeed when we walk in the light as God is in the light that we see most our need of the cleansing blood of Jesus. If we have done well, to God be the glory of it; but we might have done better. If we have loved much, to God's grace be the praise; but we ought to have loved more. If we have believed, and believed steadfastly, we ought to have believed to a far higher degree in our Almighty Friend. We are still below our capacities; there is a something yet beyond us. O ye sanctified ones, it is for you that Jesus prays that the Father may still sanctify you.

I want you to notice more particularly that these believers for whom our Lord prayed were to be the preachers and teachers of their own and succeeding generations. These were the handful of seed-corn out of which would grow the church of the future, whose harvest would gladden all lands. To prepare them to be sent out as Christ's missionaries they must be sanctified. How shall a holy God send out unholy messengers? An unsanctified minister is an unsent minister. An unholy missionary is a pest to the tribe he visits; an unholy teacher in a school is an injury rather than a blessing to the class he conducts. Only in proportion as you are sanctified unto God can you hope for the power of the Holy Spirit to rest on you, and to work with you, so as to bring others to the Savior's feet. How much may each of us have been hampered and hindered by want of holiness! God will not use unclean instruments; nay, he will not even have his holy vessels borne by unclean hands. "To the wicked, God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" A whole host may be defeated because of one Achan in the camp; and this is our constant fear. Holiness is an essential qualification to a man's fitness for being used of the Lord God for the extension of his kingdom; hence our Lord's prayer for his apostles and other workers: "Holy Father, sanctify them."

Furthermore, our Lord Jesus Christ was about to pray "that they all might be one;" and for this desirable result holiness is needed. Why are we not one? Sin is the great dividing element. The perfectly holy would be perfectly united. The more saintly men are, the more they love their Lord and one another; and thus they come into closer union with each other. Our errors and our sins are roots of bitterness which spring up and trouble us, and many are defiled. Our infirmities of judgment are aggravated by our imperfections of character, and our walking at a distance from our God; and these breed coldness and lukewarmness, out of which grow disunion and division, sects and heresies.

If we were all abiding in Christ to the full, we should abide in union with each other and with God, and our Lord's great prayer for the unity of his church would be fulfilled.

Moreover, our Lord finished his most comprehensive prayer by a petition that we might all be with him—with him where he is, that we may behold his glory. Full sanctification is essential to this. Shall the unsanctified dwell with Christ in heaven? Shall unholy eyes behold his glory? It cannot be. How can we participate in the splendor and triumphs of the exalted head if we are not members of his body? and how can a holy head have impure and dishonest members? No, brethren, we must be holy, for Christ is holy. Uprightness of walk and cleanness of heart are absolutely requisite for the purposes of Christian life, whether here or hereafter. Those who live in sin are the servants of sin; only those who are renewed by the Holy Ghost unto truth, and holiness, and love, can hope to be partakers of holy joys and heavenly bliss.

III. I am compelled by shortness of time to be brief upon each point; but I must dwell for a little upon the third subject of consideration, which is this—TO WHOM THIS PRAYER IS DIRECTED. "Sanctify them through thy truth." No one can sanctify a soul but Almighty God, the great Father of spirits. He who made us must also make us holy, or we shall never attain that character. Our dear Savior calls the great God "*Holy Father*" in this prayer, and it is the part of the holy God to create holiness; while a holy *Father* can only be the Father of holy children, for like begets like. To you that believe in Jesus he gives power to become the sons of God, and a part of that power lies in becoming holy according to the manner and character of our Father who is in heaven. As we are holy, so do we bear the image of that Lord from heaven who, as the second man, is the firstborn to whom the many brethren are conformed. The holy Father in heaven will own those as his children upon earth who are holy. The very nature of God should encourage us in our prayers for holiness; for he will not be slow to work in us to will and to do according to his perfect will.

Beloved, this sanctification is a work of God from its earliest stage. We go astray of ourselves, but we never return to the great Shepherd apart from his divine drawings. Regeneration, in which sanctification begins, is wholly the work of the Spirit of God. Our first discovery of wrong, and our first pang of penitence, are the work of divine grace. Every thought of holiness, and every desire after purity, must come from the Lord alone, for we are by nature wedded to iniquity. So also the ultimate conquest of sin in us, and the making us perfectly like to our Lord, must be entirely the work of the Lord God, who makes all things new, since we have no power to carry on so great a work of ourselves. This is a creation; can we create? This is a resurrection; can we raise the dead? Our degenerate nature can rot into a still direr putrefaction, but it can never return to purity or sweeten itself into perfection; this is of God and God alone. Sanctification is as much the work of God as the making of the heavens and the earth. Who is sufficient for these things? We go not even a step in sanctification in our own strength; whatever we think we advance of ourselves is but a fictitious progress which will lead to bitter disappointment. Real sanctification is entirely from first to last the work of the Spirit of the blessed God, whom the Father hath sent forth that he might sanctify his chosen ones. See, then, what a great thing sanctification is, and how necessary it is that our Lord should pray unto his Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth."

The truth alone will not sanctify a man. We may maintain an orthodox creed, and it is highly important that we should do so, but if it does not touch our heart and influence our character, what is the value of our orthodoxy? It is not the doctrine which of itself sanctifies, but the Father sanctifies by means of the doctrine. The truth is the element in which we are made to live in order to holiness. Falsehood leads to sin, truth leads to holiness; but there is a lying spirit, and there is also the Spirit

of truth, and by these the error and the truth are used as means to an end. Truth must be applied with spiritual power to the mind, the conscience, and the heart, or else a man may receive the truth, and yet hold it in unrighteousness. I believe this to be the crowning work of God in man, that his people should be perfectly delivered from evil. He elected them that they might be a peculiar people, zealous for good works; he ransomed them that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify them unto himself; he effectually calls them to a high and holy vocation, even to virtue and true holiness.

Every work of the Spirit of God upon the new nature aims at the purification, the consecration, the perfecting of those whom God in love has taken to be his own. Yea, more; all the events of Providence around us work towards that one end: for this our joys and our sorrows, for this our pains of body and griefs of heart, for this our losses and our crosses—all these are sacred medicines by which we are cured of the disease of nature, and prepared for the enjoyment of perfect spiritual health. All that befalls us on our road to heaven is meant to fit us for our journey's end. Our way through the wilderness is meant to try us, and to prove us, that our evils may be discovered, repented of, and overcome, and that thus we may be without fault before the throne at the last. We are being educated for the skies, meetened for the assembly of the perfect. It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we are struggling up towards it; and we know that when Jesus shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. We are rising: by hard wrestling, and long watching, and patient waiting, we are rising into holiness. These tribulations thresh our wheat and get the chaff away, these afflictions consume our dross and tin to make the gold more pure. All things work together for good to them that love God; and the net result of them all will be the presenting of the chosen unto God, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

Thus I have reminded you that the prayer for sanctification is offered to the divine Father, and this leads us to look out of ourselves and wholly, to our God. Do not set about the work of sanctification yourselves, as if you could perform it alone. Do not imagine that holiness will necessarily follow because you listen to an earnest preacher, or unite in sacred worship. My brethren, God himself must work within you; the Holy Ghost must inhabit you; and this can only come to you by faith in the Lord Jesus. Believe in him for your sanctification, even as you have believed for your pardon and justification. He alone can bestow sanctification upon you; for this is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

IV. This is a great subject, and I have but short time; so I have, in the last place, to notice with much brevity HOW SANCTIFICATION IS TO BE WROUGHT IN BELIEVERS, "Sanctify them *through thy truth*: thy word is truth. "Beloved, observe how God has joined holiness and truth together. There has been a tendency of late to divide truth of doctrine from truth of precept. Men say that Christianity is a life and not a creed: this is a part truth, and very near akin to a lie. Christianity is a life which grows out of truth. Jesus Christ is the way and the truth as well as the life, and he is not properly received except he is accepted in that threefold character.

No holy life will be produced in us by the belief of falsehood. Sanctification in visible character comes out of edification in the inner faith of the heart, or otherwise it is a mere shell. Good works are the fruit of true faith, and true faith is a sincere belief of the truth. Every truth leads towards holiness; every error of doctrine, directly or indirectly, leads to sin. A twist of the understanding will inevitably bring a contortion of the life sooner or later. The straight line of truth drawn on the heart will produce a direct course of gracious walking in the life. Do not imagine that you can live on spiritual carrion and yet be in fine moral health, or that you can drink down poisonous error and

yet lift up a face without spot before God. Even God himself only sanctifies us by the truth. Only that teaching will sanctify you which is taken from God's word, that teaching which is not true, nor the truth of God, cannot sanctify you. Error may puff you up, it may even make you think that you are sanctified; but there is a very serious difference between boasting of sanctification and being sanctified, and a very grave difference between setting up to be superior to others and being really accepted before God. Believe me, God works sanctification in us by the truth, and by nothing else.

But what is the truth? There is the point. Is the truth that which I imagine to be revealed to me by some private communication? Am I to fancy that I enjoy some special revelation, and am I to order my life by voices, dreams, and impressions? Brethren, fall not into this common delusion. God's word to us is in Holy Scripture. All the truth that sanctifies men is in God's Word. Do not listen to those who cry, "Lo here!" and "Lo there!" I am plucked by the sleeve almost every day by crazy persons and pretenders who have revelations. One man tells me that God has sent a message to me by him; and I reply, "No, sir, the Lord knows where I dwell, and he is so near to me that he would not need to send to me by you." Another man announces in God's name a dogma which, on the face of it, is a lie against the Holy Ghost. He says the Spirit of God told him so-and-so; but we know that the Holy Ghost never contradicts himself. If your imaginary revelation is not according to this Word, it has no weight with us; and if it is according to this Word, it is no new thing. Brethren, this Bible is enough if the Lord does but use it, and quicken it by his Spirit in our hearts. Truth is neither your opinion, nor mine; your message, nor mine. Jesus says, "Thy word is truth." That which sanctifies men is not only truth, but it is the particular truth which is revealed in God's Word—"Thy word is truth." What a blessing it is that all the truth that is necessary to sanctify us is revealed in the Word of God, so that we have not to expend our energies upon discovering truth, but may, to our far greater profit, use revealed truth for its divine ends and purposes! There will be no more revelations; no more are needed. The canon is fixed and complete, and he that adds to it shall have added to him the plagues that are written in this Book. What need of more when here is enough for every practical purpose? "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

This being so, the truth which it is needful for us to receive is evidently fixed. You cannot change Holy Scripture. You may arrive more and more accurately at the original text; but for all practical purposes the text we have is correct enough, and our old Authorized Version is a sound one. Scripture itself cannot be broken; we cannot take from it nor add to it. The Lord has never re-written nor revised his Word, nor will he ever do so. *Our* teachings are full of errors, but the Spirit mistaketh not. We have the "Retractations": of Augustine, but there are no retractations with prophets and apostles. The faith has been delivered once for all to the saints, and it standeth fast for ever. "Thy word is truth." The Scripture alone is absolute truth, essential truth, decisive truth, authoritative truth, undiluted truth, eternal, everlasting truth. Truth given us in the word of God is that which is to sanctify all believers to the end of time: God will use it to that end.

Learn, then, my brothers, how earnestly you ought to search the Scriptures! See, my sisters, how studiously you should read this Book of God! If this is the truth, and the truth with which God sanctifies us, let us learn it, hold it, and stand fast in it. To him that gave us the Book let us pledge ourselves never to depart from his testimonies. To us, at any rate, God's word is truth. "But they argue differently in the schools!" Let them argue. "But oratory with its flowery speech speaketh otherwise!" Let it speak: words are but air and tongues but clay. O God, "thy word is truth." "But philosophers have contradicted it!" Let them contradict it. Who are they? God's word is truth: we will go no farther while the world stands. But then let us be equally firm in our conviction that we

do not know the truth aright unless it makes us holy. We do not hold truth in a true way unless it leads us to a true life. If you use the back of a knife it will not cut: truth hath its handle and its blade; see that you use it properly. You can make pure water kill a man; you must use every good thing aright or it will not be good. The truth, when fully used, will daily destroy sin, nourish grace, suggest noble desires, and urge to holy acts. O sirs, I do pray that we may by our lives adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Some do not so. I say this to our shame and to my own hourly sorrow.

The one point of failure to be most deeply regretted would be a failure in the holiness of our church members. If you yourselves act as others do, what witness do you bear? If your families are not graciously ordered; if your business is not conducted upon principles of the strictest integrity; if your speech is questionable as to purity or truthfulness; if your lives are open to serious rebuke—how can God accept you or send a blessing on the Church to which you belong? It is all falsehood and deceit to talk about your being the people of God when even men of the world shame you. Your faith in the Lord Jesus must operate upon your lives to make you faithful and true, it must check you here, and excite you there; it must keep you back from this, and drive you on to that; it must constantly operate upon thought and speech and act, or else you know nothing of its saving power. How can I speak more distinctly and emphatically? Do not come to me with your experiences, and your convictions, and your professions, unless you sanctify the name of God in your lives. O brethren, we had better quit our professions if we do not live up to them. In the name of him who breathed this prayer just before his face was encrimsoned with the bloody sweat, let us cry mightily unto the Father, "Sanctify us through thy truth, thy Word is truth." As a people, we have stuck unto the Word of the Lord, but are we practically obeying it? We have determined as a congregation to keep the old ways; and I, for one, as the minister, am solemnly bound to the old faith. Oh that we might commend it by our holiness! Nothing is truth to me but this one Book, this infallibly inspired writing of the Spirit of God. It is incumbent upon us to show the hallowed influence of this Book. The vows of God are on us, that by our godly lives we should show forth his praises who has brought us out of darkness into his marvellous light. This Bible is our treasure. We prize each leaf of it. Let us bind it in the best fashion, in the best morocco of a clear, intelligent faith; then let us put a golden clasp upon it, and gild its edges by a life of love, and truth, and purity, and zeal. Thus shall we commend the volume to those who have never looked within its pages. Brethren, the sacred roll, with its seven seals, must not be held in hands defiled and polluted; but with clean hands and pure heart we must hold it forth and publish it among men. God help us so to do for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 17.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—107 (Song I.), 649, 645.

The Sermon of the Seasons

A Sermon

(No. 1891)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, March 14th, 1886, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."—Genesis 8:22.

OUR SAVIOR CONSTANTLY TAUGHT the people by parables, and I think he would have his ministers do the same. The condition of things just now, both as to weather and business, furnishes a very plain and instructive parable which it would not be wise to pass over. Every morning when we wake we hope for a change of wind, a glimpse of the sun, and the end of the frost; but still we moan with the poet—

"Oh, the long and dreary Winter!

Oh, the cold and cruel Winter!"

We say to ourselves, Will spring-time never come? In addition to this, trade and commerce continue in a state of stagnation; crowds are out of employment, and where business is carried on, it yields little profit. Our watchmen are asked if they discern any signs of returning day, and they answer, "No." Thus we bow our heads in a common affliction, and ask each man comfort of his fellow; for as yet we see not our signs, neither does the eastern sky grow grey with the hopeful light of the long-expected morning. Having faith in God we faint not, but believe that a lesson of love for us is written by his hand in these black characters. Let us spell it out with childlike confidence.

Our text takes us back to the time when the waters of the flood had just assuaged, and God opened the door of the ark and bade Noah and his family come forth into a new world. For a time there had been a confusion: the seasons were mixed up, the perpetual downpour of the rain had almost turned day into night, and whether it was summer or winter could scarcely be told. The frame of nature seemed to be out of joint, her order suspended. And now the Lord, in making a promise to Noah that he would never destroy the earth again with a flood, also declares that while the earth remaineth there shall be no more of the confusion of the seasons and mingling of day and night which had brought such destruction upon all living things. As there should be no more a general deluge, so should there be no more a serious disarrangement of the course of the seasons and the temperature appropriate thereto. Seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, are to succeed each other in their perpetually unchanging change, so long as the present reign of forbearance shall last. Till comes the close of time, the rolling year, made up of alternate day and night, shall pass through cold and heat in due order. We are grateful to God for thus settling in his mind that so it shall be. We are at ease because we know that he will not lift his hand again to destroy every living thing with a flood of water. He will deal with men in longsuffering, and tender mercy, and forbearance. He will not use the stern weapons of destruction, but will try the tender ministrations of patience and grace, that men may be led to repentance. There will come an end to this dispensation; but while the reign of forbearance lasts, nature shall keep

her appointed marches, and we need not fear a disorderly rush or a destructive chaos. "Four seasons fill the measure of the year." In their mysterious round they come and go, and all combined display a moving harmony of wise design most glorifying to our God. Fear not in the day of tempest, for the rain shall not deluge the earth. The Lord setteth his bow in the cloud as the ensign of his covenant with mankind. Fear not in the black midnight: God will rekindle the lamp of day, and chase away the darkness.

It is very singular that when the Lord thus ushers in the reign of forbearance he gives as his reason the following statement:—"I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." This is very singular, because this seems to have been the powerful reason why the Lord had already destroyed the guilty race from off the face of the earth. In the fifth and sixth verses of the sixth chapter we read: "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Here we have almost the same words. Can the reason for judgment become the argument for mercy? Assuredly it can. God who changeth not absolutely, yet changeth his hand in his dealing with men. He had left them to themselves and permitted them to live through centuries; but the longer they lived, the more wicked they grew, until sin reached to a horrible degree of infamy. Man becomes a bad enough sinner when he lives to be seventy; but what he became at seven hundred or more it is somewhat difficult to guess. We wonder not that there were giants in those days—giants in crime as well as in stature. The Lord saw that however long man lived he only grew a greater adept in sin, for the imagination of his heart remained evil, and even grew to an intolerable height of iniquity; and therefore he said that he would destroy the race and begin anew. But when the Lord looked down upon those whom he had spared, who were to be the parents of a new race, he saw that in them also there was the same fountain of evil, and that their hearts also yielded evil desires and devices continually. Then he resolved to shorten the life of man, so that no individuals might ever arrive at so horrible a ripeness and cleverness of iniquity; but at the same time he said: "I will bear with them. I have dealt sternly with them, but they do not change; the few whom I have snatched from a watery grave are still inclined to sin. This dreadful expedient has not washed away the rebellious tendencies of the human heart. Therefore I will deal leniently and gently with them, manifesting a long forbearance, that man may have space for repentance. I will no more destroy every living thing, because destruction itself does not avail to banish sin." Thus it seems by no means difficult to see how that which to divine holiness was a reason for judgment may be used by divine pity as a reason for mercy.

But what, think you, could have made the reasoning assume this new form? I attribute it to one thing never to be forgotten. Read the verse which precedes our text: "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl and offered burnt offerings on the altar; and the Lord smelled a sweet savor." The sacrifice is the turning-point. Without a sacrifice sin clamours for vengeance, and God sends a destroying flood; but the sacrifice presented by Noah was typical of the coming sacrifice of God's only begotten Son, and of the effectual atonement therein provided for human sin. The very shadow of the one great propitiation changed the state of the world. Now the Lord pleads with himself for grace as once he argued for doom. He speaketh of course after the manner of men; it is only to our apprehension that these things are so, for Jehovah changeth not, and he is always love and wisdom. For the sake of the sacrifice God resolves to bear with man, as with one who is incurably unwise, or desperately sick. He determines

to look upon the evil tendency of man's imagination rather as an inveterate disease than as an unbearable provocation. He deals very patiently with the race, and no more sweeps it away in his wrath. See what the Lord will do when a sacrifice is provided! Methinks I hear him say of the earth, "Deliver it from flood, and bid the seasons keep their round of beneficence; for I have found a ransom."

I. Thus I introduce to you the text, and I would have you notice, dear friends, that in that text there is first of all a hint, A SOLEMN HINT, OF WARNING. It begins thus: "While the earth remaineth." I hear a sound in the bowels of the text like subterranean thunder. The voice of the text is a voice of mercy, but there is an undertone of "terrible things in righteousness." "While the earth remaineth" implies that *the earth will not always remain*. There is an end appointed of the Most High, and it will surely come: then the seasons will melt into the endless age, and time shall be promoted into eternity. The earth hath remained now century after century; alas! it has but little changed towards God. The whole world still lieth in the wicked one; darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the nations. Jehovah hath a people, "a remnant according to the election of grace," and for their sakes the earth remaineth yet a little while; but its end draweth nearer every hour. "God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man Christ Jesus." An hour is set when mercy shall no longer hold back the axe from the barren tree, and forbearance shall no more restrain the angel with the sharp sickle from reaping the vintage of the earth. Love now journeys to and fro among the sons of men, with the voice of trembling pathos, pleading with them to be reconciled to God; but her mission will come to an end, the day of grace will be over, and the reign of judgment will come. Let us not reckon too much upon this world's enduring even for a little while; let us not set our love upon anything that is upon it; for here we have no continuing city. "The things which are seen are temporal;" the world therefore shall pass away, and all the works that are therein shall be burned up: even "The elements shall melt with fervent heat." There is a day coming when floods of fire shall be let loose: they shall fall from above, and burst upward from below, and all material things shall be melted in one common conflagration. Poor world! thou, too, art surely doomed! God is gracious to thee, but thou art as a wreck drifting upon the rocks, or as a tree waiting for the axe. Believers in the testimony of God can joyfully say, "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness:" therefore we are not dismayed.

I would have you notice again, dear friends, that *the time when the earth shall no longer remain is not mentioned*. The warning is left indefinite as to time, though definite enough as to fact. The expression, "While the earth remains," is proof enough that it will remain only for a season; but it is dumb as the tongue of death as to the date when that season shall close. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now;" but when the hour of her deliverance shall come the best instructed cannot tell. Do not attempt to prophesy, and especially do not venture upon dates. "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." The uncertainty of the end of all things is intended to keep us continually on the watch. We are to remain upon the tiptoe of expectation, and never to dream that we can reckon upon a certain length of time before the great and terrible day of the Lord. If you knew when Christ would come you might be tempted to spend the interval in neglect and wantonness; but as it is written, "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh," it is the Lord's intent that you should stand with your loins girt and your lamps trimmed, waiting for the midnight cry, "Behold he cometh."

Let me further remark that *the day when the remaining of the earth shall cease cannot be very far off*; for according to the Hebrew, which you have in the margin of your Bibles, the text runs thus: "As yet all the days of the earth, seedtime and harvest shall not cease." The "while" of the earth's remaining is counted by days; not even months or years are mentioned, much less centuries. The earth seems grey with age to us, but in the language of inspiration the present stage of its history is reckoned by days. There will one day come a last day, and let us not reckon that the time is distant, for Peter saith, "The end of all things is at hand;" and he adds, "Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. If geologists speak correctly concerning the history of the world, it has lasted many myriads of years already, and passed through many periods before it came to that which is described in the first chapter of Genesis. The era of man is that which God describes to us by the inspired penman; and we are led to believe that this era will be a very short one. From the day when God fitted up this earth for the abode of man to the time when he shall consume it with fervent heat, there will be comparatively a very short space of time. God lives by millions of years; therefore, a few thousand years to him are but as a watch in the night. Let it be thus far understood by us that this dispensation is not to be a protracted one, and that the duration of the world in its present state is to be exceedingly brief as compared with preceding and succeeding ages. The life of this present evil world is but a span; it also is of few days and full of trouble. But I must also add that the era of sin and grace is crowded with marvellous manifestations of the glory of God in infinite love and mercy.

II. Thus, then, there is a hint of warning in our text; but secondly, there is A SENTENCE OF PROMISE, rich and full of meaning: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease." It is a promise concerning temporal things, but yet it breathes a spiritual air, and hath about it the smell of a field that the Lord hath blessed.

This promise has been kept. It is long since it was written, it is longer still since it was resolved upon in the mind of God; but it has never failed. There have been times when cold has threatened to bind the whole year in the chains of frost; but genial warmth has pushed it aside. Seedtime and harvest have been threatened, but they have come; the harvest may not have been abundant, but yet there has been a harvest sufficient to sustain the race. Days have been dark, and hardly discernible from night, like the gloom of Egypt's plague; but still, taking things as a whole, day and night have divided time between them. The ordinances of heaven have continued with us as with our fathers. No student of nature can doubt that to this hour, despite occasional extremes of heat and cold, the seasons are unchanged; and notwithstanding occasional absence of sunshine, and diminution of light, day and night have followed the diurnal revolution of the earth. Since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were. One great interruption occurred at the deluge, but the Lord has kept his promise to prevent any other.

So long-continued is the fulfillment of this promise, that *even this race of unbelievers has come to believe in it*. We look for the seasons as a matter of course. I do not suppose that any one in this audience doubts the coming of spring. The boughs are bare, the buds are not eager for their bursting, the crocus and the daffodil are afraid to show themselves; but yet the birds believe in the coming spring, for I hear them in sweet chorus every morning singing their songs of expectancy. Men and brethren, you are expectant also. Long observation has begotten in you an unwavering faith. When the sun goes down at night, not even a little child fears that God has blown out the sun, and that

the great candle will never be lighted again. No, we look for the morning. When winter has chilled us a while, we look for the spring and the summer; and when summer has browned our faces, we expect the falling of the leaf and the descent of the snow. I want you to ask yourselves—Why do we not believe God's other promises? Why have we not as solid a conviction of the truth of other statements which our God has made as we have upon this point? Is it that we have experience in this case? O brethren, we have had experience concerning other matters also. If we were to deal with the weather with the same short-sighted doubt which governs us in our thoughts of divine providence, we might be doubtful about summer and winter. We might say, "It really does not look very likely that spring will come. Look at our meadows, and mark how the cold has literally burned the grass; see how our hardy evergreens are many of them dead, and others sadly cut to pieces; see what mischief the cold has wrought. Will there ever be leaf and flower again? Is it possible that I shall ever wipe the sweat from my smoking brow on some blazing noontide? Can these frozen brooks leap into liberty? To-day we crowd around the fire, hardly keeping ourselves alive from the bitter cold: shall we yet bask in the hay-field, or fan ourselves amid the golden sheaves?" Had we less experience, it would seem highly improbable. Yet we enjoy a full assurance as to the revolution of the seasons and the succession of day and night: do we not? Why this assurance of one promise, and why such frequent distrust of others equally true?

When God's promises appear to be difficult of fulfillment, wherefore do we doubt them? They are fulfilled in due season: which of them has ever failed? They come to pass without difficulty: why should we suspect them? When deliverance looks as though it could not come, it is none the less sure; for the Lord has promised it. The absence of visible means need not enter into the account: he who is Almighty God has infinite resources.

So, too, dear friends, we have to recollect, that if the Lord himself does not send spring and summer we cannot create either of them. Here we are out of the field. When the sun goes down, if the Lord did not cause it to rise again, we could not open the doors of the morning. I love to get into the field of nature on a large scale, for there one is quit of man, and the Lord alone is seen working all things according to his will. The heavens and their ordinances know no presence and power but God alone. As far as we are concerned, we cannot lift a finger to change the seasons. What could all our Parliament—King, Lords, and Commons—do with all their Acts towards bringing on spring-tide or hastening summer and harvest? Nothing at all. These matters are out of man's power; and yet they are none the less sure. So, my brethren, when you get into such a condition that you can by no means help yourself, you are not, therefore, to doubt that God can achieve his purpose and fulfill his promise without your help. When hath he asked your aid? Good men have gone very wrong when they have thought of aiding in the fulfillment of promises and prophecies. See how Rebecca erred in trying to get the promised blessing for Jacob. We had better leave the Lord's decrees in the Lord's hands. When any case comes to its worst, and you can do nothing whatever in it, you may safely stand still and see the salvation of God. At this hour you feel sure that springtime and summer will come, though you cannot move the sun an inch beyond his predestinated course; be as much at ease about the other promises of God as you are concerning the cycle of the year.

Remember, also, that every coming of summer—yes, and every rising of the sun—is a great wonder. Only our familiarity leads us to think of these things without marvelling. A real miracle is every break of day and every set of sun. A world of wonders bursts forth in every spring-tide; each blade of grass and ear of corn is a display of divine omnipotence. We are surrounded with

works of almighty power and goodness from morn till eve and through the watches of the night; from the first day of the year until its close the Lord is about us. Unseen by us, his hand propels the silent spheres which no force within human calculation could move in their orbits; that same power sustains and animates and perfects all things. God is in all, and in all wonderful. If God continues thus to work the pleasing changes of the year as he promised to do, why do you doubt him concerning other things, O ye of little faith? Will he not keep his word to his children if he keeps it to the earth? Will he not fulfill his every promise to his own elect if he is true to sun and stars? Seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, have come according to his word without our aid, and, wonderful as these changes are, they have never failed; and will the Lord forget in other things? Will he forswear his covenant and deny his promise to his Only Begotten? God forbid.

Brethren, we have come not only to believe this promise as to the seasons and to make quite sure about it, but *we practically act upon our faith*. The farmers have sown their autumn wheat, and many of them are longing for an opportunity to sow their spring wheat; but what is sowing but a burial of good store? Why do husbandmen hide their grain in the earth? Because they feel sure that seedtime will in due time be followed by harvest. They put their grain into the ground hoping to receive it again multiplied a hundredfold. Why do we not act in an equally practical style in reference to the rest of God's promises? True faith makes the promises of God to be of full effect by viewing them as true and putting them to the test. When faith asks of God, it believes that it has the petition which it has asked of him. Many prepare their thinner garments in prospect of warm weather, or at the close of summer provide household flannels for the winter, because they reckon upon the season; why do we not also prepare ourselves to receive the Lord's blessing in the time appointed? Why do we not reckon upon every word of Scripture being fulfilled? We ought to take the promises into our matter-of-fact estimate, and act accordingly.

Let me go further:—*If a man did not act upon the declaration of God in our text he would be counted foolish*. Suppose a man said, "I do not feel sure that there will come a harvest, and therefore I shall not sow;" his neighbors would look upon his uncultivated fields, and reckon him out of his mind. If another should say, "I shall lay by no stores for the winter, because I believe that we have arrived at perpetual summer, wherein there will always be corn in the sheaf and fruit on the trees," we should regard him as fit for a lunatic-asylum. Equally mad are they who treat other promises of God as if they were idle words, no more worthy of notice than the prophecies of a charlatan. The masses of our fellow-men never search the Word of God to find a promise suitable to their cases, and even if such a promise were laid before them, they would only regard it as a matter of imagination or meaningless jargon. What shall I say of those who thus trifle with eternal verities, but that madness has carried away the heart of man? What God has promised ought to be a clear indication to us of the future, and a hint as to how we should act. Let us act in faith upon the divine promise. If the Lord says, "Seek ye my face," take care that you do seek his face. If he says, "Ask, and it shall be given you," be sure to ask and expect to receive. If the Lord promises pardon to those who believe on his Son, let us believe on his Son, and receive mercy. He keeps his covenant with day and night; let us, therefore, believe that he will keep covenant with us, and do even as he hath said. Oh that this lesson, simple as it is, may be learnt by every believer, and by every unbeliever too!

Let me close this point by noticing that, *whether men believe this or not it will stand true*. A man says there will be no winter, and provides no garments; he will shiver in the northern blast all the same when December covers the earth with snow. An unbeliever declares that there will be no

summer, and therefore he will not sow nor prepare a barn. Will his foolish scepticism prevent the coming of harvest? Miserable farmer that he is! He will secure a harvest of thorns and thistles to reward his own practical unbelief, but a harvest will come to the rest of the land, to his confusion. The year will go on whoever plays the fool; so, too, will the sun arise, whoever prophesies an endless night. God's purpose and God's promise will stand fast though the hills be removed. If you believe in the Lord Jesus, you shall be saved, but if you believe not, you must perish: in either case, the law will not alter for you. God's great laws in the spiritual world hold good with a certainty as great as those which govern the natural world. We cannot suspend the force of gravitation; and if we could, we should not even then be able to change the veracity of the Most High, who must be true so long as he is God. Hath he said and shall he not do it? Ay, that he shall. Though we believe not, he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself; therefore, ye sons of men, be wise, and take heed to the word of the Lord. As in the summer ye prepare yourselves for winter; and as at spring-tide ye sow your seed that ye may gather your harvest in the Summer, and thus ye obey the voice of God in nature, I pray you also have respect to that voice as it speaks in the pages of his Book, and shape your conduct by that which the Lord has revealed.

III. There is also in the text, I think, A SUGGESTION OF ANALOGIES. Reading these words, not as a philosophical prediction, but as a part of the Word of God, I see in them a moral, spiritual, and mystical meaning. Holy Scripture is intended not to teach us natural but spiritual things: I conclude, therefore, that there is an analogy here well worthy of being worked out. May the good Spirit guide us therein!

While the earth remaineth *there will be changes in the spiritual world*. Read the text laying a stress upon the words of change, and see how it rises and falls like the waves of the sea: "While the earth remaineth, *seedtime* and *harvest*, and *cold* and *heat*, and *summer* and *winter*, and *day* and *night* shall not cease." No one of these states continues; it comes and goes. The seasons are a perpetual procession, an endless chain, an ever-moving wheel. Cold flies before heat, and anon summer is chased away by winter. Nothing is stable. Such is this life: such are the feelings of spiritual life with most men: such is the history of the church of God. We sorrow and we rejoice: we struggle and we triumph: we labor and we rest. We are not long upon Tabor, neither are we always in the valley of Baca. Let us not be amazed, as though some strange thing happened to us, if our day darkens into night, or our summer chills into winter. From joy to sorrow, from sorrow to joy, from success to defeat, from defeat to success, we pass very rapidly. It is so: it will be so while the earth remaineth, and we remain partakers of the earth.

Yet, *there will be an order in it all*. Cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, do not come in a giddy dance or tumultuous hurry-burly; but they make up the fair and beautiful year. Chance has no part in these affairs. God compelleth winds and storms, and sun and sea, to keep the order of his house, and none rebelleth against his commandment. So in the spiritual kingdom, in the life of the believer, and in the history of the church of God, all things are made to work for good, and the spiritual is being educated into the heavenly. In our seasons there is an order visible to God, even when we walk in darkness and see no light. We have our winters, in which the sap is prepared in secret to produce the clusters of summer; we have our colds, in which we lose the superfluities bred of our heat. Expect the changes, and believe that they come by rule.

Great rules will stand while the earth abideth, in the spiritual as well as in the natural world. For instance, there will be seedtime and harvest, effort and result, labor and success. There will be to you, dear brother, a time in which you will chiefly have to receive; it is your seedtime, and God

is sowing you by instruction and sanctification, in order that in due time you may yield him a harvest to his glory. Sometimes we lie passive, like the ploughed fields, and then our divine Sower casts into us the living seed; but soon other days arrive, when we are active, and yield unto God the results of his grace experienced in former days. It ought to be so. To you, beloved workers in the Mission-hall, or the Sunday-school, there will be a time of sowing; not much may be accomplished, though a great deal of effort may be put forth. To me in preaching there are times for sowing, and nothing else but sowing; few seem to be the green blades which spring up around me. Perhaps a year may intervene before the worker shall see any reward for his toil: "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth." The missionary upon his district, the Bible-woman on her round, may see no manifest effect produced by daily teaching: but harvest and seedtime are tied together in a sure knot. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Brethren, believe that, and be of good cheer. "Your labor is not in vain in the Lord." While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest will take each one its turn.

So, too, while the earth remaineth there will be the interchanges of cold and heat. Where there is life there must be change; only in death is there monotony. There will be times in your experience when you will feel the awful withering of that convincing Spirit who dries up the glory of the flesh. "Who can stand before his cold?" Anon there will be a melting season of contrition and repentance, and then the Holy Spirit will have warmed your heart into hope and faith and love and joy and delight in God. Cold and heat come to the church. I have noticed oftentimes her bitter cold, and I have cried to God about it. But the heat has come; we have felt the glow of revival; enthusiasm has been kindled, zeal has abounded. I wish we could always keep at one glorious summer heat, walking in the light as God is in the light. It ought to be so with us. Some of us labor to be always zealous and full of fire; but should times come when we or others are not in the fullness of the blessing, we will not despair; but we will the rather cry mightily unto the Lord to send his Word and cause the waters of his grace to flow, and make our winter to be over and gone, while flowers appear on the earth and the time of the singing of birds comes on.

So, too, have I seen in our mortal life summer and winter, prosperity and adversity. Do not expect, dear brother, while you are in this world, always to dwell among the lilies and roses of prosperity. Summer will come, and you will be wise to make hay while the sun shines by using all opportunities for usefulness; but look for winter. I do not know into what trade you can enter to be secure against losses, nor what profession you could follow in which you would escape disappointments. I know no corner of the earth without its night, no land without its stones, no sea without its storms. As to spiritual and mental experience, it seemeth to me within myself that while the earth remaineth I shall have my ebbs and flows, my risings and my sinkings. Do not therefore begin to kick and quarrel with the dispensations of God's providence. When it is summer-time say, "The Lord gave, and blessed be his name." When it is winter say, "The Lord hath taken away, and blessed be his name." Keep to the same music, even though you sometimes have to pitch an octave lower. Still praise and magnify the Lord whether you be sowing or reaping. Let him do what seemeth him good, but to you let it always seem good to praise.

Beloved, labor will be followed by rest; for while the earth remaineth there will be day and night. In the day man goeth forth to his labor; at night he lieth down. Let him bless God for both. There cometh a night wherein no man can work: to us this is not dreaded, but expected. I do not know for which I thank God most, for day or for night. Our young people praise God for day, with

its activities; but we who are older are more inclined to bless the Lord for night, with its repose. The grey beard, the man of many years and sad experiences, looks forward to that night wherein the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. If we regard death as night, we look forward to an endless day, which will follow on, when the sun shall go no more down for ever. Jesus our Lord is the Sun of that glorious country to which we wend our way. While the earth remaineth, there will continually be a variety of benedictions, a change-ringing upon the silver bells of mercy. When thou art on high, my brother, remember thou must descend; and when thou art cast down, expect a cheerful lifting up. When it is broad day, let us travel swiftly, for night comes on; but when it is dark, let us watch hopefully, for the morning cometh. As sojourners in a changeful country, let us spend the days of our pilgrimage in a holy fear, which shall preserve us from love of the world. I need not further work out the analogies of the text; many more will rise before the meditative mind.

IV. Last of all, I want you to regard my text as A TOKEN FOR THE ASSURANCE OF OUR FAITH. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." And they do not. In this fact we are bidden to see the seal and token of the covenant. Look at the passage we read this morning in the thirty-third chapter of Jeremiah. Here is *the security of the King in whom we rejoice*. "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, then shall David not have a son to reign upon his throne." God hath promised never to change the royal line; but while the earth remaineth, and day and night are seen, the Son of David shall reign King of kings and Lord of lords. Until all enemies are under his feet he must reign. So, then, as I wrap my garment about me, feeling the cold of winter, I will say to myself, "God hath, by sending cold, confirmed his covenant with Jesus our Lord and King." Every morning light saluteth my eyes, and declareth that "his name shall be continued as long as the sun;" and when the shades of evening fall, and the stars look forth from their houses, I hear a sound of "abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth." His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and of his kingdom there is no end. The Lord Jesus is King in Zion, and head over all things to his church while the earth remaineth.

The abiding of the ordinances of heaven is equally a token of *the continuance of the priesthood*. Under the type of the tribe of Levi the priesthood is vested in the person of our Lord. He is our Melchizedek, who is priest as well as king, and of his priesthood there is no end. While winter chills and summer burns, while day calls to labor and night to rest, our great High-priest abides in his office, still able to cleanse us, to make intercession for us, and to present our offerings unto God. His one sacrifice is perpetually a sweet savor unto God, and shall be till moons shall wax and wane no more. As I tread the soil which seems frozen into iron, and as I shiver in the bitter north-east wind, I say to myself, "The priesthood of our Lord abides; for cold has not ceased to visit us, and heat will come in its appointed months." As I go to my bed, or as I rise from it, day and night are to me a pledge that the Lord Jesus is a priest for ever according to the law of an endless life.

A third thing was also assured by the same token. The Lord said that as long as his covenant with day and night remained *he would not put away the seed of Abraham*. Since a son of David must rule them, they must exist to be ruled. There will for ever be a chosen people—a people for whom Jesus lives as king and priest. The Lord hath not cast away the people whom he did foreknow, nor will he do so, come what may. While seedtime and harvest, cold and heat abide, the Lord will maintain a church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. What a mercy is this! Alas! men whom I hoped were faithful have turned aside from the truth; ministers who were regarded as

pillars have fallen, and persons esteemed to be saints turned out to be hypocrites: yet "there is a remnant according to the election of grace." The Lord hath a reserve of men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Therefore, let us be of good courage, and never tremble for the ark of the Lord.

To end all, let our prayer be that the Lord would abide with us, and then the heat shall not smite us, nor the cold molest us. The presence of God makes fair weather. Let us sing with quaint John Ryland—

"Rise then, Sun of righteousness,
Me with thy sweet beamings bless;
Winter then may stay or flee,
Lord, 'tis all alike to me."

Oh, you that know not our God, I feel heartily sorry for you! To you all seasons must be blank, for God is not in them. Oh that you knew Jesus. The world is a bleak house, a chill and empty corridor without God; and men are orphans, and life is hopeless, and death is starless night, if Jesus is not known and loved. He who trusts his soul with Jesus has found the key of the great secret, the clue of the maze. Henceforth he shall see, in all that smiles or rages around him in our changeable weather, pledges of the love of the Father, tokens of the grace of the Son, and witnesses of the work of the Holy Ghost. To the one God be glory for ever! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 147; Genesis 8:20-22; Jeremiah 33:17-26.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—181, 211, 212.

Why They Leave Us

A Sermon

(No. 1892)

Suggested by the death of CHARLES STANFORD, D.D.,

Minister of Denmark Place Chapel, Camberwell,

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, March 21st, 1886, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."—John 17:24.

THE PRAYER OF THE SAVIOR rises as it proceeds. He asked for his people that they might be preserved from the world, then that they might be sanctified, and then that they might be made manifestly one; and now he reaches his crowning point—that they may be with him where he is, and behold his glory. It is well when in prayer the spirit takes to itself wings. The prayer that swings to and fro like a door upon its hinges may admit to fellowship; but that prayer is more after the divine pattern which, like a ladder, rises round by round, until it loses itself in heaven.

This last step of our Lord's prayer is not only above all the rest, but it is a longer step than any of the others. He here ascends, not from one blessing which may be enjoyed on earth, to another of higher degree; but he mounts right away from all that is of this present state into that which is reserved for the eternal future. He quits the highest peaks of grace, and at a single stride his prayer sets its foot in glory: "that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am."

There is this to be noticed also concerning this divine prayer, that not only does it rise as to its subject, but it even ascends as to the place which the Intercessor appears to occupy. Has it not been so with yourselves in prayer at times, that you have hardly known where you were? You might have cried with Paul, "Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell." Do not these words of our Lord Jesus remind you of this? Was he not carried away by the fervor of his devotion? Where was he when he uttered the words of our text? If I follow the language I might conclude that our Lord was already in heaven. He says, "rather, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." Does he not mean that they should be in heaven with him? Of course he does; yet he was not in heaven; he was still in the midst of his apostles, in the body upon earth; and he had yet Gethsemane and Golgotha before him ere he could enter his glory. He had prayed himself into such an exaltation of feeling that his prayer was in heaven, and he himself was there in spirit. What a hint this gives to us! How readily may we quit the field of battle and the place of agony, and rise into such fellowship with God, that we may think and speak, and act, as if we were already in possession of our eternal joy! By the ardor of prayer and the confidence of faith we may be caught up into Paradise, and there utter words which are beyond the latitude of earth, and are dated "from the Delectable Mountains."

Nor is this all; for still the prayer rises, not only as to its matter and place, but in a very singular way it also takes to itself a higher style. Before, our Lord had asked and pleaded; but now he uses a firmer word: he says, "Father, I will." I would not force that word so as to make it bear an imperious

or commanding meaning, for the Savior speaketh not so to the Father: but still it has a more elevated tone about it than asking. Our Lord here useth the royal manner rather than the tone of his humiliation. He speaketh like unto the Son of God; he addresses the great Father as one who counteth it not robbery to be equal with him, but exercises the prerogative of his Eternal Sonship. He saith, "I will." This is a tone which belongs not to us except in a very modified degree, but it teaches us a lesson. It is well in prayer, when the Holy Spirit helpeth us, not only to groan out of the dust as suppliant sinners, but to seek unto our Father in the spirit of adoption with the confidence of children, and then with the promise of God in our hand we may with consecrated bravery lay hold upon the covenant angel, and cry, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Importunity is a humble approach to this divine "I will." The will consecrated, educated, and sanctified, may and must reveal itself in our more spiritual petitions, just as, with equal correctness, it hides away when the pleading is for temporal things, and whispers, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." The Lord pours upon his pleading servants at times a kind of inspiration by which they rise into power in prayer, and have their will of the Lord. Is it not written, "Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart?" We come at last to feel that the desires of our heart are inspired of his Spirit, and then that we have the petitions which we have asked of him.

There ought to be much for our edification in a text like this, which in subject, place, and style rises to such an elevation. It is the apex of this wonderful pyramid of prayer; the last round of the ladder of light. O Spirit of the Lord, instruct us while we behold it!

I have taken this text because it has taken hold on me. Our beloved brother, Charles Stanford, has just been taken from us. I seem to be standing as one of a company of disciples, and my brethren are melting away. My brethren, my comrades, my delights, are leaving me for the better land. We have enjoyed holy and happy fellowship in days of peace, and we have stood shoulder to shoulder in the battle of the Lord; but we are melting away. One has gone; another has gone; before we look round another will have departed. We see them for a moment, and they vanish from our gaze. It is true they do not rise into the air like the Divine Master from Olivet; yet do they rise, I am persuaded of that: only the poor body descends, and that descent is for a very little while. They rise, to be for ever with the Lord. The grief is to us who are left behind. What a gap is left where stood Hugh Stowell Brown! Who is to fill it? What a gap is left where stood Charles Stanford! Who is to fill it? Who among us will go next? We stand like men amazed. Some of us stood next in the rank with those who have been taken. Why this constant thinning of our ranks while the warfare is so stern? Why this removal of the very best when we so much need the noblest examples? I am bowed down, and could best express myself in a flood of tears as I survey the line of graves so newly digged; but I restrain myself from so carnal a mode of regarding the matter, and look upon it in a clearer light. The Master is gathering the ripest of his fruit, and well doth he deserve them. His own dear hand is putting his apples of gold into his baskets of silver; and as we see that it is the Lord, we are bewildered no longer. His word, as it comes before us in the text, calms and quiets our spirits. It dries our tears, and calls us to rejoicing as we hear our heavenly Bridegroom praying, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." We understand why the dearest and best are going. We see in whose hand is held the magnet which attracts them to the skies. One by one they must depart from this lowland country, to dwell above, in the palace of the King, for Jesus is drawing them to himself. Our dear babes go home because "he gathereth the lambs with his arm and carrieth them in his bosom;" and our ripe saints go home because the Beloved is come into his garden to gather lilies. These words of our Lord Jesus explain the continual

home-going; they are the answer to the riddle which we call death. I am going to talk of how our honored brethren are not, because God taketh them; and I shall be happy if my words shall prepare us to exercise a holy readiness to see the grand request of our Redeemer fulfilled, even though it cost us many a sorrowful parting.

I. Let us begin as our text begins, and thus the first thought about the continual gathering to the house above will be THE HOME-WORD—the rallying word: "Father." Observe, our Lord had said, "Holy Father," and toward the close of the prayer he said, "O righteous Father;" but in commencing this particular petition he uses the word "Father" by itself alone: this relationship is in itself so dear that it agrees best with the loftiest petition. I like to think of that name "Father," as used in this connection. Is it not the center of living unity? If there is to be a family gathering and reunion, where should it be but in the father's house? Who is at the head of the table but the father? All the interests of the children unite in the parent, and he feels for them all.

From the great Father the Lord Jesus himself came forth. We do not understand the doctrine of the eternal filiation—we adore the mystery into which we may not pry. But we know that as our Lord Jesus is God-and-man Mediator, he came forth from the Father; and unto the Father's will he submitted himself in so doing. As for us, we come distinctly of that Father, it is he that made us, and not we ourselves; and, better and brighter fact still, of his own will begat he us by the word of truth. We were born a second time from heaven, and from our Heavenly Father our spiritual life is derived.

The whole of this sermon through, I want to show you that it is right that we should part with our brethren and joyfully permit of their going home; and surely I may at once ask you—What can be more right than that children should go home to their father? From him they came, to him they owe their life; should they not always tend towards him, and should not this be the goal of their being, that they should at last dwell in his presence? To go away from the Father and to live apart from him is the sorrow of our fallen nature as it plays the prodigal; but the coming back to the Father is restoration to life, to peace, to happiness. Yes, all our hopeful steps are towards the Father. We are saved when by believing in the name of Jesus we receive power to become the sons of God. Our sanctification lies in the bosom of our adoption. Because Jesus comes from the Father and leads us back to the Father, therefore is there a heaven for us. Wherefore, whenever we think of heaven let us chiefly think of the Father; for it is in our Father's house that there are many mansions, and it is to the Father that our Lord has gone, that he may prepare a place for us.

"FATHER!" why, it is a bell that rings us home. He who hath the spirit of adoption feels that the Father draws him home, and he would fain run after him. How intensely did Jesus turn to the Father! He cannot speak of the glory wherein he is to be without coupling his Father with it. Brethren, it is in the Father that we live and move and have our being. Is there any spiritual life in the world which does not continually proceed from the life of the great Father? Is it not by the continual outcoming of the Holy Ghost from the Father that we remain spiritual men? And as from him we live, so for him we live, if we live aright. We wish so to act as to glorify God in everything. Even our salvation should not be an ultimate end with any one of us; we should desire to glorify God by our salvation. We look upon the doctrines that we preach, and the precepts which we obey, as means to the glory of God, even the Father.

This is the consummation which the First-born looks for, and to which all of us who are like him are aspiring also, namely, that God may be all in all: that the great Father may be had in honor, and may be worshipped in every place. Since, then, we are from him, and of him, and to him, and

for him, this word "Father" calls us to gather at his feet. Shall any one of us lament the process? No; we dare not complain that our choicest brethren are taken up to gladden the great Father's house. Our brother is gone; but we ask, "Where is he gone?" and when the answer comes, "He is gone to the Father," all notion of complaint is over. To whom else should he go? When the great First-born went away from us, he told his sorrowing followers that he was going to their Father and his Father; and that answer was enough. So, when our friend, or our child, or our wife, or our brother is gone, it is enough that he is with the Father. To call them back does not occur to us; but rather we each one desire to follow after them.

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

A child may be happy at school, but he longs for the holidays. Is it merely to escape his lessons? Ah, no! Ask him, and he will tell you, "I want to go home to see my father." The same is equally true, and possibly more so, if we include the feminine form of parentage. What a home-cry is that of "mother!" The sight of that dear face has been longed and hungered for by many a child when far away. Mother or father, which you will; they are blended in the great Fatherhood of God. Let it but be said that any one has gone to his father, and no further question is asked as to the right of his going thither. To the father belongs the first possession of the child; should he not have his own child at home? The Savior wipes our tears away with a handkerchief which is marked in the corner with this word—"Father."

II. Secondly, I want your thoughts upon THE HOME IMPETUS. The force which draws us home lies in the word, "I will." Jesus Christ, our most true God, veiled in human form, bows his knee and prays, and throws his divine energy into the prayer for the bringing home of his redeemed. This one irresistible, everlastingly almighty prayer carries everything before it. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am," is the centripetal energy which is drawing all the family of God towards its one home.

How shall the chosen get home to the Father? Chariots are provided. Here are the chariots of fire and horses of fire in this prayer. "I will," saith Jesus, "that they be with me;" and with him they must be. There are difficulties in the way—long nights and darkness lie between, and hills of guilt, and forests of trouble, and bands of fierce temptations; yet the pilgrims shall surely reach their journey's end, for the Lord's "I will" shall be a wall of fire round about them. In this petition I see both sword and shield for the church militant. Here I see the eagles' wings on which they shall be upborne till they enter within the golden gates. Jesus saith, "I will;" and who is he that shall hinder the home-coming of the chosen? As well hope to arrest the marches of the stars of heaven.

Examine the energy of this "I will" for a moment, and you will see, first, that it hath the force of *an intercessory prayer*. It is a gem from that wonderful breastplate of jewels which our great High-priest wore upon his breast when he offered his fullest intercession. I cannot imagine our Lord's interceding in vain. If he asks that we may be with him where he is, he must assuredly have his request. It is written, that "he was heard in that he feared." When with strong crying and tears he poured out his soul unto death, his Father granted the requests of his heart. I do not wonder it should be so; how could the best Beloved fail of that which he sought in intercession from his Father God! Mark, then, that the force of irresistible intercession is drawing every blood-bought soul into the place where Jesus is. You cannot hold your dying babe; for Jesus asks for it to be with

him. Will you come into competition with your Lord? Surely you will not. You cannot hold your aged father, nor detain your beloved mother, beyond the time appointed; for the intercession of Christ has such a force about it that they must ascend even as sparks must seek the sun.

More than intercession is found in the expression "I will." It suggests the idea of *a testamentary bequest* and appointment. The Lord Jesus is making his last will and testament, and he writes, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me." No man who makes his will likes to have it frustrated. Our Savior's testament will assuredly be carried out in every jot and tittle; and, if for no other reason, yet certainly for this cause, that though he died, and thus made his will valid, yet he lives again to be his own executor, and to carry out his will. When I read in our Lord's testament the words, "Father, I will that they be with me," I ask, "Who is to hold them back?" They must in due time be with him, for the will of the ever blessed Savior must be carried out: there can be no standing against a force of that kind.

Nor is this all: the words read to me, not only like intercession and testamentary decree, but there is a strong expression of *desire, resolve, and purpose*. Jesus desires it, and saith, "I will." It is a deliberate desire—a forcible, distinct, resolute, determined purpose. The will of God is supreme law. It needeth not that he should speak; he doth but will or purpose, and the thing is done. Now read my text: "I will that they be with me;" the Son of God wills it. How are the saints to be hindered from what the Lord wills? They must rise from their beds of dust and silent clay;—they must rise to be with Jesus where he is, for Jesus wills it. By your anxious care you may seek to detain them; you may sit about their bed and nurse them both night and day, but they must quit these dark abodes when Jesus gives the signal. You may clutch them with affectionate eagerness, and even cry in despair, "They shall not go, we cannot bear to part with them;" but go they must when Jesus calls. Take back your naughty hands, which would detain them, for naughty they are if you would rob your Savior. Would you cross *his* will? Would you set at naught his testament? You could not if you would; you would not if you could. Rather be inclined to go with them than think to resist the heavenly attraction which upraises them. If Jesus saith, "I will," then it is yours to say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt. They were never so much mine as they are thine. I never had so much right to them as thou hast who hast bought them. They never so truly could be at home with me as they will be at home with thee in thine own bosom; so my will dissolves itself into thy will, and I say with steadfast resignation, 'Let them go.'"

Brothers and sisters, you perceive the forces which are bearing away our beloved ones. I see tender hands reaching after us this morning; they are invisible to sense, but palpable to faith. Cords of love are being cast about the chosen, and they are being drawn out secretly from their fellows. Would you break those bands asunder, and cast those cords from us? I beseech you, think not so; but let that pierced hand which bought the beloved ones seek out its own purchase and bring them home. Should not Jesus have his own? Do we not bow our knee and pray for Jesus, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven?"

III. But now I want to conduct you farther into the text. We have had the home-word and the home-bringing impetus, and now let us carefully note THE HOME CHARACTER. "Father, I will that *they also, whom thou hast given me*, be with me where I am." The description is—"They also, whom thou hast given me." The Greek is somewhat difficult to translate. The translators of the Revised Version were, no doubt, excellent Greek scholars, and if they had known a little more English, they might have come a little nearer to a perfect translation, but they do not always appear to think the common English reader to be worthy of their consideration. This is their translation in

the present instance:—"Father, that which thou hast given me, I will that, where I am they also may be with me." This, to speak plainly, sounds very like nonsense. It is the translation which a boy would present to his tutor at school, but it is of small use to the general reader. It is literal, no doubt; but literalisms are often another proof that the letter killeth. Translators into the English tongue might have contrived to have given us words with a meaning in them. I merely quote the version to show you that there is here a something in the singular as well as persons in the plural. "Father, I will concerning *that* which thou hast given me, that *they* may be with me where I am." Our Lord looked upon those whom the Father gave him as one—one body, one church, one bride: he willed that as a whole the church should be with him where he is. Then he looked again and saw each of the many individuals of whom the one church is composed, and he prayed that each, that all of these, might be with him and behold his glory. Jesus never so prays for the whole church as to forget a single member; neither does he so pray for the members individually as to overlook the corporate capacity of the whole. Sweet thought! Jesus wills to have the whole of what he bought with his precious blood with him in heaven; he will not lose any part. He did not die for a part of a church, nor will he be satisfied unless the entire flock which he has purchased shall be gathered around him.

But while the Lord looks at those whom his Father gave him as one body, he looks upon you and me, and each believer here, as a part of that great unity, and his prayer is that all of us may be with him. I believe that he prays as much for the least as for the greatest, as much for Benjamin as for Judah, as much for the despondent as for those who are fully assured. The prayer is one of great breadth and comprehensiveness, but yet it is not the prayer which those who believe in Universalism would put into his mouth. He does not pray that those who die unbelievers may be with him where he is, neither does he will that souls in hell should one day come out of it and be with him in glory. There is no trace of that doctrine in holy writ: those who teach such fables draw their inspiration from some other source. The new purgatory, in which so many have come to believe, is unknown to Holy Scripture. No, our Lord's prayer is distinctly for those whom the Father gave him—for every one of these, but for no others. His "I will" concerns them only.

I feel right glad that there is no sort of personal character mentioned here, but only—"Those whom thou hast given me." It seems as if the Lord in his last moments was not so much looking at the fruit of grace as at grace itself; he did not so much note either the perfections or the imperfections of his people, but only the fact that they were his by the eternal gift of the Father. They belonged to the Father—"thine they were." The Father gave them to Jesus—"thou gavest them me." The Father gave them as a love token and a means of his Son's glorification—"Thine they were and thou gavest them me;" and now our Lord pleads that because they were the Father's gift to him he should have them with him. Does anybody raise a cavil as to Christ's right to have those with him who were his Father's, whom his Father gave him, and whom he himself actually took into his own possession? No, they ought to be with him, since they are his in so divine a manner. If I possess a love-token that some dear one has given me I may rightly desire to have it with me. Nobody can have such a right to your wedding-ring, good sister, as you have yourself, and are not Christ's saints, as it were, a signet upon his finger, a token which his Father gave him of his good pleasure in him? Should they not be with Jesus where he is, since they are his crown jewels and his glory? We in our creature love lift up our hands, and cry, "My Lord, my Master, let me have this dear one with me a little longer. I need the companionship of one so sweet, or life will be misery to me." But if Jesus looks us in the face, and says, "Is thy right better than mine?" we

draw back at once. He has a greater part in his saints than we can have. O Jesus, thy Father gave them to thee of old; they are his reward for the travail of thy soul; and far be it from us to deny thee. Though blinded by our tears, we can yet see the rights of Jesus, and we loyally admit them. We cry concerning our best beloved, "The Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." Does not the text sweetly comfort us in the talking away of one and another, since it shows how they belong to Christ?

IV. And now, advancing another step, Christ reveals to us something concerning THE HOME COMPANIONSHIP in the glory land. Those who are taken away, where are they gone? The text saith, "I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory."

By this language we are impressed with *the nearness of the saints to Christ in glory*—"that they may be with me." Think for a moment: when our Lord used these words, and John took them down, the disciples were with him. They had left the supper-table where they had feasted together. The Master had said, "Arise, let us go hence;" and it was in the very midst of them that the Lord Jesus offered this choice prayer. Learn, then, that in heaven the saints will be nearer to Christ than the apostles were when they sat at the table with him, or heard him pray. That was a nearness which might consist only in place, and their minds might still be, as they often were, far away from him: but up in heaven we shall be one with him in sympathy, in spirit, in conscious fellowship. We shall be with Jesus in the closest, clearest, and most complete sense. No fellowship on earth can reach to the plenitude of the communion which we shall enjoy above. "With him"—"for ever with the Lord"—this is heaven. Who would wish to detain from such companionship those whom we love?

Yet do not drop the thought of place, lest you refine away the essence of the prayer. Let us see the spiritual clearly, but let us not, on that account, make the sense less real, less matter of fact. To the prayer that his saints may be with him our Lord added the words, "May be with me where I am." Our bodies will rise from the dust, and they *must occupy a place*: that place will be where Jesus is. Even spirits must be somewhere, and that somewhere with us is to be where Jesus is. We are to be, not metaphorically and fancifully, but really, truly, literally with Jesus. We shall enjoy an intense nearness to him in that blessed place which the Father has prepared for him, and which he is preparing for us. There is a place where Jesus is revealed in all the splendor of his majesty, amid angels and glorified spirits; and those whom our Lord's will has taken away from us have not gone into banishment in a mysterious land, neither are they shut up in a house of detention till there is a general jail delivery, but they are with Christ in Paradise. They serve him, and they see his face. Who would be so cruel as to keep a saint from such a fair country? I would desire all good for my children, my relatives, my friends; and what good is better than to be where Jesus is? Are you not glad to hear of the promotion of those you love? Will you quarrel with God because some of your dearest ones are promoted to the skies? The thought of their amazing bliss greatly moderates our natural grief. We weep for ourselves, but as we remember their companionship with the Altogether Lovely One a smile blends with our tears.

Notice the *occupation* of those who are with Jesus: "That they may behold my glory." I do not wonder that Jesus wants his dear ones to be with him for this purpose, since love always pines for a partner in its joys. When I have been abroad, and have been specially charmed with glorious scenery, I have a hundred times felt myself saying, almost involuntarily, "How I wish that my dear wife could be here! I should enjoy this a hundred times as much if she could but see it!" It is an instinct of affection to seek fellowship in joy. The Lord Jesus is truly human, and he feels this

unselfish desire of every loving human heart, and therefore says, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Our Lord graciously permits his disciples to have fellowship with him in his sufferings, and hence he is all the more desirous that they should participate in his glory. He knows that nothing will be a greater joy to them than to see him exalted; therefore he would give them this highest form of delight. Was not Joseph delighted when he said to his brethren, "Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt;" and still more so when he could actually show his father how great was his power, how exalted was his rank. It is joy to Jesus to let us behold his joy, and it will be glory to us to behold his glory. Should not the redeemed ascend to such blessed delights? Would you hinder them?

How unselfish it is on our Lord's part to think himself not fully glorified till we behold his glory! How unselfish he will make us also, since it will be our glory to see his glory! He does not say that he is going to take us home, that *we* may be in glory, but that we may behold *his* glory. His glory is better to us than any personal glory: all things are more ours by being his. Glory apart from him were no glory. Beloved, even as our Lord seems to lose himself in his people, his people hide themselves away in him. It is his glory to glorify them; it is their glory to glorify him; and it will be the glory of glories for them to be glorified together. Who would not go to this heaven? Who would keep a brother out of it an hour?

Observe the fellowship which exists in the glory land. Read the verse: "That *they* may behold *my* glory, which *thou* hast given *me*." What a blending of persons! Where did our Lord's glory come from? "Thou gavest it me," says Jesus. Hence it is the Father's glory passed over to the Son. Yet Jesus calls it "*my* glory," for it is truly his own. The saints are to behold this, and it will be their glory to see it. Here we have the Father, and the Elder Brother, and the many brethren, and a wonderful communism of interests and possessions. It is ever so in a loving family. There we draw no hard and fast lines of *meum* and *tuum*. "All thine are mine, and mine are thine." We ask not whose is this? or whose is that? when we are at home. If you were to go into a stranger's house, you would not think of taking this or that; but as your father's own son you make yourself at home, and no one enquires, "What doest thou?" Bridegroom and bride do not quarrel about property whether it be his or hers. Laws have been made lately to settle different estates for those who are one: this is well enough when love is gone, but true conjugal love laughs at all that can make separate that which God hath joined together. The wife says, "That is mine." "No" saith the caviller, "it is your husband's." Her answer is, "and therefore it is mine." In that blessed union into which divine love has admitted us Christ is ours, and we are Christ's; his Father is our Father, we are one with him, he is one with the Father: and hence all things are ours, and the Father himself loveth us. All this will not only be true in heaven, but it will there be realized and acted on. So when the Lord brings his people home, we shall be one with him, and he one with the Father, and we also in him one with the Father, so that we shall then find boundless glory in beholding the glory of our Lord and God. My text has baffled me. I am beaten back by its blaze of light. Forgive me. I had a thought, but I cannot express it. The fire of my text burns with such fervent heat that it threatens to consume me if I draw nearer to it. Easily could I step into heaven—so I feel at this moment.

V. I must end by speaking of THE HOME ATMOSPHERE. None of us can wish our departed friends back from their thrones. Since they have gone to be where Jesus is, and to enter so fully into the most blissful fellowship with him and the Father, we would not have them return even for an instant to this poor country. We only wish that our turn for migration may come soon. We would not be too long divided from our fellows. If some of the birds have gone to the sunny land, let us

plume our wings to follow them. There will be only a little interval between our parting and our everlasting meeting. Look at the many who died before we came into the world. Some of them have been in heaven together now for thousands of years. To them it must seem that they were only divided by a moment's interval; their continents of fellowship have made the channel of death seem but a streak of sea. Soon we shall take the same view of things.

Breathe the home atmosphere. Jesus tells us that the atmosphere of his home is *love*: "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Brethren, can you follow me in a great flight? Can you stretch broader wings than the condor ever knew, and fly back into the unbeginning eternity? There was a day before all days, when there was no day but the Ancient of Days. There was a time before all time, when God only was: the uncreated, the only-existent One. The Divine Three, Father, Son, and Spirit, lived in blessed consort with each other, delighting in each other. Oh the intensity of the divine love of the Father to the Son! There was no world, no sun, no moon, no stars, no universe, but God alone; and the whole of God's omnipotence flowed forth in a stream of love to the Son, while the Son's whole being remained eternally one with the Father by a mysterious essential union. How came all this which we now see and hear? Why this creation? this fall of Adam? this redemption? this church? this heaven? How came it all about? It needed not to have been, but the Father's love made him resolve to show forth the glory of his Son. The mysterious volume which has been gradually unfolded before us has only this one design—the Father would make known his love to the Son, and make the Son's glories to appear before the eyes of those whom the Father gave him. This Fall and this Redemption, and the story as a whole, so far as the divine purpose is concerned, are the fruit of the Father's love to the Son, and his delight in glorifying the Son. Those myriads, those white-robed myriads, harping to music infinitely deep, what mean they all? They are the Father's delight in the Son. That he might be glorified for ever, he permitted that he should bear a human body, and should suffer, bleed, and die, so that there might come out of him, as a harvest cometh from a dying and buried corn of wheat, all the countless hosts of elect souls, ordained for ever to a felicity exceeding bounds. These are the bride of the Lamb, the body of Christ, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. Their destiny is so high that no language can fully describe it. God only knows the love of God, and all that it has prepared for those who are the objects of it.

Love wraps up the whole in its cloth of gold. Love is both the source and the channel, and the end of the divine acting. Because the Father loved the Son he gave us to him, and ordained that we should be with him. His love to us is love to the Son. "Not for your sakes do I this, O House of Israel; be ashamed and be confounded." Because of the boundless, ineffable, infinite love of the great Father toward his Son, therefore hath he ordained this whole system of salvation and redemption, that Jesus in the church of his redeemed might everlastingly be glorified. Let our saintly ones go home, beloved, if that is the design of their going. Since all comes of divine love, and all sets forth divine love, let them go to him who loves them—let divine love fulfill its purpose of bringing many sons unto glory. Since the Father once made our Lord perfect by his sufferings, let him now be made perfectly glorious by the coming up of his redeemed from the purifying bath of his atonement I see them rise like sheep from the washing, all of them gathering with delight at the feet of that great Shepherd of the sheep.

Beloved, I am lost in the subject now. I breathe that heavenly air. Love surrounds all, and conquers grief. I will not cause the temperature to fall by uttering any other words but this—Hold your friends lovingly, but be ready to yield them to Jesus. Detain them not from him to whom they

belong. When they are sick, fast and pray; but when they are departed, do much as David did, who washed his face, and ate, and drank. You cannot bring them back again; you will go to them, they cannot return to you. Comfort yourselves with the double thought of their joy in Christ and Christ's joy in them; add the triple thought of the Father's joy in Christ and in them. Let us watch the Master's call. Let us not dread the question—who next, and who next? Let none of us start back as though we hoped to linger longer than others. Let us even desire to see our names in the celestial conscription. Let us be willing to be dealt with just as our Lord pleases. Let no doubt intervene; let no gloom encompass us. Dying is but going home; indeed, there is no dying for the saints. Charles Stanford is gone! Thus was his death told to me—"He drew up his feet and smiled." Thus will you and I depart. He had borne his testimony in the light, even when blind. He had cheered us all, though he was the greatest sufferer of us all; and now the film has gone from the eyes, and the *anguish* is gone from the heart, and he is with Jesus. He smiled. What a sight was that which caused that smile! I have seen many faces of dear departed ones lit up with splendor. Of many I could feel sure that they had seen a vision of angels. Traces of a reflected glory hung about their countenances. O brethren, we shall soon know more of heaven than all the divines can tell us. Let us go home now to our own dwellings; but let us pledge ourselves that we will meet again. But where shall we appoint the trysting place? It would be idle to appoint any spot of earth, for this assembly will never come together again in this world. We will meet with Jesus, where he is, where we shall behold his glory. Some of you cannot do this. Turn from your evil ways. Turn to the right, where stands that cross, and keep straight on, and you will come to Jesus in glory. Blessed be the name of the Lord! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Revelation 21:22-27; 22.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—855, 865, 873.

Jesus Angry with Hard Hearts

A Sermon

(No. 1893)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, March 28th, 1886, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand."—Mark 3:5.

MY TEXT WILL REALLY CONSIST of these words: "He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." It is the divine Lord, the pitiful Jesus, the meek and lowly in heart, who is here described as being angry. Where else do we meet with such a statement while he was here among men? A poor man was present in the synagogue who had a withered hand: it was his right hand, and he who has to earn his daily bread can guess what it must be to have that useful member dried up or paralyzed. In the same synagogue was the Savior, ready to restore to that hand all its wonted force and cunning. Happy conjunction! The company that had gathered in the synagogue, professedly to worship God, would they not have special cause to do so when they saw a miracle of divine goodness? I can imagine them whispering one to another, "We shall see our poor neighbor restored to-day; for the Son of God has come among us with power to heal, and he will make this a very glorious Sabbath by his work of gracious power."

But I must not let imagination mislead me: they did nothing of the kind. Instead of this, they sat watching the Lord Jesus, not to be delighted by an act of his power, but to find somewhat of which they might accuse him. When all came to all, the utmost that they would be able to allege would be that he had healed a withered hand *on the Sabbath*. Overlooking the commendation due for the miracle of healing, they laid the emphasis upon its being done on the Sabbath; and held up their hands with horror that such a secular action should be performed on such a sacred day. Now, the Savior puts very plainly before them the question, "Is it right to do good on the Sabbath-day?" He put it in a form which only allowed of one reply. The question could, no doubt, have been easily answered by these Scribes and Pharisees, but then it would have condemned themselves, and therefore they were all as mute as mice. Scribes most skilled in splitting hairs, and Pharisees who could measure the border of a garment to the eighth of an inch, declined to answer one of the simplest questions in morals. Mark describes the Savior as looking round upon them all with anger and grief, as well he might.

You know how minute Mark is in his record: his observation is microscopic, and his description is graphic to the last degree. By the help of Mark's clear words you can easily picture the Savior looking round upon them. He stands up boldly, as one who had nothing to conceal; as one who was about to do that which would need no defense. He challenged observation, though he knew that his opposition to ecclesiastical authority would involve his own death, and hasten the hour of the cross. He did not defy them, but he did make them feel their insignificance as he stood looking round upon them all. Can you conceive the power of that look? The look of a man who is much given to anger has little force in it: it is the blaze of a wisp of straw, fierce and futile. In many cases we almost smile at the impotent age which looks out from angry eyes; but a gentle spirit, like the

Savior's, commands reverence if once moved to indignation. His meek and lowly heart could only have been stirred with anger by some overwhelming cause. We are sure that he did well to be angry.

Even when moved to an indignant look, his anger ended there; he only looked, but spake no word of upbraiding. And the look itself had in it more of pity than of contempt; or, as one puts it, "more of compassion than of passion." Our Lord's look upon that assembly of opponents deserves our earnest regard. He paused long enough in that survey to gaze upon each person, and to let him know what was intended by the glance. Nobody escaped the searching light which that expressive eye flashed upon each malicious watcher. They saw that to him their base conduct was loathsome; he understood them, and was deeply moved by their obstinacy.

Note well that Jesus did not speak a word, and yet he said more without words than another man could have said with them. They were not worthy of a word; neither would more words have had the slightest effect upon them. He saved his words for the poor man with the withered hand; but for these people a look was the best reply: they looked on him, and now he looked on them. This helps me to understand that passage in the Revelation, where the ungodly are represented as crying to the rocks to cover them, and the hills to hide them from the face of him that sat upon the throne. The Judge has not spoken so much as a single word; not yet has he opened the books; not yet has he pronounced the sentence, "Depart, ye cursed;" but they are altogether terrified by the look of that august countenance. Concentrated love dwells in the face of Jesus, the Judge; but in that dread day, they will see it set on fire with wrath. The wrath of a lion is great, but it is nothing compared with that of the Lamb. I wish I had skill to describe our Lord's look; but I must ask the aid of your understandings and your imaginations to make it vivid to your minds.

When Mark has told us of that look, he proceeds to mention the mingled feelings which were revealed by it. In that look there were two things—there were anger and grief—indignation and inward sorrow. "He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." He was angry that they should willingly blind their eyes to a truth so plain, an argument so convincing. He had put to them a question to which there could only be one answer, and they would not give it; he had thrown light on their eyes, and they would not see it; he had utterly destroyed their chosen pretext for opposition, and yet they would persist in opposing him. Evidently it is possible to be angry and to be right. Hard to many is the precept "Be ye angry, and sin not;" and this fact renders the Savior's character all the more admirable, since he so easily accomplished what is so difficult to us. He could be angry with the sin, and yet never cease to compassionate the sinner. His was not anger which desired evil to its object; no touch of malevolence was in it; it was simply love on fire, love burning with indignation against that which is unlovely.

Mingled with this anger there was grief. He was heart broken because their hearts were so hard. As Manton puts it, "He was softened because of their hardness." His was not the pitiless flame of wrath which burns in a dry eye; he had tears as well as anger. His thunder-storm brought a shower of pity with it. The Greek word is hard to translate. There is what an eminent critic calls a sort of *togetherness* in the word; he grieved with them. He felt that the hardness of their hearts would one day bring upon them an awful misery; and foreseeing that coming grief, he grieved with them by anticipation. He was grieved at their hardness because it would injure themselves; their blind enmity vexed him because it was securing their own destruction. He was angry because they were wilfully rejecting the light which would have illuminated them with heavenly brightness, the life which could have quickened them into fullness of joy. They were thus determinedly and resolutely

destroying their own souls out of hatred to him, and he was angry more for their sakes than his own.

There is something very admirable in our Savior even when we see him in an unusual condition. Even when he grows angry with men, he is angry with them because they will not let him bless them, because they will persevere in opposing him for reasons which they cannot themselves support, and dare not even own. If I had been one of the disciples who were with him in the synagogue, I think I should have burned with indignation to see them all sitting there, refusing to forego their hate, and yet unable to say a word in defense of it. I doubt not, the loving spirit of John grew warm. What a horrible thing that any creature in the shape of a man should act so unworthily to the blessed Son of God, as to blame him for doing good! What a disgrace to our race, for men to be so inhuman as to wish to see their fellow-man remain withered, and to dare to blame the gentle Physician who was about to make him perfectly whole! Man is indeed at enmity with God when he finds an argument for hate in a deed of love.

Our first question is, *What was the cause of this anger and this grief?* Then let us enquire, *Does anything of this sort rest in us?* Do we cause our Lord anger and grief? And, thirdly, let us ask, *what should be our feeling, when we see that something about us may cause, or does cause him, anger and grief?* Oh that the Holy Spirit may bless this sermon to all who hear me this day!

I. WHAT CAUSED THIS ANGER AND GRIEF? It was their hardness of heart. To use other words, it was the callousness of their conscience their want of feeling. Their hearts had, as it were, grown horny, and had lost their proper softness. The hand may furnish us with an illustration. Some persons have very delicate hands: the blind who read raised type with their fingers develop special sensitiveness, and this sensitiveness is of great value. But when men are put to pick oakum, or break stones, or do other rough work, their hands become hard and callous: even so is it with the heart, which ought to be exceedingly tender; through continuance in sin it becomes callous and unfeeling. Use is second nature: the traveller's foot gets hardened to the way, his face becomes hardened to the cold, his whole constitution is hardened by his mode of life. Persons have taken deadly drugs by little and little till they have been hardened against their results: we read in history that Mithridates had used poison till at last he was unable to kill himself thereby, so hardened had he become. But hardening is of the worst kind when it takes place in the heart. The heart ought to be all tenderness; and when it is not, the life must be coarse and evil. Yet multitudes are morally smitten with ossification of the heart. Do we not know some men in whom the heart is simply a huge muscle? If they have any hearts they are made of leather, for they have no pity for anybody, no fellow-feeling even for their relatives. God save us from a hard heart: it leads to something worse than death! A heart of flesh may be gone out of a man, and instead thereof he may have a heart of stone: Scripture even calls it "an adamant stone"—unfeeling, unyielding, impenetrable, obstinate. Those enemies of our Lord who sat in the synagogue that Sabbath-day were incorrigible: they were desperately set on hating him, and they strengthened themselves in the resolve that they would not be convinced, and would not cease to oppose him, let him say or do whatever he might. Our Lord Jesus became angry, grieved, and sorrowful with them.

What was their exact fault?

First, *they would not see*, though the case was clear. He had set the truth so plainly before them that they were obliged to strain their understandings to avoid being convinced: they had to draw down the blinds of the soul, and put up the shutters of the mind, to be able *not* to see. There are none so blind as those that will not see, and these were of that blindest order; they were blind people

that had eyes and boasted that they could see, and therefore their sin was utterly without excuse. Ah, me! I fear that we have many around us still, who know, but do not act on their knowledge; who do not wish to be convinced and converted, but harden themselves against known duty and plain right.

What was more, *what these people were forced to see they would not acknowledge*. They sullenly held their tongues when they were bound to speak. Does it not happen to many persons that the gospel forces itself upon their belief? They feel that they could not conjure up an argument against the divine truth which is set before them: the word comes with such demonstration that it smites them with sledge-hammer force; but they do not intend to admit its power, and so they brace themselves up to bear the blow without yielding. They shut their mouths against the water of life which is held up to them in the golden cup of the gospel. No child could shut his teeth more desperately against medicine than they against the gospel. Any man may take a horse to the water, but ten thousand cannot make him drink, and this is proved in many a hearer of the word. There sat these Scribes and Pharisees: it is a wonder that the stones did not cry out against them, they were so doggedly determined not to admit that which they could not deny. Are there none of that breed among us still?

More than that, *while they would not see what was so plain, they were diligently seeking to spy out flaws and faults where there were none, namely, in the Lord Jesus*. So there are many who profess that they cannot understand the gospel, but they have understanding enough to cavil at it, and cast slurs upon it. They have a cruelly keen eye for non-existent errors in Scripture: they find this mistake in Deuteronomy, and the other in Genesis. What great wisdom, to be diligent in making discoveries against one's own eternal interests! The gospel of the Lord Jesus is man's only hope of salvation: what a pity to count it the height of cleverness to destroy our only hope! Alas for captious sceptics! They are sharp-sighted as eagles against themselves, but they are blind as bats to those things which make for their peace. These Scribes and Pharisees tried to discover the undiscoverable, namely, some fault in Jesus, and yet they could not or would not see the wickedness of their own opposition to him.

They dared to sit in judgment upon the Lord, who proved himself by his miracles to be divine, and yet all the while they professed great reverence for God and for his law. Though they were fighting against God, *they made the pretense of being very zealous for him*, and especially for his holy day. This is an old trick of the enemy, to fight true religion with false religion, to battle with godliness in the name of orthodoxy. This is a hollow sham, and we do not wonder that our ever sincere and truthful Lord felt indignant at it. You will know yourselves whether you ever do this. I fear that many do. By their zeal for the externals of religion they try to justify their opposition to the vital possession of it.

Brethren, I pray that none of us may be hypocrites, for the Lord Jesus cannot endure such. He cares not for whitewashed sepulchres, but proclaims woe unto all false professors. Here let me give you a parable:—In our fine old churches and cathedrals you see monuments raised to the dead. These are rich in costly marble and fine statuary, with here and there a touch of gold, and a Latin inscription flattering the dead. What a goodly show! Yet what does it all mean? Why, that corpses are underneath. Take down those marble slabs, remove a little earth, and you come to corruption and moving loathsomeness. Graves are fitter for cemeteries than for the place which is consecrated to the living God. I do not mean by this any censure upon the tombs, which are well enough; I only use them as a parable. What shall I say of those men and women of whom they are the type and

emblem? They are dead while they live, and have a form of godliness but deny the power of it; they present a fair outside, but secretly practice all manner of abominations. What have these to do in the church of God? What a horror to know that there are such in the assemblies of the saints! O my hearers, dread the hardness which would permit you to be hypocrites! Shun above all things that deadness of soul which makes a false profession possible, for this is very grievous to the Lord.

A hard heart is insensible, impenetrable, inflexible. You can no more affect it than if you should strike your hand against a stone wall. Satan has fortified it, and made its possessor to be steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the works of sin. The enmity of such a heart leads it to resist all that is good; its hardness returns the efforts of love in the form of opposition. Our Savior saw before him persons who would oppose him whatever he did, and would not change their minds however they might be made to see their error. Let this suffice to explain the scene before us of our Lord grieved and angry.

II. I must now come closer home, while I enquire, IS THERE ANYTHING OF THIS SORT AMONG US? Oh, for help in the work of self-examination!

Remember, we may grieve the Savior because of the hardness of our hearts, and yet be very respectable people. We may go to the synagogue, as these did; we may be Bible-readers, as the Scribes were; we may practice all the outward forms of religion, as the Pharisees did; and yet the Lord Jesus may be grieved with us because of the hardness of our heart.

We may anger the Lord, and yet be strictly non-committal. I dare say there are some here who are not Christians, and yet they never say a word against Christianity. They are strictly neutral. They judge that the less they think or say about this great matter the better. Jesus was angry that men should be silent when honesty and candour demanded speech of them. You must not think you are going to escape by saying, "I am not a professor." There can be no third party in this case. In the eternal world there is no provision made for neutrals. Those who are not with Jesus are against him, and they that gather not with him are scattering abroad. You are either wheat or tares, and there is nothing between the two. O sirs, you grieve him though you do not openly oppose him! Some of you are especially guilty, for you ought to be amongst the foremost of his friends. Shame on you to treat the Lord so ill!

You may be very tender towards other people; in fact, you may have, like the old Jewish king, great tenderness towards everybody but the Lord. Did not Zedekiah say, "The king is not he that can do anything against you?" I know many who are so fond of pleasing others that they cannot be Christians. They have not the moral courage to oppose any one for the truth's sake. O sirs, this may well make Jesus look upon you with anger and grief; that you should be so self denying, so kind, and so considerate to others, and yet act so cruelly to him and to yourselves. To yourselves, it is a cruel kindness, to save yourselves from speaking out. Your fear is driving you to spiritual suicide. To save a little present trouble you are heaping up wrath and judgment.

Alas, this hardness of heart may be in us, though we have occasional meltings! I think that man has a very hard heart who is at times deeply moved, but violently represses his emotions. He hurries home to his chamber greatly distressed, but in a short time he rallies, and shakes off his fears. He goes to a funeral, and trembles on the brink of the grave, but joins his merry companions, and is at his sins again. He likes to hear a stirring sermon, but he is careful not to go beyond his depth while hearing it. He is on the watch against his own welfare, and is careful to keep out of the way of a blessing. By a desperate resolve he holds out against the pressure of the grace of God, as it comes to him in exhortations and entreaties. He is often rebuked, but he hardens his neck; he is occasionally

on the verge of yielding, but he recovers his evil firmness, and holds on his way with a perseverance worthy of a better cause. How often have we hoped better things for some of you! How often have you blighted those hopes! You must be very hard in heart to hold out so long. It shows a strong constitution when a man has frequently been near to death, and yet has recovered; and it shows an awful vitality of evil when you have been driven to the verge of repentance, and then have deliberately turned back to the way of evil, sinning against conscience and conviction.

Yes, and we may have this hardness of heart, and yet keep quite clear of gross sins. I have wondered at some men, how they have guarded themselves in certain directions, and yet have been lax in other matters. While they have gone to excess in sins against God, they have been scrupulous in avoiding wrong towards man. Their sins have not been stones, but sand: I hope they do not forget that "sand is heavy," and that a vessel can as easily be wrecked upon a quicksand as upon a rock. Your outwardly moral man is often a hardened rebel against God. His pride of character helps to harden him against the gospel of grace. He condemns others who are really no worse than himself. There is an abominable kind of prudence which keeps some men out of certain sins: they are too mean to be prodigal, too fond of ease to plunge into risky sins. Many a man is carried off his feet by a sudden flood of temptation, and sins grievously, and yet at heart he may be by no means so hardened as the cool, calculating transgressor. Woe unto the man who has learned to sin deliberately, and to measure out iniquity as if it were a lawful merchandize, to be weighed by the ounce and the pound! Why, sir, on account of the evident strength of your mind better things are expected of you. You cannot plead violence of passion, or feebleness of judgment. For you there will be reserved the deeper hell, though you escape present condemnation.

This hardness of heart may not overcome you to the full at present, and yet you may have grave cause to dread it. Hardness of heart creeps over men by insensible degrees. The hardest hearted man in the world was not so once; the flesh of his heart was petrified little by little. He that can now curse and blaspheme once wept for his boyish faults at his mother's knee, and would have shuddered at the bare idea of falling asleep without a prayer. There are those about us who would give worlds to be free from the bondage of habit, so as to feel as once they did. Their soul is as parched as the Sahara, it has forgotten the dew of tears; their heart is hot as an oven with evil passions, and no soft breath of holy penitence ever visits it. Oh that they could weep! Oh that they could feel! Repentance is hid from their eyes. There remains nothing sensitive about them, except it be the base imitation of it which comes over them when they are in a maudlin state through strong drink. What calamity can be greater? What can be said of sin that is more terrible than that it hardens and deadens? Well did the apostle say, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

I cannot forbear saying that among the hardened there are some who may be said especially to provoke the Lord. Among these we must mention those who, from their birth and education, received an unusually keen moral sense, but have blunted it by repeated crimes. Those sin doubly who have had double light, and special tenderness of nature. Judge, O ye sons of the godly, whether there are not many such among you! Esau was all the more a "profane person" because he was a son of Isaac, knew something about the covenant heritage, and had certain fine touches of nature which ought to have made him a better man.

This is also true of those who have been indulged by Providence. God has dealt with them with wonderful favor; they have continued long in good health; they have been prosperous in business; their children have grown up around them; they have all that heart can wish; and yet God receives

from them no gratitude; indeed, they hardly give a thought to him. Ingratitude is sure to bring a curse upon the man who is guilty of it. Alas, the ungrateful are numerous everywhere! Some who are well known to me should have remembered the Lord, for he has granted them a smooth path, a full wallet, and sunshine to travel in. If there were an honest heart in you, your hearts would cleave to the Lord in deep and hearty love. Silken cords of love are stronger with true men than fetters of iron are to thieves.

Let me not forget the obligations of others who have been often chastened, for this side of the question has its force also. Certain persons have endured many trials, they have often suffered pain of body, and have been brought at times to the verge of the grave; they have lost the beloved of their eyes with a stroke; they have followed their children to the grave: sorrows have been multiplied to them. Yet, after all, they are hard of heart. The fire of affliction has not softened their iron nature. Why should they be stricken any more? They will revolt more and more. The Lord himself cries, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" Long-suffering fails: mercy is weary. There are no more rods to use upon you, as the bullock kicks out against the goad, so do you resist the chastening of the Lord God. The Savior looks upon all such with that grieving anger of which the text speaks.

Alas! I dare not omit those towards whom the Savior must feel this anger very especially, because they have been the subjects of tender, earnest, faithful ministry. I will not say much of my own personal ministry, which has been spent for years upon many of you; but assuredly if it has not affected you, it is not for want of strong desire and intense longing to be of service to your souls. God is my witness that I have kept back nothing of his truth. I have never flattered you, neither have I occupied this pulpit to make it a platform for self-display. I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. But, apart from this, certain of you have had the tender ministries of a holy mother who is now with God, of a wise father who lives still to pray for you, of affectionate teachers who instructed you aright, and loving friends who sought your good. Father, your child has wooed you. Young man, your newly-converted wife has agonized for you, and is agonizing even now. Very select have been the agencies used upon you. Choice and musical the voices which have endeavored to charm you. If these do not reach you, neither would you be converted though one rose from the dead. If Jesus himself were here again among men, how could even he reach you? If all the means he has already used have failed with you, I know not what is to be done with you. The Savior himself will, I fear, leave you; with a look of grief and anger he will turn from you because of the hardness of your heart. Stay, Lord Jesus, stay a little longer! Peradventure they will be won next time. Bid not thy Spirit take his everlasting flight. Do not swear in thy wrath that they shall not enter into thy rest, but be patient with them yet a little longer, for thy mercy's sake.

III. We must now close. Oh that my poor pleadings may not have been lost upon you! In many things which I have spoken there has been a loud voice to many of you; now hear me while I raise the question, **WHAT SHOULD BE OUR FEELING IN REFERENCE TO THIS SUBJECT?**

First, *let us renounce for ever the habit of cavilling*. These Scribes and Pharisees were great word-spinners, critics, fault-finders. They found fault with the Savior for healing on the Sabbath-day. He had not broken God's law of the Sabbath, he had only exposed their error upon that point. If the Sabbath had not furnished an opportunity for objection, they would soon have found another; for they meant to object: one way or another, they resolved to contradict. Multitudes of persons in this present day are most effectually hardening their hearts by the habit of cavilling. While others are struck by the beauty of the gospel which they hear, these people only remember a mispronunciation

made by the preacher. Having commenced in this line they begin to sit in judgment on the gospel preached, and before long the Scriptures themselves are subjected to their alteration and correction. Reverence is gone, and self-sufficiency reigns supreme. They criticize God's word. Any fool can do that, but only a fool will do it. They give themselves the airs of literary men; they are not like common-place hearers: they require something more intellectual. They look down with contempt upon people who enjoy the gospel, and are proving the power of it in their lives. They themselves are persons of remarkable mind; men of light and leading, and it gives them distinction to act the part of sceptics. They show their great learning by turning up their noses at the plain teachings of the Bible. It seems to be the great feature of a cultured man nowadays to wear a sneer upon his face when he meets with believers in inspiration. An idiot can attain in five minutes to a high degree of contempt of others; do not exhibit such folly. Pride of this sort ruins those who indulge it. To be unbelieving in order to show one's superiority is an unsatisfactory business. Let us never imitate that evil spirit, who in the garden of Eden proved himself to be the patron and exemplar of all sceptics. Remember how he raised the question, "Yea, hath God said?" Forget not how he went further, and, like a sage philosopher, hinted that there was a larger hope: "Ye shall not surely die," said he. Then he advanced to lay down a daring radical philosophy, and whispered, "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods." This old serpent has left his trail on many minds at the present day, and you can see it in the slimy questions and poisonous suggestions of the age. Get away from cavilling: it is of all labors the least remunerative.

Next, *let us feel an intense desire to submit ourselves unto the Lord Jesus*. If he be in the synagogue, let us ask him to heal us, and to do it in his own way. Let us become his disciples, and follow him whithersoever he goeth. Yield yourselves unto God. Be as melted wax to the seal. Be as the water of the lake, which is moved with every breath of the wind. All he wills is our salvation. Lord Jesus, let thy will be done!

Let us be careful to keep away from all hardening influences, whether of books, or men, or habits, or pleasures. If there be any company which deadens us as to spiritual things, which hinders our prayers, shakes our faith, or damps our zeal, let us get out of it, and keep out of it. If any amusement lessens our hatred of sin, let us never go near it; if any book clouds our view of Jesus, let us never read it. We grow hard soon enough through the needful contact with the world which arises out of work-day life and business pursuits; let us not increase these evils. Shun the idler's talk, the scorner's seat, and the way of the ungodly. Shun false doctrine, worldliness, and strife. Keep clear of frivolity and trifling. Be in earnest, and be pure; live near to God, and remove far off from the throne of iniquity.

Lastly, *use all softening influences*. Ask to have your heart daily rendered sensitive by the indwelling of the quickening Spirit. Go often to hear the word: it is like a fire, and like a hammer breaking the rock in pieces. Dwell at the foot of the cross it is there that tenderness is born into human hearts. Jesus makes all hearts soft, and then stamps his image on them. Entreat the Holy Ghost to give you a very vivid sense of sin, and a very intense dread of it. Pray often according to the tenor of Charles Wesley's hymn, in which he cries—

"Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make!
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake.

"Oh, may the least omission pain
 My well-instructed soul
 And drive me to the blood again,
 Which makes the wounded whole!"

If such be the condition of our heart our Lord will not be angry with us. He will look round upon us with joy, and take a delight in us.

So far I have kept to the text, bearing all the while the burden of the Lord. If it be not heavy hearing to you, it is certainly painful preaching to me. That same love which made the loving Jesus grieved has driven me to speak after this fashion. Not that I love men as much as he did; but a spark from his fire has kindled in my soul, and is burning there according to the measure of grace given. But now, my dear hearers, let me indulge myself with a word of gospel. Surely there are some among you who desire to lose your hardness. You are crying to yourselves—

"Heart of stone, relent! relent!
 Melt by Jesus' love subdued!"

To you there is abundant cause of hope. He who made the heart can melt it. Job said, "God maketh my heart soft." It is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit to renew our nature; indeed, he makes us to be born again, working on the behalf of our Lord Jesus, whose royal word is, "Behold I make all things new." The Holy Ghost can work in us conviction of sin, the new birth, faith in the Lord Jesus, deep contrition, and holy tenderness. Do you desire that it should be so? Will you join me in a silent prayer that his melting operations may at this moment be felt in your soul?

To you is the word of this salvation sent. The Lord God has undertaken to glorify himself in redeeming his people from all iniquity. He has entered into covenant with his chosen, and all who believe in his Son Jesus are comprehended in that number. The covenant speaketh on this wise: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26.) See how this promise exactly meets your case! That kind of heart which you so greatly need shall be given you, though indeed it is a miracle of miracles to do it. A new arm or leg would be a wonder; but what shall be said of a new heart? The spirit which you also so greatly require is to be bestowed, your whole tone, temper, and tendency shall be altered in an extraordinary manner. The Lord can drive out the evil spirit, and then he can renew your spirit, and fill your being with his own Holy Spirit. As for that nature which refuses to feel or yield, or break or bend, the Lord is able to take this altogether away. What an operation to perform, and yet leave the patient alive! "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh." None but he that made the heart could execute such delicate surgery as this. Do you think that it can never be done in your case? Remember that the Lord never speaks beyond his line; there is no boasting with him. His arm has not waxed short; he is still able to save unto the uttermost. When the old stony heart is gone, the Lord can fill up the empty space with the most gentle and sensitive affections, even as he says, "I will give you an heart of flesh." By this means we shall be made to stand in awe of God's word; we shall tremble before him; we shall also feel a childlike gratitude, a filial love, and a holy obedience. Instead of needing to be smitten with a hammer we shall feel the slightest touch of the divine finger, and shall answer to the faintest call of the divine voice. What a change!

Now this is matter of promise. See how the verse glitters with "I will," and "I will." The Lord, who is able to perform his word, has spoken in this fashion, and he will not run back from his promise. But please read the thirty-seventh verse of this thirty-sixth chapter of Ezekiel, and mark

it well. "Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Will you not enquire? Will you not ask the Lord to do this for you? If so, your prayer has begun to be answered. Your desire is a token that the stone is softening, and flesh is taking its place. O Lord, grant that it may be so! Believe in the Lord Jesus that he is able to do this unto you, and it shall be according to your faith.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark 2:23-28; Hebrews 3:7-19.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—257, 579, 598.

How To Become Fishers of Men

A Sermon

(No. 1906)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And Jesus saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."—Matthew 4:19.

WHEN CHRIST CALLS US by his grace we ought not only to remember what we are, but we ought also *to think of what he can make us*. It is, "Follow me, and *I will make you*." We should repent of what we have been, but rejoice in what we may be. It is not "Follow me, because of what you are already." It is not "Follow me, because you may make something of yourselves;" but, "Follow me, because of what I will make you." Verily, I might say of each one of us as soon as we are converted, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." It did not seem a likely thing that lowly fishermen would develop into apostles; that men so handy with the net would be quite as much at home in preaching sermons and in instructing converts. One would have said, "How can these things be? You cannot make founders of churches out of peasants of Galilee." That is exactly what Christ did; and when we are brought low in the sight of God by a sense of our own unworthiness, we may feel encouraged to follow Jesus because of what he can make us. What said the woman of a sorrowful spirit when she lifted up her song? "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes." We cannot tell what God may make of us in the new creation, since it would have been quite impossible to have foretold what he made of chaos in the old creation. Who could have imagined all the beautiful things that came forth from darkness and disorder by that one fiat, "Let there be light?" And who can tell what lovely displays of everything that is divinely fair I lay yet appear in a man's formerly dark life, when God's grace has said to him, "Let there be light?" O you who see in yourselves at present nothing that is desirable, come you and follow Christ for the sake of what he can make out of you. Do you not hear his sweet voice calling to you, and saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men?"

Note, next, that *we are not made all that we shall be*, nor all that we ought to desire to be, when we are ourselves fished for and caught. This is what the grace of God does for us at first; but it is not all. We are like the fishes, making sin to be our element; and the good Lord comes, and with the gospel net he takes us, and he delivers us from the life and love of sin. But he has not wrought for us all that he can do, nor all that we should wish him to do, when he has done this; for it is another and a higher miracle to make us who were fish to become fishers—to make the saved ones saviours—to make the convert into a converter—the receiver of the gospel into an imparter of that same gospel to other people. I think I may say to every person whom I am addressing—If you are saved yourself, the work is but half done until you are employed to bring others to Christ. You are as yet but half formed in the image of your Lord. You have not attained to the full development of the Christ-life in you unless you have commenced in some feeble way to tell to others of the grace of God: and I trust that you will find no rest to the sole of your foot till you have been the means of leading many to that blessed Savior who is your confidence and your hope. His word is—Follow me, not merely that you may be saved, nor even that you may be sanctified; but, "Follow me, and

I will make you fishers of men." Be following Christ with that intent and aim; and fear that you are not perfectly following him unless in some degree he is making use of you to be fishers of men. The fact is, that every one of us must take to the business of a mancatcher. If Christ has caught us, we must catch others. If we have been apprehended of him, we must be his constables, to apprehend rebels for him. Let us ask him to give us grace to go a-fishing, and so to cast our nets that we may take a great multitude of fishes. Oh that the Holy Ghost may raise up from among us some master-fishers, who shall sail their boats in many a sea, and surround great shoals of fish!

My teaching at this time will be very simple, but I hope it will be eminently practical; for my longing is that not one of you that love the Lord may be backward in his service. What says the Song of Solomon concerning certain sheep that come up from the washing? It says, "Every one beareth twins, and none is barren among them." May that be so with all the members of this church, and all the Christian people that hear or read this sermon! The fact is, the day is very dark. The heavens are lowering with heavy thunder-clouds. Men little dream of what tempests may soon shake this city, and the whole social fabric of this land, even to a general breaking up of society. So dark may the night become that the stars may seem to fall like blighted fruit from the tree. The times are evil. Now, if never before, every glow-worm must show its spark. You with the tiniest farthing candle must take it from under the bushel, and set it on a candlestick. There is need of you all. Lot was a poor creature. He was a very, very wretched kind of believer; but still, he might have been a great blessing to Sodom had he but pleaded for it as he should have done. And poor, poor Christians, as I fear many are, one begins to value every truly converted soul in these evil days, and to pray that each one may glorify the Lord. I pray that every righteous man, vexed as he is with the conversation of the wicked, may be more importunate in prayer than he has ever been, and return unto his God, and get more spiritual life, that he may be a blessing to the perishing people around him. I address you, therefore, at this time first of all upon this thought. Oh that the Spirit of God may make each one of you feel his personal responsibility!

Here is for believers in Christ, in order to their usefulness, *something for them to do*. "Follow me." But, secondly, here is *something to be done by their great Lord and Master*: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." You will not grow into fishers of yourselves, but this is what Jesus will do for you if you will but follow him. And then, lastly, here is *a good illustration*, used according to our great Master's wont; for scarcely without a parable did he speak unto the people. He presents us with an illustration of what Christian men should be—*fishers of men*. We may get some useful hints out of it, and I pray the Holy Spirit to bless them to us.

I. First, then, I will take it for granted that every believer here wants to be useful. If he does not, I take leave to question whether he can be a true believer in Christ. Well, then, if you want to be really useful, here is SOMETHING FOR YOU TO DO TO THAT END: "*Follow me*, and I will make you fishers of men."

What is the way to become an efficient preacher? "Young man," says one, "go to college." "Young man," says Christ, "*follow me*, and I will make you a fisher of men." How is a person to be useful? "Attend a training-class," says one. Quite right; but there is a surer answer than that—Follow Jesus, and he will make you fishers of men. The great training-school for Christian workers has Christ at its head; and he is at its head, not only as a tutor, but as a leader: we are not only to learn of him in study, but to follow him in action. "*Follow me*, and I will make you fishers of men." The direction is very distinct and plain, and I believe that it is exclusive, so that no man can become a fisherman by any other process. This process may appear to be very simple; but

assuredly it is most efficient. The Lord Jesus Christ, who knew all about fishing for men, was himself the Dictator of the rule, "Follow me, if you want to be fishers of men. If you would be useful, keep in my track."

I understand this, first, in this sense: *be separate unto Christ*. These men were to leave their pursuits; they were to leave their companions; they were, in fact, to quit the world, that their one business might be, in their Master's name, to be fishers of men. *We* are not all called to leave our daily business, or to quit our families. That might be rather running away from the fishery than working at it in God's name. But we are called most distinctly to come out from among the ungodly, and to be separate, and not to touch the unclean thing. We cannot be fishers of men if we remain among men in the same element with them. Fish will not be fishers. The sinner will not convert the sinner. The ungodly man will not convert the ungodly man; and, what is more to the point, the worldly Christian will not convert the world. If you are of the world, no doubt the world will love its own; but you cannot save the world. If you are dark, and belong to the kingdom of darkness, you cannot remove the darkness. If you march with the armies of the wicked one, you cannot defeat them. I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church. Nowadays we hear Nonconformists pleading that they may do this and they may do that—things which their Puritan forefathers would rather have died at the stake than have tolerated. They plead that they may live like worldlings, and my sad answer to them, when they crave for this liberty, is, "Do it if you dare. It may not do you much hurt, for you are so bad already. Your cravings show how rotten your hearts are. If you have a hungering after such dog's meat, go, dogs, and eat the garbage. Worldly amusements are fit food for mere pretenders and hypocrites. If you were God's children you would loathe the very thought of the world's evil joys, and your question would not be, 'How far may we be like the world?' but your one cry would be, 'How far can we get away from the world? How much can we come out from it?'" Your temptation would be rather to become sternly severe, and ultra-Puritanical in your separation from sin, in such a time as this, than to ask, "How can I make myself like other men, and act as they do?" Brethren, the use of the church in the world is that it should be like salt in the midst of putrefaction; but if the salt has lost its savor, what is the good of it? If it were possible for salt itself to putrefy, it could but be an increase and a heightening of the general putridity. The worst day the world ever saw was when the sons of God were joined with the daughters of men. Then came the flood; for the only barrier against a flood of vengeance on this world is the separation of the saint from the sinner. Your duty as a Christian is to stand fast in your own place and stand out for God, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh, resolving like one of old that, let others do as they will, as for you and your house, you will serve the Lord.

Come, ye children of God, you must stand out with your Lord outside the camp. Jesus calls to you to-day, and says, "Follow me." Was Jesus found at the theater? Did he frequent the sports of the racecourse? Was Jesus seen, think you, in any of the amusements of the Herodian court? Not he. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." In one sense no one mixed with sinners so completely as he did when, like a physician, he went among them healing his patients; but in another sense there was a gulf fixed between the men of the world and the Savior which he never essayed to cross, and which they could not cross to defile him. The first lesson which the church has to learn is this: Follow Jesus into the separated state, and he will make you fishers of men. Unless you take up your cross and protest against an ungodly world, you cannot hope that the holy Jesus will make you fishers of men.

A second meaning of our text is very obviously this: *abide with Christ*, and then you will be made fishers of men. These disciples whom Christ called were to come and live with him. They were every day to be associated with him. They were to hear him teach publicly the everlasting gospel, and in addition they were to receive choice explanations in private of the word which he had spoken. They were to be his body-servants and his familiar friends. They were to see his miracles and hear his prayers; and, better still, they were to be with himself, and become one with him in his holy labor. It was given to them to sit at the table with him, and even to have their feet washed by him. Many of them fulfilled that word, "Where thou dwellest I will dwell:" they were with him in his afflictions and persecutions. They witnessed his secret agonies; they saw his many tears; they marked the passion and the compassion of his soul, and thus, after their measure, they caught his spirit, and so they learned to be fishers of men.

At Jesus' feet we must learn the art and mystery of soul-winning to live with Christ is the best education for usefulness. It is a great boon to any man to be associated with a Christian minister whose heart is on fire. The best training for a young man is that which the Vaudois pastors were wont to give, when each old man had a young man with him who walked with him whenever he went up the mountainside to preach, and lived in the house with him, and marked his prayers and saw his daily piety. This was a fine instruction. Was it not? But it will not compare with that of the apostles who lived with Jesus himself, and were his daily companions. Matchless was the training of the twelve. No wonder that they became what they were with such a heavenly tutor to saturate them with his own spirit! And now to-day his bodily presence is not among us; but his spiritual power is perhaps more fully known to us than it was to those apostles in those two or three years of the Lord's corporeal presence. There be some of us to whom he is intimately near. We know more about him than we do about our dearest earthly friend. We have never been able quite to read our friend's heart in all its twistings and windings, but we know the heart of the Well Beloved. We have leaned our head upon his bosom, and have enjoyed fellowship with him such as we could not have with any of our own kith and kin. This is the surest method of learning how to do good. Live with Jesus, follow Jesus, and he will make you fishers of men. See how he does the work, and so learn how to do it yourself. A Christian man should be bound apprentice to Jesus to learn the trade of a Savior. We can never save men by offering a redemption, for we have none to present; but we can learn how to save men by warning them to flee from the wrath to come, and setting before them the one great effectual remedy. See how Jesus saves, and you will learn how the thing is done: there is no learning it anyhow else. Live in fellowship with Christ, and there shall be about you an air and a manner as of one who has been made in heart and mind apt to teach, and wise to win souls.

A third meaning, however, must be given to this "Follow me," and it is this: "*Obey me*, and then you shall know what to do to save men." We must not talk about our fellowship with Christ, or our being separated from the world unto him, unless we make him our Master and Lord in everything. Some public teachers are not true at all points to their convictions, and how can they look for a blessing? A Christian man anxious to be useful, ought to be very particular as to every point of obedience to his Master. I have no doubt whatever that God blesses our churches even when they are very faulty, for his mercy endureth for ever. When there is a measure of error in the teaching, and a measure of mistake in the practice, he may still vouchsafe to use the ministry, for he is very gracious. But a large measure of blessing must necessarily be withheld from all teaching which is knowingly or glaringly faulty. God can set his seal upon the truth that is in it, but he cannot set his seal upon the error that is in it. Out of mistakes about Christian ordinances and other things,

especially errors in heart and spirit, there may come evils which we never looked for. Such evils may even now be telling upon the present age, and may work worse mischief upon future generations. If we desire as fishers of men to be largely used of God we must copy our Lord Jesus in everything, and obey him in every point. Failure in obedience may lead to failure in success. Each one of us, if he would wish to see his child saved, or his Sunday-school class blessed, or his congregation converted, must take care that, bearing the vessels of the Lord, he is himself clean. Anything we do that grieves the Spirit of God must take away from us some part of our power for good. The Lord is very gracious and pitiful; but yet he is a jealous God. He is sometimes sternly jealous towards his people who are living in neglects of known duty, or in associations which are not clean in his sight. He will wither their work, weaken their strength, and humble them until at last they say, "My Lord, I will take thy way after all. I will do what thou biddest me to do, for else thou wilt not accept me." The Lord said to his disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" and he promised them that signs should follow, and so they did follow them, and so they will. But we must get back to apostolic practice and to apostolic teaching: we must lay aside the commandments of men and the whimseys of our own brains, and we must do what Christ tells us, as Christ tells us, and because Christ tells us. Definitely and distinctly, we must take the place of servants; and if we will not do that, we cannot expect our Lord to work with us and by us. Let us be determined that, as true as the needle is to the pole, so true will we be, as far as our light goes, to the command of our Lord and Master. Jesus says—"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." By this teaching he seems to say—"Go beyond me, or fall back behind me, and you may cast the net; but it shall be night with you, and that night you shall take nothing. When you shall do as I bid you, you shall cast your net on the right side of the ship, and you shall find."

Again, I think that there is a great lesson in my text to those who preach their own thoughts instead of preaching the thoughts of Christ. These disciples were to follow Christ that they might listen to him, hear what he had to say, drink in his teaching, and then *go and teach what he had taught them*. Their Lord says, "What I tell you in darkness, speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops." If they will be faithful reporters of Christ's message, he will make them "fishers of men." But you know the boastful method nowadays is this: "I am not going to preach this old, old gospel, this musty Puritan doctrine. I will sit down in my study, and burn the midnight oil, and invent a new theory; then I will come out with my brand-new thought, and blaze away with it." Many are not following Christ, but following themselves, and of them the Lord may well say, "Thou shalt see whose word shall stand, mine or theirs." Others are wickedly prudent, and judge that certain truths which are evidently God's word had better be kept back. You must not be rough, but must prophesy smooth things. To talk about the punishment of sin, to speak of eternal punishment, why, these are unfashionable doctrines. It may be that they are taught in the Word of God, but they do not suit the genius of the age. We must pare them down. Brothers in Christ, I will have no share in this. Will you? O my soul, come not thou into their secret! Certain things not taught in the Bible our enlightened age has discovered. Evolution may be clean contrary to the teaching of Genesis, but that does not matter. We are not going to be believers of Scripture, but original thinkers. This is the vain-glorious ambition of the period. Mark you, in proportion as the modern theology is preached the vice of this generation increases. To a great degree I attribute the looseness of the age to the laxity of the doctrine preached by its teachers. From the pulpit they have taught the people that sin is a trifle. From the pulpit these traitors to God and to his Christ

have taught the people that there is no hell to be feared. A little, little hell, perhaps, there may be; but just punishment for sin is made nothing of. The precious atoning sacrifice of Christ has been derided and misrepresented by those who were pledged to preach it. They have given the people the name of the gospel, but the gospel itself has evaporated in their hands. From hundreds of pulpits the gospel is as clean gone as the dodo from its old haunts; and still the preachers take the position and name of Christ's ministers. Well, and what comes of it? Why, their congregations grow thinner and thinner; and so it must be. Jesus says, "Follow *me*, I will make you fishers of men;" but if you go in your own way, with your own net, you will make nothing of it, and the Lord promises you no help in it. The Lord's directions make himself our leader and example. It is, "Follow *me*, follow *me*. Preach *my* gospel. Preach what I preached. Teach what I taught, and keep to that." With that blessed servility which becomes one whose ambition it is to be a copyist, and never to be an original, copy Christ even in jots and tittles. Do this, and he will make you fishers of men; but if you do not do this, you shall fish in vain.

I close this head of discourse by saying that we shall not be fishers of men unless we follow Christ in one other respect; and that is, by endeavoring, in all points, to *imitate his holiness*. Holiness is the most real power that can be possessed by men or women. We may preach orthodoxy, but we must also live orthodoxy. God forbid that we should preach anything else; but it will be all in vain, unless there is a life at the back of the testimony. An unholy preacher may even render truth contemptible. In proportion as any of us draw back from a living and zealous sanctification we shall draw back from the place of power. Our power lies in this word, "Follow me." Be Jesus-like. In all things endeavor to think, and speak, and act as Jesus did, and he will make you fishers of men. This will require self-denial. We must daily take up the cross. This may require willingness to give up our reputation—readiness to be thought fools, idiots, and the like, as men are apt to call those who are keeping close to their Master. There must be the cheerful resigning of everything that looks like honor and personal glory, in order that we may be wholly Christ's, and glorify his name. We must live his life and be ready to die his death, if need be. O brothers, sisters, if we do this and follow Jesus, putting our feet into the footprints of his pierced feet, he will make us fishers of men. If it should so please him that we should even die without having gathered many souls to the cross, we shall speak from our graves. In some way or other the Lord will make a holy life to be an influential life. It is not possible that a life which can be described as a following of Christ should be an unsuccessful one in the sight of the Most High. "Follow me," and there is an "I will" such as God can never draw back from: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Thus much on the first point. There is something for us to do: we are graciously called to follow Jesus. Holy Spirit, lead us to do it.

II. But secondly, and briefly, there is **SOMETHING FOR THE LORD TO DO**. When his dear servants are following him, he says, "I will make you fishers of men;" and be it never forgotten that *it is he that makes us follow him*; so that if the following of him be the step to being made a fisher of men, yet this he gives us. 'Tis all of his Spirit. I have talked about catching his spirit, and abiding in him, and obeying him, and hearkening to him, and copying him; but none of these things are we capable of apart from his working them all in us. "From me is thy fruit found," is a text which we must not for a moment forget. So, then, if we do follow him, it is he that makes us follow him; and so he makes us fishers of men.

But, further, if we follow Christ he will make us fishers of men *by all our experience*. I am sure that the man who is really consecrated to bless others will be helped in this by all that he feels,

especially by his afflictions. I often feel very grateful to God that I have undergone fearful depression of spirits. I know the borders of despair, and the horrible brink of that gulf of darkness into which my feet have almost gone; but hundreds of times I have been able to give a helpful grip to brethren and sisters who have come into that same condition, which grip I could never have given if I had not known their deep despondency. So I believe that the darkest and most dreadful experience of a child of God will help him to be a fisher of men if he will but follow Christ. Keep close to your Lord and he will make every step a blessing to you. If God in providence should make you rich, he will fit you to speak to those ignorant and wicked rich who so much abound in this city, and so often are the cause of its worst sin. And if the Lord is pleased to let you be very poor you can go down and talk to those wicked and ignorant poor people who so often are the cause of sin in this city, and so greatly need the gospel. The winds of providence will waft you where you can fish for men. The wheels of providence are full of eyes, and all those eyes will look this way to help us to be winners of souls. You will often be surprised to find how God has been in a house that you visit: before you get there, his hand has been at work in its chambers. When you wish to speak to some particular individual, God's providence has been dealing with that individual to make him ready for just that word which you could say, but which nobody else but you could say. Oh, be you following Christ, and you will find that he will, by every experience through which you are passing, make you fishers of men.

Further than that, if you will follow him he will make you fishers of men *by distinct monitions in your own heart*. There are many monitions from God's Spirit which are not noticed by Christians when they are in a callous condition; but when the heart is right with God and living in communion with God, we feel a sacred sensitiveness, so that we do not need the Lord to shout, but his faintest whisper is heard. Nay, he need not even whisper. "Thou shalt guide me with thine eye." Oh, how many mulish Christians there are who must be held in with kit and bridle, and receive a cut of the whip every now and then! But the Christian who follows his Lord shall be tenderly guided. I do not say that the Spirit of God will say to you, "Go and join yourself unto this chariot," or that you will hear a word in your ear; but yet in your soul, as distinctly as the Spirit said to Philip, "Go and join yourself to this chariot," you shall hear the Lord's will. As soon as you see an individual, the thought shall cross your mind, "Go and speak to that person." Every opportunity of usefulness shall be a call to you. If you are ready, the door shall open before you, and you shall hear a voice behind you saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it." If you have the grace to run in the right way you shall never be long without an intimation as to what the right way is. That right way shall lead you to river or sea, where you can cast your net, and be a fisher of men.

Then, too, I believe that the Lord meant by this that *he would give his followers the Holy Ghost*. They were to follow him, and then, when they had seen him ascend into the holy place of the Most High, they were to tarry at Jerusalem for a little while, and the Spirit would come upon them and clothe them with a mysterious power. This word was spoken to Peter and Andrew; and you know how it was fulfilled to Peter. What a host of fish he brought to land the first time he cast the net in the power of the Holy Ghost! "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Brethren, we have no conception of what God could do by this company of believers gathered in the Tabernacle to-night. If now we were to be filled with the Holy Ghost there are enough of us to evangelize London. There are enough here to be the means of the salvation of the world. God saveth not by many nor by few. Let us seek a benediction; and if we seek it let us hear this directing voice, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." You men and women that sit before me,

you are by the shore of a great sea of human life swarming with the souls of men. You live in the midst of millions; but if you will follow Jesus, and be faithful to him, and true to him, and do what he bids you, he will make you fishers of men. Do not say, "Who shall save this city?" The weakest shall be strong enough. Gideon's barley cake shall smite the tent, and make it lay along. Samson, with the jawbone, taken up from the earth where it was lying bleaching in the sun, shall smite the Philistines. Fear not, neither be dismayed. Let your responsibilities drive you closer to your Master. Let horror of prevailing sin make you look into his dear face who long ago wept over Jerusalem, and now weeps over London. Clasp him, and never let go your hold. By the strong and mighty impulses of the divine life within you, quickened and brought to maturity by the Spirit of God, learn this lesson from your Lord's own mouth: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." You are not fit for it, but he will make you fit. You cannot do it of yourselves, but he will make you do it. You do not know how to spread nets and draw shoals of fish to shore, but he will teach you. Only follow him, and he will make you fishers of men.

I wish that I could somehow say this as with a voice of thunder, that the whole church of God might hear it. I wish I could write it in stars athwart the sky, "Jesus saith, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." If you forget the precept, the promise shall never be yours. If you follow some other track, or imitate some other leader, you shall fish in vain. God grant us to believe fully that Jesus can do great things in us, and then do great things by us for the good of our fellows!

III. The last point you might work out in full for yourselves in your private meditations with much profit. We have here A FIGURE FULL OF INSTRUCTION. I will give you but two or three thoughts which you can use. "I will make you *fishers of men*." You have been fishers of fish: if you follow me, I will make you fishers of men.

A fisher is a person who is *very dependent, and needs to be trustful*. He cannot see the fish. One who fishes in the sea must go and cast in the net, as it were, at a peradventure. Fishing is an act of faith. I have often seen in the Mediterranean men go with their boats and enclose acres of sea with vast nets; and yet, when they have drawn the net to shore, they have not had as much result as I could put in my hand. A few wretched silvery nothings have made up the whole take. Yet they have gone again and cast the great net several times a day, hopefully expecting something to come of it. Nobody is so dependent upon God as the minister of God. Oh, this fishing from the Tabernacle pulpit! What a work of faith! I cannot tell that a soul will be brought to God by it. I cannot judge whether my sermon will be suitable to the persons who are here, except that I do believe that God will guide me in the casting of the net. I expect him to work salvation, and I depend upon him for it. I love this complete dependence, and if I could be offered a certain amount of preaching power, by which I could save sinners, which should be entirely at my own disposal, I would beg the Lord not to let me have it, for it is far more delightful to be entirely dependent upon him at all times. It is good to be a fool when Christ is made unto you wisdom. It is a blessed thing to be weak if Christ becomes more fully your strength. Go to work, you who would be fishers of men, and yet feel your insufficiency. You that have no strength, attempt this divine work. Your Master's strength will be seen when your own has all gone. A fisherman is a dependent person, he must look up for success every time he puts the net down; but still he is a trustful person, and therefore he casts in the net joyfully.

A fisherman who gets his living by it is a *diligent and persevering man*. The fishers are up at dawn. At day-break our fishermen off the Doggerbank are fishing, and they continue fishing till late in the afternoon. As long as hands can work men will fish. May the Lord Jesus make us

hard-working, persevering, unwearied fishers of men! "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that."

The fisherman in his own craft is *intelligent and watchful*. It looks very easy, I dare say, to be a fisherman, but you would find that it was no child's play if you were to take a real part in it. There is an art in it, from the mending of the net right on to the pulling it to shore. How diligent the fisherman is to prevent the fish leaping out of the net! I heard a great noise one night in the sea, as if some huge drum were being beaten by a giant; and I looked out, and I saw that the fishermen of Mentone were beating the water to drive the fish into the net, or to keep them from leaping out when they had once encompassed them with it. Ah, yes! and you and I will often have to be watching the corners of the gospel net lest sinners who are almost caught should make their escape. They are very crafty, these fish, and they use this craftiness in endeavoring to avoid salvation. We shall have to be always at our business, and to exercise all our wits, and more than our own wits, if we are to be successful fishers of men.

The fisherman is *a very laborious person*. It is not at all an easy calling. He does not sit in an armchair and catch fish. He has to go out in rough weathers. If he that regardeth the clouds will not sow, I am sure that he that regardeth the clouds will never fish. If we never do any work for Christ except when we feel up to the mark, we shall not do much. If we feel that we will not pray because we cannot pray, we shall never pray, and if we say, "I will not preach to-day because I do not feel that I could preach," we shall never preach any preaching that is worth the preaching. We must be always at it, until we wear ourselves out, throwing our whole soul into the work in all weathers, for Christ's sake.

The fisherman is *a daring man*. He tempts the boisterous sea. A little brine in his face does not hurt him; he has been wet through a thousand times, it is nothing to him. He never expected when he became a deep-sea fisherman that he was going to sleep in the lap of ease. So the true minister of Christ who fishes for souls will never mind a little risk. He will be bound to do or say many a thing that is very unpopular; and some Christian people may even judge his utterances to be too severe. He must do and say that which is for the good of souls. It is not his to entertain a question as to what others will think of his doctrine, or of him; but in the name of the Almighty God he must feel, "If the sea roar and the fullness thereof, still at my Master's command I will let down the net."

Now, in the last place, the man whom Christ makes a fisher of men is *successful*. "But," says one, "I have always heard that Christ's ministers are to be faithful, but that they cannot be sure of being successful." Yes, I have heard that saying, and one way I know it is true, but another way I have my doubts about it. He that is faithful is, in God's way and in God's judgment, successful, more or less. For instance, here is a brother who says that he is faithful. Of course, I must believe him, yet I never heard of a sinner being saved under him. Indeed, I should think that the safest place for a person to be in if he did not want to be saved would be under this gentleman's ministry, because he does not preach anything that is likely to arouse, impress, or convince anybody. This brother is "faithful:" so he says. Well, if any person in the world said to you, "I am a fisherman, but I have never caught anything," you would wonder how he could be called a fisherman. A farmer who never grew any wheat, or any other crop—is he a farmer? When Jesus Christ says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," he means that you shall really catch men—that you really shall save some; for he that never did get any fish is not a fisherman. He that never saved a sinner after years of work is not a minister of Christ. If the result of his life-work is *nil*, he made a mistake when he undertook it. Go thou with the fire of God in thy hand and fling it among the stubble, and

the stubble will burn. Be thou sure of that. Go thou and scatter the good seed: it may not all fall in fruitful places, but some of it will. Be thou sure of that. Do but shine, and some eye or other will be lightened thereby. Thou must, thou shalt succeed. But remember this is the Lord's word—"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Keep close to Jesus, and do as Jesus did, in his spirit, and he will make you fishers of men.

Perhaps I speak to an attentive hearer who is not converted at all. Friend, I have the same thing to say to you. You also may follow Christ, and then he can use you, even you. I do not know but that he has brought you to this place that you may be saved, and that in after years he may make you speak for his name and glory. Remember how he called Saul of Tarsus, and made him the apostle of the Gentiles. Reclaimed poachers make the best gamekeepers; and saved sinners make the ablest preachers. Oh, that you would run away from your old master to-night, without giving him a minute's notice; for if you give him any notice, he will hold you. Hasten to Jesus, and say, "Here is a poor runaway slave! My Lord, I bear the fetters still upon my wrists. Wilt thou set me free, and make me thine own?" Remember, it is written, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Never runaway slave came to Christ in the middle of the night without his taking him in; and he never gave one up to his old master. If Jesus make you free you shall be free indeed. Flee away to Jesus, then, on a sudden. May his good Spirit help you, and he will by-and-by make you a winner of others to his praise! God bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matt. 4 verse 12, &c.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—45, 12, 262.

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"The Tender Mercy of Our God"

A Sermon

(No. 1907)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, June 27th, 1886, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace."—Luke 1:77-79.

OBSERVE HOW ZACHARIAS, in this his joyful song, extolled the remission of sins, as one of the most extraordinary proofs of the tender mercy of our God. He had been dumb for a season, as a chastisement for his unbelief; and therefore he used his recovered speech to sing of pardoning mercy. No salvation is possible without forgiveness, and so Zacharias says, "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." The Lord could not forgive them on the ground of justice, and therefore he did so because of his tender mercy—the tender mercy of our God, who has made himself "our God" by the covenant of grace. He passes by the transgression of his people because he delighteth in mercy. At the very outset, I want any soul here that is burdened with sin to believe in the forgiveness of sins, and to believe in it because God is love, and has a great tenderness towards the work of his hands. He is so pitiful that he loves not to condemn the guilty, but looks with anxious care upon them to see how he can turn away his wrath and restore them to favor. For this reason alone there is remission of sins. Forgiveness comes not to us through any merit of ours, present or foreseen; but only through the tender mercy of our God, and the marvellous visit of love which came of it. If he be gracious enough to forgive our sins, it can be done; for every arrangement is already made to accomplish it. The Lord is gracious enough for this—for anything. Behold him in Christ Jesus, and there we see him as full of compassion. We sang just now, and sang most truly—

"His heart is made of tenderness,

His bowels melt with love."

The main point of this morning's sermon will be to bring out into prominence those few words, "*the tender mercy of our God.*" To me they gleam with kindly light: I see in them a soft radiance, as of those matchless pearls whereof the gates of heaven are made. There is an exceeding melody to my ear as well as to my heart in that word "tender." "Mercy" is music, and "tender mercy" is the most exquisite form of it, especially to a broken heart. To one who is despondent and despairing, this word is life from the dead. A great sinner, much bruised by the lashes of conscience, will bend his ear this way, and cry, "Let me hear again the dulcet sound of these words, *tender mercy.*" If you think of this tenderness in connection with God, it will strike you with wonder, for an instant, that one so great should be so tender; for we are apt to impute to Omnipotence a crushing energy, which can scarcely take account of little, and feeble, and suffering things. Yet if we think again, the surprise will disappear, and we shall see, with a new wonder of admiration, that it must be so. He that is truly great among men is tender because he is great in heart as well as in brain and hand.

The truly great spirit is always gentle; and because God is so infinitely great, he is, therefore, tender. We read of his gentleness and of his tenderness towards the children of men; and we see them displayed to their full in the gospel of our salvation. Very conspicuous is this "tender mercy of our God."

Now, the original word is, "The mercy of the heart of our God." The evangelists, though they wrote in Greek, carried with them into that language the idioms of the Hebrew tongue; so that they do not use an adjective, as it would seem from our translation—"tender mercy;" but they say, mercy of the bowels, or of the inwards, or of the heart of God. "The mercy of the heart of God" is to be seen in the remission of sin, and in the visitation of his love when he comes to us as "the dayspring from on high." Great is the tenderness of divine mercy.

But I call your attention to the original reading because it seems to me not only to mean tenderness, but much more. The mercy of the heart of God is, of course, the mercy of his great tenderness, the mercy of his infinite gentleness and consideration; but other thoughts also come forth from the expression, like bees from a hive. It means the mercy of God's very soul. The heart is the seat and center of life, and mercy is to God as his own life. "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God." God is love: not only is he loving, but he is love itself. Mercy is of the divine essence: there is no God apart from his heart, and mercy lies in the heart of God. He has bound up his mercy with his existence: as surely as God lives, he will grant remission of sins to those who turn unto him.

Nor is this all—the mercy of God's heart means his hearty mercy, his cordial delight in mercy. Remission of sins is a business into which the Lord throws his heart. He forgives with an intensity of will, and readiness of soul. God made heaven and earth with his fingers, but he gave his Son with his heart in order that he might save sinners. The Eternal God has thrown his whole soul into the business of redeeming men. If you desire to see God most Godlike, it is in the pardon of sin, and the saving of men. If you desire to read the character of God written out in capital letters, you must study the visitation of his love in the person of his dear Son, and all the wonderful works of infinite grace which spring therefrom. It is a grand sight to behold God in earnest when he says, "Now will I arise." With awe we watch him as he lays bare his arm: but this full energy of power is best seen when his work is grace. When he stirs up his strength to come and save us, and brings the essence of his being into intense action to bless us, we are favored indeed. It is this watching to do us good, this eagerness to bless us, which is meant by the mercy of his heart. It is not only tenderness, but intensity, heartiness, eagerness, delight, and concentration of power. All this is to be seen in the dealing of God with guilty men when he visits them to grant them the remission of their sins.

Just as the leader of our psalmody sometimes sounds his tuning-fork at the commencement of our song, so have I done in these opening remarks. "Tender mercy" is the key-note of my discourse, I want you to keep it still in your ears. Whatever else of melody there may come from the text, yet this is to be the chief note: the tender, hearty, intense mercy of God, which he has shown to us.

I. In the first place, I invite you to observe that he shows this tender mercy in that HE DEIGNS TO VISIT US. "Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high *hath visited us.*"

Observe that God has not merely pitied us from a distance, and sent us relief by way of the ladder which Jacob saw, but he hath himself *visited us*. It needs no studied language to preach from this text, the expressions themselves are full of holy thought. A *visit* from God, what must it be!

"Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" A visit from the Queen would be remembered by most of you all your lives: you would feel yourselves half ennobled. But a visit from God, what shall I say of it?—that he should stoop to leave his high abode, and the majesty wherein he reigns, to visit insignificant beings like ourselves? This Bible is a letter from him, and we prize it beyond the finest gold; but an actual visit from God himself, what shall we say of such a favor?

In what ways has the Lord shown his tender mercy in deigning to visit us?

I answer, first, God's great visit to us is *the incarnation of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. Many visits of God to men had been paid before that—read your Bibles, and see; but the most wonderful visit of all was when he came to tarry here, some thirty years and more, to work out our salvation. What but "tender mercy," hearty mercy, intense mercy, could bring the great God to visit us so closely that he actually assumed our nature? Kings may visit their subjects, but they do not think of taking upon themselves their poverty, sickness, or sorrow: they could not if they would, and would not if they could; this were more than we could expect from them. But our divine Lord, when he came hither, came into our flesh. He veiled his Godhead in a robe of our inferior clay. O children! the Lord so visited you as to become a babe, and then a child, who dwelt with his parents, and was subject unto them, and grew in stature, as you must do. O working men! the Lord so visited you as to become the carpenter's son, and to know all about your toil, and your weariness, ay, even to hunger and faintness. O sons of men! Jesus Christ has visited you so as to be tempted in all points like as you are, though without sin. He really assumed our nature, and thus paid to us a very close visit. He took our sickness, and bare our infirmities. This was a kind of visit such as none could have thought of granting save the infinitely tender and merciful God. The man is our next kinsman, a brother born for adversity; in all our affliction he is afflicted; he is tenderness itself.

Remember that he not only took our nature, but he dwelt among us in this world of sin and sorrow. This great Prince entered our abode—what if I call it this hut and hovel?—wherein our poor humanity finds its home for a season. This little planet of ours was made to burn with a superior light among its sister stars while the Creator sojourned here in human form. He trod the acres of Samaria, and traversed the hills of Judea. "He went about doing good." He mingled among men with scarcely any reservation; being through his purity separate from sinners as to his character, yet he was the visitor of all men. He was found eating bread with a Pharisee, which perhaps is a more wonderful thing than when he received sinners, and ate with them. A fallen woman was not too far gone for him to sit on the kerb of the well, and talk to her; nor were any of the poor and ignorant too mean for him to care for them. He was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and his visit to us was therefore of the most intimate kind. He disdained no man's lowliness; he turned aside from no man's sin.

But remember that he visited us not merely to look upon us, and to talk with us, and to teach us, and set us a high and divine example, which, as I have said, were incomparably gracious, if it went no further; but he so visited us that he went down into our condemnation, that he might deliver us from it. He was made a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." He took our debts upon him that he might pay them, minting his own heart to create the coinage. He gave himself for us, which is more than if I said, "he gave his blood and his life;" his own self he gave. So did he visit us that he took away with him our ill, and left all good behind. He did not come into our nature, and yet keep himself reserved from all the consequences of our sin; nor come into our world, and yet maintain a status superior to the usual denizens of it; but he came to be a

man among men, and to bear all that train of woes which had fallen upon human nature through its departure from the ways of God. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, because the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all. Our Lord so visited us as to become our surety and our ransom. This was a wonderful piece of tender mercy indeed. I feel at this moment as if I could not talk about it, for it excels all conception and speech. Even if I were not full of pain, the subject would master me. If for the first time you had heard of the visit of the Incarnate God to this world, you would be struck with a wonder which would last throughout all eternity, that God himself should really condescend to such a deed as this. This is the heart of the gospel—the incomparable fact of the incarnation of the Son of God, his dwelling upon the earth, and his presentation of himself as a sacrifice unto God. You need no flourish of words; do but hear the bare statement of the fact, and leap for joy because of it. Since God has visited us, not in form of vengeance, nor as a cherub with a flaming sword, but in the gentle person of that lowliest of the lowly, who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me," we are herein made to see the tender mercy of our God. Nothing could be more tender than the divine appearance of the Man of Sorrows.

But I do not think we ought to insist upon this as the only visit of God's tender mercy, since the text is in the Revised Version rendered in the future: "The tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high shall visit us." To this day we are visited of God in other respects, but with equal mercy. *The proclamation of the gospel* in a nation, or to any individual, is a visit of God's mercy. Whenever you come and hear the gospel, be you sure of this, whether you receive it or not, the kingdom of God has come nigh unto you. Even if you stop your ears, and will have none of it, yet God has visited you in tender mercy, in that by the gospel he tells you that there is a way of salvation, that there is a plan for the remission of sin. It is a monstrosity—what if I say a miracle?—of iniquity, that men having sinned, and God having done so much to work out a way of remission of those sins, men should refuse to accept God's pardoning love. Oh, my hearers, Why are you so besotted? Wherefore do you hate your own souls? Surely, the devils themselves would at the first have scarce believed it, that there could exist a race of creatures so hardened as to refuse the love which visits them in grace. This is what devils never did. Men sin not only against God, but against their own interest, when they turn aside from the wooings of disinterested goodness, and refuse salvation through him who loved us even to the death. That which God has so tenderly and heartily wrought out in the gift of his dear Son to die for us ought to be received with eagerness. Will not *you* receive it? My dear hearers, you shall not go out of this place this morning without knowing that God in great tender mercy hath visited you by the blessed fact of your having heard the good tidings of free grace. Jesus seeks you, will you not seek him?

But, blessed be his name, he has visited some of us in a more remarkable manner still, for *by the Holy Spirit he has entered into our hearts*, and changed the current of our lives. He has turned our affections towards that which is right by enlightening our judgments. He has led us to the confession of sin, he has brought us to the acceptance of his mercy through the atoning blood; and so he has truly saved us. What a visit is this! This visit of the Holy Ghost, when he comes to dwell in us, is surpassingly condescending. I have often said that I never know which to admire most, the incarnation of the Son of God, or the indwelling of the Spirit of God. This last is a wonderful condescension, for the Holy Ghost does not take a pure body of his own, but he makes our bodies to be his temples; he dwells not only in one of these, but in tens of thousands; and that not only by the space of thirty years, but throughout the whole life of the believer. He dwelleth in us notwithstanding all our provocations and rebellions. Mark the word, not only with us, but *in us*,

and that evermore. Oh, this tender mercy! Who can describe it? Sweet Spirit, gentle Spirit, how canst thou abide with me? O heavenly Dove, how canst thou find rest in such a soul as mine? Yet without thee we are undone, and therefore we adore the tender mercy which makes thee bear with us so long, and work in us so graciously till thou hast conformed us to the image of the Firstborn. We are melted by the love of the Spirit—the communion of the Holy Spirit, by which the Lord hath visited us.

Often and often, since our first visitation by the Lord, I trust *we have had special visits from him*, bringing with them rapturous joys, singular deliverances, and countless blessings. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." The Lord has visited us in the night: he has drawn nigh unto our spirit, and so he has preserved us. We have enjoyed near and dear communion with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. Have we not? This hath often happened when we have been in great trouble. When we were depressed in spirit, when we were burdened with unusual cares, or weeping over heart-breaking bereavements, the mercy of our God has made the dayspring from on high to visit us at just such times; and therein we have seen his tenderness. Our life is bright with these visits as the sky with stars. I cannot enlarge upon this charming theme, but I leave it to your thoughts, O you whose experience will be the best sermon on the text! The visits of God to his own children are proofs of the heartiness, the intensity, the tenderness of his mercy. Talk of it, ye who have had most enjoyment of such visits!

II. I call your attention now to a second point. There is so much sea-room here that one scarce knows which way to steer. Secondly, he shows his tender mercy in that HE VISITS US AS THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH. This means the dawning in the east, the rising of the sun at break of day. He does not come to us in Christ, or by his Spirit, as a tempest, as when he came from Paran, with ten thousand of his holy ones, in all the pomp of his fiery law; but he has visited us as smiling morn, which in gentle glory floods the world with joy.

While this gospel visitation is thus apparently less in splendor than that of the law, yet it is not deficient in efficacy or in true glory. God has not visited us as a candle, which might suffice to cheer our darkness but could not change it into day. David rejoiced, saying, "The Lord will light my candle;" but in this we go far beyond him: we need no candle, for the Lord has visited us with the day-dawn.

He has come, moreover, not as a blaze which will soon die down, but as a light which will last our day, yea, last for ever. After the long dark and cold night of our misery, the Lord cometh in the fittest and most effectual manner; neither as lightning, nor candle, nor flaming meteor, but as the sun which begins the day.

The visitation of the Lord to us is as the dayspring, because *it suits our eye*. Observe how the eye is suited to the light, and the light to the eye, in the economy of nature; and it is even so in the realm of grace. Day, when it first breaks in the east, has not the blaze of burning noon about it; but it peeps forth as a grey light, which gradually increases to the perfect day. So did the Lord Jesus Christ come: dimly as it were, at first, at Bethlehem, but by-and-by he will appear in all the glory of the Father. So doth the Spirit of God come to us in gradual progress. There is sweet suitableness in the grace of God to the heart, and in the renewed heart to the grace of God. He hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. The revelation of God to each individual is made in form and manner tenderly agreeable to the condition and capacity of the favored one. I sometimes think the gospel was made exactly to meet my case. Do you not think the same of it yourselves? The morning light suits your eye as exactly as if there were no other creature to behold it; and so in

divine tenderness the Lord has made his visits suitable to our sorrow, and even to our weakness. He shows us just so much of himself as to delight us without utterly overwhelming us with the excess of brightness. He might have come in the majesty of his grace to us at the first, as he does to us afterwards; but then we were not able to bear it, and so he forbore. We are now more ready to sup with him upon strong meat, and so he puts us upon men's fare; whereas before he gave us milk, which is more convenient for babes. All the visits of God to us are merciful, but in those of the dawn of grace we see tenderness as well as mercy.

The visits of God are like the dayspring, because they *end our darkness*. The dayspring banishes the night. Without noise or effort, it removes the ebon blackness, and sows the earth with orient pearl. Night stretches her bat's wings, and is gone: she flies before the arrows of the advancing sun; and the coming of Jesus to us, when he does really come into our hearts, takes away the darkness of ignorance, sorrow, carelessness, fear, and despair. Our night is ended once for all when we behold God visiting us in Christ Jesus. Our day may cloud over, but night will not return. O, you that are in the blackest midnight, if you can but get a view of Christ, morning will have come to you! There is no light for you elsewhere, believe us in this; but if Jesus be seen by faith, you shall need no candles of human confidence, nor sparks of feelings and impressions: the beholding of Christ shall be the ending of all night for you. "They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed."

I like to think of Christ as coming into the world as the morning light, because he comes *with such a largeness of present blessing*—blessing immeasurable, unlimited. Some are always for measuring out Christ: they can never do without estimates of how much, and how far. Truly our Lord comes to save his elect, that I do verily believe; but hence certain friends would allot so many beams of light to so many eyes, and limit the light by the number of those who rejoice in it. Not so, beloved, Jesus is the light of the world; he comes from on high to shed light over the whole universe, even as the sun goeth forth from one end of heaven to the other, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. He appears as the light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world: there is no other light. Whosoever is willing to receive that light is free to do so: yea, he shines on blind eyes. This light comes even to those who hate it, and thus they are left without excuse: "the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not," and "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." When the Lord comes to men, his blessings are infinite. You might as well take your three feet rule, and begin to measure the length and breadth of the sunlight as measure the length and breadth of the tender mercy of our God in the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When the Lord visits us, it is as the dayspring, because *he brings us hope of greater glory yet to come*. The first coming of Christ has not at once manifested everything; the dayspring is not the noon; but it is the sure guarantee of it; and so is the First Advent the pledge of the glory to be revealed. The sun never rises in error to set upon a sudden: he rises to complete his course, as the strong man cometh out of his chamber to fulfill his race. When we receive a visit from the Lord, it may be in the way of rebuke, or of feeble hope; but let us be patient, for the dawn shall grow with constant increase of light, and there is no fear of its dying down into the old sinful darkness. "Sacred, high, eternal noon" is the destiny of all those whose eyes have beheld the Christ, so as to rejoice in his light.

Now all this seems to me to be a wonderful instance of the tenderness of divine mercy. Think you not so? This coming of the Lord, and of his light, so gradually, and yet so lavishly; so fittingly,

and yet so effectually; does it not fill you with gratitude? Every little bird rejoices in the rising of the sun: God has made that great orb to rise so graciously that not even a sparrow trembles at it, but chirps with confidence its happy praises. Not even a little flower trembles because the great sun is about to flood the heavens, but God hath so made the sun to rise that every tiny cup of every flower that blooms opens to drink in the golden light, and is refreshed thereby. The coming of Christ is just such to us, even to the least and feeblest of us. It is not a stupendous blessing, crushing us by its enormous weight; it is not a mysterious revelation, confounding us by its profundity; but it is simplicity itself, gentleness itself; none the less, but all the more grand and sublime because it is so simple and so tender. Let us bless God this morning, then, that he visits us, and that when he visits us, it is as the dayspring from on high.

III. Thirdly, there is another instance of great tenderness in this, in that **THE LORD VISITS US IN OUR VERY LOWEST ESTATE**. Permit me to read the text to you—"To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins," from which it appears that *God comes to visit us when we are in our sins*. If the plan of salvation were that we were to get out of our sins, and then God would come to us, it might be full of mercy, but it would not be tender mercy. Let it never be forgotten that "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." I feel always at home when I get upon this blessed topic of the visits of God to undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinners. His saving visits spring from grace, pure grace, altogether unmixed with any merit or claim on our part. God comes to us as the morning, which does not wait for man, nor tarry for the sons of men. I cannot bear the spirit which I see spreading among us in reference to almsgiving. It should not be indiscriminate, but it should be bounteous. Many cry, "We shall give help only to the deserving." If God were to adopt that rule, where would you and I be? It has even been muttered in an undertone that, with regard to hospitals, no doubt they are used by persons who ought to provide for themselves, and so help to support struggling medical men. It may be so; but I like not the hard and niggardly spirit which suggests such criticisms. Talk not so; this is fit chatter for barbarians. Those who know the tender mercy of God will recollect that, when we ourselves had no good about us whatsoever, his tender mercy visited us, even as the sun ariseth upon the just and upon the unjust. He giveth with gladness to those who have no deservings of any kind. He will not mar the magnificence of his goodness by asking our pitiful pence of merit as a payment for it; but he giveth freely, according to the riches of his grace. As he makes his rain to water the fields of the miser and of the churl, as well as those of the kind and the generous, so doth he give his bounty to the worst of men. Let us learn this, and imitate it, for thus we shall know the tender mercy of God. To copy the divine example will be the surest method of coming to an understanding of it.

Furthermore, *our God visits us when we are in darkness*; when we are in such darkness as to know nothing, see nothing, believe nothing, hope nothing; even then the Lord's mercy comes to us. Is not this tenderness? "Educate a man up to a certain point," says one, "and then we may hope that God's grace will visit him." Educate him by all means, but have hope that God may visit even those who have no education of any sort. "Follow the advance of civilization," cries one, "and do not risk your missionaries among barbarians." Not so; our marching orders are, "Preach the gospel to every creature." The gospel is to precede and produce civilization. To them that sit in darkness, the Lord is pleased to send the dayspring from on high. To send light where there is light is superfluous. Have we not a proverb about sending coals to Newcastle? God sendeth not grace to

us because we have already something which may be viewed as prevenient and preparatory; but the prevenient and the preparatory are of his grace, and he comes in love to bring these with him, to those who as yet know nothing of his light and life. They are in the dark, and he creates their day.

Did you notice that it is said "to those that *sit* in darkness?" This is more than being in the dark. The man who *sits* in darkness does so because he feels that his case is hopeless, and therefore he forbears all further action. A poor benighted traveler has wandered this way and that to find a track, but it is so dark that he cannot perceive his road; and so at last he embraces the rock for want of a shelter, crouching to the earth in despair. It is a part of the tender mercy of our God that he visits those who despond and are motionless in a dread inactivity. Those who have lost hope are lost indeed, and such the Savior has come to save.

Then it is added, "*and in the shadow of death.*" Did you ever feel that shadow? It has a horrible influence. Chill and cold, it freezes the marrow of the bones, and stops the genial current of life in the veins. Death stands over the man, and if his hand does not smite, yet his shadow darkens joy, and chills hope, benumbing the heart, and making life itself a mode of death. The shadow of death is confusion of mind, depression of spirit, dread of the unknown, horror at the past, and terror of the future. Are any of you at this time bowing down under the shadow of death? Has hell gaped wide, and opened her jaws for you? Have you in your despair made a league with death, and a covenant with hell? Thus saith the Lord, "Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand;" for the Lord has come forth, and visited you in the person of his dear Son to deliver the captive, and save those who are appointed unto death. Knowing your guilt, the Lord visits you this morning, and bids you look up. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Look and live; look, and be delivered at once, even from the horrible deathshadow which now broods over you. I do delight to think of this tender mercy of God to those who are lost. There are lost that shall be found, and last that shall be first. You seem forgotten of God, left out of the register of hope, but yet to you has Jesus come—"to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." Is not this *tender* mercy? If he had not come to shine on such I should never have been saved. A gospel for the cheerful would never have met my case; I wanted a gospel for the despairing. I know some here who must have perished if the gospel had only been suitable to those who are of good character, and have the beginnings of natural religion within them. Only a sinner's Savior would have suited some of you, or, indeed, any of us. As the good Samaritan did to the wounded man, "he came where he was," so did Jesus come to us in our ruin. The benefactor of the wounded did not stand and say to him, "Come here, and get on my beast, and he shall carry you to the inn." But he went to him when he was lying half dead, and therefore helpless; and he poured the oil and wine into his wounds while the poor wretch could not move an inch, nor stir hand or foot. He bound up his wounds, and then set him on his own beast, and took him to the inn. This is tender mercy; and in this fashion Jesus deals with us. He does everything for us from the very beginning. He is Alpha, even as he must be Omega. Does not this show the tender mercy of our God, that he does come to us in the darkness, and under the grim shadow of death, and there and then reveals his love to us?

IV. Both time and strength fail me, so now I must finish with a fourth reflection from the text—Our God shows his tender mercy in that HE VISITS US WITH SUCH WONDERFUL AND JOYFUL RESULTS—"to give light to them that sit in darkness, to guide our feet into the way of peace." One sketch must suffice. Help me as I make an outline. Imagine a caravan in the desert,

which has long lost its way, and is famishing. The sun has long gone down, and the darkness has caused every one's heart to droop. All around them is a waste of sand, and an Egyptian darkness. There they must remain and die unless they can find the track. They feel themselves to be in a fearful case, for, hungry and thirsty, their soul fainteth in them. They cannot even sleep for fear. Heavier and heavier the night comes down, and the damps are on the tents chilling the souls of the travelers. What is to be done? How they watch! Alas, no star comforts them! At last the watchmen cry, "The morning cometh." It breaks over the sea of sand, and, what is better, it reveals a heap which had been set up as a way-mark, and the travelers have found the track. The dayspring has saved them from swift destruction by discovering the way of peace.

Our point is this, that when the Lord Jesus Christ visits us, he actually brings light to our darkness; really leads into the way, and makes that way a way of peace to us. Put all together, and remember what the Lord has done for you. You did not know the way once, and all the preaching in the world would not have made you know it, if Jesus had not by his Spirit visited you as the dayspring. When you did know the way, you could not reach it of yourself: you saw it as from a distance, and could not enter upon it, but when Jesus came near, he actually guided your feet into that way. He put your feet upon a rock, and established your goings. That way, good as it was, would have been to you a way of doubt, and fear, and hesitation, if the Lord had not so sweetly shone upon you that your road became a way of perfect peace. Peace in our text means prosperity, plenty, rest, joy. I ask you, friends, whether you have not found it so. Since the Lord has visited you, have you not gone forth with joy, and been led forth with peace?

Well, now, the conclusion of all this is a practical matter. If the tender mercy of God has visited us, and done so much more for us than I can tell, or than you can hear, let us ourselves exhibit tender mercy in our dealings with our fellow-men. It is a wretched business for a man to call himself a Christian, and have a soul which never peeps out from between his own ribs. It is horrible to be living to be saved, living to get to heaven, living to enjoy religion, and yet never to live to bless others, and ease the misery of a moaning world. Do you not know that it is all nonsense to regard religion as a selfish spiritual trade by which we save our own souls? It is useless to hope for peace till you know how to love. Whence come wars and fightings but from a want of love? Unless your religion tears you away from yourself, and makes you live for something nobler than even your own spiritual good, you have not passed out of the darkness into the light of God. Only the way of unselfishness is the way of peace. I ask you, therefore, today to think very tenderly of all poor people. These are hard times; let those who have more than they actually want be ready always to relieve distress, which is very urgent just now.

The call this morning is for liberal help to our hospitals. These are called in France "houses of God;" truly they are Godlike in their design. There is not a man here but may be in a hospital to-morrow. Do you reply that you are a wealthy man? Yet you may be run over in the street, or fall in a fit, and the hospital's door is open to you. It is not merely for the beggar, but for the noble, that this is a refuge. Many a time men of immense wealth have had to be carried to the hospital from injury inflicted by fire or water, accident, or sudden sickness. I appeal to your selfishness, and to your honor: pay your proportion towards a common protection.

But I appeal to you on higher grounds. I forget just now how many thousands of cases of accident have gone into the hospital during the past year, but it is very surprising. They never ask who they are, or where they come from, but receive all the wounded. Every great accident involves a huge expense upon the hospital which is near the spot. This is not sufficiently thought of, or there would

be special contributions on each sad occasion. Few consider how these noble institutions are supported. "Oh, the rich people give to them!" Alas, the rich people often forget them! "Oh, but these general collections will do the work!" No such thing! It is such a pitiful contribution which usually makes up a collection that the hospitals are little aided thereby. These institutions are left to run into debt, or spend their capital, or keep their beds empty. I could not too strongly put the case of hospitals just now. I have half wished that the Government would undertake them, only I am not sure that they would be so well conducted in that case as when they are left to private management by hearts that feel for men. Something must be done. We must give a great deal more; the collections ought to be at least twice as much in all our churches and chapels as they have ever been. If you were present when a man was run over, and you heard his bone break, you would put your hand into your pocket, or do anything else in your power to help him. I wish I could make you feel in the presence of such a calamity for a minute, so as to touch your hearts and your hands. Diseases are always abroad, and driving thousands to seek hospital help. I would like to take you down a ward, and cause you to listen to the stories told from half-a-dozen beds. What sickness! What poverty caused by sickness! What pains poor bodies are capable of enduring! Oh, come, let us help them! Let us give to the support of those who nurse them, and for the help of those who exercise their best skill for their relief. Who can withhold? By the tender mercy of our God, I charge you to give freely to this excellent cause. As the box goes round, remember that this is not the time for threepenny-pieces. You who are wealthy must write cheques or give notes, and you may send them to our treasurer if you prefer it. All must be generous for the sake of that tender mercy which is the dayspring of our hope and life.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew 8:1-18.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—912, 328, 195.

Washed to Greater Foulness

A Sermon

(No. 1908)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me."—Job 9:30, 31.

I FEEL certain that I am sent on a special errand at this time. Before my mind's eye I see a soul whose awful reflections are hurrying him to despair. He refuses counsel, and will not listen to direction, for dread has made him desperate. I would have a word in the ear of that worried and wearied one. See ye not the man? He has battled long against a dark temptation, but at last he is beaten. He feels that he can hold out no longer. He can scarcely take breath; the air grows hot and stifling around him, as he faces the question—what next? Accustomed as I am to look down on these crowded aisles and up at these closely-packed galleries, I feel a strange curiosity as I gaze into the mass; for I know that there is one man among all of you to whom I have a private message. I carry despatches from the King of kings to one who is grievously troubled, and is become as a woman forsaken and despised. My Lord and Master described himself in parable as leaving the ninety-and-nine to seek for one lost sheep: I must now copy his example. You will not grudge me for this service, I am sure. I quit the throng that I may find the bewildered one, and bring him safe and sound to the fold.

Turning to my text, let me say, that as one is startled by a shriek, or saddened by a groan, so these sharp utterances of Job astonish us at first, and then awake our pity. How much are we troubled with brotherly compassion as we read the words,— "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me!" The sense of misery couched in this passage baffles description. Yet this is but one of a series, in which sentence after sentence reveals a fresh chamber of horrors. The similitudes of grief are here piled up in heaps, with what an old author has spoken of as the "rhetoric of sorrow." Physical sufferings had produced a strain on Job's mind, and he sought relief by expressing his anguish. Like some solitary prisoner in the gloomy keep of an old castle, he graves on the walls pictures of the abject despondencies which haunt him. His afflictions are aggravated by vain efforts to alleviate them: he wounds his hand with the rough hammer and nail with which he is engraving his griefs. Of such tortures many of us have had a taste.

From my experience, as a patient myself, smitten down with soul-sickness; and from my observation as a pastor, into whose ears the woes of awakened sinners are constantly poured, I have somewhat learned to understand the imagery of Job. The sufferer is in double straits. While he is tossed about by Satan, his friends are discharging their arrows at him, and the Almighty troubleth him. To help such a sufferer we must be careful to distinguish between the causes of his sorrow, and divide between his affliction itself and the further sorrows which he has brought upon himself by his unwise efforts to escape from it.

Such, then, is the line of thought we will pursue. I shall make four divisions; three of them are to be found in the text, and the fourth will follow on, as an important consequence. First, we shall notice that *a quickened soul becomes conscious of guilt*; secondly, *the soul that is quickened makes ineffectual attempts to rid itself of the stain of guilt*; thirdly, to deter his people from self-righteousness *it pleases God to plunge deeper into the mire those who attempt to cleanse themselves*; the fourth point is, that *only by severe training are men led to look alone to God for salvation*,—it needs omnipotence to teach us that salvation is of the Lord.

I. At the outset, then, we observe that QUICKENED SOULS ARE CONSCIOUS OF GUILT. They see it; they know it; they feel it; and they blush to find that they are without excuse for it. All men are sinners: to most men, however, sin appears to be a fashion or the times, a necessity of nature, a folly of youth, or an infirmity of age, which a slight apology will suffice to remove. You will scarcely meet with an Englishman who will not acknowledge that he is a sinner. Is it not the General Confession stereotyped in the book of Common Prayer? But it is one thing to call yourself a sinner, and quite another thing to feel it. I have heard of a lady who owned to her minister that she was a great sinner. He questioned her kindly as to which of the ten commands she had broken. Beginning with the first, he asked her, "Did you ever break this?" to which enquiry she indignantly answered, "No." In like manner he dealt with the second, and right through the whole ten. She professed in detail to have observed each one, and yet pretended to confess that she had broken them all. By such equivocations multitudes of men and women deceive themselves; and it is unhappily the custom of many a preacher to address his congregation as if they were all good people, and every one of them knew the Lord, from the least even to the greatest. This is pleasing to the flesh, and clattering to pride; but it is most pernicious. How many are being deceived by this want of marking a difference where a vital difference exists!

Not till men are quickened by divine grace do they truly know that they are sinners. How is this? Some diseases are so insidious that the sufferers fancy that they are getting better, while in very truth they are hastening to the grave. After such manner does sin deceive the sons of men: they think they are saved when they are still unrenewed. How often have I seen a poor girl, whose pale face, sunken eyes, shadowy hand, and languid step have clearly betokened that she was on the brink of death, yet she mistook the flush of consumption for the ruddiness of health. Slowly she waned; but within a day of her departure she planned cheerful projects which proved that she looked for life. Consumption is not, however, so deceitful as sin. Where it has full power over the soul, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" If sin were not so deceitful it would not be half so destructive as it is.

How is this, you ask again? Few give themselves the trouble to think about these matters at all. Ours is an age in which men's thoughts are keen upon politics and merchandize, practical science and economic inventions, financial schemes and Home Rule, and I know not what beside; but sound doctrine and sincere piety are out of vogue. Few people trouble themselves to think about their souls' everlasting welfare. Men die at the same rate as of yore, but the mortality is reckoned by a percentage; and as for the life hereafter it is ignored. Friend, have *you* ever dedicated ten minutes of your time to a consideration of your destiny? Days to your ledger; hours to your amusements; years to your commercial engagements; would it not be wise to reserve some moments for your soul's outlook beyond the grave? You have made your last will and testament for the world that is fading away, but you have laid up no treasure for the world to come. Is this consistent with your usual prudence? I should have good hope for some of you if I could make you sit for one hour

alone, and think of nothing but your souls, your God, and the final judgment. Alas! alas! as the horse rusheth to the battle, so men rush to the heated competition of the hour. They cannot be persuaded to consider. Poor mortals! They concern themselves about everything that does not concern them, but they persistently neglect everything that is needful to their eternal well-being.

How is this? we enquire once more. To natural ignorance we may attribute much of the ordinary indifference of men to their own sinfulness. They live in a benighted age. In vain you boast the enlightenment of this nineteenth century: the nineteenth century is not one whit more enlightened as to the depravity of human nature than the first century. Men are as ignorant of the plague of their own hearts to-day as they were when Paul addressed them. I know that almost every man you meet with talks as if he were qualified to set up for a doctor of divinity; but is not this the confidence of ignorance? "Vain man would be wise"—or read it, if you please, "vain man is void of understanding—though man be born like a wild ass's colt." Until God the Holy Ghost takes him in hand no spiritual light enters the man's soul. Preaching is an effective means of instructing the mind, arousing the conscience, and impressing the hearts of the people; and faithful preachers are scattered up and down the country within measurable reach of most of your homes. Why, then, is the doctrine of human sinfulness so little understood, and so seldom accepted as an undeniable fact? Many persons seem startled, and try to think that they misunderstand us when we say plainly that in the very best man in the world there is no virtue or grace that can be pleasing to God, unless he has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus. Let me put the truth before you as plainly as I can by speaking of your body in order to describe your soul. You probably imagine that your physical constitution is sound and healthy. I grant you all you ask on that score; yet you are but flesh and blood, like the rest of our mortal race, and therefore you are exposed to every disease which waylays your fellow creatures. Even so, your deceitful heart is capable of as desperate crimes as the vilest of sinners ever committed. The evil propensity lurks within, it needs only the contagion of society, or the temptation of Satan to bring it out. Does not this alarm you? It ought to do so.

Hardly a glimmer of the humbling truth of our natural depravity dawns on the dull apprehension of the worldly-wise, though souls taught from above know it and are appalled by it. In divers ways the discovery comes to those whom the Lord ordains to save. Sometimes a preacher sent of God lets in the dreadful light. Many men, like the false prophet Mokanna, hide their deformity. You may remember the story. Mokanna wore a silver veil upon his forehead: should he ever remove it the brightness of his countenance would blind the astonished world. In truth a foul disease had cankered his brow. God's faithful servants are sent to tear off these veils, and expose men to themselves. This duty demands courage. Men veil black villainy with self-flattery! Like Jezebel, they paint their eyebrows, and tire their heads, till they think themselves beautiful. It is ours, like Jehu, to cry, "Throw her down." What have they to do with peace who are the servants of sin? How dare they pretend to comeliness whose hearts are not right with God?

How comes it to pass, then, that the best of saints on earth are prone to account themselves the chief of sinners? Their sincerity is unquestionable. This discovery is due to the Holy Spirit. He it is who convinces men of sin. By his mysterious but most blessed agency on the hearts of men, a sense of utter ruin is wrought in the chosen, and this prepares them to accept the full redemption provided by the sacrifice of the Redeemer. We cannot explain to you the mystery of the Spirit's operation. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." But this we do know—the Holy Spirit withers all merely human hope and righteousness, and thus makes room

for trust in the work of our Lord Jesus. Man by nature is blindly proud, and proudly blind. The moment the Spirit of God comes into a man, the scales fall from his eyes, and he sees himself in quite a different light. To each saved soul it seems a strange miracle. I have heard the story from simple lips full many a time. The new self talks of the old self with a kind of vacant wonderment. Yesterday our friend was on good terms with himself as a virtuous citizen, an honest trader, a sound churchman; in moral worth all that his neighbors could wish. To-day he is vile in his own sight: his hands are filthy, his heart is foul, his thoughts are loathsome. He perceives that he has been walking in a vain show, and therefore he writes himself down a hypocrite. No name too base by which to surname himself.

Have I found you out, my friend? Wandering among the motley throng, I am in quest of a soul that seeks the mercy of the Lord. Am I not upon your track?

Mayhap I am at this moment addressing a person who has been the subject of a mysterious gloom for which he sees no reason whatever. I am right happy to have found him, for I trust I have met with a recruit for the army of truth. But why, you may enquire, do I make such a remark? I will tell you in a moment. There is a vital connection between soul-distress and sound doctrine. Sovereign grace is dear to those who have groaned deeply because they see what grievous sinners they are. Witness Joseph Hart and John Newton, whose hymns you have often sung, or David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards, whose biographies many of you have read. You seldom hear much of God's everlasting covenant in these modern times, for few men feel that thorough conviction of sin which comes directly from the teaching of the Holy Spirit. In the economy of redemption the effectual operation of the Spirit in enlightening the heart concerning its own sinfulness is sure evidence of the Father's personal love to his chosen people, and of the special atonement that the Son of God made for their transgressions.

"Ne'er had ye felt the guilt of sin,
Or sweets of pardoning love,
Unless your worthless names had been
Enrolled to life above."

You may walk through a dark cellar without discerning by the eye that anything noisome is there concealed. Let the shutters be thrown open! Bid the light of day stream in! You soon perceive frogs upon the cold clammy pavement, filthy cobwebs hanging on the walls in long festoons, foul vermin creeping about everywhere. Startled, alarmed, horrified, who would not wish to flee away, and find a healthier atmosphere? The rays of the sun are, however, but a faint image of that light divine shed by the Holy Spirit, which penetrates the thickest shades of human folly and infatuation, and exposes the treachery of the inmost heart. Then the soul cries out in agony, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" When brought to feel this, we think our doom is sealed, and everlasting destruction is close upon us. But it is not so. *This is the way of hope*. Through death to life every saved soul must pass. Ask us not to paint the sensations; nor blame us if we usually describe that experience which is most distinct. Sharp conviction, fainting heart, struggling hope, fear that haunts, terror that appalls,—an awful fight of fiercely strange emotions! This is the extreme measure of the life-change. In milder form, with one decisive pang the true heart is born again. The Slough of Despond lies across every pilgrim's pathway. The years or hours it takes to wade through it must be left an open question. Sudden death is an occasional fact, but more frequently the saints are peacefully welcomed to the realms above; so in the church on earth, sudden conversions happen, but as a rule men pass gradually into the kingdom of God.

Between the sensual and the spiritual there is a great gulf, and it must be passed. Of the wind or weather in which you make the passage it is not for me to speak: the voyage may be long or short; but in some sort the gulf must be traversed. Conviction of sin is of the first importance: it cannot be dispensed with.

You will say, "Why?" Well, we might suggest many reasons. It will make mercy the more precious, it will excite horror of sin in the future—burnt children dread the fire, it will teach you patience, for no future trial will be so severe as this; and it will tend to keep you persevering in holiness. But be the reasons what they may, be you sure of this, that no soul is saved without being made conscious of its own sinfulness.

II. We pass on to notice that it often happens that AWAKENED SOULS USE MANY INEFFECTUAL MEANS TO OBTAIN CLEANSING. Job describes himself as washing in snow water, and making his hands never so clean. His expressions remind me of my own labor in vain. By how many experiments I tried to purify my own soul! Like all my fellows, I was always foiled in every attempt. See a squirrel in a cage; the poor thing is working away, trying to mount, yet he never rises one inch higher. In like case is the sinner who seeks to save himself by his own good works, or by any other means: he toils without result. It is astonishing what pains men will take in this useless drudgery. They prevent the dawn of day in their anxiety to attend matins or observe mass; they are austere in their fastings; they say prayers without stint and do penance to the full. We should be sorry to impugn their sincerity. With what exemplary zeal many in the Anglican Church go about to establish their own righteousness! They practice ceremonies, with a claim to catholicity which no Catholic will allow. Untiring is their diligence in one department or another of amateur office, they hope for a reward for doing what God never commanded. Without a Scriptural proof of being right in anything, they would fain be righteous overmuch in everything. The labor of the foolish in spinning a righteousness of their own, that is neither accredited by the divine law nor by the holy gospel is almost incredible: they would rather give their bodies to be buried and their goods to feed the poor, than submit to salvation by grace, though it is the only possible salvation.

In seeking to obtain absolution of their sins, to establish a righteousness of their own, and to secure peace of mind, men tax their ingenuity to the utmost. Job talks of washing himself *with snow water*. The imagery is, no doubt, meant to be instructive. Why is snow water selected? The reason probably was, first, because *it was hard to get*. Far easier, generally, to procure water from the running brooks than from melted snow. Men set a high value on that which is difficult to procure. Whence comes it that the great majority of the so-called Christian world prefer worship conducted with gorgeous ritual and stately ceremonial? Is it not the rarity of the thing which creates a sense of value? Enter a Popish cathedral, and try, if you can, to understand the services. What are all these persons doing dressed in red and white, or those other persons in more sombre color? Manipulations, genuflexions, prostrations, waving of censers, and elevating of hosts—an array of symbolism which it took ages to conglomerate. What is the value of it all, unless it lies in its complications and expenses? Our Protestant friends have their milder predilections. Organs and orchestras serve them for snow water. In measured accents let me speak of music. For psalms and spiritual songs you all know I have an ardent passion. My spirit wings its way to the very portals of heaven in the words and tunes of our hymns. But for your instrumental melodies I have no mind, when you substitute mere sound for heartfelt prayer and praise. The obvious simplicity of the gospel is the only outward voucher I know of for its inward sincerity. Praise is none the better because of the difficulty of the music; say rather that the more simple and congregational it is the better by

far. Forms of worship which are expensive and difficult are greatly affected by many, as snow water was thought in Job's day to be a bath for kings; but, after all, it is an idle fashion, likely to mislead.

Besides, *snow water enjoyed a reputation for purity*. If you would have a natural filtered water gather the newly-fallen snow and melt it. The figure represents the religiousness which is of the most rigid kind—the cream of the cream. Specimens yet remain among us of piety more than possible to men, religiousness above the range of mortals; which piety is, however, not of God's grace, and consequently is a vain show. Though we should use the purest ceremonies, multiply the best of good works, and add thereto the costliest of gifts, yet we should be unable to make ourselves clean before God. You may wash yourself till you deny the existence of a spot, and yet you may be unclean. You may make rigid rules, and find much content in keeping them, and yet remain in nature's filthiness. With all your shrewdness you have but practiced a human device, and in refusing to trust in the Lord Jesus you have failed to observe a divine ordinance; and therefore you will fail.

Once again, this snow water is probably extolled because *it descends from the clouds of heaven*, instead of bubbling up from the clods of earth. Religiousness which can color itself with an appearance of the supernatural is very taking with many. Some folks are fond of apostolical succession; it professes to come from heaven. No doubt the notion originated in cloudland. Others are fascinated by Popery. His holiness the Pope is accounted to be a great cistern, full of grace, which is distilled in streams, and runs through capacious pipes called cardinals, and then through smaller tubes, styled bishops. At length by the still smaller pipes of the priests it comes to the people. No pretext was ever more paltry than this, and yet many are deceived by it. There is no peace in it for thoughtful minds. For such your snow water has no solace, because they see no connection between outward acts and the purifying of the heart.

Not all the outward forms on earth,
Nor rites that God has given,
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,
Can raise a soul to heaven."

If I "*make my hands never so clean*," is an expression peculiarly racy in the original. The Hebrew word has an allusion to soap or nitre. Such was the ordinary and obvious method any one would take to whiten his hands when they were grimy. Tradition tells that certain stains of blood cleave to the floor. The idea is that human blood, shed in murder, can never be scrubbed or scraped off the boards. Thus is it most certainly with the dye of sin. The blood of souls is in thy skirts, is the terrible language of Jeremiah (2:34). When ye think that baptism can begin, that confirmation can further, and that other sacraments can complete your purification, ye are mere dupes of your own folly. "Though I wash myself in snow water, and make myself never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." There it stands, it is the testimony of one man, but yet it is true; the Almighty attests it, and all human experience affirms it. These worthless experiments to cleanse yourselves would be ended once for all if you would have regard to the great truth of the gospel: "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." God alone can remove sin, and he does so by the blood of Jesus.

III. But AS SURE AS EVER QUICKENED BOWLS TRY TO GET PURITY IN THE WRONG WAY, GOD WILL THRUST THEM DOWN INTO THE DITCH. This is a terrible predicament. I find, on looking at the passage closely, that it means "head over ears in the ditch." It is not merely

some filthy puddle in which a man treads till he is splashed all over, it is a slough of despond into which he sinks. His eyes, his ears, and his mouth, are filled with pollution; and his very clothes are so foul that he utterly abhors himself. Old Master Caryl, a rare expositor of the Book of Job, says that the original can only be equalled in English by the expression—we would not touch such an one with a pair of tongs.

Often it happens with those who try to get better by their own good works, that their conscience is awakened by the effort, and they are more conscious of sin than ever. If a chosen man strives to save himself from his sins by his own righteousness the Lord permits him to see his own heart and he ceases from all glorying. The word here rendered "ditch" is elsewhere translated "corruption." So in the sixteenth Psalm: "Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Language cannot paint abasement, reproach, or ignominy in stronger terms. "THOU shalt plunge me in the ditch." Is it not as though God himself would undertake the business of causing his people to know that by their vain ablutions they were making themselves yet more vile in his eyes? We read, in the second chapter of Jeremiah, of God's remonstrance with Judah: "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God. How canst thou say, I am not polluted?"

May we not regard this as the discipline of our Heavenly Father's love, albeit when passing through the trial we do not perceive it to be so? Thus, in the apocalyptic epistle to the church at Laodicea, expostulation more severe or more tender it would be hard to imagine—"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Mark the gentle words, "I counsel thee," addressed to a people whose lukewarmness excited nausea! Then follows a sentence of encouragement so sweet and enchanting that it almost sounds like an apology for the fierceness of the former censure. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." A revelation of wretched sinfulness ends in a declaration of love and a visit of grace; for the Lord goes on to say, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." Anyhow, the Lord will end the conceit which is the source of the lukewarmness: he cannot permit his chosen to remain in self-righteous pride; for *that* his soul hateth.

Perhaps, my friend, the experience I am trying to describe will come to you through the preaching of the Word. This sermon may dishearten and distract you. Your hope was thriving like a plant. This sermon shrivels every leaf; and though, at the scent of water, the branch of self-righteousness will bud again, the next sermon you hear may wither even the stem of your confidence. If another sermon soon afterwards cuts it down to the very root, the ministry will be profitable to you; for the root of pride must be cut up. Believe me, this is mild treatment: I trust you may not be left to severer methods.

Frequently our great Lord leaves a poor wayward soul to eat the fruits of its own ways, and this is the severest form of plunging in the ditch. While striving after righteousness in a wrong way, the man stumbles into the very sin against which he struggled. The young man, of whom I am now thinking, resolved, by the help of God, that he would be different henceforth from what he ever had been. His vows kept pace with his devotions. He started them at early morn—

"And felt, good, easy man, full surely
His goodness was a-ripening."

To the shop he went, as was his wont; but his thoughts were no longer set on earthly things: he stood, as he supposed, on heavenly ground. Because he had taken snow-water and had washed his hands, he began to think that he was singularly clean. Towards evening a temptation suddenly crossed his path. At first he resisted, but it proved a feeble fight. The argument of another young man, that it was policy to yield, availed to break the covenant he had made with his own conscience. So he was led astray to a place of amusement, where the light of God's countenance never shines. The wretchedness of his reflections on the morrow could not easily be told. He felt that his feet were fast in the miry clay, and his garments foully soiled. His empty conceit might not have been dislodged from its secret lurking-place in his depraved nature without some such perilous downfall.

Mayhap, there sits out yonder a good sister who has grown familiar with spiritual straits. Did you ever happen to hear of Mary Huntington, wife of William Huntington, S.S., the famous Calvinistic preacher? When he prayed for her, which he did with much affection, he confessed before God—"O Lord, I beseech thee, hear me on her behalf. Thou knowest how warmly attached she has ever been to MOSES, and what narrow and vain searches she has made in order to find out his grave, which thou, in infinite wisdom and mercy, hast thought fit to conceal." That prayer, which was published about a century ago, is worth preserving in your memory. For that "Mary," like many worthy housewives of these days, was rather fond of collecting the rags and relics of self. If it had been possible, she would have worn at least an apron of the linsey-woolsey of self-righteousness. The Lord will not have his handmaids thus arranged: they must be quit of self altogether.

Our lives through various scenes are drawn and vexed with petty provocations. Paltry annoyances are the bane of our peace. Some of you, dear sisters, spend your years and your thoughts in a narrow circle, and I deeply sympathize with you therein. Without a wish to be great, or to enlarge your coast, you intensely desire to be good. To do your duty to the best of your ability, is your aim, and therein you are worthy of all honor. The lot of many of you is to pass much of your time in loneliness; your temptations are therefore peculiar. For many a quiet hour you have been busy with domestic employments, distracted by no acute anxiety, but cheered by much quiet meditation. At such seasons you are apt to get on good terms with yourselves. Presently the shades of evening begin to fall. Evening! of which Cowper sweetly sings:

"Come, evening, once again, season of peace,
Return, sweet evening, and continue long!"

You are prepared to welcome home the husband, brother, son, who will look for his repast, and seek his well-earned repose. Possibly, my sisters, this is your season of temptation. His rough word, his needless complaint, his vacant look, when you pine for sympathy puts you about. A sense of injustice stings you. It may be very natural, but all the same it is very fatal to your sense of superior goodness. What more treacherous than one's temper? In a sudden gust of passion, you utter words of anger. How gladly would you recall them! but they are registered. Down into the ditch of despondency you sink. For days to come you feel that you cannot forgive yourself. Your rich mantle of righteousness after this tumble in the ditch looks mean enough to provoke your own ridicule.

Thus do we, in our different spheres, fly from this to that, and from that to the other. Some hope to cleanse away sin by a supreme effort of self-denial, or of miraculous faith. Men dream of being clean without the blood of Jesus, they even boast of it, and yet their sin remaineth. The eye of the judgment may be deceived till we half think we are clean; but no sooner does the scale grow thin, or the light grow strong, than the conscience perceives its error and learns the lesson that no human

endeavor can wash out the accursed spot. Let us not play at purification, nor vainly hope to satisfy conscience with that which renders no satisfaction to God.

Persons of sensitive disposition, and sedentary habits, are prone to seek a righteousness of inward feeling. Let me describe these good folks to you. They aim at a righteousness that renounces every fault, and they cultivate such graces as are naturally lovely, watching from moment to moment their own feelings of joy or grief. Yet these be they who get to know, with the keenest anguish, the plague of their own hearts. How it happens is sufficiently clear. They try to live by their feelings and frames of mind; and what can be more deceitful than these sensations? Treacherous as the sea on which you sail so smoothly on sunny days, but which, at other times, wrecks your barque without mercy, your frames and feelings are not in the least to be depended on. One day you are all aglow, the flush of fervor is on your face, the next day you feel so dead and cold that prayer would freeze upon your lips. Your evidences are dark. You think you have none, and, seized with despondency, you lament that "there is no hope." Ah, me! the sin-sick soul, given to watch its own symptoms, is brought into perilous straits; trying one nostrum after another, sometimes feeling a little better, and anon feeling itself much worse. Oh, that it could turn from feeling to faith; and look steadily out of inward sensation to the work finished once for all by the Lord Jesus!

Poor Job was smitten with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. No doubt he sent for the doctor—though we are not actually told that he did so. It is likely enough that snow water was prescribed to him for a relief. His hands may not have seemed very slightly when he used it; there may, at least, have been some connection between his physician's prescription and his poetry, when he said, "If I wash myself with snow water, and make *my hands* never so clean." Perfection in any one part of conduct would not secure cleanness for the rest. Washed hands would be a small matter if the boils remained over the rest of the body. This is another aspect of the same unsatisfactory expedient that I am wanting to point out to you. You are under bad treatment until you walk by faith in Jesus. Anything short of grace will prove a mere mockery of your malady. Asa, King of Judah, was diseased in his feet. He sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. Asa never recovered; but the Lord restored Job to perfect health. The gratuitous advice which the patriarch received in the time of his sore sickness was not worth his gratitude. Of his three friends, he said: "Ye are all physicians of no value." Then comes back the metaphor which I have repeated so often: "Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." After all is said and done by the wisest of men the poor sinner is worse off than when they undertook his case. All is vanity till God comes in.

Let us not forget that the man who thus described his own case "was perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil." Such a case is a puzzle to those who are not enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Although Job was renowned for righteousness in his generation, a gleam from God's countenance exposed the faultiness of his soul. Does this prove him to have been a hypocrite? By no means. His friends supposed him to be so, though they had no ground whatever for the suspicion: it was their rough way of solving a hard problem. If the patriarch's integrity had not been so firm, if his refinement had not been so tender, if his piety towards God had not been so invariably accompanied by his pity for his brother men; if, in a word, his character had not been so complete, his trial and his deliverance could not have exhibited the extraordinary lesson which has interested and instructed every succeeding generation. He appears before us at first in the vigor of health, in the height of prosperity, and in the charm of good repute. But oh, the vanity of man! At a touch of God's finger, his flesh develops a festering mass of corruption; at a glance of God's eye, which

searched him through and through, the total depravity of human nature at its best estate becomes apparent. "He abhors himself in dust and ashes." What next? Utter ruin? Nay, friend, *it is full redemption*.

IV. By such severe training THE AWAKENED ONE IS LED TO LOOK ALONE TO GOD FOR SALVATION, and to find the salvation he looks for. This is my last point, and I have no time left to enlarge upon it. What I want is that the truth may flash across your mind in a moment. There sits the man who is menaced with despair because every effort to extricate himself from the tangled web of his own strange experience has left him worse than before. Did I attempt to comfort him he would repel my kindest expressions. And why? He knows that it is God who condemns him. In a British court of justice, when the judge sums up against the prisoner, small cheer can he get from the honeyed words of his counsel. But hark—"It is God that justifieth." Whom does he justify? The ungodly. He first condemns them in their own consciences; and then he justifies them according to his grace. If I receive the sentence of death in myself it is the earnest of deliverance in my Redeemer. My brother, has light beamed on your soul? I hope I have found you, and that the Lord has visited you with his salvation.

I want you to notice a simple fact which seems to me to have escaped your observation. When the Almighty justified Job he commended him, and pronounced a high encomium on his conduct. Whatever mistakes he made about himself or his circumstances, in one matter he was clear as a bell; *He has spoken right of me*, saith the Lord. (Job 42:7.) Eliphaz and his friends transgressed in this respect. Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek it in yourselves, you are all on the wrong track. You begin below with *the whole duty of man*, and try to work upward: you are sure to fail. You should begin up yonder, with *the righteousness of God*; and then you could work downward to righteousness of daily life. God give you knowledge of salvation by grace, to the glory of his own name, and to your own sanctification, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job 9.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—556, 476, 602.

The Heart of The Gospel

A Sermon

(No. 1910)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, July 18th, 1886, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."—2 Corinthians v 20,21.

THE heart of the gospel is redemption, and the essence of redemption is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. They who preach this truth preach the gospel in whatever else they may be mistaken; but they who preach not the atonement, whatever else they declare, have missed the soul and substance of the divine message. In these days I feel bound to go over again the elementary truths of the Gospel. In peaceful times we may feel free to make excursions into interesting districts of truth which lie far afield; but now we must stay at home, and guard the hearths and homes of the church by defending the first principles of the faith. In this age there have risen up in the church itself men who speak perverse things. There be many that trouble us with their philosophies and novel interpretations, whereby they deny the doctrines they profess to teach, and undermine the faith they are pledged to maintain. It is well that some of us, who know what we believe, and have no secret meanings for our words, should just put our foot down and maintain our standing, holding forth the word of life, and plainly declaring the foundation truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a parable. In the days of Nero there was great shortness of food in the city of Rome, although there was abundance of corn to be purchased at Alexandria. A certain man who owned a vessel went down to the sea coast, and there he noticed many hungry people straining their eyes toward the sea, watching for the vessels that were to come from Egypt with corn. When these vessels came to the shore, one by one, the poor people wrung their hands in bitter disappointment, for on board the galleys there was nothing but sand which the tyrant emperor had compelled them to bring for use in the arena. It was infamous cruelty, when men were dying of hunger to command trading vessels to go to and fro, and bring nothing else but sand for gladiatorial shows, when wheat was so greatly needed. Then the merchant whose vessel was moored by the quay said to his shipmaster, "Take thou good heed that thou bring nothing back with thee from Alexandria but corn; and whereas, aforetime thou hast brought in the vessel a measure or two of sand, bring thou not so much as would lie upon a penny this time. Bring thou nothing else, I say, but wheat: for these people are dying, and now we must keep our vessels for this one business of bringing food for them." Alas! I have seen certain mighty galleys of late loaded with nothing but mere sand of philosophy and speculation, and I have said within myself, "Nay, but I will bear nothing in my ship but the revealed truth of God, the bread of life so greatly needed by the people." God grant us this day that our ship may have nothing on board it that may merely gratify the curiosity, or please the taste; but that there may be necessary truths for the salvation of souls. I would have each one of you say: "Well, it was just the old, old story of Jesus and his love, and nothing else." I have no desire to be famous for anything but preaching of the gospel. There are

plenty who can fiddle to you the new music; it is for me to have no music at any time but that which is heard in heaven,—“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory for ever and ever!”

I intend, dear friends, to begin my discourse with the second part of my text, in which the doctrine of Substitution is set forth in these words—“He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” This is the basis and power of those appeals which it is our duty to make to the consciences of men.

I have found, my brethen, by long experience, that nothing touches the heart like the cross of Christ; and when the heart is touched and wounded by the two-edged sword of the law, nothing heals its wounds like the balm which flows from the pierced heart of Jesus. The cross is life to the spiritually dead. There is an old legend which can have no literal truth in it, but if it be regarded as a parable it is then most instructive. They say that when the Empress Helena was searching for the true cross they digged deep at Jerusalem and found the three crosses of Calvary buried in the soil. Which out of the three crosses was the veritable cross upon which Jesus died they could not tell, except by certain tests. So they brought a corpse and laid it on one of the crosses, but there was neither life nor motion. When the same dead body touched another of the crosses it lived; and then they said, “This is the true cross.” When we see men quickened, converted, and sanctified by the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice, we may justly conclude that it is the true doctrine of atonement. I have not known men made to live unto God and holiness except by the doctrine of the death of Christ on man's behalf. Hearts of stone that never beat with life before have been turned to flesh through the Holy Spirit causing them to know this truth. A sacred tenderness the obstinate when they have heard of Jesus crucified for them. Those who have lain at hell's dark door, wrapped about with a sevenfold death-shade, even upon them hath a great light shined. The story of the great Lover of the souls of men who gave himself for their salvation is still in the hand of the Holy Ghost the greatest of all forces in the realm of mind.

So this morning I am going to handle, first, *the great doctrine*, and then afterwards, and secondly, as God shall help me, we shall come to *the great argument* which is contained in the 20th verse: “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

1. First, then, with as much brevity as possible I will speak upon THE GREAT DOCTRINE. *The great doctrine*, the greatest of all, is this, that God, seeing men to be lost by reason of their sin, hath taken that sin of theirs and laid it upon his only begotten Son, making him to be sin for us, even him who knew no sin; and that in consequence of this transference of sin he that believeth in Christ Jesus is made just and righteous, ya, is made to be the righteousness of God in Christ. Christ was made sin that sinners might be made righteousness. That is the doctrine of the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ on the behalf of guilty men.

Now consider, first, *who was made sin for us?* The description of our great Surety here given is upon one point only, and it may more than suffice us for our present meditation. Our substitute was spotless, innocent, and pure. “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” Christ Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate, and was made flesh, and dwelt here among men; but though he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, he knew no sin. Though upon him sin was laid, yet not so as to make him guilty. He was not, he could not be, a sinner: he had no personal knowledge of sin. Throughout the whole of his life he never committed an offence against the great law of truth and right. The law was in his heart; it was his nature to be holy. He could say to all the world,

"Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Even his vacillating judge enquired, "Why, what evil hath he done?" When all Jerusalem was challenged and bribed to bear witness against him, no witnesses could be found. It was necessary to misquote and wrest his words before a charge could be trumped up against him by his bitterest enemies. His life brought him in contact with both the tables of the law, but no single command had he transgressed. As the Jews examined the Paschal lamb before they slew it, so did scribes and Pharisees, and doctors of the law, and rulers and princes, examine the Lord Jesus, without finding no offence in him. He was the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot.

As there was no sin of commission, so was there about our Lord no fault of omission. Probably, dear brethen, we that are believers have been enabled by divine grace to escape most sins of commission; but I for one have to mourn daily over sins of omission. If we have spiritual graces, yet they do not reach the point required of us. If we do that which is right in itself, yet we usually mar our work upon the wheel, either in the motive, or in the manner of doing it, or by the self-satisfaction with which we view it when it is done. We come short of the glory of God in some respect or other. We forget to do what we ought to do, or, doing it, we are guilty of lukewarmness, self-reliance, unbelief, or some other grievous error. It was not so with our divine Redeemer. You cannot say that there was any feature deficient in his perfect beauty. He was complete in heart, in purpose, in thought, in word, in deed, in spirit. You could not add anything to the life of Christ without its being manifestly an excrescence. He was emphatically an all-round man, as we say in these days. His life is a perfect circle, a complete epitome of virtue. No pearl has dropped from the silver string of his character. No one virtue has overshadowed and dwarfed the rest: all perfections combine in perfect harmony to make in him one surpassing perfection.

Neither did our Lord know a sin of thought. His mind never produced an evil wish or desire. There never was in the heart of our blessed Lord a wish for an evil pleasure, nor a desire to escape any suffering or shame which was involved in his service. When he said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," he never desired to escape the bitter potion at the expense of his perfect lifework. The "if it be possible," meant, "if it be consistent with full obedience to the Father, and the accomplishment of the divine purpose." We see the weakness of his nature shrinking, and the holiness of his nature resolving and conquering, as he adds, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." He took upon him the likeness of sinful flesh, but though that flesh often caused him weariness of body, it never produced in him the weakness of sin. He took our infirmities, but he never exhibited an infirmity which had the least of blameworthiness attached to it. Never fell there an evil glance from those blessed eyes; never did his lips let drop a hasty word; never did those feet go on an ill errand, nor those hands move towards a sinful deed; because his heart was filled with holiness and love. Within as well as without our Lord was unblemished. His desires were as perfect as his actions. Searched by the eyes of Omniscience, no shadow of fault could be found in him.

Yea, more, there were no tendencies about our Substitute towards evil in any form. In us there are always those tendencies; for the taint of original sin is upon us. We have to govern ourselves and hold ourselves under stern restraint, or we should rush headlong to destruction. Our carnal nature lusteth to evil, and needs to be held in as with bit and bridle. Happy is that man who can master himself. But with regard to our Lord, it was his nature to be pure, and right, and loving. All his sweet wills were towards goodness. His unconstrained life was holiness itself: he was "the holy child Jesus." The prince of this world found in him no fuel for the flame which he desired to kindle. Not only did no sin flow from him, but there was no sin in him, nor inclination, nor tendency in

that direction. Watch him in secret, and you find him in prayer; look unto his soul, and you find him eager to do and suffer the Father's will. Oh, the blessed character of Christ! If I had the tongues of men and of angels I could not worthily set forth his absolute perfection. Justly may the Father be well pleased with him! Well may heaven adore him!

Beloved, it was absolutely necessary that any one who should be able to suffer in our stead should himself be spotless. A sinner obnoxious to punishment by reason of his own offences, what can he do but bear the wrath which is due to his own sin? Our Lord Jesus Christ as man was made under the law: but he owed nothing to that law, for he perfectly fulfilled it in all respects. He was capable of standing in the room, place, and stead of others, because he was under no obligations of his own. He was only under obligations towards God because he had voluntarily undertaken to be the surety and sacrifice for those whom the Father gave him. He was clear himself, or else he could not have entered into bonds for guilty men.

Oh, how I admire him, that being such as he was, spotless and thrice holy, so that even the heavens were not pure in his sight, and he charged his angels with folly, yet he condescended to be made sin for us! How could he endure to be numbered with the transgressors and bear the sin of many? It may be no misery for a sinful man to live with sinful men; but it would be a heavy sorrow for the pure-minded to dwell with a company of abandoned and licentious wretches. What an overwhelming sorrow it must have been to the pure and perfect Christ to tabernacle among the hypocritical, the selfish, and the profane! How much worse that he himself should have to take upon himself the sins of those guilty men. His sensitive and delicate nature must have shrunk from even the shadow of sin, and yet read the words and be astonished: "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Our perfect Lord and Master bare our sins in his own body on the tree. He, before whom the sun itself is dim and the pure azure of heaven is defilement, was made sin. I need not put this in fine words: the fact is itself too grand to need any magnifying by human language. To gild refined gold, or paint the lily, were absurd; but much more absurd would it be to try to overlay with flowers of speech the matchless beauties of the cross. It suffices in simple rhyme to say—

"Oh, hear that piercing cry!
 What can its meaning be?
 'My God! my God! oh! why hast thou
 In wrath forsaken me?'
 "Oh 'twas because our sins
 On him by God were laid;
 He who himself had never sinn'd,
 For sinners, sin was made."

This leads me on to the second point of the text, which is, *what was done with him who knew no sin?* He was "made sin." It is a wonderful expression: the more you weigh it the more you will marvel at its singular strength. Only the Holy Ghost might originate such language. It was wise for the divine Teacher to use very strong expressions, for else the thought might not have entered human minds. Even now, despite the emphasis, clearness, and distinctness of the language used here and elsewhere in Scripture there are found men daring enough to deny that substitution is taught in Scripture. With such subtle wits it is useless to argue. It is clear that language has no meaning for them. To read the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and to accept it as relating to the Messiah, and then to deny his substitutionary sacrifice is simply wickedness. It would be vain to reason with

such beings; they are so blind that if they were transported to the sun they could not see. In the church and out of the church there is a deadly animosity to this truth. Modern thought labours to get away from what is obviously the meaning of the Holy Spirit, that sin was lifted from the guilty and laid upon the innocent. It is written, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." This is as plain language as can be used; but if any plainer was required, here it is,—"He hath made him to be sin for us."

The Lord God laid upon Jesus, who voluntarily undertook it, all the weight of human sin. Instead of its resting on the sinner, who did commit it, it was made to rest upon Christ, who did not commit to it; while the righteousness which Jesus wrought out was placed to the account of the guilty, are treated as righteous. Those who by nature are guilty, are regarded as righteous, while he who by nature knew no sin whatever, was treated as guilty. I think I must have read in scores of books that such a transference is impossible; but the statement has had no effect upon my mind. I do not care whether it is impossible or not with learned unbelievers: it is evidently possible with God, for he has done it. But they say it is contrary to reason. I do not care for that, either: it may be contrary to the reason of those unbelievers, but it is not contrary to mine; and if I am to be guided by reason, I prefer to follow my own. The atonement is a miracle, and miracles are rather to be accepted by faith than measured by calculation. A fact is the best of arguments. It is a fact that the Lord hath laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all. God's revelation proves the fact, and our faith defies human questioning! God saith it, and I believe it; and believing it, I find life and comfort in it. Shall I not preach it? Assuredly I will.

"E'er since by faith I saw the stream
His flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die."

Christ was not guilty, and could not be made guilty; but he was treated as if he were guilty, because he willed to stand in the place of the guilty. Yea, he was not only treated as a sinner, but he was treated as if he had been sin itself in the abstract. This is an amazing utterance. The sinless one was made to sin.

Sin pressed our great Substitute very sorely. He felt the weight of it in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he "sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground." The full pressure of it came upon him when he was nailed to the accursed tree. There in the hours of darkness he bore infinitely more than we can tell. We know that he bore condemnation from the mouth of a man, so that is written, "He was numbered with the transgressors." We know that he bore shame for our sakes. Did not your hearts tremble last Sunday evening when our text was, "Then did they spit in his face?" It was a cruel scorn that exhausted itself upon his blessed person. This, I say, we know. We know that he bore pains innumerable of body and mind: he thirsted, he cried out in the agony of desertion, he bled, he died. We know that he poured out his soul unto death, and yielded up the ghost. But there was at the back, and beyond all this, an immeasurable abyss of sufferings": probably to us they are *unknowable* sufferings. He was God as well as man, and the Godhead lent an omnipotent power to the manhood, so that there was compressed within his soul, and endured by it, an amount of anguish of which we can form no conception. I will say no more: it is wise to veil what it is impossible to depict. This text both veils and discovers his sorrow, as it says, "He made him to be sin." Look into the words. Perceive their meaning if you can. The angels desire to look into it. Gaze into this terrible crystal. Let your eyes search deep into this opal, within whose jewelled

depth there are flames of fire. The Lord made the perfectly innocent one to be sin for us: that means more humiliation, darkness, agony, and death than you can conceive. It brought a kind of distraction and well-nigh a destruction to the tender and gentle spirit of our Lord. I do not say that our substitute endured a hell, that were unwarrantable. I will not say that he endured either the exact punishment for sin, or an equivalent for it; but I do say that what he endured rendered to the justice of God a vindication of his law more clear and more effectual than would have been rendered to it by the damnation of the sinners for whom he died. The cross is under many aspects a more full revelation of the wrath of God against human sin than even Tophet, and the smoke of torment which goeth up for ever and ever. Who would know God's hate of sin must see the Only Begotten bleeding in body and bleeding in soul even unto death: he must, in fact, spell out each word of my text, and read its innermost meaning. There, my brethen, I am ashamed of the poverty of my explanation, and I will therefore only repeat the full and sublime language of the apostle—"He hath made him to be sin for us." It is more than "He hath put him to grief"; it is more than "God hath forsaken him"; it is more than "The chastisement of our peace was upon him"; it is the most suggestive of all descriptions—"He hath made him sin for us." Oh depth of terror, and yet height of love!

So I pass on to notice in the third place, *who did it?* The text saith, "*He* hath made him to be sin for us"; that is, God himself it was who appointed his dear Son to be made sin for guilty men. The wise ones tell us that this substitution cannot be just. Who made them judges of what is right and just. I ask them whether they believe that Jesus suffered and died at all? if they believe that he did, how do they account for the fact? Do they say that he died as an example? Then I ask, is it just for God to allow a sinless being to die as an example? The fact of our Lord's death is sure, and it has to be accounted for.

In the appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ to be made sin for us, there was first of all a display of the Divine Sovereignty. God here did what none but he could have done. It would not have been possible for all of us together to have laid sin upon Christ; but it was possible for the great Judge of all, who giveth no account of his matters, to determine that so it should be. He is the fountain of rectitude, and the exercise of his divine prerogative is always unquestionable righteousness. That the Lord Jesus, who offered himself as a willing surety and substitute, should be accepted as surety and substitute for guilty man was in the power of the great Supreme. In his Divine Sovereignty he accepted him, and before that sovereignty we bow. If any question it, our only answer is, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

The death of our Lord also displayed divine justice. It pleased God as the judge of all, that sin should not be forgiven without the exaction of the punishment which had been so righteously threatened to it, or such other display of justice as might vindicate the law. They say that this is not God of love. I answer, it is God of love, pre-eminently so. If you had upon the bench to-day a judge whose nature was kindness itself, it would behove him as a judge to execute justice, and if he did not, he would make his kindness ridiculous; indeed, his kindness to the criminal would be unkindness to society at large. Whatever the judge may be personally, he is officially compelled to do justice. And "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" You speak of the Fatherhood of God. Enlarge as you please upon that theme, even till you make a heresy of it; but still God is the great moral Governor of the universe, and it behoves him to deal with sin in such a way that it is seen to be an evil and a bitter thing. God cannot wink at wickedness. I bless his holy name, and adore him that he is not unjust in order to be merciful, that he does not spare the guilty in order to indulge his gentleness. Every transgression and disobedience has its just recompense of reward. But through

the sacrifice of Christ he is able justly to pardon. I bless his holy name that to vindicate his justice he determined that, while a free pardon should be provided for believers, it should be grounded upon an atonement which satisfied all requirements of the law.

Admire also in the substitutionary sacrifice the great grace of God. Never forget that he whom God made to be sin for us was his own Son; ay, I go further, it was in some sense his own self; for the Son is one with the Father. You may not confound the persons, but you cannot divide the Son of God from the Father as to forget that God was in him reconciling the world unto himself. It is the Father's other self who on the cross in human form doth bleed and die. "Light of light, very God of very God": it is this Light that was eclipsed, that Godhead which purchased the church with his own blood. Herein is infinite love! You tell me that God might have pardoned without atonement. I answer, that finite and fallible love might have done so, and thus have wounded itself by killing justice; but the love which both required and provided the atonement is indeed infinite. God himself provided the atonement by freely and fully giving up himself in the person of his Son to suffer in consequence of human sin.

What I want you to notice here is this, if ever your mind should be troubled about the propriety or rightness of a substitutionary sacrifice, you may at once settle the matter by remembering that God himself "hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin." If God did it, it is well done. I am not careful to defend an act of God: let the man who dares accuse his Maker think what he is at. If God himself provided the sacrifice, be you sure that he has accepted it. There can be no question ever raised about it, since Jehovah made to meet on him our iniquities. He that made Christ to be sin for us, knew what he did, and it is not for us to begin to say, "Is this right, or is this not right?" The thrice holy God hath done this, and it must be right. That which satisfies God may well satisfy us. If God is pleased with the sacrifice of Christ, shall not we be much more pleased? Shall we not be delighted, entranced, emparadised, to be saved by such a sacrifice as God himself appoints, provides, and accepts? "He hath made him to be sin for us."

The last point is, *what happens to us in consequence?* "That we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Oh this weighty text! No man living can exhaust it. No theologian lived, even in the palmiest day of theology, who could ever get to the bottom of this statement.

Every man that believes in Jesus is through Christ having taken his sin made to be righteousness before God. We are righteous through faith in Christ Jesus, "justified by faith." More than this, we are made not only to have the character of "righteous," but to become the substance called "righteousness." I cannot explain this, but it is no small matter. It means no inconsiderable thing when we are said to be "made righteousness." What is more, we are not only made righteousness, but we are made "the righteousness of God." Herein is a great mystery. The righteousness which Adam had in the garden was perfect, but it was the righteousness of man: ours is the righteousness of God. Human righteousness failed; but the believer has a divine righteousness which can never fail. He not only has it, but he is it: he is "made the righteousness of God in Christ." We can now sing,

"With my Saviour's vesture on,
Holy as the Holy One."

How acceptable with God must those be who are made by God himself to be "the righteousness of God in him"! I cannot conceive of anything more complete.

As Christ was made sin, and yet never sinned, so are we made righteousness, though we cannot claim to have been righteous in and of ourselves. Sinners though we be, and forced to confess it

with grief, yet the Lord doth cover us so completely with the righteousness of Christ, that only his righteousness is seen, and we are made the righteousness of God in him. This is true of all the saints, even of as many as believe on his name. Oh, the splendor of this doctrine! Canst thou see it, my friend? Sinner though thou be, and in thyself defiled, deformed, and debased, yet if thou wilt accept the great Substitute which God provide for in the person of his dear Son, thy sins are gone from thee, and righteousness has come to thee. Thy sins were laid on Jesus, the scapegoat: they are thine no longer, he has put them away. I may say that his righteousness is imputed unto thee; but I go further, and say with the text, "Thou art made the righteousness of God in him." No doctrine can be more sweet than this to those who feel the weight of sin and the burden of its curse.

II. So now, gathering all up, I have to close with the second part of the text, which is not teaching, but the application of teaching,—A GREAT ARGUMENT. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Oh, that these lips had language, or that this heart could speak without them! Then would I plead with every unconverted, unbelieving soul within this place, and plead as for my life. Friend, you are at enmity with God, and God is angry with you; but on his part there is every readiness for reconciliation. He has made a way by which you can become his friend—a very costly way to himself, but free to you. He could not give up his justice, and so destroy the honour of his own character; but he did give up his Son, his Only Begotten, and his Well-Beloved; and that Son of his had been made sin for us, though he knew no sin. See how God meets you! See how willing, how anxious he is that there should be reconciliation between you and God to-day it is not from want of kindness on his part; it is from want of willingness on yours. The burden of your ruin must lie at your own door: your blood must be on your own skirts.

Now observe what we have to say to you to-day is this: we are anxious that you should be at peace with God, and therefore we act as ambassadors for Christ. I am not going to lay any stress upon the office of ambassador as honourable or authoritative, for I do not feel that this would have weight with you: but I lay all the stress upon the peace to which we would fain have you reconciled also. I once knew him not, neither did I care for him. I lived well enough without him, and sported with trifles of a day, so as to forget him. He brought me to seek his face, and seeking his face I found him. He has blotted out my sins and removed my enmity. I know that I am his servant, and that he is my friend, my Father, my All. And now I cannot help trying in my poor way to be an ambassador for him with you. I do not like that any of you should live at enmity with my Father who made you; and that you should be wantonly provoking him by preferring evil to good. Why should you not be at peace with one who so much wants to be at peace with you? Why should you not love the God of love, and delight in him who is so kind to you? What he hath done for me he is quite willing to do for you: he is a God ready to pardon. I have preached his gospel now for many years, but I never met with a sinner yet that Christ refused to cleanse when he came to him. I never knew a single case of a man who trusted Jesus, and asked to be forgiven, confessing his sin and forsaking it, who was cast out. I say I never met with one man whom he has restored to purity, and drunkards whom he has delivered from their evil habit, and with men guilty of foul sins who have become pure and chaste through the Lord Jesus. They have always told me the same story—"I sought the Lord, and he heard me; he hath washed me in his blood, and I am whiter than snow." Why should you not be saved as well as these?

Dear friend, perhaps you have never thought of this matter, and this morning you did not come here with any idea of thinking of it; but why should you not begin? You came just to hear a well-known preacher; I pray you forget the preacher, and think only of yourself, your God and your Saviour. It must be wrong for you to live without a thought of your Maker. To forget him is to despise him. It must be wrong for you to refuse the great atonement: you so refuse it if you do not accept it at once. It must be wrong for you to stand out against your God; and you do stand out against him if you will not be reconciled to him. Therefore I humbly play the part of an ambassador for Christ, and I beseech you believe in him and live.

Notice how the text puts it: "We are ambassadors for Christ, *as though God did beseech you by us.*" This thought staggers me. As I came along this morning I felt as if I could bury my head in my hands and weep as I thought of God beseeching anybody. He speaks, and it is done; myriads of angels count themselves happy to fly at his command; and yet man has so become God's enemy that he will not be reconciled to him. God would make him his friend, and spends the blood of his dear Son to cement that friendship; but man will not have it. See the great God turns to beseeching his obstinate creature! his foolish creature! In this I feel a reverent compassion for God. Must he beseech a rebel to be forgiven? Do you hear it? Angels, do you hear it? He who is the King of kings veils his sovereignty, and stoops to beseeching his creature to be reconciled to him! I wonder not that some of my brethen start back from such an idea, and cannot believe that it could be so: it seems so derogatory to the glorious God. Yet my text saith it, and it must be true—"As though God did beseech you by us." This makes it awful work to preach, does it not? I ought to beseech you as though God spoke to you through me, looking at you through these eyes, and stretching out his hands through these hands. He saith, "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." He speaks softly, and tenderly, and with paternal affection through these poor lips of mine, "as though God did beseech you by us.

Furthermore notice that next line, which if possible has even more force in it: "*We pray you in Christ's stead.*" Since Jesus died in our stead we, his redeemed ones, are to pray others in his stead; and as he poured out his heart for sinners in their stead, we must in another way pour out our hearts for sinners in his stead. "We pray you in Christ's stead." Now if my Lord were here this morning how would he pray you to come to him? I wish, my Master, I were more fit to stand in thy place at this time. Forgive me that I am so incapable. Help me to break my heart, to think that it does not break as it ought to do, for these men and women who are determined to destroy themselves, and, therefore, pass thee by, my Lord, as though thou were but a common felon, hanging on a gibbet! O men, How can you think so little of the death of the Son of God? It is the wonder of time, the admiration of eternity. O souls, why will you refuse eternal life? Why will ye die? Why will ye despise him by whom alone you can live? There is one gate of life, that gate is the open side of Christ; why will ye not enter, and live? "Come unto me," saith he; "Come unto me." I think I hear him say it: "Come unto me all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." I think I see him on that last day, the great day of the feast, standing and crying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." I hear him sweetly declare, "Him that cometh to me I will no wise cast out." I am not fit to pray you in Christ's stead, but I do pray you with all my heart. You that hear my voice from Sunday to Sunday, do come and accept the great sacrifice, and be reconciled to God. You that hear me but this once, I would like you to go away with this ringing in your ears, "Be ye reconciled to God." I have nothing pretty to say to you; I have only to declare

that God has prepared a propitiation, and that now he entreats sinners to come to Jesus, that through him they may be reconciled to God.

We do not exhort you to some impossible effort. We do not bid you do some great thing; we do not ask you for money or price; neither do we demand of you years of miserable feeling; but only this—*be ye reconciled*. It is not so much reconcile yourselves as "be reconciled." Yield yourselves to him who round you now the bands of a man would cast, drawing you with cords of love because he was given for you. His spirit strives with you, yield to his striving. With Jacob you know there wrestled a man till the breaking of the day; let that man, that God-man, overcome you. Submit yourselves. Yield to grasp of those hands which were nailed to the cross for you. Will you not yield to your best friend? He that doth embrace you now presses you to a heart that was pierced with the spear on your behalf. Oh, yield thee! Yield thee, man! Dost thou not feel some softness stealing over thee? Steel not thine heart against it. He saith, with a Tone most still and sweet. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Believe and live! Quit the arch-enemy who has held thee in his grip. Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, stay not in all the plain, but flee where thou seest the open door of the great Father's house. At the gate the bleeding Saviour is waiting to receive thee, and to say, "I was made sin for thee, and thou art made the righteousness of God in me." Father, draw them! Father, draw them! Eternal Spirit, draw them, for Jesus Christ thy Son's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Corinthians 4 and 5.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—917, 404, 284.

The Abiding of the Spirit the Glory of the Church

A Sermon

(No. 1918)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, September 5th, 1886, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not."—Haggai 2:4-5.

SATAN is always doing his utmost to stay the work of God. He hindered these Jews from building the temple; and to-day he endeavours to hinder the people of God from spreading the gospel. A spiritual temple is to be builded for the Most High, and if by any means the evil one can delay its uprising he will stick at nothing: if he can take us off from working with faith and courage for the glory of God he will be sure to do it. He is very cunning, and knows how to change his argument and yet keep to his design: little cares he how he works, so long as he can hurt the cause of God. In the case of the Jewish people on their return from captivity he sought to prevent the building of the temple by making them selfish and worldly, so that every many was eager to build his own house, and cared nothing for the house of the Lord. Each family pleaded its own urgent needs. In returning to a long-deserted and neglected land, much had to be done to make up for lost time; and to provide suitably for itself every family needed all its exertions. They carried this thrift and self-providing to a great extreme, and secured for themselves luxuries, while the foundations of the temple which had been laid years before remained as they were, or became still more thickly covered up with rubbish. The people could not be made to bestir themselves to build a house of God, for they answered to every exhortation, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." A more convenient season was always looming in the future, but it never came. Just now it was too hot, further it was too cold; at one time the wet season was just setting in, and it was of no use to begin, and soon the fair weather required that they should be in their own fields. Like some in our day, they saw to themselves first, and God's turn was very long in coming; hence the prophet cried, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?"

By the mouth of His servant Haggai stern rebukes were uttered, and the whole people were aroused. We read in verse twelve of the first chapter, "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord." All hands were put to the work; course after course of stone began to rise; and then another stumbling-block was thrown in the way of the workers. The older folks remarked that this was a very small affair compared with the temple of Solomon, of which their fathers had told them; in fact, their rising building was nothing at all, and not worthy to be called a temple. The prophet describes the feeling in the verse which precedes our text. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" Feeling that their work would be very poor and insignificant,

the people had little heart to go on. Being discouraged by the humiliating contrast, they began to be slack; and as they were quite willing to accept any excuse, and here was an excuse ready made for them, they would soon have been at a standstill had not the prophet met the wiles of the arch-enemy with another word from the Lord. Nothing so confounds the evil one as the voice of the Eternal. Our Lord Himself defeated Satan by the word of the Lord; and the prophet Haggai did the same. The subtle craft of the enemy is defeated by the wisdom of the Most High, which reveals itself in plain words of honest statement. The Lord cuts the knots which bind His people, and sets them at liberty to do His will. He did this by assuring them that He was with them. Twice the voice was heard—*"I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts."* They were also assured that what they builded was accepted, and that the Lord meant to fill the new house with glory; yea, He meant to light it up with a glory greater than that which honoured the temple of Solomon. They were not spending their strength for nought, but were labouring with divine help and favour. Thus they were encouraged to put their shoulders to the work: the walls rose in due order, and God was glorified in the building up of His Zion.

The present times are, in many respects, similar to those of Haggai. History certainly repeats itself within the church of God as well as outside of it; and therefore the messages of God need to be repeated also. The words of some almost-forgotten prophet may be re-delivered by the watchman of the Lord in these present days, and be a timely word for the present emergency. We are not free from the worldliness which puts self first and God nowhere, else our various enterprises would be more abundantly supplied with the silver and the gold which are the Lord's, but which even professing Christians reserve for themselves. When this selfish greed is conquered, then comes in a timorous depression. Among those who have escaped from worldliness there is apt to be too much despondency, and men labour feebly as for a cause which is doomed to failure. This last evil must be cured. I pray that our text may this morning flame from the Lord's own mouth with all the fire which once blazed about it. May faint hearts be encouraged and drowsy spirits be aroused, as we hear the Lord say, *"My spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not."*

I shall enter fully upon the subject, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, by calling your attention to *discouragement forbidden*. Then I shall speak of *encouragement imparted*; and, having done so, I shall linger with this blessed text, which overflows with comfort, and shall speak, in the third place, of *encouragement further applied*. Oh that our Lord, who knows how to speak a word in season to him that is weary, may cheer the hearts of seekers by what shall be spoken under this last head of discourse!

I. To begin with, here is DISCOURAGEMENT FORBIDDEN. Discouragement comes readily enough to us poor mortals who are occupied in the work of God, seeing it is a work of faith, a work of difficulty, a work above our capacity, and a work much opposed.

Discouragement is very natural: it is a native of the soil of manhood. To believe is supernatural, faith is the work of the Spirit of God; to doubt is natural to fallen men; for we have within us an evil heart of unbelief. It is abominably wicked, I grant you; but still it is natural, because of the downward tendency of our depraved hearts. Discouragement towards good things is a weed that grows without sowing. To be faint-hearted and downcast happens to some of us when we are half drowned in this heavy atmosphere, and it also visits us on the wings of the east wind. It takes little to make some hands hang down: a word or a look will do it. I do not, therefore, excuse it; but the rather condemn myself for having a nature prone to such evil.

Discouragement may come and does come to us, as it did to these people, from a consideration of the great things which God deserves at our hands, and the small things which we are able to render. When in Haggai's days the people thought of Jehovah, and of the temple for Him, and then looked upon the narrow space which had been enclosed, and the common stones which had been laid for foundations, they were ashamed. Where were those hewn stones and costly stones which, of old, Solomon brought from far? They said within themselves, "This house is unworthy of Jehovah: what do we by labouring thus?" Have you not felt the depressing weight of what is so surely true? Brethren, all that we do is little for our God; far too little for Him that loved us and gave Himself for us. For Him that poured out His soul unto death on our behalf the most splendid service, the most heroic self-denial, are all too little; and we feel it so. Alabaster boxes of precious ointment are too mean a gift. It does not occur to our fervent spirit to imagine that there can be any waste when our best boxes are broken and the perfume is poured out lavishly for Him. What we do fear is that our alabaster boxes are too few, and that our ointment is not precious enough. When we have done our utmost in declaring the glory of Jesus, we have felt that words are too poor and mean to set forth our adorable Lord. When we have prayed for His kingdom we have been disgusted with our own prayers; and all the efforts we have put forth in connection with any part of His service have seemed too few, too feeble for us to hope for acceptance. Thus have we been discouraged. The enemy has worked upon us by this means, yet he has made us argue very wrongly. Because we could not do much, we have half resolved to do nothing! Because what we did was so poor, we were inclined to quit the work altogether! This is evidently absurd and wicked. The enemy can use humility for his purpose as well as pride. Whether he makes us think too much or too little of our work, it is all the same to him as long as he can get us off from it.

It is significant that the man with one talent went and hid his Lord's money in the earth. He knew that it was but one, and for that reason he was the less afraid to bury it. Perhaps he argued that the interest on one talent could never come to much, and would never be noticed side by side with the result of five or ten talents; and he might as well bring nothing at all to his Lord as bring so little. Perhaps he might not have wrapped it up if it had not been so small that a napkin could cover it. The smallness of our gifts may be a temptation to us. We are consciously so weak and so insignificant, compared with the great God and His great cause, that we are discouraged, and think it vain to attempt anything.

Moreover, the enemy contrasts our work with that of others, and with that of those who have gone before us. We are doing so little as compared with other people, therefore let us give up. We cannot build like Solomon, therefore let us not build at all. Yet, brethren, there is a falsehood in all this; for, in truth, nothing is worthy of God. The great works of others, and even the amazing productions of Solomon, all fell short of His glory. What house could man build for God? What are cedar, and marble, and gold as compared with the glory of the Most High? Though the house was "exceeding magnificent," yet the Lord God had of old dwelt within curtains, and never was His worship more glorious than within the tent of badger's skins; indeed, as soon as the great house was built, true religion declined. What of all human work can be worthy of the Lord? Our little labours do but share the insignificance of greater things, and therefore we ought not to withhold them: yet here is the temptation from which we must pray to be delivered.

The tendency to depreciate the present because of the glories of the past is also injurious. The old people looked back to the days of the former temple, even as we are apt to look upon the times of the great preachers of the past. What work was done in those past days? What Sabbaths were

enjoyed then! What converts were added to the church! What days of refreshing were then vouchsafed! Everything has declined, decreased, degenerated! As for the former days, they beheld a race of giants, who are now succeeded by pigmies. We look at one of these great men, and cry,

"Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves."

But, brethren, we must not allow this sense of littleness to hamper us; for God can bless our littleness, and use it for His glory. I notice that the great men of the past thought of themselves even as we think of ourselves. Certainly they were not more self-confident than we are. I find in the story of the brave days of old the same confessions and the same lamentations which we utter now. It is true that in a spiritual strength we are not what our fathers were; I fear the Puritanic holiness and truthfulness of doctrine are dying out, while adherence to principle is far from common; but our fathers had also faults and follies to mourn over, and they did mourn over them most sincerely. Instead of being discouraged because what we do is unworthy of God, and insignificant compared with what was done by others, let us gather up our strength to reform our errors, and reach to higher attainments. Let us throw our heart and soul into the work of the Lord, and yet do something more nearly in accordance with our highest ideal of what our God deserves of us. Let us excel our ancestors. Let us aspire to be even more godly, more conscientious, and more sound in the faith than they were, for the Spirit of God remaineth with us.

Brethren, it is clear that discouragement can be produced by these reasons, and yet they are a mere sample of a host of arguments which work in the same direction: hence *discouragement is very common*. Haggai was sent to speak to Zerubbabel, the governor, and to Joshua, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people. The great man may become discouraged: he that leads the van has his fainting fits; even Elijah cries, "Let me die!" The consecrated servant of God whose life is a priesthood is apt to grow discouraged, too: standing at God's altar, he sometimes trembles for the ark of the Lord. The multitude of the people are all too apt to suffer from panic, and to flee at the sight of the enemy. How many are they who say, "The old truth cannot exceed: the cause of orthodoxy is desperate; we had better yield to the modern spirit"! This faith-heartedness is so common that it has been the plague of Israel from her first day until now. They were discouraged at the Red Sea, at the mere rattling of Pharaoh's chariots; they were discouraged when they found no water; they were discouraged when they had eaten up the bread which they brought out of Egypt; they were discouraged when they heard of the giants, and of the cities walled to heaven. I need not lengthen the wretched catalogue. What has not cowardice done? The fearful and unbelieving have brought terrible disasters upon our camps. Discouragement is the national epidemic of our Israel. "Being armed and carrying bows" we turn back in the day of battle. This is as common among Christians as consumption among the inhabitants of this foggy island. Oh that God would save us all from distrust, and cause us to quit ourselves like men!

Wherever discouragement comes in it is dreadfully weakening. I am sure it is weakening, because the prophet was bidden to say three times to the governor, high priest, and people, "Be strong." This proves that they had become weak. Being discouraged, their hands hung down, and their knees were feeble. Faith girds us with omnipotence, but unbelief makes everything hang loose and limp about us. Distrust, and thou wilt fail in everything; believe, and according to thy faith so shall it be unto thee. To lead a discouraged people to the Holy War is as difficult as for Xerxes'

commanders to conduct the Persian troops to battle against the Greeks. The vassals of the great king were driven to the conflict by whips and sticks, for they were afraid to fight: do you wonder that they were defeated? A church that needs constant exhorting and compelling accomplishes nothing. The Greeks had no need of blows and threats, for each man was a lion, and courted the encounter, however great the odds against him. Each Spartan fought *con amore*; he was never more at home than when contending for the altars and the hearths of his country. We want Christian men of this same sort, who have faith in their principles, faith in the doctrines of grace, faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and who therefore contend earnestly for the faith in these days when piety is mocked at from the pulpit, and the gospel is sneered at by professional preachers. We need men who love the truth, to whom it is dear as their lives; men into whose hearts the old doctrine is burned by the hand of God's Spirit through a deep experience of its necessity and of its power. We need no more of those who will parrot what they are taught, but we want men who will speak what they know. Oh, for a troop of men like John Knox, heroes of the martyr and covenanter stock! Then would Jehovah of hosts have a people to serve Him who would be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Discouragement not only weakens men, but *it takes them off from the service of God*. It is significant that the prophet said to them, "Be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, *and work*." They had ceased to build: they had begun to talk and argue, but they had laid down the trowel. They were extremely wise in their observations, and criticisms, and prophecies; but the walls did not rise. One person knew exactly how big the former temple was; another declared that their present architect was not up to the mark, and that the structure was not built in a scientific manner: one objected to this, and another to that; but everyone was wiser than all the rest, and sneered at old-fashioned ways. It is always so when we are discouraged: we cease from the work of the Lord, and waste time in talk and nonsensical refinements. May the Lord take away discouragement from any of you who now suffer from it! I suppose some of you do feel it, for at times it creeps over my heart and makes me go with heaviness to my work. I believe that God's truth will come to the front yet, but it hath many adversaries to-day. All sorts of unbeliefs are being hatched out from under the wings of "modern thought." The gospel seems to be regarded as a nose of wax, to be altered and shaped by every man who wishes to show his superior skill. Nor is it in doctrine alone, but in practice also, that the times are out of joint. Separateness from the world, and holy living, are to give place to gaiety and theatre-going. To follow Christ fully has gone out of fashion with many of those from whom we once hoped better things. Yet are there some who waver not, some who are willing to be in the right with two or three. For my own part, even should I find none around me of the same mind, I shall not budge an inch from the old truth, nor sweat a hair of fear of its overthrow; but I shall abide confident that the eternal God, whose truth we know and hold, will vindicate Himself ere long, and turn the wisdom of the world into babble, and its boasting into confusion. Blessed is the man who shall be able to stand fast by his God in these evil days. Let us not in any wise be discouraged. "Be strong; be strong; be strong," sounds as a threefold voice from the Triune God. "Fear not" comes as a sweet cordial to the faint: therefore let no man's heart fail him. Thus much about the discouragement.

II. Secondly, here is THE ENCOURAGEMENT IMPARTED, which is the grand part of our text. "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not." God remembers His covenant and stands to His ancient promises. When the people came out of Egypt, the Lord was with them by His Spirit; hence He spoke to them

by Moses, and through Moses He guided, and judged, and taught them. He was with them also by His Spirit in inspiring Bezaleel and Aholiab, as to the works of art which adorned the tabernacle. God always finds the workmen for His work, and by His Spirit fits them for it. The Spirit of God rested upon the elders who were ordained to relieve Moses of his great burden. The Lord was also with His people in the fiery cloudy pillar which was conspicuous in the midst of the camp. His presence was their glory and their defence. This is a type of the presence of the Spirit with the church. At the present day, if we hold the truth of God, if we live in obedience to His holy commands, if we are spiritually-minded, if we cry unto God in believing prayer, if we have faith in His covenant and in His Son, the Holy Spirit abideth among us. The Holy Ghost descended upon the church at Pentecost, and He has never gone back again: there is no record of the Spirit's return to heaven. He will abide with the true church evermore. This is our hope for the present struggle. The Spirit of God remaineth with us.

To what end, my brethren, is this Spirit with us? Let us think of this, that we may be encouraged at this time. The Spirit of God remaineth among you *to aid and assist the ministry which He has already given*. Oh, that the prayers of God's people would always go up for God's ministers, that they may speak with a divine power and influence which none shall be able to gainsay! We look too much for clever men; we seek out fluent and flowery speakers; we sigh for men cultured and trained in all the knowledge of the heathen: nay, but if we sought more for unction, for divine authority, and for the power which doth hedge about the man of God, how much wiser should we be! Oh, that all of us who profess to preach the gospel would learn to speak in entire dependence upon the direction of the Holy Spirit, not daring to utter our own words, but even trembling lest we should do so, and committing ourselves to that secret influence without which nothing will be powerful upon the conscience or converting to the heart. Know ye not the difference between the power that cometh of human oratory, and that which cometh by the divine energy which speaks so to the heart that men cannot resist it? We have forgotten this too much. It were better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Ghost than to preach seventy years of sermons without the Spirit. He who rested on those who have gone to their reward in heaven can rest this day upon our ministers and bless our evangelists, if we will but seek it of Him. Let us cease to grieve the Spirit of God, and look to him for help to the faithful ministers who are yet spared to us.

This same Spirit who of old gave to His church eminent teachers *can raise up other and more useful men*. The other day, a brother from Wales told me of the great men he remembered: he said that he had never heard such a one as Christmas Evans, who surpasses all men when he was in the *hwyl*. I asked him if he knew another Welsh minister who preached like Christmas Evans. "No," he said, "we have no such man in Wales in our days." So in England we have neither Wesley nor Whitefield, nor any of their order; yet, as with God is the residue of the Spirit, He can fetch out from some chimney-corner another Christmas Evans, or find in our Sunday-school another George Whitefield, who shall declare the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Let us never fear for the future, or despair for the present, since the Spirit of God remaineth with us. What if the growing error of the age should have silenced the last tongue that speaks out the old gospel, let not faith be weakened. I hear the tramp of legions of soldiers of the cross. I hear the clarion voices of hosts of preachers. "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those that published it." Have faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ! When He ascended on high He led captivity captive, and received gifts for men. He then gave apostles, teachers, preachers, and evangelists,

and He can do the like again. Let us fall back upon the eternal God, and never be discouraged for an instant.

Nor is this all. The Holy Spirit being with us, *He can move the whole church to exercise its varied ministries*. This is one of the things we want very much—that every member of the church should recognise that he is ordained to service. Everyone in Christ, man or woman, hath some testimony to bear, some warning to give, some deed to do in the name of the holy child Jesus; and if the Spirit of God be poured out upon our young men and our maidens, each one will be aroused to energetic service. Both small and great will be in earnest, and the result upon the slumbering masses of our population will surprise us all. Sometimes we lament that the churches are so dull. There is an old proverb which says of So-and-so, that he was "as sound asleep as a church." I suppose there is nothing that can sleep so soundly as a church. But yet the Spirit of God still remaineth, and therefore churches go to be awakened. I mean that not only in part but as a whole, a church may be quickened. The dullest professor, the most slovenly believer, the most captious and useless member of a church, may yet be turned to good account. I see them like a stack of faggots, piled up, dead and dry. Oh for the fire! We will have a blaze out of them yet.

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, brood over the dark, disordered church as once thou didst over chaos, and order shall come out of confusion, and the darkness shall fly before the light. Only let the Spirit be with us, and we have all that is wanted for victory. Give us His presence, and everything else will come in its due season for the profitable service of the entire church.

If the Spirit be with us, there will come multitudinous conversions. We cannot get at "the lapsed masses," as they are pedantically called. We cannot stir the crass infidelity of the present age: no, *we* cannot, but *He* can. All things are possible with God. If you walk down to our bridges at a certain hour of the day you will see barges and vessels lying in the mud; and all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot stir them. Wait until the tide comes in, and they will walk the water like things of life. The living flood accomplishes at once what no mortals can do. And so to-day our churches cannot stir. What shall we do? Oh, that the Holy Spirit would come with a flood-tide of His benign influences, as He will if we will but believe in Him; as He must if we will but cry unto Him; as He shall if we will cease to grieve Him. Everything will be even as the saints desire when the Lord of saints is with us. The hope of the continuance and increase of the church lies in the remaining of the Spirit with us. The hope of the salvation of London lies in the wonder-working Spirit. Let us bow our heads and worship the omnipotent Spirit who deigns to work in us, by us, and with us.

Then, brethren, if this should happen—and I see not why it should not—then we may expect to see *the church put on her beautiful garments*; then shall she begin to clear herself of th errors which now defile her; then shall she press to her bosom the truths which she now begins to forget; then will she go back to the pure fount of inspiration and drink from the Scriptures of truth; and then out of the midst of her shall flow no turbid streams, but rivers of living water. If the Holy Ghost will work among us we shall rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the name of our God.

When once the Spirit of God putteth forth His might all things else will be in accord with Him. Notice that in the rest of the chapter—which I shall read now, not as relating to that temple at all, but to the church of God—there is great comfort given to us. If the Holy Spirit be once given, then we may expect providence to co-operate with the church of God. Read verse 6: "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. I will shake all nations." Great commotions will co-operate with the Holy Spirit. We may expect that God will

work for His people in an extraordinary fashion if they will but be faithful to Him. Empires will collapse, and times will change, for the truth's sake. Expect the unexpected, reckon upon that which is unlikely, if it be necessary for the growth of the kingdom. Of old the earth helped the woman when the dragon opened his mouth to drown her with the floods that he cast forth: unexpected help shall come to us when affairs are at their worst.

Specially do I look for a shaking among the hosts of unbelief. How often did the Lord of old rout His enemies without Israel drawing sword! The watchword was, "Stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord." The adversaries of old fell out among themselves; and they will do so again. When Cadmus slew the dragon with his javelin, he was bidden to sow its teeth in the earth. When he did so, according to the classic fable, he saw rising out of the ground nodding plumes, and crested helmets, and broad shoulders of armed men. Up from the earth there sprang a host of warriors; but Cadmus needed not to fly; for the moment they found their feet, these children of the dragon fell upon each other till scarcely one was left. Error, like Saturn, devours its own children. Those that fight against the Lord of hosts are not agreed among themselves; they shall sheathe their swords in each other's bosoms.

I saw in the night vision the sea, the deep and broad sea of truth, flashing with its silver waves. Lo, a black horse came out of the darkness and went down to the deep, threatening to drink it dry. I saw him stand there drinking, and swelling as he drank. In his pride he trusted that he could snuff up Jordan at a draught. I stood by and saw him drink, and then plunge further into the sea, to drink still more. Again he plunged in with fury, and soon he lost his footing, and I saw him no more, for the deep had swallowed *him* that boasted that he could swallow *it*. Rest assured that every black horse of error that comes forth to swallow up the sea of divine truth shall be drowned therein. Wherefore be of good courage. God, who maketh the earth and the heavens to shake, shall cause each error to fall like an untimely fig.

And next, the Lord in this chapter promises His people that they shall have all the supplies they need for His work. They feared that they could not build His house, because of their poverty; but, saith the Lord of hosts, "The silver and the gold are mine." When the church of God believes in God, and goes forward bravely, she need not trouble as to supplies. Her God will provide for her. He that gives the Holy Ghost will give gold and silver according as they are needed; therefore let us be of good courage. If God is with us, why need we fear? One of our English kings once threatened the great city of London that if its councillors talked so independently, he would—yes—he would, indeed he would—take his court away from the city. The Lord Mayor on that occasion replied, that if his majesty would graciously leave the river Thames behind him, the citizens would try to get on without his court. If any say, "If you hold to these old-fashioned doctrines you will lose the educated, the wealthy, the influential," we answer: But if we do not lose the godly and the presence of the Holy Ghost we are not in the least alarmed. If the Holy Ghost remaineth with us, there is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God. Brethren, my heart leaps within me as I cry, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

The best comfort of all remained: "The desire of all nations shall come." This was in a measure fulfilled when Jesus came into that latter house and caused all holy hearts to sing for gladness; but it was not wholly fulfilled in that way; for if you notice, in the ninth verse it is written, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former; *and in this place will I give peace,*" which the Lord did not fully do to the second temple, since that was destroyed by the Romans. But there

is another advent, when "the desire of all nations shall come" in power and glory; and this is our highest hope. Though truth may be driven back, and error may prevail, Jesus comes, and He is the great Lord and patron of truth: He shall judge the world in righteousness, and the people in equity. Here is our last resource; here are God's reserves. He whom we serve liveth and reigneth for ever and ever; and He saith, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

III. I should have done if it had not been that this text seemed to me to overflow so much, that it might not only refresh God's people, but give drink to thirsty sinners who are seeking the Lord. For a moment or two I give myself to ENCOURAGEMENT FURTHER APPLIED.

It is at the beginning of every gracious purpose that men have most fear, even as these people had who had newly begun to build. When first the Holy Spirit begins to strive with a man to lead him to Jesus, he is apt to say—"I cannot; I dare not; it is impossible. How can I believe and live?" Now I want to speak to some of you here who are willing to find Christ, and to encourage you by the truth that the Spirit lives to help you. I would even like to speak to those who are *not* anxious to be saved. I remember that Dr. Payson, an exceedingly earnest and useful man of God, once did a singular thing. He had been holding inquiry meetings with all sorts of people, and great numbers had been saved. At last, one Sunday he gave out that he should have a meeting on Monday night of those persons who did not desire to be saved; and, strange to say, some twenty persons came who did not wish to repent or believe. He spoke to them and said, "I am sure that if a little film, thin as a web of the gossamer, were let down by God from heaven to each one of you, you would not push it away from you. Although it were almost invisible, you would value even the slightest connection between you and heaven. Now, your coming to meet me to-night is a little link with God. I want it to increase in strength till you are joined to the Lord for ever." He spoke to them most tenderly, and God blessed those people who did not desire to be saved, so that before the meeting was over they were of another mind. The film had become a thicker thread, and it grew and grew until the Lord Christ held them by it for ever. Dear friends, the fact of your being in the Tabernacle this morning is like that filmy thread: do not put it away. Here is your comfort, the Holy Ghost still works with the preaching of the word. Do I hear you say, "I cannot feel my need of Christ as I want to feel it"? The Spirit remaineth among us. He can make you feel more deeply the guilt of sin and your need of pardon. "But I have heard so much about conviction and repentance; I do not seem to have either of them." Yet the Spirit remaineth with us, and that Spirit is able to work in you the deepest conviction and the truest repentance. "O sir, I do not feel as if I could do anything": but the Spirit remaineth with us, and all things that are needful for godliness He can give. He can work in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure. "But I want to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Who made you want to do that? Who but the Holy Spirit? Therefore He is still at work with you; and though as yet you do not understand what believing is, or else I am persuaded you would believe at once, the Spirit of God can instruct you in it. You are blind, but He can give you sight; you are paralyzed, but He can give you strength—the Spirit of God remaineth.

"Oh, but that doctrine of regeneration staggers me: you know, we must be born again." Yes, we are born again of the Spirit, and the Spirit remaineth still with us; He is still mighty to work that wondrous change, and to bring you out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear

Son. The Spirit remaineth with us, blessed be His name! "Ah, dear sir," says one, "I want to conquer sin"! Who made you desire to conquer sin? Who, but the Spirit that remaineth with us? He will give you the sword of the Spirit and teach you how to use it, and He will give you both the will and the power to use it successfully. Through the Spirit's might you can overcome every sin, even that which has dragged you down and disgraced you. The Spirit of God is still waiting to help you. When I think of the power of the Spirit of God, I look hopefully upon every sinner here this morning. I bless His name that He can work in you all that is pleasing in His sight. Some of you may be very careless, but He can make you thoughtful. Coming up to London to see the Exhibition, I hope you may yourselves become an exhibition of divine grace. You think not about things, but He can make you feel at this moment a sweet softness stealing over you, until you long to be alone and to get home to the old arm-chair and there seek the Lord. You can thus be led to salvation.

I thought when I came in here that I should have a picked congregation; and so I have. You are one of them. Wherever you come from, I want you now to seek the Lord. He has brought you here, and He means to bless you. Yield yourselves to Him while His sweet Spirit pleads with you. While the heavenly wind softly blows upon you open wide every window. You have not felt that you wanted it; but that is the sure proof that you need it; for he that does not know his need of Christ, is most in need. Open wide your heart that the Spirit may teach you your need; above all, breathe the prayer that He would help you this morning to look to the Lord Jesus Christ, for "there is life in a look at the Crucified One—there is life at this moment for you." "Oh," you say, "if I were to begin I should not keep on." No; if *you* began perhaps you would not; but if *He* begins with you *He* will keep on. The final perseverance of saints is the result of the final perseverance of the Holy Spirit; He perseveres to bless, and we persevere in receiving the blessing. If He begins, you have begun with a divine power that fainteth not neither is weary. I wish it might so happen that on this fifth day of the ninth month, not the prophet Haggai, but I, God's servant, may have spoken to you such a word by the witness of the Holy Ghost, "From this day will I bless you"! Go away with that promise resting upon you. I would like to give a shake of the hand to every stranger here this morning, and say, "Brother, in the name of the Lord I wish you from this day a blessing." Amen and amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Haggai 1; 2:1-9.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—956, 957, 451.

Love's Complaining

A Sermon

(No. 1926)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, October 24th, 1886, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent"—Rev 2:4,5.

IT WAS the work of the priest to go into the holy place and to trim the seven-branched lamp of gold: see how our Great High Priest walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: his work is not occasional, but constant. Wearing robes which are at once royal and priestly, he is seen lighting the holy lamps, pouring in the sacred oil, and removing impurities which would dim the light.

Hence our Lord's fitness to deal with the churches, which are these golden lamp-stands, for no one knows so much about the lamps as the person whose *constant* work it is to watch them and trim them. No one knows the churches as Jesus does, for the care of all the churches daily comes upon him, he continually walks among them, and holds their ministers as stars in his right hand. His eyes are perpetually upon the churches, so that he knows their works, their sufferings, and their sins; and those eyes are as a flame of fire, so that he sees with a penetration, discernment, and accuracy to which no other can attain. *We* sometimes judge the condition of religion too leniently, or else we err on the other side, and judge too severely. Our eyes are dim with the word's smoke; but his eyes are as a flame of fire. He sees the churches through and through, and knows their true condition much better than they know themselves. The Lord Jesus Christ is a most careful observer of churches and of individuals; nothing is hid from his observant eye.

As he is the most *careful* observer, so he is the most candid. He is ever "the faithful and true witness." He loves much, and therefore he never judges harshly. He loves much, and therefore he always judges jealously. Jealousy is the sure attendant of such love as his. He will neither speak smooth words nor bitter words; but he will speak the truth—the truth in love, the truth as he himself perceives it, and as he would have us perceive it. Well may he say, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," since his sayings are so true, so just, so weighty.

Certainly no observer can be so *tender* as the Son of God. Those lamps are very precious to him: it cost him his life to light them. "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." Every church is to our Lord a more sublime thing than a constellation in the heavens; as he is precious to his saints, so are they precious to him. He careth little for empires, kingdoms, or republics; but his heart is set on the kingdom of righteousness, of which his cross is the royal standard. He must reign until his foes are vanquished, and this is the great thought of his mind at this present, "From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." He ceases not to watch over his church: his sacrifice is ended, but not his service in caring for the golden lamps. He has completed the redemption of his bride, but he continues her preservation.

I therefore feel at this time that we may well join in a prayer to our Lord Jesus to come into our midst and put our light in order. Oh for a visit from himself such as he paid in vision to the seven churches of Asia! With him is the oil to feed the living flame, and he knows how to pour it in according to due measure; with him are those golden snuffers with which to remove every superfluity of naughtiness, that our lights may so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Oh for his presence now, to search us and to sanctify us; to cause us to shine forth to his Father's praise! We would be judged of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. We would pray this morning, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do; and we delight to have it so. We invite thee, O great High Priest, to come into this sanctuary, and look to this thy lamp this morning.

In the text, as it is addressed to the church at Ephesus and to us, we note three things. First, we note that *Christ perceives*: "I know thy works . . . nevertheless I have somewhat against thee." Secondly, *Christ prescribes*: "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent," and so forth. Thirdly, *Christ persuades*—persuades with a threatening: "I will remove thy candlestick out of his place;" persuades, also, with a promise: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." If the Lord himself be here at this time, our plan of discourse will be a river of life; but if he be not among us by his Holy Spirit, it will be as the dry bed of a torrent which bears the name of "river," but lacks the living stream. We expect our Lord's presence; he will come to the lamps which his office calls upon him to trim; it has been his wont to be with us; some of us have met him this morning already, and we have constrained him to tarry with us.

I. First, then, we notice that HE PERCEIVES.

Our Lord sorrowfully perceives the faults of his church—"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee;" but *he does not so perceive those faults as to be forgetful of that which he can admire and accept*; for he begins his letter with commendations, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil." Do not think, my brethren, that our Beloved is blind to the beauties of his church. On the contrary, he delights to observe them. He can see beauties where she herself cannot see them. Where we observe much to deplore, his loving eyes see much to admire. The graces which he himself creates he can always perceive. When we in the earnestness of self-examination overlook them, and write bitter things against ourselves, the Lord Jesus sees even in those bitter self-condemnations a life and earnestness and sincerity which he loves. Our Lord has a keen eye for all that is good. When he searches our hearts he never passes by the faintest longing, or desire, or faith, or love, of any of his people. He says, "I know thy works."

But this is our point at this time, that while Jesus can see all that is good, *yet in very faithfulness he sees all that is evil*. His love is not blind. He does not say, "As many as I love I commend;" but, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." It is more necessary for us that we should make a discovery of our faults than of our virtues. So notice in this text that Christ perceiveth the flaw in his church, even in the midst of her earnest service. The church at Ephesus was full of work. "I know thy works and thy labour, and for my name's sake thou hast laboured, and hast not fainted." It was such a laborious church that it pushed on and on with diligent perseverance, and never seemed to flag in its divine mission. Oh that we could say as much of all our churches! I have lived to see many brilliant projects lighted and left to die out in smoke. I have heard of schemes which were to

illuminate the world; but not a spark remains. Holy perseverance is a great desideratum. In these three and thirty years we thank God he has enabled us to labour and not to faint. There has been a continuance of everything attempted, and no drawing back from anything. "This is the work, this is the labour," to hold out even to the end. Oh how I have dreaded lest we should have to give up any holy enterprise or cut short any gracious effort! Hitherto the Lord has helped us. With men and means, liberality and zeal, he has supplied us. In this case the angel of the church has been very little of an angel from heaven, but very much of a human angel; for in the weakness of my flesh and in the heaviness of my spirit have I pursued my calling; but I have pursued it. By the help of God I continue to this day, and this church with equal footsteps is at my side; for which the whole praise is due to the Lord, who fainteth not, neither is weary. Having put my hand to the plough I have not looked back, but have steadily pressed forward, making straight furrows; but it has been by the grace of God alone.

Alas! under all the labouring the Lord Jesus perceived that the Ephesians had left their first love; and this was a grievous fault. So it may be in this church; every wheel may continue to revolve, and the whole machinery of ministry may be kept going at its normal rate, and yet there may be a great secret evil which Jesus perceives, and this may be marring all.

But this church at Ephesus was not only laborious, it was patient in suffering great persecution. He says of it: "I know thy works and thy patience, and how thou hast borne, and hast patience, and hast not fainted." Persecution upon persecution visited the faithful, but they bore it all with holy courage and constancy, and continued still confessing their Lord. This was good, and the Lord highly approved it; but yet underneath it he saw the tokens of decline; they had left their first love. So there may seem to be all the patient endurance and dauntless courage that there should be, and yet as a fair apple may have a worm at its core, so may it be with the church when it looks best to the eye of friends.

The Ephesian church excelled in something else, namely, in its discipline, its soundness in the faith, and fidelity towards heretics; for the Lord says of it, "how thou canst not bear them which are evil." They would not have it; they would not tolerate false doctrine, they would not put up with unclean living. They fought against evil, not only in the common people, but in prominent individuals. "Thou has tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." They had dealt with the great ones; they had not flinched from the unmasking of falsehood. Those who seemed to be apostles they had dragged to the light and discovered to be deceivers. This church was not honeycombed with doubt; it laid no claim to breadth of thought and liberality of view; it was honest to its Lord. He says of it, "This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." This was grand of them: it showed a backbone of truth. I wish some of the churches of this age had a little of this holy decision about them; for nowadays, if a man be clever, he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of hell, and it will go down with some. He may assail every doctrine of the gospel, he may blaspheme the Holy Trinity, he may trample on the blood of the Son of God, and yet nothing shall be said about it if he be held in repute as a man of advanced thought and liberal ideas. The church at Ephesus was not of this mind. She was strong in her convictions; she could not yield the faith, nor play the traitor to her Lord. For this her Lord commended her: and yet he says, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." When love dies orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism. Adhesion to the truth sours into bigotry when the sweetness and light of love to Jesus depart. Love Jesus, and then it is well to hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes; but mere hate

of evil will tend to evil if love of Jesus be not there to sanctify it. I need not make a personal application; but that which is spoken to Ephesus may be spoken at this hour to ourselves. As we hope that we may appropriate the commendation, so let us see whether the expostulation may not also apply to us. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Thus I have shown you that Jesus sees the evil beneath all the good; he does not ignore the good, but he will not pass over the ill.

So, next, *this evil was a very serious one*; it was love declining: "Thou hast left thy first love." "Is that serious?" saith one. It is the most serious ill of all; for the church is the bride of Christ, and for a bride to fail in love is to fail in all things. It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient, and so forth: if love to her husband has evaporated, her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled, she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. So, my brethren, this is a most important matter, our love to Christ, because it touches the very heart of that communion with him which is the crown and essence of our spiritual life. As a church we must love Jesus, or else we have lost our reason for existence. A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Have I not often reminded you that almost any disease may be hopefully endured except disease of the heart? But when our sickness is a disease of the heart, it is full of danger; and it was so in this case; "Thou hast left thy first love." It is a disease of the heart, a central, fatal disease, unless the great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress, and to deliver us from it. Oh, in any man, in any woman, any child of God here, let alone in the church as a whole, if there be a leaving of the first love, it is a woeful thing! Lord have mercy upon us; Christ have mercy upon us: this should be our solemn litany at once. No peril can be greater than this. Lose love, lose all. Leave our first love, we have left strength, and peace, and joy, and holiness.

I call your attention, however, to this point, that *it was he that found it out*. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Jesus himself found it out! I do not know how it strikes you; but as I thought it over, this fact brought the tears to my eyes. When I begin to leave off loving Christ, or love him less than I do, I would like to find it out myself; and if I did so, there would soon be a cure for it. But for him to find it out, oh, it seems so hard, so sad a thing! That we should keep on growing cold, and cold, and cold, and never care about it till the Beloved points it out to us. Why even the angel of the church did not find it out; the minister did not know it; but *He* saw it who loves us so well, that he delights in our love, and pines when it begins to fail. To him we are unutterably dear; he loved us up out of the pit into his bosom, loved us up from the dunghill among beggars to sit at his right hand upon his throne; and it is sorrowful that he should have to complain of our cooling love while we are utterly indifferent to the matter. Does Jesus care more about our love than we do? He loves us better than we love ourselves. How good of him to care one jot about our love! This is no complaint of an enemy, but of a dear wounded friend.

I notice that Jesus *found it out with great pain*. I can hardly conceive a greater grief to him as the husband of his church than to look her in the face and say, "Thou hast left thy first love." What can she give him but love? Will she deny him this? A poor thing is the church of herself: her Lord married her when she was in beggary; and if she does not give him love, what has she to give him? If she begins to be unfaithful in heart to him, what is she worth? Why, any unloving wife is a foul fountain of discomfort and dishonour to her husband. O beloved, shall it be so with thee? Wilt thou grieve Emmanuel? Wilt thou would thy Well-beloved? Church of God, wilt thou grieve him whose heart was pierced for thy redemption? Brother, sister, can you and I let Jesus find out that our love is departing, that we are ceasing to be zealous for his name? Can we wound him so? Is not this to

crucify the Lord afresh? Might he not hold up his hands this morning with fresh blood upon them, and say, "These are the wounds which I received in the house of my friends. It was nothing that I died for them, but ill it is that, after having died for them, they have failed to give me their hearts?" Jesus is not so sick of our sin as of our lukewarmness. It is a sad business to my heart; I hope it will be sad to all whom it concerns, that our Lord should be the first to spy out our declines in love.

The Saviour, having thus seen this with pain, now points it out. As I read this passage over to myself, I noticed that the Saviour had nothing to say about the sins of the heathen among whom the Ephesians dwelt: they are alluded to because it must have been the heathen who persecuted the church, and caused it to endure, and exhibit patience. The Saviour, however, has nothing to say against the heathen; and he does not say much more than a word about those who were evil. These had been cast out, and he merely says: "Thou canst not bear them which are evil." He denounced no judgment upon the Nicolaitanes, except that he hated them; and even the apostles which were found to be liars the Master dismisses with that word. He leaves the ungodly in their own condemnation. But what he has to say is against his own beloved: "I have somewhat against *thee*." It seems as if the Master might pass over sin in a thousand others, but he cannot wink at failure of love in his own espoused one. "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." The Saviour loves, so that his love is cruel as the grave against cold-heartedness. He said of the church of Laodicea, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." This was one of his own churches, too, and yet she made him sick with her lukewarmness. God grant that we may not be guilty of such a crime as that!

The Saviour pointed out the failure of love; and when he pointed it out *he called it by a lamentable name*. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen." He calls it *a fall* to leave our first love. Brothers, sisters, this church had not been licentious, it had not gone aside to false doctrine, it had not become idle, it had not been cowardly in the hour of persecution; but this one sin summed up the whole—she did not love Christ as she once loved him, and he calls this a fall. A fall indeed it is. "Oh, I thought," saith one, "that if a member of the church got drunk that was a fall." That is a grievous fall, but it is a fall if we become intoxicated with the world, and lose the freshness of our devotion to Jesus. It is a fall from a high estate of fellowship to the dust of worldliness. "Thou art fallen." The word sounds very harshly in my ears—no, not harshly, for his love speaks it in so pathetic a manner; but it thunders in my soul deep down. I cannot bear it. It is so sadly true. "Thou art fallen." "Remember from whence thou art fallen." Indeed, O Lord, we have fallen when we have left our first love for thee.

The Master evidently counts this decline of love to be a personal wrong done to himself. "I have somewhat against thee." It is not an offence against the king, nor against the judge, but against the Lord Jesus as the husband of the church: an offence against the very heart of Christ himself. "I have somewhat against thee." He does not say, "Thy neighbour has somewhat against thee, thy child has somewhat against thee, thy God has somewhat against thee," but, "I, I thy hope, thy joy, thy delight, thy Saviour, I have this against thee." The word *somewhat* is an intruder here. Our translators put it in italics, and well they might, for it is a bad word, since it seems to make a small thing of a very grave change. The Lord has *this* against us, and it is no mere "somewhat." Come, brothers and sisters, if we have not broken any law, nor offended in any way so as to grieve anybody else, this is sorrow enough, if our love has grown in the least degree chill towards him; for we have done a terrible wrong to our best friend. This is the bitterness of our offence; Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that I have left my first love. The Saviour tells us this most lovingly. I wish I knew how to speak as tenderly as he does; and yet I feel at this moment that I

can and must be tender in this matter, for I am speaking about myself as much as about anybody else. I am grieving, grieving over some here present, grieving for all of us, but grieving most of all for myself, that our Well-beloved should have cause to say, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

So much for what our Lord perceives. Holy Spirit, bless it to us!

II. And now, secondly, let us note what THE SAVIOUR PRESCRIBES. The Saviour's prescription is couched in these three words: "Remember," "Repent," "Return."

The first word is *Remember*. "Thou hast left thy first love." Remember, then, what thy first love was, and compare thy present condition with it. At first nothing diverted thee from thy Lord. He was thy life, thy love, thy joy. Now thou lookest for recreation somewhere else, and other charms and other beauties win thy heart. Art thou not ashamed of this? Once thou wast never wearied with hearing of him and serving him. Never wert thou overdone with Christ and his gospel: many sermons, many prayer-meetings, many Bible readings, and yet none too many. Now sermons are long, and services are dull, and thou must have thy jaded appetite excited with novelties. How is this? Once thou wast never displeased with Jesus whatever he did with thee. If thou hadst been sick, or poor, or dying, thou wouldst still have loved and blessed his name for all things. He remembers this fondness, and regrets its departure. He says to thee to-day, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness." Thou wouldst have gone after thy Lord anywhere in those days: across the sea, or through the fire, thou wouldst have pursued him; nothing would have been too hot or too heavy for thee then. Is it so now? Remember! Remember from whence thou art fallen. Remember the vows, the tears, the communings, the happy raptures of those days; remember and compare with them thy present state.

Remember and consider, that when thou wast in thy first love, that love was none too warm. Even then, when thou didst live *to* him, and *for* him, and *with* him, thou wast none too holy, none too consecrated, none too zealous. If thou wast not too forward then, what art thou now—now that thou hast come down even from that poor attainment? Remember the past with sad forebodings of the future. If thou hast come down from where thou wast, who is to tell thee where thou wilt cease thy declining? He who has sunk so far may fall much farther. Is it not so? Though thou sayest in thy heart like Hazeel, "Is thy servant a dog?" thou mayest turn out worse than a dog yet, yea, prove a very wolf. Who knows? thou mayest even now be a devil! Thou mayest turn out a Judas, a son of perdition, and deny thy Master, selling him for thirty pieces of silver. When a stone begins to fall it falls with an ever-increasing rate; and when a soul begins to leave its first love, it quits it more and more, and more and more, til at last it falleth terribly. Remember!

The next word of the prescription is "Repent." Repent as thou didst at first. The word so suitable to sinners is suitable to thee, for thou hast grievously sinned. Repent of the wrong thou hast done thy Lord by leaving thy first love of him. Couldst thou have lived a seraphic life, only breathing his love, only existing for him, thou hadst done little enough; but to quit thy first love, how grievously hast thou wronged him! That love was well deserved, was it not? Why, then, hast thou left it? Is Jesus less fair than he was? Does he love thee less than he did? Has he been less kind and tender to thee than he used to be? Say, hast thou outgrown him? Canst thou do without him? Hast thou a hope of salvation apart from him? I charge thee, repent of this thine ill-doing towards one who has a greater claim upon thy love than ever he had. He ought to be to-day loved more than thou didst love him at thy very best! O my heart, is not all this most surely true? How ill art thou behaving! What an ingrate art thou! Repent! Repent!

Repent of much good that thou hast left undone through want of love. Oh, if thou hadst always loved thy Lord at thy best, what mightest thou not have known of him by this time! What good deeds thou mightest have done by force of his love! How many hearts mightest thou have won for thy Lord if thine own heart had been fuller of love, if thine own soul had been more on fire! Thou hast lived a poor beggarly life because thou hast allowed such poverty of love.

Repent! Repent! To my mind, as I thought over this text, the call for repentance grew louder and louder, because of the occasion of its utterance. Here is the glorious Lord, coming to his church and speaking to her angel in tones of tender kindness. He condescends to visit his people in all his majesty and glory, intending nothing but to manifest himself in love to his own elect as he doth not to the world. And yet he is compelled even then to take to chiding, and to say, "I have this against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Here is a love-visit clouded with upbraiding—necessary upbraiding. What mischief sin has done! It is a dreadful thing that when Jesus comes to his own dear bride he should have to speak in grief, and not in joy. Must holy communion, which is the wine of heaven, be embittered with the tonic of expostulation? I see the upper springs of nearest fellowship, where the waters of life leap from their first source in the heart of God. Are not these streams most pure and precious? If a man drink thereof he liveth for ever. Shall it be that even at the fountain-head they shall be dashed with bitterness? Even when Christ communes personally with us must he say, "I have somewhat against thee?" Break, my heart, that it should be so! Well may we repent with a deep repentance when our choicest joys are flavoured with the bitter herbs of regret, that our best Beloved should have somewhat against us.

But then he says in effect, *Return*. The third word is this—"Repent, and do the first works." Notice, that he does not say, "Repent, and get back thy first love." This seems rather singular; but then love is the chief of the first works, and, moreover, the first works can only come of the first love. There must be in every declining Christian a *practical repentance*. Do not be satisfied with regrets and resolves. Do the first works; do not strain after the first emotions, but do the first works. No renewal is so valuable as the practical cleansing of our way. If the life be made right, it will prove that the love is so. In doing the first works you will prove that you have come back to your first love. The prescription is complete, because the doing of the first works is meant to include the feeling of the first feelings, the sighing of the first sighs, the enjoying of the first joys: these are all supposed to accompany returning obedience and activity.

We are to get back to these first works at once. Most men come to Christ with a leap; and I have observed that many who come back to him usually do so at a bound. The slow revival of one's love is almost an impossibility; as well expect the dead to rise by degrees. Love to Christ is often love at first sight: we see him, and are conquered by him. If we grow cold, the best thing we can do is to fasten our eyes on him till we cry, "My soul melted while my Beloved spake." It is a happy circumstance if I can cry, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." How sweet for the Lord to put us back again at once into the old place, back again in a moment! My prayer is that it may be so this morning with any declining one. May you so repent as not merely to feel the old feelings, but instantly to do the first works, and be once more as eager, as zealous, as generous, as prayerful, as you used to be! If we should again see you breaking the alabaster box, we should know that the old love had returned. May the good Master help us to do as well as ever, yea, much better than before!

Notice, however, that this will require much of effort and warfare; for the promise which is made is "to him that overcometh." Overcoming implies conflict. Depend upon it, if you conquer a

wandering heart, you will have to fight for it. "To him that overcometh," saith he, "will I give to eat of the tree of life." You must fight your way back to the garden of the Lord. You will have to fight against lethargy, against an evil heart of unbelief, against the benumbing influence of the world. In the name and power of him who bids you repent, you must wrestle and struggle till you get the mastery over self, and yield your whole nature to your Lord.

So I have shown you how Christ prescribes, and I greatly need a few minutes for the last part, because I wish to dwell with solemn earnestness upon it. I have no desire to say a word by which I may prove myself a true brother pleading with you in deep sympathy, because in all the ill which I rebuke I mourn my own personal share. Bless us, O Spirit of the Lord!

III. Now see, brethren, HE PERSUADES. This is the third point: the Lord Jesus persuades his erring one to repent.

First, he *persuades with a warning*: "I will come unto thee;" "quickly" is not in the original: the Revised Version has left it out. Our Lord is generally very slow at the work of judgment: "I will come unto thee, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." This he must do: he cannot allow his light to be apart from love, and if the first love be left, the church shall be left in darkness. The truth must always shine, but not always in the same place. The place must be made fit by love, or the light shall be removed.

Our Lord means, first, I will take away the comfort of the Word. He raises up certain ministers, and makes them burning and shining lights in the midst of his church, and when the people gather together they are cheered and enlightened by their shining. A ministry blessed of the Lord is a singular comfort to the church of God. The Lord can easily take away that light which has brought comfort to so many: he can remove the good man to another sphere, or he can call him home to his rest. The extinguisher of death can put out the candle which now gladdens the house. The church which has lost a ministry by which the Lord's glory has shone forth has lost a good deal; and if this loss has been sent in chastisement for decline of love it is all the harder to bear. I can point you to places where once was a man of God, and all went well; but the people grew cold, and the Lord took away their leader, and the place is now a desolation: those who now attend those courts and listen to a modern ministry cry out because of the famine of the Word of the Lord. O friends, let us value the light while we have it, and prove that we do so by profiting by it; but how can we profit if we leave our first love? The Lord may take away our comfort as a church if our first zeal shall die down.

But the candlestick also symbolizes usefulness: it is that by which a church shines. The use of a church is to preserve the truth, wherewith to illuminate the neighbourhood, to illuminate the world. God can soon cut short our usefulness, and he will do so if we cut short our love. If the Lord be withdrawn, we can go on with our work as we used to do, but nothing will come of it: we can go on with Sunday-schools, mission-stations, branch churches, and yet accomplish nothing. Brethren, we can go on with the Orphanage, the College, the Colportage, the Evangelistic Society, the Book Fund, and all else, and yet nothing will be effected if the arm of the Lord be not made bare.

He can, if he wills, even take away from the church her very existence as a church. Ephesus is gone: nothing but ruins can be found. Rome once held a noble church of Christ, but has not her name become the symbol of antichrist? The Lord can soon take away candlesticks out of their places if the church uses her light for her own glory, and is not filled with his love. God forbid that we should fall under this condemnation! Of thy mercy, O Lord, forbid it! Let it not so happen to any one of us. Yet this may occur to us as individuals. You, dear brother or sister, if you lose your

first love, may soon lose your joy, your peace, your usefulness. You, who are now so bright, may grow dull. You, who are now so useful, may become useless. You were once an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes; but if the Lord be withdrawn you will instruct nobody, you will be in the dark yourself. Alas! you may come to lose the very name of Christians, as some have done who once seemed to be burning and shining lights. They were foolish virgins, and ere long they were heard to cry, "Our lamps are gone out!" The Lord can and will take away the candlestick out of its place if we put *him* out of his place by a failure in our love to him.

How can I persuade you, then, better than with the warning words of my Master? My beloved, I persuade you from my very soul not to encounter these dangers, not to run these terrible risks; for as you would not wish to see either the church or your own self left without the light of God, to pine in darkness, it is needful that you abide in Christ, and go on to love him more and more.

The Saviour holds out a promise as his other persuasive. Upon this I can only dwell for a minute. It seems a very wonderful promise to me: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Observe, those who lose their first love *fall*, but those who abide in love are made to stand. In contrast to the fall which took place in the paradise of God, we have man eating of the tree of life, and so living for ever. If we, through grace, overcome the common tendency to decline in love, then shall we be confirmed and settled in the favour of the Lord. By eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil we fell; by eating of the fruit of a better tree we live and stand fast for ever. Life proved true by love shall be nourished on the best of food: it shall be sustained by fruit from the garden of the Lord himself, gathered by the Saviour's own hand.

Note again, those who lose their first love wander far, they depart from God. "But," saith the Lord, "if you keep your first love you shall not wander, but you shall come into closer fellowship. I will bring you nearer to the centre. I will bring you to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The inner ring is for those who grow in love; the centre of all joy is only to be reached by much love. We know God as we love God. We enter into his paradise as we abide in his love. What joy is here! What a reward hath love!

Then notice the mystical blessing which lies here, waiting for meditation. Do you know how we fell? The woman took of the fruit of the forbidden tree, and gave to Adam, and Adam ate and fell. The reverse is the case in the promise before us: the Second Adam takes of the divine fruit from the tree of promise, and hands it to his spouse; she eats and lives for ever. He who is the Father of the age of grace hands down to us immortal joys, which he has plucked from an unwithering tree. The reward of love is to eat the fruit of life. "We are getting into mysteries," says one. Yes, I am intentionally lifting a corner of the veil, and no more. I only mean to give you a glimpse at the promised boon. Into his innermost joys our Lord will bring us if we keep up our first love, and go from strength to strength therein. Marvelous things are locked up in the caskets whereof love holds the key. Sin set the angel with a flaming sword between us and the tree of life in the midst of the garden; but love has quenched that sword, and now the angel beckons us to come into the innermost secrets of paradise. We shall know as we are known when we love as we are loved. We shall live the life of God when we are wholly taken up with the love of God. The love of Jesus answered by our love to Jesus makes the sweetest music the heart can know. No joy on earth is equal to the bliss of being all taken up with love to Christ. If I had my choice of all the lives that I could live, I certainly would not choose to be an emperor, nor to be a millionaire, nor to be a philosopher; for power, and wealth, and knowledge bring with them sorrow and travail; but I would choose to have

nothing to do but to love my Lord Jesus—nothing, I mean, but to do all things for his sake, and out of love to him. Then I know that I should be in paradise, yea, in the midst of the paradise of God, and I should have meat to eat which is all unknown to men of the world.

Heaven on earth is abounding love to Jesus. This is the first and last of true delight—to love him who is the first and the last. To love Jesus is another name for paradise. Lord, let me know this by continual experience. "You are soaring aloft," cries one. Yes, I own it. Oh that I could allure you to a heavenward flight upon wings of love! There is bitterness in declining love: it is a very consumption of the soul, and makes us weak, and faint, and low. But true love is the antepast of glory. See the heights, the glittering heights, the glorious heights, the everlasting hills to which the Lord of life will conduct all those who are faithful to him through the power of his Holy Spirit. See, O love, thine ultimate abode! I pray that what I have said may be blessed by the Holy Spirit to the bringing of us all nearer to the Bridegroom of our souls. Amen.

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