



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 41: 1895

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 41: 1895* by Charles Spurgeon

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A People Prepared for the Lord

A Sermon

(No. 2404)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, March 17th, 1895,

Delivered By

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, March 13th, 1887.

"To make ready a people prepared for the Lord."?Luke 1:17.

John was the herald of Christ; he was to prepare the way for the coming King, but from this text it appears that he was to do more than that. He was not only to make the road ready for the Lord, but he was also "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." That was a great work, a task in which he would require strength and wisdom greater than his own. He would need that the Spirit of God, who was to be given without measure to the coming One, should also be in a measure within himself, if he should really "make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

This is not at all a usual expression; at first sight, it hardly looks to us like a gospel expression. We sang just now,?

"Just as I am?and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come."

We sang over and over again those words, "Just as I am," "Just as I am," and we are prone to protest against the idea of being prepared for Christ; we preach constantly that no preparation is needed, but that men are to come to Jesus just as they are. Yet here is John the Baptist set apart "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

The fact is, dear friends, that to get men to come to Jesus just as they are, is not an easy thing. To get them to give up the idea of preparing, to get them prepared to come without preparing, to get them ready to come just as they are, this is the hardest part of our work, this is our greatest difficulty. If we came and preached to men the necessity of preparation through so many weeks of fasting during a long Lent, or through so many days of scourging and penitence, they would attend to us at once, for they would be willing enough to make any preparation of that kind; but, when we say to them, "Come just as you are now, with nothing in your hand to buy the mercy of God, with nothing wherewith to demand or to deserve it," men want a great deal of preparing before they will come to that point. Only the grace of God, working mightily through the Word, by the Spirit, will prepare men to come to Christ thus, prepared by being unprepared so far as any fitness of their own is concerned. The only fit state in which they can come is that of sinking themselves, abandoning all idea of helping Christ, and coming in all their natural impotence and guilt, and taking Christ to be their all in all.

Beloved friends, this is the true preparedness of heart for coming to Christ, the preparedness of coming to him just as you are; and it was John's business thus "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." That is also my business at this time. May the good Spirit, who dwelt in John the

Baptist, work through us also, that some here may be made ready for Christ, "a people prepared for the Lord"! Let us see how John carried out his commission; we shall then be able better to understand the text.

I. First, John made ready "a people prepared for the Lord" BY AROUSING THEIR ATTENTION. The people were asleep; they had fallen into a condition of religious lethargy, when suddenly there stood in their midst a man clothed with camel's hair, and with a leathern girdle about his loins, a prophet, manifestly, by the boldness and truthfulness of his utterances. He spoke in such a way that the people in general heard of his speaking, and they advertised him by saying the one to the other, "That is a strange man who has begun to preach by the River Jordan, and whose meat is locusts and wild honey."

The whole style of the man set the people wondering and talking; and when they came to listen to him, he did not flatter them, he did not utter mere commonplace truths to them, but with burning earnestness he drove straight at their hearts, and spoke like Elijah, the great prophet of fire, had done in the ages gone by. So *he set them thinking*. That is a great preparation for coming to Christ just as you are, to be set a-thinking. We have always hope of men when they once begin to think about religion and the things of God. See how the bulk of them hurry on with their eyes tightly shut, rushing fast and yet faster still down to destruction. You cannot make them stop and think. There are thousands of men who would almost sooner be whipped than be made to think. The last thing to which they will ever come of themselves is thoughtfulness. Let me appeal to some here who are still unconverted. Did you ever give the affairs of your soul the benefit of an hour's serious consideration? You have your regular time for stock-taking, those of you who are in business; do you ever take stock of your spiritual estate? I know that you are not such fools as to neglect your ledgers, you cast up your accounts to see whereabouts you are financially; but do you cast up the account between God and your own soul, and look the matter fairly, and squarely in the face? Oh, if we could but bring you to do this, we should feel that you were being prepared for coming to Christ just as you are, for no man will come to Christ while he is utterly careless and thoughtless! Faith is a matter of thought; it requires a mind aroused from slumber, a mind that has taken wing; and John the Baptist did good service for his Master when he startled men into that condition, and so made them consider their ways.

He did more than that, for, having first made them think, he *preached to them a Saviour*. He told them that One was coming with power to baptize them after a higher sort than his baptism. He cried, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," and this message infused into the people a measure of hope. The poor people said, "What shall we do?" for they had a hope that there was something to be gained. Even the tax-gatherers, despised as they were, began to look up, and think that there might be something even for them, so they said to John, "Master, what shall we do?" And the rough Roman soldiers thought, "There may be something for us," so they also asked, "And what shall we do?" John inspired the multitudes with hope.

It is a very blessed state of mind for a man to get in when he begins to hope that he may be saved. Then he will be prepared to come to Jesus, just as he is, when he feels that he is not shut up to despair. "Oh!" says the poor man, "I need not, after all, be lost; I need not abide for ever under the wrath of God. There is an open door set before me, there is a way of mercy even for me." I wish it were possible that everybody whom I am now addressing had that feeling; it would be part of the making ready of "a people prepared for the Lord" when thought had blossomed into hope.

But John led his hearers on further than that, for *they began to expect something as well as to hope for it*. They expected that the Christ would speedily come, and they expected some great blessings through the coming of the Messiah. And oh! when men, after hearing the gospel, have great expectations concerning God and his salvation, surely their expectations will not be long disappointed. I remember a man coming one day to see me, and he said that he wished to take a sitting in the Tabernacle. He had been hearing me for some time, and he wanted to take a seat; but he desired to be very honest with me, and not to take a seat except upon a right understanding. I asked, "What is the difficulty, my friend?" "Well," he replied, "the person who sat next to me on Sunday told me that, if I became a regular hearer here, you would expect me to be converted." "Well," I answered, "that is true, I shall expect it." "But," said he, "you do not mean that you will require it of me." "Oh, dear no!" I replied, "nothing of the sort; I do not expect you to convert yourself; but I hope and trust that you will be converted, that is what I mean. I shall expect that God, in his grace, will meet with you and save you." "Oh!" he said, "I hope that, too; only I mean that I could not guarantee it." "Ah!" I said, "I see that you have taken the word 'expect' in the wrong sense; but I think, dear friend, that if you come expecting to be converted, and I preach expecting that you will be converted, it is highly probable that it will soon take place." "Oh!" he exclaimed, "God grant it!" The good brother has long since gone to heaven. A very few weeks after our conversation, he came and told me that the expectation in which we had united had been fulfilled, and he trusted that he had found the Saviour. When people come really expecting a blessing, they will be sure to get it. I do believe that some folk go to hear ministers with the idea that there will be something to find fault with, and, of course, they find that it is so; and when people come to hear another preacher, with the hope and expectation that God will bless them, of course God does bless them. Their expectation is divinely fulfilled. I have always a bright hope that a man will lay hold on Christ when he begins to expect to be saved, for he feels then that the time has come for him to find eternal life. John made ready "a people prepared for the Lord" because, first, he led them to thought; next, he led them to hope; and then he led them to expectation, and this is a high measure of preparation.

John did more than this, for he cried, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," that is to say, *he put a pressure of presentness upon the people*. A brother, who is an eminent preacher, but who uses rather long words, was explaining to me the benefit of the preaching of Mr. Fullerton and Mr. Smith in his place of worship. He said, "I do not know exactly why these brethren were the means of the conversion of many in my place whom I had never reached, but I perceived that they had the power to precipitate decision." It sounded rather strange, but when I thought it over a little while, I rather liked the expression, "the power to precipitate decision." That is the power that leads men to make up their minds, and say "Yes," or "No," to feel that the decision has to be made at once, and that the putting of it off is impossible because it would be a kind of insanity. Now that is the meaning of what John said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand! Repent ye! He is coming who wields the axe of divine Justice; bear fruit, or else be cut down. He is coming who uses the great winnowing fan; be the true wheat, or else be blown away." He put the truth so pointedly, and so earnestly, that he did by that means make ready "a people prepared for the Lord."

II. Now, secondly, John made the people ready for Christ BY AWAKENING THEIR CONSCIENCES.

His very first utterance, as I have reminded you, was, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "Repent! Repent! Repent!" was John's continual cry. This awakened the consciences

of his hearers concerning *their sin*. Preaching repentance meant, "You have sinned; change your mind in reference to that sin. You have sinned; quit the sin, mourn over it, ask forgiveness for it. Repent ye!" Whenever a man brings to the minds of others their sins, when he so does it that they begin to feel that they have sinned, then they are being prepared for the Lord, for no man will come to the Saviour unless he knows that he needs a Saviour; and no man will feel that he needs a Saviour until he feels that he is a sinner. Hence it is a real preparation of men for Christ to convince them of sin.

This John did; he brought their sin before them, and then *he showed them their need of cleansing*, for he stood by the River Jordan, not with a scallop shell, as some depict him, but he stood by the flowing stream, ready to immerse all those who repented. This was practically saying to them, "You need to be washed, you need to be cleansed; and I show you this truth as I baptize you with water unto repentance. Be this a token to you that there is no entering heaven in your filthiness, but you must first be washed. As your bodies are washed with pure water, so must your souls be washed and made clean ere you can enter heaven." This was John's plain teaching by his action as well as by his words.

Then he went very straight to his point of arousing their consciences by telling them of *their need of a change of life*. He said that it was no use for them to pretend to grieve over the past, and then continue to sin in the same fashion. "Bring forth fruits," said he, "meet for repentance," or, "answerable to amendment of life," as the margin has it. And he took pains to point out what the fruits must be. If they were men of greed, they must become generous, and give to their needy neighbours. If they had been unrighteous and exacting, they must become honest. If they had been domineering, and brutal, and murmuring, they must become contented, and quiet, and gentle.

He not only preached to the multitudes about repentance of sin in general, but *he pointed out the precise sin of each class of persons* that came to him, and urged them to perform the special duties which they had neglected. Now, brethren, I believe, as I have often said, that there is no sewing with silk thread alone; you must have a needle as well. You need a sharp needle to go first to draw the thread through the material; so you must preach the law, you must denounce sin, and you must individualize, and condemn special sins; and you must be personal, and pointed, or else men will not feel in their consciences what you say to them. Conscience is very apt to get seared as with a hot iron, to lose sensitiveness, so as to be no use at all as a conscience. Some say that conscience is a spark of deity, a divine monitor; it is nothing of the sort, in many a man it is almost extinct, for it does not act at all. The preacher who would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" must come out with his axe, and lay it to the root of the trees; he must be definite and distinct in indicating this sin and that sin, and crying to all men, "Repent of these sins. Give them up. Get clear from them. Be washed from them; or else, as God lives, when the Christ himself comes, it will not be to save you, but to blow you away with his winnowing fan as the chaff is blown into the fire."

This is "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" by their being convinced of sin and led to repentance. That, I think, is a second meaning clearly illustrated in the ministry of John the Baptist.

III. But thirdly, John had "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" BY POINTING OUT THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION.

He showed that *it did not depend upon external privileges*. As soon as ever John began to preach, the men of Jewish race, proud of their pedigree, pressed near; and John, with all the courage

that a servant of the Lord could have, said, "Begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." You see the drift of his preaching, do you not? He says, practically, "Men and women, there is no virtue in your boasted privileges, there is no merit in your religious descent. As for supposing yourselves to be the peculiar people of God, you are not to be saved that way. Say not, We have Abraham to our father." Oh, how many hug that idea, "My father was a Christian." Others say, "Well, I live in a Christian country." They suppose that there is something in the very race from which they have sprung. Away with all such notions, for whatever external privileges you may have had, they are not sufficient to secure salvation for you.

Then came the Pharisees and the Sadducees; they were the religious people of the time, the great observers of all outward propriety, but John taught them that *true religion is not the same as official pretension*. He called them a "generation of vipers." This was very disrespectful, and very shocking indeed on his part; all the newspapers of the period, if there had been any, would have cried him down for his want of charity, but he wanted those who came to him to understand that true religion was not the same as professing to be religious. It was not making broad the borders of their garments, it was not wearing a text of Scripture as a phylactery between their eyes, it was not making long prayers at the corners of the streets, that would save them; there must be a thorough change of heart. So John spoke right straight out; and this, I believe, is a great way of preparing men for coming to Christ, when you tell them, "It is not your early training, it is not your going to church or chapel, it is not your infant sprinkling and your confirmation, it is not even your adult baptism, nor your saying prayers and reading the Bible, that will save you; but 'ye must be born again.' There must be an inward spiritual change, wrought by the Holy Spirit. You must believe in Jesus Christ, whom God has sent, and you must so believe in him as to be made new creatures in him, or else you cannot be saved." Now, when men realize that all this is true, it startles them out of their false refuges, and makes them ready to flee to the only true refuge, so that it is really the way of making ready "a people prepared for the Lord."

While John set forth this matter negatively, putting down all the wrong hopes of his hearers, he was exceedingly plain in telling them that the way of salvation would involve them in *the necessity of being right before God*. "There," said he, "the proof of a tree's life is its fruit, and the evidence of your new life will be your good works. 'Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore, every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.'" Unless our religion makes us holy, it has not done anything for us that is really worth doing. Unless we hate sin, and love righteousness, our religion is a sham and a lie. John stated that truth very plainly; and that is the way to drive men to Christ.

He told them also that the trial of a life would be by its weight as well as by its fruit. "Look," said he, "at the heap that lies on the threshing-floor. He that hath the fan in his hand begins to winnow it; that which is light and chaffy is blown away, that which has wheat in it remains on the floor. So," said he, "there must be weight about your religion?stability, reality, sincerity. There must be heart-work in it, it must be no pretence; it must be true from beginning to end, or else it shall no more avail you than a heap of chaff would avail the husbandman when it is blown into the fire."

Then John taught his hearers that Christ himself would be the great Trier of human hearts; not ministers or fellow-professors, but, Christ himself. When men feel this to be true, then they begin to say to themselves, "There is more required than we at present possess. There is more demanded

than we can ever manufacture of ourselves. Let us go to him that hath it, and ask him for it. Let us go to Christ, who hath grace to bestow upon the poor and needy."

This, then, is the way to make ready "a people prepared for the Lord," by pointing out to them the nature of true religion; that is what I have tried to do, dear hearer. When you know that you cannot save yourself, you sing?

"Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands:
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone:"

and then you are ready to finish the verse by singing?

"Thou must save, and thou alone."

IV. Now I shall close my discourse by noticing a fourth way in which John made ready "a people prepared for the Lord." He did it BY DECLARING THE GRACE AND POWER OF JESUS CHRIST.

My brethren, if I were to preach to you merely to arouse your attention, to awaken your consciences to a sense of sin, or simply to show you the nature of true religion, yet you would not be prepared for Christ unless also you knew something about him, something about his suitableness and his power to save you. So, *John preached Jesus Christ as a mighty and glorious Saviour on whom the Spirit rested.* He says that, when he baptized our Lord, as Jesus came up out of the water, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." John boldly preached, and told the people that the Spirit of God rested upon Jesus Christ, yea, abode upon him. Now, this would lead them to him, and this should lead you to him. Whatever there is, poor souls, that you need to make you holy and perfect, Christ has it, for the Spirit of God rests on him, and abides in him without measure. It you want the grace of penitence, Christ has it to give you. If you want the grace of supplication, he has it to give you. If you want the grace of faith, he has it. If you want the grace of holiness, he has it. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell," "and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." John taught this to his hearers, and I teach it to you. There is nothing wanted between hell-gate and heaven-gate but what is in Christ, nothing wanted for the biggest sinner out of hell to make him the biggest saint in heaven but what Christ has, nothing wanted in any hour of temptation, in any time of depression, nothing wanted in any moment of sickness, or in the article of death itself, but what it is in Christ, and there for you if you trust him. If you are willing to have it, it is freely presented to you. He who makes you willing to receive is certainly willing to give. If he has emptied you, and prepared you to receive of his fulness, do not think that he will refuse you when you come to him for it. He hath said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Last Sunday morning, I blew the great trumpet in the hope of startling some to Christ; on this occasion, I would ring the little silver bell with a gentle noise in the hope that some may, by that means, be made willing to come to Christ. My hearer, thou canst want nothing which Christ does not possess; all thy requirements are fully met in him. The Spirit of God dwells in him as a fulness, and as an abiding fulness; therefore, do but believe in him, and even that faith he will give thee, do but trust him, and thou art saved, and fully supplied in him who can meet all the necessities of thy case. Now, brethren, John taught the

people this, that they might be ready for Christ, "a people prepared for the Lord," for, when men begin to see what a Christ Christ is, what a Saviour the Saviour is, then they are ready to come to him; and I pray that many of you may so come to him even now.

John also told his hearers that *the Christ whom he preached was able to baptise them with the Holy Ghost*. "See," says he, "I only plunge you in the flowing stream, I can do nothing more for you than dip you in this River Jordan, on profession of your repentance of sin; but this Saviour, this Christ of God, can immerse you into the Spirit of God. He can give you of his power to fill you; you can be baptized into the Holy Ghost by him:" Dost thou hear this, sinner? Jesus Christ can come and give thee the Holy Spirit in such measure that thou shalt be baptized into him?

"Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea,
And lost in his immensity."

This will make thee to be really his, and make thee truly to live unto him. The very fulness of grace, then, is with Christ, and he is prepared to give it; and this should make men prepared to receive it. Did not the poor prodigal son say of the provision in his father's house, "There is bread enough and to spare"? It was partly that which made him go to his father's house; and we may say of the Spirit who is in Christ, "There is enough and to spare for every poor sinner who comes to him;" therefore, come along with thee, be prepared at once to come and receive the Saviour.

Lastly, John said in his preaching, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." *He pointed out Christ as the Sin-bearer*, bearing human guilt in his own person. That is the master-key which lets men into the kingdom of heaven. Oh! how I do delight to preach Christ as the Substitute, Christ as the atoning sacrifice; and when you have heard Christ preached in that way, it makes you ready, "a people prepared for the Lord." How can men come to Christ if they do not know what Christ has done for them? If you do not understand that he suffered in your stead, the Just for the unjust, to bring you to God, how can you come to Christ? But when you have learned that holy and blessed doctrine of Christ's propitiation for human sin, why, then, methinks, you will leap at the very sound of it, and say, "Yes, I will take this propitiation to be a sacrifice for me. Blessed Lamb of God,?

"My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine,
While like a penitent I stand
And there confess my sin."

John's preaching Christ was the best way of making ready "a people prepared for the Lord," and there is no better way of preparing you to come to Jesus. Oh, that God would grant to some of you that "precipitation of decision" of which my learned friend spoke! Oh, that in some lives the turning-point might be reached to-night, the happy moment when they should decide for Christ! Lord, decide them! My friend, you have come to the cross-roads; peradventure, to-night, if you reject the Saviour, it will be your last rejection of him, and it will finally seal your doom; and I am sure, with no peradventure whatever, that if this night you look to Jesus, and trust to his finished work, you shall be saved, and saved for ever.

Here is a text for you: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Is not that a wonderful "whosoever"? "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord" in believing prayer, asking mercy, trusting Christ for mercy, "shall be saved." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Most of you know these texts by heart; grip them as with hooks of steel. If you say that you are hungry, and I put a loaf of

bread in front of you, will you sit and look at it all night? If I meet you in a week's time, will you still complain that you are hungry, while there is the bread in front of you still untouched? You deserve to be hungry if that is the case, you deserve to be famished to death if, the bread being there, you will not have it. Take it, and eat it. "May I have it?" asks one. Thou art commanded to have it; this is not a matter that is left to thy option. "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Our Lord himself said, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." It is, therefore, a gospel command that thou shouldst repent and believe, and truly thou mayest obey a command given by the Lord himself. There is no question about thy permission to obey it; then, obey it at once, and take Christ to thyself.

"You do not know me," says a sorrowing one away there in the corner, "you do not know me, sir; else you would not talk so." I do not need to know you; but if you were the devil's own, if you would but come to Christ, you should be at once and for ever Christ's own. Though thou wert sunk almost into hell by a life of horrible crime, yet if thou wilt now come and repent of thy sin, and lay hold on Christ, thou shalt be saved. I do not know how to use language that shall be stronger than that; but do not think that I will withdraw it, or qualify it. If I did know how to speak in broader terms even than those I have used, I would so speak. Ye guiltiest of the guilty, you most condemned of all the condemned, for whom the hottest hell would be your due place, yet come away, and look to Christ, and you shall live, for none are too vile for him to cleanse, none are too guilty for him to pardon. Oh, that you would believe in Jesus while yet the gospel bell rings out, "mercy, mercy, mercy!"! God help you to do so, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"?546, 549, 419.

Luke 1:5-17, and 3:1-18

Chapter 1. Verses 5, 6. *There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia; and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*

You have here a very interesting couple, Zacharias and Elisabeth, a priest with a wife. I have often marvelled why the Church of Rome should think it wrong that priests should be married, when it is evident that the priests under the law were so. The priests had grown so numerous that there was not room for them all to work at the Temple at one time; they were divided into twenty-four courses, and Zacharias would, therefore, come up to Jerusalem for a fortnight to take his share of the service.

Zacharias and Elisabeth were notable for excellence of character: "They were both righteous before God." Not only did they stand high in the esteem of men, but the great God, who reads the hearts of all, and sees how they live in secret, reckoned them to be righteous: "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments" that is, in the moral precepts of the law? "and ordinances" that is, in the ceremonial rites? "of the Lord blameless."

7?9. *And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.*

Certain offices of the priest were considered to be more honourable than others; and so, to prevent any jealousy, they cast lots as to which they should take in turn. It fell to the lot of Zacharias to burn incense; this did not happen by chance. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing

thereof is of the Lord;" and there was a special reason why this good man should stand at the altar at this particular time.

10. *And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.*

While he, in the inner shrine, was burning incense, the multitudes in the outer courts were engaging in prayer. I think that is a very beautiful symbol, the priest unseen, like the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy of Holies above, and the mass of the people engaged in prayer while the unseen priest is offering the sacred perfume before the altar of Jehovah.

11, 12. *And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.*

He was a good man, yet he was troubled at the sight of an angel. Consciousness of sin, even in an outwardly blameless man, makes us all tremble in the presence of anything heavenly. This bright spirit had come fresh from the courts of God; he was a courtier of the heavenly Temple, and he had come down on a sudden with a sweet and cheering message for the earthly priest; but the priest was troubled, and fear fell upon him." Brethren, we cannot know much of heaven here below, because it would cause us trembling; we are as yet unfit for all the glories of that upper state. Good John Berridge wrote,?

"And now they range the heavenly plains,
And sing their hymns in melting strains;
And now their souls begin to prove
The heights and depths of Jesus' love.
"Ah! Lord, with tardy steps I creep,
And sometimes sing, and sometimes weep;
Yet strip me of this house of clay,
And I will sing as loud as they."

Yes, and so will we; we will be as much at home as the happy saints, who dwell in light, when once we are delivered from this hampering flesh and blood.

13. *But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard;*

The best *quietus* to fear is answered prayer. If God has heard thee, be not thou again afraid.

13. *And thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.*

"The grace" or "the gift of God", so the name "John" signifies; and it is a sweet name for anyone to bear: "Thou shalt call his name John." I do not think the prayer alluded to here was so much a prayer for a son; if so, methinks that Zacharias had long ago left off praying it, and now his old prayers are heard, after he had discontinued them. I think that it alludes rather to his prayer for the coming of the Christ, the appearance of the Messiah; that prayer was heard, as we shall see further on.

14, 15. *And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink;*

I do not say that it is the duty of every man to drink neither wine nor strong drink, but I beg every man to notice that if anyone was to be peculiarly consecrated to a holy calling, it was always to be so: "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink." If there be nothing defiling about wine or strong drink, there is certainly nothing sanctifying about it; and the tendency seems to lie the other way, else it is a strange thing that men dedicated to God were so continually bidden to drink neither wine nor strong drink.

15?17. *And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

In the third chapter of this Gospel, you will find the record of John beginning to fulfil this prophecy concerning himself.

Chapter iii. Verses 1?7. *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

Does not John the Baptist speak like Elijah? Here are no honeyed phrases to delight the popular ear. The prophet of the wilderness talks like one who is all on fire with zeal for God, and indignation against evil.

8?11. *Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, what shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*

John was wonderfully practical in his advocacy of a holy charity and benevolence. His words cut against all greed, all hoarding, all hardening of the heart towards our fellow-men.

12, 13. *Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.*

They were accustomed to gather the taxes unfairly, and to increase the rates by oppressing the people, getting, perhaps, twice or even ten times more out of them than they could legally claim. John speaks to the point, does he not?

14. *And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man,*

Those rough Roman soldiers, as they had conquered the country, were very apt to treat the people as though they were their slaves; so John says to them, "Do violence to no man,"?

14. *Neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.*

"With your rations, your allowances," so it runs. They were very apt to be contending for an increase in their pay, and to drag civilians before the courts with false accusations unless they chose to give them bribes to let them go. John does not mince matters with any of his hearers; he speaks with wonderful plainness and courage, and therein proves himself to be a true herald of his Master.

15?18. *And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water;*

but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

Joy, a Duty

A Sermon

(No. 2405)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, March 24th, 1895,

Delivered By

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, March 20th, 1887.

"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."?Philippians 4:4.

THERE IS A marvelous medicinal power in joy. Most medicines are distasteful; but this, which is the best of all medicines, is sweet to the taste, and comforting to the heart. We noticed, in our reading, that there had been a little tiff between two sisters in the church at Philippi;?I am glad that we do not know what the quarrel was about; I am usually thankful for ignorance on such subjects;?but, as a cure for disagreements, the apostle says, "Rejoice in the Lord alway." People who are very happy, especially those who are very happy in the Lord, are not apt either to give offence or to take offence. Their minds are so sweetly occupied with higher things, that they are not easily distracted by the little troubles which naturally arise among such imperfect creatures as we are. Joy in the Lord is the cure for all discord. Should it not be so? What is this joy but the concord of the soul, the accord of the heart, with the joy of heaven? Joy in the Lord, then, drives away the discords of earth.

Further, brethren, notice that the apostle, after he had said, "Rejoice in the Lord alway," commanded the Philippians to be careful for nothing, thus implying that joy in the Lord is one of the best preparations for the trials of this life. The cure for care is joy in the Lord. No, my brother, you will not be able to keep on with your fretfulness; no, my sister, you will not be able to weary yourself any longer with your anxieties, if the Lord will but fill you with his joy. Then, being satisfied with your God, yea, more than satisfied, overflowing with delight in him, you will say to yourself, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." What is there on earth that is worth fretting for even for five minutes? If one could gain an imperial crown by a day of care, it would be too great an expense for a thing which would bring more care with it. Therefore, let us be thankful, let us be joyful in the Lord. I count it one of the wisest things that, by rejoicing in the Lord, we commence our heaven here below. It is possible so to do, it is profitable so to do, and we are commanded so to do.

Now I come to the text itself, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

I. It will be our first business at this time to consider THE GRACE COMMANDED, this grace of joy; "Rejoice in the Lord," says the apostle.

In the first place, *this is a very delightful thing*. What a gracious God we serve, who makes delight to be a duty, and who commands us to rejoice! Should we not at once be obedient to such a command as this? It is intended that we should be happy. That is the meaning of the precept, that we should be cheerful; more than that, that we should be thankful; more than that, that we should rejoice. I think this word "rejoice" is almost a French word; it is not only joy, but it is joy over

again, re-joyce. You know *re* usually signifies the reduplication of a thing, the taking it over again. We are to joy, and then we are to re-joy. We are to chew the cud of delight; we are to roll the dainty morsel under our tongue till we get the very essence out of it. "Rejoice." Joy is a delightful thing. You cannot be too happy, brother. Nay, do not suspect yourself of being wrong because you are full of delight. You know it is said of the divine wisdom, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Provided that it is joy in the Lord, you cannot have too much of it. The fly is drowned in the honey, or the sweet syrup into which he plunges himself; but this heavenly syrup of delight will not drown your soul, or intoxicate your heart. It will do you good, and not evil, all the days of your life. God never commanded us to do a thing that would really harm us; and when he bids us rejoice, we may be sure that this is a delightful as it is safe, and as safe as it is delightful. Come, brothers and sisters, I am inviting you now to no distasteful duty when, in the name of my Master, I say to you, as Paul said to the Philippians under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice."

But, next, *this is a demonstrative duty*: "Rejoice in the Lord." There may be such a thing as a dumb joy, but I hardly think that it can keep dumb long. Joy! Joy! Why, it speaks for itself! It is like a candle lighted in a dark chamber; you need not sound a trumpet, and say, "Now light has come." The candle proclaims itself by its own brilliance; and when joy comes into a man, it shines out of his eyes, it sparkles in his countenance. There is a something about every limb of the man that betokens that his body, like a well-tuned harp, has had its strings put in order. Joy? it refreshes the marrow of the bones; it quickens the flowing of the blood in the veins; it is a healthy thing in all respects. It is a speaking thing, a demonstrative thing; and I am sure that joy in the Lord ought to have a tongue. When the Lord sends you affliction, sister, you generally grumble loudly enough; when the Lord tries you, my dear brother, you generally speak fast enough about that. Now when, on the other hand, the Lord multiplies his mercies to you, do speak about it, do sing about it. I cannot recollect, since I was a boy, ever seeing in the newspapers columns of thankfulness and expressions of delight about the prosperity of business in England. It is a long, long time since I was first able to read newspapers—a great many years now; but I do not recollect the paragraphs in which it was said that everybody was getting on in the world, and growing rich; but as soon as there was any depression in business, what lugubrious articles appeared concerning the dreadful times which had fallen upon the agricultural interest and every other interest! Oh, my dear brethren, from the way some of you grumble, I might imagine you were all ruined if I did not know better! I knew some of you when you were not worth twopence, and you are pretty well-to-do now; you have got on uncommonly well for men who are being ruined! From the way some people talk, you might imagine that everybody is bankrupt, and that we are all going to the dogs together; but it is not so, and what a pity it is that we do not give the Lord some of our praises when we have better times! If we are so loud and so eloquent over our present woes, why could we not have been as eloquent and as loud in thanksgiving for the blessings that God formerly vouchsafed to us? Perhaps the mercies buried in oblivion have been to heaven, and accused us to the Lord, and therefore he has sent us the sorrows of to-day. True joy, when it is joy in the Lord, must speak; it cannot hold its tongue, it must praise the name of the Lord.

Further, *this blessed grace of joy is very contagious*. It is a great privilege, I think, to meet a truly happy man, a graciously happy man. My mind goes back at this moment to that dear man of God who used to be with us, years ago, whom we called "Old Father Dransfield." What a lump of sunshine that man was! I think that I never came into this place with a heavy heart, but the very

sight of him seemed to fill me with exhilaration, for his joy was wholly in his God! An old man and full of years, but as full of happiness as he was full of days; always having something to tell you to encourage you. He constantly made a discovery of some fresh mercy for which we were again to praise God. O dear brethren, let us rejoice in the Lord, that we may set others rejoicing! One dolorous spirit brings a kind of plague into the house; one person who is always wretched seems to stop all the birds singing wherever he goes; but, as the birds pipe to each other, and one morning songster quickens all the rest, and sets the groves ringing with harmony, so will it be with the happy cheerful spirit of a man who obeys the command of the text, "Rejoice in the Lord alway." This grace of joy is contagious.

Besides, dear brethren, *joy in the Lord is influential for good*. I am sure that there is a mighty influence wielded by a consistently joyous spirit. See how little children are affected by the presence of a happy person. There is much more in the tone of the life than there is in the particular fashion of the life. It may be the life of one who is very poor, but oh, how poverty is gilded by a cheerful spirit! It may be the life of one who is well read and deeply instructed; but, oh, if there be a beauty of holiness, and a beauty of happiness added to the learning, nobody talks about "the blue stocking," or "the bookworm" being dull and heavy. Oh, no, there is a charm about holy joy! I wish we had more of it! There are many more flies caught with honey than with vinegar; and there are many more sinners brought to Christ by happy Christians than by doleful Christians. Let us sing unto the Lord as long as we live; and, mayhap, some weary sinner, who has discovered the emptiness of sinful pleasure, will say to himself, "Why, after all, there must be something real about the of these Christians; let me go and learn how I may have it." And when he comes and sees it in the light of your gladsome countenance, he will be likely to learn it, God helping him, so as never to forget it. "Rejoice in the Lord alway," says the apostle, for joy is a most influential grace, and every child of God ought to possess it in a high degree.

I want you to notice, dear friends, that *this rejoicing is commanded*. It is not a matter that is left to your option; it is not set before you as a desirable thing which you can do without, but it is a positive precept of the Holy Spirit to all who are in the Lord: "Rejoice in the Lord alway." We ought to obey this precept because joy in the Lord makes us like God. He is the happy God; ineffable bliss is the atmosphere in which he lives, and he would have his people to be happy. Let the devotees of Baal cut themselves with knives and lancets, and make hideous outcries if they will; but the servants of Jehovah must not even mar the corners of their beard. Even if they fast, they shall anoint their head, and wash their face, that they appear not unto men to fast, for a joyous God desires a joyous people.

You are commanded to rejoice, brethren, because this is for your profit. Holy joy will oil the wheels of your life's machinery. Holy joy will strengthen you for your daily labour. Holy joy will beautify you, and, as I have already said, give you an influence over the lives of others. It is upon this point that I would most of all insist, we are commanded to rejoice in the Lord. If you cannot speak the gospel, live the gospel by your cheerfulness; for what is the gospel? Glad tidings of great joy; and you who believe it must show by its effect upon you that it is glad tidings of great joy to you. I do believe that a man of God?under trial and difficulty and affliction, bearing up, and patiently submitting with holy acquiescence, and still rejoicing in God?is a real preacher of the gospel, preaching with an eloquence which is mightier than words can ever be, and which will find its secret and silent way into the hearts of those who might have resisted other arguments. Oh, do, then, listen to the text, for it is a command from God, "Rejoice in the Lord alway!"

May I just pause here, and hand this commandment round to all of you who are members of this church, and to all of you who are truly members of Christ? You are bidden to rejoice in the Lord alway; you are not allowed to sit there, and fret, and fume; you are not permitted to complain and grown. Mourner, you are commanded to put on beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for mourning. For this purpose your Saviour came, the Spirit of the Lord is upon him for this very end, that he might make you to rejoice. Therefore, sing with the prophet, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

II. Now we come to the second head, on which I will speak but briefly; that is, THE JOY DISCRIMINATED: "Rejoice *in the Lord*."

Notice *the sphere of this joy*: "Rejoice in the Lord." We read in Scripture that children are to obey their parents "in the Lord." We read of men and women being married "only in the Lord." Now, dear friends, no child of God must go outside that ring, "in the Lord." There is where you are, where you ought to be, where you must be. You cannot truly rejoice if you get outside that ring; therefore, see that you do nothing which you cannot do "in the Lord." Mind that you seek no joy which is not joy in the Lord; if you go after the poisonous sweets of this world, woe be to you. Never rejoice in that which is sinful, for all such rejoicing is evil. Flee from it; it can do you no good. That joy which you cannot share with God is not a right joy for you. No; "in the Lord" is the sphere of your joy.

But I think that the apostle also means that *God is to be the great object of your joy*: "Rejoice in the Lord." Rejoice in the Father, you Father who is in heaven, your loving, tender, unchangeable God. Rejoice, too, in the Son, your Redeemer, your Brother, the Husband of you soul, your Prophet, Priest, and King. Rejoice also in the Holy Ghost, your Quickener, your Comforter, in him who shall abide with you for ever. Rejoice in the one God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; in him delight yourselves, as it is written, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." We cannot have too much of this joy in the ord, for the great Jehovah is our exceeding joy. Or if, by :the Lord" is meant the Lord Jesus, then let me invite, persuade, command you to delight in the Lord Jesus, incarnate in your flesh, dead for your sins, risen for your justification, gone into the glory claiming victory for you, sitting at the right hand of God interceding for you, reigning over all worlds on your behalf, and soon to come to take you up into his glory that you may be with him for ever. Rejoice in the Lord Jesus. This is a sea of delight; blessed are they that dive into its utmost depths.

Sometimes, brethren and sisters, you cannot rejoice in anything else, but you can rejoice in the Lord; then, rejoice I him to the full. Do not rejoice in your temporal prosperity, for riches take to themselves wings, and fly away. Do not rejoice even in your great successes in the work of God. Remember how the seventy disciples came back to Jesus, and said, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name," and he answered, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." Do not rejoice in your privileges; I mean, do not make the great joy of your life to be the fact that you are favoured with this and that external privilege or ordinance, but rejoice in God. He changes not. If the Lord be your joy, your joy will never dry up. All other things are but for a season; but God is for ever and ever. Make him your joy, the whole of your joy, and then let this joy absorb your every thought. Be baptized into this joy; plunge into the deeps of this unutterable bliss of joy in God.

III. Thirdly, let us think of THE TIME APPOINTED for this rejoicing: "Rejoice in the Lord *always*."

"Always." Well, then, that begins at once, certainly; so let us now begin to rejoice in the Lord. If any of you have taken a gloomy view of religion, I beseech you to throw that gloomy view away at once. "Rejoice in the Lord always," therefore, rejoice in the Lord now. I recollect what a damper I had, as a young Christian, when I had but lately believed in Jesus Christ. I felt that, as the Lord had said, "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life," I, having believed in him, had everlasting life, and I said so, with the greatest joy and delight and enthusiasm, to an old Christian man; and he said to me, "Beware of presumption! There are a great many who think they have eternal life, but who have not got it," which was quite true; but, for all that, is there not more presumption in doubting God's promise than there is in believing it? Is there any presumption in taking God at his word? Is there not gross presumption in hesitating and questioning as to whether these things are so or not? If God says that they are so, then they are so, whether I feel that they are so or not; and it is my place, as a believer, to accept God's bare word, and rest on it. "We count cheques as cash," said one who was making up accounts. Good cheques are to be counted as cash, and the promises of God, though as yet unfulfilled, are as good as the blessings themselves, for God cannot lie, or make a promise that he will not perform. Let us, therefore, not be afraid of being glad, but begin to be glad at once if we have hitherto taken a gloomy view of true religion, and have been afraid to rejoice.

When are we to be glad? "Rejoice in the Lord always;" that is, *when you cannot rejoice in anything or anyone but God*. When the fig-tree does not blossom, when there is no fruit on the vine and no herd in the stall, when everything withers and decays and perishes, when the worm at the root of the gourd has made it to die, then rejoice in the Lord. When the day darkens into evening, and the evening into midnight, and the midnight into a seven fold horror of great darkness, rejoice in the Lord; and when that darkness does not clear, but becomes more dense and Egyptian, when night succeedeth night, and neither sun nor moon nor stars appear, still rejoice in the Lord always. He who uttered these words had been a night and a day in the deep, he had been stoned, he had suffered from false brethren, he had been in peril of his life, and yet most fittingly do those lips cry out to us, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Ay, at the stake itself have martyrs fulfilled this word; they clapped their hands amid the fire that was consuming them. Therefore, rejoice in the Lord when you cannot rejoice in any other.

But also take care that you *rejoice in the Lord when you have other things to rejoice in*. When he loads your table with good things, and your cup is overflowing with blessings, rejoice in *him* more than in *them*. Forget not that the Lord your Shepherd is better than the green pastures and the still waters, and rejoice not in the pastures or in the waters in comparison with your joy in the Shepherd who gives you all. Let us never make gods out of our goods; let us never allow what God gives us to supplant the Giver. Shall the wife love the jewels that her husband gave her better than she loves him who gave them to her? That were an evil love, or no love at all. So, let us love God first, and rejoice in the Lord always when the day is brightest, and multiplied are the other joys that he permits us to have.

"Rejoice in the Lord always." That is, *if you have not rejoiced before, begin to do so at once; and when you have long rejoiced, keep on at it*. I have known, sometimes, that things have gone so smoothly that I have said, "There will be a check to this prosperity; I know that there will. Things cannot go on quite so pleasantly always."

"More the treacherous calm I dread
Than tempests lowering overhead."

One is apt to spoil his joy by the apprehension that there is some evil coming. Now listen to this: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." "Rejoice in the Lord alway." Do not anticipate trouble. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Take the good that God provides thee, and rejoice not merely in it, but in him who provided it. So mayest thou enjoy it without fear, for there is good salt with that food which is eaten as coming from the hand of God.

"Rejoice in the Lord alway." That is, *when you get into company, then rejoice in the Lord*. Do not be ashamed to let others see that you are glad. *Rejoice in the Lord also when you are alone*. I know what happens to some of you on Sunday night. You have had such a blessed Sabbath, and you have gone away from the Lord's table with the very flavour of heaven in your mouths; and then some of you have had to go home where everything is against you. The husband does not receive you with any sympathy with your joy, or the father does not welcome you with any fellowship in your delight. Well, but still, "Rejoice in the Lord *alway*." When you cannot get anybody else to rejoice with you, still continue to rejoice. There is a way of looking at everything which will show you that the blackest cloud has a silver lining. There is a way of looking at all things in the light of God, which will turn into sweetness that which otherwise had been bitter as gall. I do not know whether any of you keep a quassia cup at home. If you do, you know that it is made of wood, and you pour water into the bowl, and the water turns bitter directly before you drink it. You may keep this cup as long as you like, but it always embitters the water that is put into it. I think that I know some dear brethren and sisters who always seem to have one of these cups handy. Now instead of that, I want you to buy a cup of another kind that shall make everything sweet, whatever it is. Whatever God pleases to pour out of the bowl of providence shall come into your cup, and your contentment, your delight in God, shall sweeten it all. God bless you, dear friends, with much of this holy joy!

IV. So now I finish with the fourth head, which is this, THE EMPHASIS LAID ON THE COMMAND: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and again I say, Rejoice*." What does that mean, "Again I say, Rejoice"?

This was, first, *to show Paul's love for the Philippians*. He wanted them to be happy. They had been so kind to him, and they had made him so happy, that he said, "Oh, dear brethren, do rejoice; dear sisters, do rejoice. I say it twice over to you, 'Be happy, be happy,' because I love you so well that I am anxious to have you beyond all things else to rejoice in the Lord alway."

I also think that, perhaps, he said it twice over to suggest the *difficulty of continual joy*. It is not so easy as some think always to rejoice. It may be for you young people, who are yet strong in limb, who have few aches and pains, and none of the infirmities of life. It may be an easy thing to those placed in easy circumstances, with few cares and difficulties; but there are some of God's people who need great grace if they are to rejoice in the Lord always; and the apostle knew that, so he said, "Again I say, Rejoice." He repeats the precept, as much as to say, "I know it is a difficult thing, and so I the more earnestly press it upon you. Again I say, Rejoice."

I think, too that he said it twice over, *to assert the possibility of it*. This was as much as if he had said, "I told you to rejoice in the Lord always. You opened your eyes, and looked with astonishment upon me; but, "Again I say, Rejoice." It is possible, it is practicable; I have not spoken unwisely. I have not told you to do what you never can do; but with deliberation I write it down,

"Again I say, Rejoice.' You can be happy. God the Holy Ghost can lift you above the down-draggings of the flesh, and of the world, and of the devil; and you may be enabled to live upon the mount of God beneath the shinings of his face. "Again I say, Rejoice."

Do you not think that this was intended also *to impress upon them the importance of the duty?* "Again I say, Rejoice." Some of you will go and say, "I do not think that it matters much whether I am happy or not, I shall get to heaven, however gloomy I am, if I am sincere." "No," says Paul, "that kind of talk will not do; I cannot have you speak like that. Come, I must have you rejoice, I do really conceive it to be a Christian's bounden duty, and so, "Again, I say, Rejoice."

But do you not think, also, that Paul repeated the command *to allow of special personal testimony?* "Again I say, Rejoice. I, Paul, a sufferer to the utmost extent for Christ's sake, even now an ambassador in bonds, shut up in a dungeon, I say to you, Rejoice." Paul was a greatly-tried man, but he was a blessedly happy man. There is not one of us but would gladly change conditions with Paul, if that were possible, now that we see the whole of his life written out; and to-night, looking across the ages, over all the scenes of trouble which he encountered, he says to us, "Brethren, rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

Did you ever notice how full of joy this Epistle to the Philippians is? Will you spare me just a minute while I get you to run your eye through it, to observe what a joyful letter it is? You notice that, in the first chapter, Paul gets only as far as the fourth verse when he says, "Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy." Now he is in his right vein; he is so glad because of what God has done for the Philippians that, when he prays for them, he mixes joy with his prayer. In the eighteenth verse, he declares that he found joy even in the opposition of those who preached Christ in order to rival him. Hear what he says: "The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." And he does not finish the chapter till, in the twenty-fifth verse, he declares that he had joy even in the expectation of not going to heaven just yet, but living a little longer to do good to these people: "And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again." You see it is joy, joy, joy, joy. Paul seems to go from stave to stave of the ladder of light, as if he were climbing up from Nero's dungeon into heaven itself by way of continual joy. So he writes, in the second verse of the second chapter, "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." When he gets to the sixteenth verse, he says, "That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain."

But I am afraid that I should weary you if I went through the Epistle thus, slowly, verse by verse. Just notice how he begins the third chapter: "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." The word is sometimes rendered "farewell." When he says, "Rejoice," it is the counterpart of "welcome." We say to a man who comes to our house, "Salve," "Welcome." When he goes away, it is our duty to "speed the parting guest," and say "Farewell." This is what Paul meant to say here. "Finally, my brethren, fare you well in the Lord. Be happy in the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord." And I do not think that I can finish up my sermon better than by saying on this Sabbath night, "Finally, my brethren, fare you well, be happy in the Lord."

"Fare thee well! a if for ever

Still for ever, fare thee well."

May that be your position, so to walk with God that your fare shall be that of angels! May you eat angels' food, the manna of God's love! May your drink be from the rock that flows with a pure stream! So may you feed and so may you drink until you come unto the mount of God; where you shall see his face unveiled, and standing in his exceeding brightness, shall know his glory, being glorified with the saved. Till then, be happy. Why, even?

"The thought of such amazing bliss,
Should constant joy create."

Be happy. If the present be dreary, it will soon be over. Oh, but a little while, and we shall be transferred from these seats below to the thrones above! We shall go from the place of aching brows to the place where they all wear crowns, from the place of weary hands to where they bear the palm branch of victory, from the place of mistake and error and sin, and consequent grief, to the place where they are without fault before the throne of God, for they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Come, then, let us make a solemn league and covenant together in the name of God, and let it be called, "The Guild of the Happy"; for the?

"Favourites of the Heavenly King
May speak their joys abroad;"

ay, they *must* speak their joys abroad; let us endeavour to do so always, by the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen and Amen.

Philippians 4

This Epistle was written by Paul when he was in prison, with iron fetters about his wrists; yet there is no iron in the Epistle. It is full of light, life, love, and joy, blended with traces of sorrow, yet with a holy delight that rises above his grief.

Verse 1. *Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.*

See how the heart of the apostle is at work; his emotions are not dried up by his personal griefs. He takes a delight in his friends at Philippi; he has a lively recollection of the time when he and Silas were shut up in prison there, and that same night baptized the jailor and his household, and formed the church at Philippi.

2. *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.*

These two good women had fallen out with one another. Paul loves them so much that he would not have any strife in the church to mar its harmony; and he therefore beseeches both of these good women to end their quarrel, and to "be of the same mind in the Lord." You cannot tell what hurt may come to a church through two members being at enmity against each other. They may be unknown persons, they may be Christian women, but they can work no end of mischief; and therefore it is a most desirable thing that they should speedily come together again in peace and unity.

3. *And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life.*

He tenderly thinks of all those who had helped the work of the Lord, and, in return, he would have all of them helped, and kindly remembered, and affectionately cherished. May we always have this tender feeling towards one another, especially towards those who work for the Lord with us! May we ever delight in cheering those who serve our Lord!

4, 5. *Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

We have come to understand this word "moderation" in a sense not at all intended here. The best translation would probably be "forbearance." Do not get angry with anybody; do not begin to get fiery and impetuous: be forbearing, for the Lord is at hand. You cannot tell how soon he may appear; there is no time to spare for the indulgence of anger; be quiet; be patient; and if there be anything very wrong, well, leave it. Our Lord Jesus will come very soon; therefore be not impatient.

6. *Be careful?*

That is, be anxious?

6. *For nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

See how the apostle would bid us throw anxiety to the winds; let us try to do so. You cannot turn one hair white or black, fret as you may. You cannot add a cubit to your stature, be you as anxious as you please. It will be for your own advantage, and it will be for God's glory for you to shake off the anxieties which else might overshadow your spirit. Be anxious about nothing, but prayerful about everything, and be thankful about everything as well. Is not that a beautiful trait in Paul's character? He is a prisoner at Rome, and likely soon to die; yet he mingles thanksgiving with his supplication, and asks others to do the same. We have always something for which to thank God, therefore let us also obey the apostolic injunction.

7, 8. *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

If there is any really good movement in the world, help it, you Christian people. If it is not purely and absolutely religious, yet if it tends to the benefit of your fellow-men, if it promotes honesty, justice, purity, take care that you are on that side, and do all you can to help it forward.

9. *Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen I me, do:*

Paul was a grand preacher to be able to say that; to hold up his own example, as well as his own teaching, as a thing which the people might safely follow.

9. *And the God of peace shall be with you.*

In the seventh verse, we had the expression, "the peace of God." In this ninth verse, we have the mention of the "God of peace." May we first enjoy the peace of God, and then be helped by the Spirit of God to get into a still higher region, where we shall be more fully acquainted with the God of peace!

10. *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.*

"I rejoiced." So Paul was himself in a happy mood; these saints in Philippi had sent to him in prison a gift by the hand of one of their pastors, and Paul, in his deep poverty, had been much comforted by their kind thoughtfulness about him.

11. *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

That was not an easy lesson to learn, especially when one of those states meant being in prison at Rome. If he was ever in the Mamertine those of us who have been in that dungeon would confess that it would take a deal of grace to make us content to be there; and if he was shut up in the prison of the palatine hill, in the barracks near the morass, it was, to say the least, not a desirable place to be in. Soldier chained to your hand day and night, however good a fellow he may be, does not

always make the most delightful company for you, nor you for him; and it takes some time to learn to be content with such a companion; but, says Paul, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

12. *I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

These are both hard lessons to learn; I do not know which is the more difficult of the two. Probably it is easier to know how to go down than to know how to go up. How many Christians have I seen grandly glorifying God in sickness and poverty when they have come down in the world; and ah! How often have I seen other Christians dishonouring God when they have grown rich, or when they have risen to a position of influence among their fellow-men! These two lessons grace alone can fully teach us.

13. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

What a gracious attainment! There is no boasting in this declaration; Paul only spoke what was literally the truth.

14, 15. *Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.*

The Philippians were the only Christians who had sent any help to this great sufferer for Christ's sake in the time of his need.

16?18. *For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.*

I do not suppose that they sent him very much; but he knew the love that prompted the gift, he understood what they meant by it. I always had a fancy that Lydia was the first to suggest that kind deed. She, the first convert of the Philippian church, thought of Paul, I doubt not, and said to the other believers, "Let us take care of him as far as we can. See how he spends his whole life in the Master's service, and now he may at last die in prison for want of even common necessities; let us send him a present to Rome." How grateful is the apostle for that gift of love! What gladness they had put into his heart! Now he says:?

19. *But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

"You have supplied my need out of your poverty; my God shall supply all your need out of his riches. Your greatest need shall not exceed the liberality of his supplies."

20, 21. *Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus.*

The religion of Christ is full of courtesy, and it is full of generous thoughtfulness. I do not think that he can be a Christian who has no knowledge nor care about his fellow church-members.

21. *The brethren which are with me greet you.*

They saw that he was writing a letter, and they therefore said, "Send our love to the Philippians."

22. *All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.*

Only think of saints in the household of Nero, saints in the service of such a demon as he was, and saints who were first in every good thing: "Chiefly they that are of Caesar's household."

23. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"?136, 720, 870.

First Forgiveness, Then Healing

A Sermon

(No. 2417)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day, June 16th, 1895,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,

On Thursday Evening, June 2nd, 1887.

"When he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins be forgiven thee."?Luke 5:20.

I HAVE READ TO YOU the narrative of the healing of the man taken with the palsy; and many of you remember that, last Sabbath evening,* I preached upon the Pharisees and the doctors of the law who were "sitting by." I tried to represent the position of many in our congregations who are just "sitting by." I preached to the outsiders of the congregation, on the divers reasons which led to this "sitting by." I must confess that I did not reckon on so large a blessing as I have already seen as the result of that sermon. When I came here on Monday afternoon, that being Whit-Monday, when everybody is supposed to take a holiday, I was surprised, on my arrival, at about three o'clock, by a friend running up to me, and saying, "We are glad you have come, sir, for there is a room full already. There is quite a nice number of friends who have come forward from the congregation, and who one after another have said, "We cannot be 'sitting by' any longer; we feel that we cannot remain among the sitters-by, but that we must come in and partake of the gospel feast, and join ourselves with the disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

This blessed result of my sermon has set the bells of my heart ringing all the week, and I have felt deeply thankful to God for it. I said to myself that, as I had taken one arrow, which had sped so well, out of that quiver, I would take another. Having spoken to those who are "sitting by", I think I will now speak to those who are not sitting by, but who indeed are the principal persons in the congregation, namely, those who are sick and sorry, and who need the Saviour. For this palsied man, who was let down by ropes through the ceiling, was the most remarkable person in that congregation. We may readily forget those Pharisees and learned legal gentlemen; but we can never forget this man to whom, as soon as ever they "let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus," the Saviour said, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." I trust that, at this time, there are some present in this audience who are not sitting by, but who are already praying, "God be merciful to whose prayers are rising to heaven in accents like these, "Lord, help me!" "Lord, save, or I perish!" You are the principal persons in the congregation both to the preacher and to the preacher's Master. He cares more about you, and about what shall take place in you, than about any of the Pharisees or doctors of the law who may be sitting by. God is glorified in scattering his miracles of mercy where there is the greatest need of them. Our Lord Jesus, when the poor man was let down by his four friends through the ceiling, said to him at once, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." Matthew puts our Saviour's words thus, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee;" while Mark's record is, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Well, Jesus may have uttered all of these words, and all the different versions of the story may be correct, for it is not every man's ear that catches the whole of every sentence that is spoken, and we may be glad that there are three

Evangelists who have recorded what the Saviour said. There is no real difference in the sense, and the difference in the words may only show that Jesus said all three sentences.

I am going, on this occasion, to talk a little about this man, first, *before his forgiveness*; next, a little more about *his forgiveness itself*; and then a little about what followed *after his forgiveness*.

I. First, then, let us think of this man BEFORE HIS FORGIVENESS.

We are not told much about him. If I indulge in imagination a little, you will take it for what it is worth. This man, it seems to me, first, *had faith which went out towards the Lord Jesus*. Evidently, as I read the narrative, he had been suddenly paralyzed. This affliction usually comes upon a sudden; men who have been about their business, as active as usual, have been in a moment struck down with paralysis. This man appears to have been completely paralyzed, so as to have been unable to move; and, as he lay in that helpless state, he heard that Jesus of Nazareth had come to the city, and he believed that Jesus of Nazareth was able to heal even him. It does not strike me that his friends would have brought him to Christ unless at his own request; the most rational explanation of the whole proceeding seems to me to be this, he believed in Jesus as able to heal him, and he continued to cry out earnestly, and to pray that he might somehow or other be taken into Christ's presence. He could not stir hand or foot, but he had friends, and he begged those friends to take him to Jesus.

Well now, there never was a soul yet that had faith in Christ but what Christ revealed himself more fully in the way of love to that soul. If thou knowest that thou canst not save thyself, if thou believest that Christ can save thee, and if thy one anxiety is to be laid at his feet, that he may look upon thee, and save thee, he will assuredly accept thee. "Him that cometh to me," saith he, "I will in no wise cast out." Whether he comes running, or walking, or creeping, or borne of four, so long as he doth come, Christ will accept him; and if his faith be but as a grain of mustard seed, our Lord Jesus will not let it die. If there be but a smouldering faith, he will not quench the smoking flax. Believest thou this? If thou dost, let it cheer thee and comfort thee. There is something that is well with thy soul already. It was better to be paralyzed and to have faith in Christ than to be walking upright like the Pharisees and lawyers who had no faith in him. The apparent wretchedness of thy condition is not the real wretchedness of it; it may even turn out to be the blessedness and the hopefulness of it. If thou believest in Jesus, I care not how far thou hast fallen, nor how great is thy inability; if thou believest in Jesus, thou art brought into contact with omnipotence, and that omnipotence will heal thee.

This man, I believe, further, thought that Christ could heal him, but *he began to feel his great sinfulness*. I am certain that he did, because Jesus never does forgive where there is no repentance. There was never yet the fiat, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," until first there was a consciousness of sin, and a confession of sin. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This man, lying there paralyzed, wept at the thought of his past life, his omissions and his commissions, his falling short and his transgressions, and his heart was heavy within him. He seemed to say to his friends, "Get me somehow to the great Prophet; get me within sight of this wonderful Saviour. Oh, get me within touch of him, that I may be restored, that I may have this great load, which presses me down so sorely, taken off my heart! Worse to me even than the paralysis is this awful sense of sin. Take me, oh, take me into the presence of this Messiah, this Son of David, that he may have mercy upon me!" That I conceive to have been his condition before the word of pardon was spoken to him.

Next, being hopeful himself, *he inspired those about him with hope*. Of course, they would not have taken him to Christ if they had not had some sort of belief that possibly he might be healed. It is wonderful what sick people can do even when they can do nothing; how, when they seem to be utterly powerless, they find a strength in feebleness. Their very helplessness seems to be a plea where there is anything of generosity left in the heart of those who are near them. So this man pleaded, "I believe Jesus will heal me, I believe he will have mercy upon me; get me to him, do get me to him."

They resolved to do it if they could; and *he was willing to be carried to Christ*. Four stout stalwart men said, "Yes, we will get you to him somehow, though it is a difficult task, for the house is small, the room is crowded, and there is sure to be a press about the door." "But," said the poor man, "Oh! try to do it, for it is my only hope. If I could but get where Jesus could see me, he would look on me, and save me. Oh, get me to him, get me to him!" The palsied man would make no dispute about how it was to be done, so they carried him to the door of the house, and then they said to the people crowding around, "Make way for this poor palsied man," and he would say, "I pray you, friends and neighbours, make way;" but they could not; perhaps they, too, had their friends who wanted to be healed, or they themselves had an anxiety to hear the great Teacher, so they pushed and pressed to get as near him as they could. You see, those quibbling Pharisees and doctors of the law had got in first, and they blocked up the road. They are always in a poor sinner's way. What must be done? The poor man's bearers would have abandoned the task, I think, but he said, "No, do not give up trying to get me in; it is my only hope. Oh, get me to him! Get me near him!"

So, next, the man was *willing to be lowered into the presence of Christ*. There was no other way but to go up those stairs outside the house, and to take him to the top of the roof; and he, not fearing as many would have done, said, "Ay, break it up, and let me down." These four men, belonging to a fishing town, were adepts in the use of ropes, and they soon had their tackle ready, and they broke a way through the roof. As I told you in the reading, I always feel pleased at the idea of the dust and the *debris* of the roof coming down upon the heads of the Pharisees and doctors of the law. It always delights me to think that those gentlemen would have dust on their heads for once; since they were there, they were bound to have a little of it. Of course, when these gentlemen come to a place of worship, one feels bound to be respectful to them; but if they come at an untimely hour, when there is any rough work going on, one does not feel any particular regret. If, when souls are being saved, these gentlemen should have their corns trodden upon, we do not even ask their pardon, or make any apology. Such a work as Christ had to do could not stand still for the sake of reverence to the learned doctors of the law; so the roof was broken up, and this man, though paralyzed, was not afraid to be let down. It is probable that there were no outcries from him when they began to let him down; I think, if it had been my case, I might have been afraid that one rope would go a little faster than the other. But no, the man keeps still in his paralysis and courage mingled, till down drops the pallet just before the Saviour.

There he lies upon his mattress, on the floor of the house, *just before the Saviour's eyes*, exactly where he wanted to be. Here I address myself to some who would give all that they have if they could but be brought under the eye of Jesus. The one thought of such a sufferer is, "Oh, that I could be near him! Oh, that I could be near him! Oh, that he would look on me, and cure my helplessness, and pardon my sin!" What a wonderful picture this scene would make! The crowd are obliged to make way, or else they will have to bear the man and his bed on their heads; so he is dropped down

into their midst, and there he lies. The great Preacher has been preaching, and he stops. There is an interruption which is indeed no interruption to him. His discourse is but broken off for a minute, to be illustrated with engravings, that men may see, in after years, that what they have heard is but the letter-press, and that the miracle which is now to be wrought shall be the engraving which shall convey the Teacher's wonderful meaning to all eyes. So the poor palsied man lies there before the Saviour.

Is that where you desire to lie, dear friend? In your deadly sorrow, and sin, and weakness, do you wish to lie at the Saviour's feet? That is where I want you to lie; and if you will to lie there, that is where you do lie. The Lord Jesus is in the midst of us to-night, and you can at once cast yourself down before him. Do so, tell him about your paralysis, tell him how sick you are, how sinful you are. Nay, you need not speak so that I can hear you; his ears will hear the whisper of your soul. Your heart-beats will be vocal to his heart, and he will note all you say or feel in your inmost soul. Just lie before Jesus; and as you lie there, what are you to do? This man did not speak a word; but, as I believe, he lay there repenting that ever he should have lived as he had done, mourning that he should have wasted his life and misspent his time. I think, too, that he lay there believing, looking at that wondrous Man, and believing that all power was in him, and that he had only to speak the word, and the sinner should be at once forgiven. So he lay there, in the presence of Jesus, hoping and expecting forgiveness and healing.

II. Now, in the second place, we are to consider **THE FORGIVENESS ITSELF**.

This poor paralyzed man had not lain there long before the blessed Master broke the silence, and said to him, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." I think that the four men up on the roof, looking down to see what would happen to their friend, would hardly understand what that sentence meant. They had brought him to Jesus because he was paralyzed, but he had wanted to come first of all because he was a sinner. He did desire to have his paralysis cured; but secretly in his soul there was another matter which they might not have understood if he had tried to interpret it to them; it was his sin that was his heaviest burden; and the Saviour, the great Thought-reader knew all about that sin, so he did not first say to him, "Rise up and walk," but he began by saying, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee."

Observe, that *the pardon of sin came in a single sentence*. He spake, and it was done. Jesus said "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee," and they were forgiven him. Christ's voice had such almighty power about it that it needed not to utter many words. There was no long lesson for the poor man to repeat, there was no intricate problem for him to work out in his mind. The Master said all that was required in that one sentence, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." The burden of a sinner does not need two ticks of the clock for it to be removed; swifter than the lightning's hash is that verdict of absolution which comes from the eternal lips, when the sinner lies hoping, believing, repenting at the feet of Jesus. It was a single sentence which declared that the man was forgiven.

Next, remember that it was *a sentence from One who was authorized to absolve*. He was sent by the Father on purpose to forgive sin; and do not imagine that he has now lost his authorization to forgive; for "him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Jesus is appointed as High Priest on purpose that he may stand on God's behalf, and declare the remission of sin. What Jesus said was spoken with divine authority. It is vain for a priest to say to a sinner, "I absolve thee." What can he do in such a case? He, or any other man who does not call himself a Priest, may speak in his Master's name, and say to the penitent, "If thou dost sincerely repent, if thou truly believest, I know thou art absolved,

and I comfort thee with the assurance of this absolution." So far, so good; but the Master alone can really give the absolution, it must come from him who has power upon earth to forgive sins.

Now, my hearer, hast thou never been forgiven? Art thou in thy pew, and yet lying at that dear Master's feet, and dost thou desire above all things that he should say to thee, "Thy sins are forgiven thee"? And dost thou believe that he can say it, and wilt thou accept it from him as being by divine authority? If so, I think he says it to thee, for in his own Word he declares that they who believe in him are forgiven. He says to each one of those who are penitent, and believe in his grace, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Take thou the absolution, and go thy way. Do as Martin Luther did, in the days of his dark distress, when a brother-monk said to him, "Dost thou not believe in the Creed, and dost thou not say, 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins'? Now believe in the forgiveness of sins for thyself." Trust Christ's Word, and thou wilt be believing what is absolutely true. Trust it, take the comfort of it, and go thy way. It is thus that Jesus Christ, by the preaching of the gospel, and by the revealed Word of God, says authoritatively to each penitent, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee."

Further observe, that this sentence, although it was but one, and was so short, yet was *wonderfully comprehensive*: "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." Not one sin alone, nor many sins, but all thy sins are forgiven thee. When you go into particulars, you are apt to leave something out; hence, the declaration is made all-inclusive, there are no particulars given. "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Sins against the holy God? Sins against a righteous law? Sins against the gospel? Sins against the light of nature? Sins of this and sins of that kind? No, there is no enumeration. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." Murder, adultery, theft, fornication, blasphemy? Yes, in a word, "all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." At one sudden sweep of the divine wave of mercy they are all washed away. There is no such thing as a half-pardon of sin. I heard someone talking, the other day, about original sin being forgiven, and the other sins left; but sin is a whole, it goes or it stays altogether, it cannot be broken up into pieces, it is all there or it is not there at all, and it is not there if thou believest in Jesus. This blessed and comprehensive sentence sets free from every jot and taint and stain of guilt: "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee."

Observe, also, that *this sentence contains no conditions*: and the blessed gospel, speaking to every repenting and believing sinner, gives him absolute forgiveness. Behold, the tally is destroyed, the record of thy debt is nailed to the cross and as for thy sins, they are like the Egyptians when the Red Sea swallowed them up, the depths have covered them, there is not one of them left, however great or many they may have been. If thou art now a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he says to thee now by his Word, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." I pray the blessed Master by his Holy Spirit to make his Word come home to many here with power. Oh, that those dear lips, which are as lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, did themselves speak to you! Oh, that those wounds of his, which are mouths that preach pardon to sinners, might speak to you, and say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." There is no mouth that speaketh pardon like that gash in his side, out of which his very heart speaks, as he says, "I have loved thee, and given myself to death for thee. Thy sins I have borne on the tree, and put them away once for all. Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." Oh, that Jesus himself might thus speak effectually to many of you!

But note, that *this sentence sufficed the receiver*. When the Saviour afterwards raised this palsied man to health and strength, he did not do it to let the man himself know that his sins were forgiven. The man knew that already, and did not need any more evidence of it; but Jesus did it for another reason. To the scribes and Pharisees he said, "That ye may know that the Son of man hath power

upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house." Those unbelieving men had not evidence enough that Christ could forgive, but he to whom Christ spake wanted no further proof than the power of that voice in his own conscience; and if he shall speak to thee, my hearer, thou wilt not want any books about the evidences of Scripture, the proofs of inspiration, and so on; to thee, this indisputable miracle of pardoned sin shall stand for ever as a holy memorial of God's mighty grace. It shall be unto you for a sign, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off, that God has pardoned you, and spoken peace to your soul; and this God shall be your God for ever and ever. To every soul that is in a similar case to that of the poor palsied man lying repenting and believing at the feet of Jesus, his Word gives the comfortable assurance, "Believe, and thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee." Believe it, and go thy way in peace.

III. Now I close by noticing, thirdly, what followed AFTER THIS MAN'S FORGIVENESS.

He was absolutely, irreversibly, eternally forgiven; for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." He never plays fast and loose with men; he never issues a pardon from his throne, and afterwards executes the pardoned sinner. His pardon covers all that may come afterwards as well as all that has gone before. But what happened to this man?

I believe that, first, there was *an inward peace that stole over his soul*. If you could have looked into the face of that palsied man, whilst still palsied, and lying there in that hammock, you would have seen a wonderful transformation. Did you ever see a face transfigured? If you are a soul-winner, you have often seen it. All human faces are not beautiful, some are absolutely repulsive; the countenances of some who have lived long in sin are dreadful to look upon. Yet I have noticed faces, that at first I could scarcely endure, when the persons have been gently led to the Saviour, and they have perceived the love of God to them, and have at last believed, and felt within their soul the kiss of peace, why, they have looked positively beautiful! I should have liked to have had them photographed, only it was too sacred a thing. Speak of physiognomies; the grace of God is such an eternal beautifier that the face, from which you would have turned away in disgust, and said, "There can be no good thing behind that countenance," is absolutely changed by the Lord's mighty working. I say not that a single feature may be altered; the person may be the same in feature, but, oh! what a marvellous difference there is in the expression of the whole contour of the countenance when free grace and dying love have cast their magic spell over the spirit, and the Holy Ghost has made the dead to live, and the person has been born again in Christ Jesus. Well, that change took place in this man's mind, I am sure it did, when Jesus said to him, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." He was in no hurry to be raised from his palsied state; he does not appear to have said a word, and those scribes and Pharisees looked on with their malevolent countenances, but they did not frighten him; he lay quite still, and was in no haste even for the Master's next blessing. It would come in due time, he knew it would, and he was of good cheer, for had not Jesus said to him "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee"?

But next followed *the Man's immediate cure*. The Master said to him, "Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house." Our blessed Master was accustomed to preach the gospel in a way which I have heard some friends greatly question. They tell us that we ought not to bid men to believe and repent, because they cannot. There are two parties on opposite sides of this question; one says, "If you tell a man to believe and repent, that proves that he can," which I do not believe; and others say, "If they cannot repent, you ought not to exhort them to do so," which also I do not believe. Though I know them to be as helpless as that poor palsied man, unable to lift hand or foot,

yet in the Master's name we do say, as the Master was wont to say, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." "Oh!" says one, "I could not say that to an unregenerate man." Do not do it, brother, if you cannot do it; go home, and go to bed; what is the use of you for such work? The man who can speak miracles is the one who is wanted, and the man who can speak as his Master has bidden him speak. Surely, the faith does not lie in believing that the man can himself do what he is bidden to do; the faith lies in believing that Christ can do it, and therefore, speaking in Christ's name, we say to the sinner just as the Lord Jesus did to the man with the withered hand, "Stretch forth thine hand," and he does so. Look at Ezekiel speaking to the dry bones in the valley. Ezekiel, dost thou believe that these dry bones can live? "Not I," says he, "I know that they are dead." The Lord says to him, "Ezekiel, prophesy upon these dry bones!" How can he do it? It would be inconsistent with what he said just now. "I have nothing to do with that," says he, "I was sent by the Lord to do it, and I do it in the name of God." That which may seem perfectly inconsistent with your reason, is quite consistent when faith brings in the supernatural element with which God moves those to whom he gives the commission to preach the gospel in his name.

The Saviour said to this man, "Arise, take up thy couch, and go into thine house." Now observe *his precise obedience*. "Immediately he rose up before them all." The tendency of a paralyzed person is to be paralyzed in will. There are some persons, no doubt, who have ailments that can easily be cured if they believe they can be cured, because there is not much the matter with them after all; but this man was completely paralyzed, yet he so fully believed in Christ that up he rose, and stood before the Master. Then Jesus said, "Take up thy couch." I think I see him undo those four ropes, and quickly he shoulders his mattress. "Walk," says the Master, and he walks. "Go into thine house," says the Master. He might have stopped, and said, "No, Lord, do let me stay and hear the sermon out;" but no, not a word did he say about it, but off he went to his own house.

Oh, that all were as obedient to Christ as this man was, that, having the simplicity of faith, they would render the fullest obedience! But thus it often is that the very chief of sinners, when pardon is given to them, have given to them at the same time a tender conscience, a willing mind, a yielding spirit. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it," said the virgin mother to the servants at Cana of Galilee; and that is good advice for you. If Christ hath healed you, obey him, obey him at once, obey him exactly, obey him in everything, be it little, or be it great. If some say it is non-essential, remember that what is not essential to salvation may be essential to obedience. Do it if Jesus commanded it. Do it whether it appears to thee to be essential or not. That is not a question for thee to ask, that is a heartless, loveless question. He hath healed thee, do what he bids thee, as he bids thee, when he bids thee, and raise no question about it. Take up thy bed, and go into thy house, if so he bids thee. Or, if he puts it to thee, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," believe thou, and be thou baptized. Be thou obedient unto him who deserves to be obeyed.

Now, lastly, this man, it is said, "immediately rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house *glorifying God*." I think I hear what he said. "Glory!" he cried, "Glory be to God!" He felt so glad, so happy, that he took up his bed before them all, and as he walked along he glorified God; and would not you have done the same if you had been paralyzed, and had been restored as he had been? And will you not do so? If you have been sin-bound, and Christ has set you free, surely, you will take the earliest opportunity of telling others what Jesus has done for you, and you will seek to glorify his name. I did not wonder when a brother lately said to me, "I have been spending all the morning in the workshop telling the men that I have found the Saviour," and one, last Sunday, turned to his wife in this Tabernacle, and said, "I am saved!" She

said to him, "Don't disturb the worship," but I almost wish he had done so. What a mercy it is to be saved! Salvation puts a new sun in our sky, and a new joy in our hearts. Believe on Jesus, and this salvation is yours. God grant that it may be, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.

Luke 5:12-26.

Verse 12. *And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy:*

As far gone with leprosy as he could be; thoroughly tainted, and eaten up with that loathsome disease.

12. *Who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

He felt that the difficulty lay in the will of Christ, not in his power. No other teacher would have looked at such a man. Everybody shrank from him, for he scattered defilement wherever he moved. A leper was a being from whom all kept clear, so this one was afraid that the great Teacher was not willing to cure him. "If thou wilt," said he, "thou canst. I know that thou canst make me clean."

13. *And he put forth his hand, and touched him,*

This was a wonderful instance of condescending love on the part of the Lord Jesus; and touching the leper did not defile him. On the contrary, Christ removed the defilement from the leper: "He touched him,"?

13. *Saying, I will: be thou clean.*

It was the will of Christ that wrought the miracle, that secret movement of the heart of Christ, that silent omnipotent going forth of divine energy, that accomplished the leper's cure.

13. *And immediately the leprosy departed from him.*

Christ can heal sin in the same way that he cured this leper. If he touches the worst man in this place, he can make sin to depart from him the moment he touches him. It does not require years in order to perfect the work of salvation, it can be done in a moment, such is the wonder-working power of Christ: "immediately the leprosy departed from him."

14. *And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

Our blessed Master did not court fame; he did not wish to make himself notorious, the crowds that flocked around him were inconvenient to him, so he did not wish to have them increased. There was danger in such crowding, and Jesus was wise in his generation, so he charged the healed leper to tell no man, but to show himself to the priest, and to present the offering enjoined under the law.

15. *But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him:*

Fame is like fire. If you heap anything on it to prevent it from spreading, it often acts as fuel to the flame; so, the very effort to hide the light of Christ's power, made it spread all the more widely.

15. *And great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.*

I wish that all congregations would come together from the same motives?to hear and to be healed by Christ. What is thy disease, my hearer? What ails thy soul? What is the mischief in thy spirit? What is the malady in thy heart? Jesus can heal thee. Oh, that thou wouldst at once seek to be healed by him!

16. *And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.*

Just when there were such grand opportunities of doing good, just when everybody sought him, does he get right away from them into the wilderness to pray? Yes, because he felt what we ought to feel but often do not, that he needed fresh power, that as the servant of God he must wait upon

God for fresh power for his great life-work: "He withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed." No doubt it was the constant habit of Christ to pray, but there were certain special times when he retired into lonely places, and his prayer was peculiarly fervent and prolonged.

17. *And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.*

The word "them" scarcely gives the right sense of the original; it should be, "the power of the Lord was present to heal." Jesus did not heal the Pharisees and doctors of the law, but he healed many of the congregation. Now, how do you account for this power present to heal? Why, by that wilderness prayer: "He withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed," and afterward, in a very high and remarkable manner, "the power of the Lord was present to heal."

And when the power to heal was present, the patient to be healed was very soon present, too.

18, 19. *And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.*

There does appear to have been, according to Mark, some breaking up of the material that formed the roof of the house where Christ was. It was not altogether such an easy matter as some have imagined to let this poor palsied man down into the presence of Jesus; and if some of the dust from the roof fell down upon the Pharisees and doctors of the law who were sitting by, it would only be what they were accustomed to throw into other people's eyes.

20. *And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.*

Christ has eyes with which he can see faith. You and I cannot see it; but he can: "When he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins be forgiven thee." This was going to the very root of his disease. Jesus knew what the man really ailed; he was palsied in spirit as well as in body, and Christ removed the root of his disease by forgiving his sin.

21. *And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason,*

The gentlemen I alluded to just now began to reason. It was just like them; instead of beginning to praise God, they "began to reason,"?

21, 22. *Saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?*

See, Jesus can perceive thoughts. I have heard of "thought-reading"; here is a true specimen of it: "Jesus perceived their thoughts, and said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?"

23. *Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?*

Anyone can say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," or, "Rise up and walk," but to forgive sins, or to give the power to rise up and walk, equally needs a God. If God be present, and can make the palsied man arise and walk, he is also able to forgive his sins.

24?26. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear,*

With awe, and reverence. They felt that God had come very near to them, and they perhaps said, like Jacob of old, when he was afraid, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." They were filled with fear,?

26. *Saying, We have seen strange things to-day.*

Oh, that we might see such "strange things" in this house to-night, and whenever we meet to worship God!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"?567, 566, 564.

The Ark of His Covenant

A Sermon

(No. 2427)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day, August 25th, 1895,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,

On Thursday Evening, August 18th, 1887.

"And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament [covenant?R-V.]; and great hail."?Revelation 11:19.

I SHALL take the passage quite by itself. I do not fully understand its connection, whether it relates to that which goes before or that which comes afterwards; and happily, it is necessary for us to know this, for the passage stands complete in itself, and is full of valuable instruction.

Dear friends, even we who believe have as yet failed to see much of the truth of God. We know enough to save us, to comfort us, and to help us on our way to heaven; but oh, how much of the glory of divine truth has never yet been revealed to our eyes! Some of God's children do not fully know even the common truths as yet, and those who do not know them realize but little of their depth and height. From our text, it appears that there are certain things of God which as yet we have not yet seen there is need that they should be opened to us: "The temple of God was opened in heaven." When our Lord Jesus died, He rent the veil of the temple, and so He laid open the Holy of Holies but such is our dimness of sight, that we need to have the temple opened, and we need to have the Holy of Holies opened, so that we may see what is not really concealed, but what we are not ready to perceive by reason of the slowness of our understandings. The two words for "temple" here may relate not only to the temple itself, but also to the Holy of Holies, the innermost shrine. Both of these, it seems, need to be opened, or else we shall not see what there is in them. Blessed be the Holy Spirit that He does open up one truth after another to us. Our Saviour's promise to His disciples was, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." If we were more teachable, if we were more anxious to be taught, and waited upon Him more, He would, doubtless, lead us into many a truth which at the present moment we have not fully enjoyed. It is a happy thing for you and for me when at any time we can say, "The temple of God was opened in heaven, so that we saw even that which was in the innermost shrine of the holy temple."

The saints in heaven doubtless behold all the glory of God so far as it can be perceived by created beings; but we who are on the right way thither behold, as in a glass darkly, the glory of the Lord. We know only in part, but the part we do know is not so great as it might be, we might know far more than we do even here. Some suppose that they can know but little, because they say that it is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Yes, but why do you stop there? Half a text is often not true; go on to the end of the passage: "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God"; and that which your eye cannot see, and your ear cannot hear, and the heart of man cannot imagine, can be revealed to you

by the Spirit of the Lord. Oh, that we were more conscious of the power of the Spirit, and that we waited upon Him for yet fuller instruction! Then I am persuaded that, in our measure and degree, it would be true to us, even as to the perfected ones above, "The temple of God was opened in heaven," and they saw that which was in the holiest place.

What did they see when the temple was opened? When the secret place was laid bare to them, what did they see? That is to be my subject now. "There was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant." If we could look into heaven at this moment, this is what we should see, "the ark of his covenant." O sinner, thou thinkest that thou wouldst see an angry God, but thou wouldst see the ark of His covenant! O child of God, perhaps thou dreamest of many things that might distress thee in the glory of that sight; but rest thou content, this would be the main sight that thou wouldst see, Jesus, the incarnate God, the great covenant Surety! Thou wouldst see there, where, the Godhead shines resplendent, the ark of His covenant.

I. I shall begin by noticing. first, that THE ARK OF HIS COVENANT IS ALWAYS NEAR TO GOD: "There was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant."

Of course, the outward symbol is gone; we are not now speaking of a temple made with hands, that is to say, of this building. We speak of the spiritual temple above; we speak of the spiritual Holy of Holies. If we could look in there, we should see the ark of the covenant; and we should see the covenant itself always near to God. The covenant is always there. God never forgets it; it is ever before Him: "There was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant."

Why is this? Is it not because the covenant is always standing? The Lord said concerning His people of old. "I will make with them an everlasting covenant," of which David said, "Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." If God has made a covenant with you, it is not simply for today and tomorrow, nor merely for this life, but for the ages of ages, even forever and ever. If He has struck hands with you through the great Surety, and He has pledged Himself to you, remember, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." Jehovah hath said, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." What He hath said He will stand to forever. He will keep His Word. He said to His Son, "I will preserve thee. .and give thee for a covenant of the people"; and He will never revoke the gift. This covenant stands secure. Though earth's old columns bow, and though my spirits sink, and flesh and heart fail me, yet this covenant shall bear me up even to the end.

The covenant of grace is forever the same, because, first, *the God who made it changes not*. There can be no change in God. The supposition is inconsistent with a belief in His deity. Hear what He says: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." The sun hath his changes, but the Father of lights is without variableness, or shadow of turning. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" God has never to alter His purposes; why should He? Those purposes are always infinitely wise. He knoweth the end from the beginning; so His covenant, which He made with such deliberation in the councils of eternity, that covenant which is sealed with the most precious things He ever had, even with the blood of His only-begotten Son, that covenant upon which He stakes His eternal honor, for His glory and honor are wrapped up with the covenant of grace?that covenant cannot be changed because God Himself changeth not.

Then, next, *the Christ who is its Surety and Substance changes not*. Christ, the great Sacrifice by whose death the covenant was ratified, Christ, the Surety, who has sworn to carry out our part of the covenant, Christ, who is the very sum and substance of the covenant, never alters. "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." If we had a variable Saviour, brethren, we should have a changeable covenant. Look at Adam; he could change, and therefore he was a poor representative of the human race. Our first federal head soon fell because he was a mere man; but the Surety of the new covenant is the Son of God, who, like His Father, faileth not, and changeth not. Though He is of the substance of His mother, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and therefore can stand as man's Representative, yet is he Light of Light, very God of very God, and so He standeth fast and firm, like the unchanging God Himself. In this great truth we do and we will rejoice. The covenant is always before God, for Christ is always there. He, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, makes the covenant always to be close to the heart of God.

And, beloved, note you this. The covenant must always be near to God because *the love which suggested it changes not*. The Lord loves His people with a love which has no beginning, no end, no boundary, no change. He says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-Kindness have I drawn thee." When the love of God's heart goeth forth toward the believer, it is not changeful like the love of man, sometimes high and sometimes low, sometimes strong and sometimes weak; but, as it is said of our Saviour, "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end," so can it be said of the great Father that His love is evermore the same; and if the love which dictated the covenant is always in the heart of God, depend upon it that the covenant which comes of that love is always there in the secret place of the Most High.

Reflect also, beloved brethren, that *the promises contained in the covenant change not*. I quoted to you, just now, one passage about the promises, and that is enough: "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen." Not one single promise of God shall ever fall to the ground unfulfilled. His Word in the form of promises, as well as in the form of the gospel, shall not return unto Him void. O souls, you may hang your whole weight upon any promise of God! You need not fear that it will break. Though all the vessels of the King's house were hung on one nail made by Him, that nail would bear them all up, as well as the fagons as the vessels of smaller measure. Heaven and earth may hang upon a single promise of God. The voice that rolls the stars along, and keeps them all in their orbits, is that voice which spoke even the least of the promises, and therefore every promise of God stands secure forever.

And once more, not only the promises, but *the force and binding power of the covenant change not*. All God's acts are done with a reference to His covenant, and all His covenant has a reference to His covenanted ones. Remember what Moses said of old, "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." Everything that He does follows the line and rule of His covenant. If He chastens and afflicts, it is not in anger, but in His dear covenant love. When first that covenant came into full action with the redeemed, it was all powerful; but it is just as powerful still. All that God doeth is still guided and directed by His eternal purpose and His covenant pledges to His people. Stand still, then, and when thou lookest up, if thou canst not see that temple because thine eye of faith is dim, if thou scarcely darest to look within into the secret place which is the holiest of all, yet know thou of a surety that the covenant is still there, and always there, whether thou seest it or seest it not.

I will tell thee when perhaps, thou wilt best know that the covenant is there; that is, when the storm-clouds gather the most thickly. When thou shalt see the black masses come rolling up, then remember that the Lord said to Noah, "I do set my bow in the loud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." Then shalt thou know that Jehovah remembereth His covenant; thou mayest even be half glad of a black cloud, that the sun of the divine love may paint upon it the many-colored bow, that God may look on it, and remember His covenant. It is good for thee to look on it; but what must it be for Him to look on it, and to remember His covenant? Be thou glad that the covenant is always near to God, as our text declares, "And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant."

II. Now, secondly, THE COVENANT IS SEEN OF SAINTS: There was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant."

First, we see it when, by faith, *we believe in Jesus as our Covenant-head.*

By faith we know that God has entered into covenant with us. He that believeth in Christ Jesus is in covenant with God. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." "He that believeth on Him is not condemned." He that believeth in Him is at peace with God, he has passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation. Thou art in covenant with God, believer. Wipe thy weeping eyes, ask God to take the dust out of them, that thou mayest see that there is an unchanging covenant made with thee tonight and forever.

Next, we see this covenant when, by faith, *we perceive it in God's actions toward us.* Faith may see the covenant of God in all His actions. Do you not remember how the old Scotch woman blessed God for her porridge, but she blessed Him most of all because the porridge was in the covenant? God had promised bread and water, and therefore it was sure to come to her. God sent her bread to her in the form of porridge, and she blessed the Lord that it was in the covenant. Now, I thank God that food is in the covenant, and that raiment is in the covenant. It is written, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass," so they are in the covenant. Life is in the covenant and death is in the covenant: "To die is gain." Everything that is to happen to us is in the covenant; and when faith sees it so, it makes like a happy one. Am I chastened? I say to myself "Well, the rod was in the covenant, for the Lord said that, if His children disobeyed Him, He would chasten them with the rod of men. If I never had the rod, I should be afraid I was not in the covenant." Is it not written, "In the world ye shall have tribulation?" That is a part of the covenant, you see; so that, when you get it, say to yourself, "The God who is evidently keeping this part of His covenant will keep the rest of it to me, His child."

Brethren, we get, perhaps, the best sight of the covenant when *by prayer we plead it.* In that hour of our wrestling, in the time of our inward craving of mercies from the hand of God, we come at last to this. "Lord, thou hast promised; do as thou hast said." I love to put my finger on a promise, and then to plead it with the Lord, saying, "This is thy Word, my Father; and I know that thou wilt not run back from it. O God, I believe in the inspiration of this Book, and I take every word of it as coming from thy lips. Wilt thou not seal it to my conscience, my heart, my experience, by proving it to be true?" Have you ever found the Lord's promises fail you? I remember one who had put in the margin of her Bible in several places, "I and P"; and when she was asked what those letters meant, she said, "That they mean, 'Tried and Proved.'" As I go through life, I keep trying and proving the promises of God, and then I put a mark in the margin of my Bible against every one I have tested, that I may not forget it the next time I have to plead it." That is the way to see the covenant at the right hand of God, when you plead it in prayer.

And there are some of us, I think, who can say that *our experience up till now* proves that God does not forget His covenant. We have wandered, but we have been able to say, "He restoreth my soul." for He has restored us. We have needed many things, and we have gone to Him in prayer, and pleaded that word, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," and He has listened to the cries of His servants. He said He would do so: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." He has remembered us in our low estate, for His mercy endureth forever; and some of us who are no longer young can set to our seal that God is true because of many experiences of His faithfulness. If they tell us that there is nothing in the Bible, and nothing in God, and nothing in the gospel of Christ, we laugh them to scorn. We have now for many a year lived upon the faithfulness of God, and we cannot be driven into a distrust of Him. He is faithful, and His mercy endureth forever.

Do you not also think that, *when we arrive in heaven, we shall have a wonderful retrospect*, and that retrospect will all come to this: "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant?" Miss Hannah More very prettily puts it that, often, we do not see the right side of things here. She went into a carpet manufactory, and she looked at what the workmen were doing, and she could see nothing that looked like beauty of design. "There were tags and ends hanging out, and she said to the men, "I cannot perceive any design here," and they answered, "No, madam, for you are on the wrong side of the carpet"; but when she went round to the other side, she saw the beauty of the workmanship. Alas! we are at present on the wrong side of God's work; we must get to heaven to see it perfectly, and when we get there, we shall?

Sing, with wonder and surprise,
His loving-kindness in the skies.
and we shall say, It was all right; it could not have been better.
Every dark and bending line
Meets in the centre of his love.

God hath not erred. He has not gone about the longest way to do His work, but He has done in the wisest and most prudent manner all that was for the best and highest interests of His dear covenanted ones.

Thus, I have shown you that sometimes, and it should be always, God's people do see that glorious covenant of grace which is in the temple above.

III. Now I want to have your attention while I say briefly, in the third place, that **THE COVENANT CONTAINS MUCH THAT IS WORTH SEEING**. Let us think of what was in the ancient ark of the covenant, for all that was in that ark as a type is to be seen in Christ our heavenly covenant ark above.

In that ark, if you and I could have gone into the holy place, and have had our eyes strengthened to look. we should have seen, first, *God dwelling among men*. What a wonderful thing! Over the top of the lid of that sacred coffer which was called the ark, there shone an amazing light which was the index of the presence of God. He was in the midst of the camp of Israel. He that filleth heaven and earth, the infinite Jehovah, deigned to make that place His special dwelling-place, so that He is addressed as, "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims." Here is a part of the new covenant: "I will dwell in them, and walk in them." It is marvelous that God does speak with men. He whom you heard thundering, last night, as He drove His chariot through the sky, that God in infinite condescension speaks with us, and has come down to us, and taken us into relationship with Himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is at once the fellow of the Almighty, and

the brother of the sons of men. O beloved, rejoice in the covenant, that God is no longer divided from men! The chasm made by sin is filled, the gulf is bridged, and God now dwells with me, and manifests Himself to them; and "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him."

Next, in that ark you would have noticed, if you could have seen into it, *God reconciled and communing with men upon the mercy-seat*. Over the top of that ark, as I have told you, was a golden lid, which fitted it, and covered it exactly, and that golden lid was called the mercy-seat, the throne of grace. There God spoke with men. He sat there, as it were, enthroned as the Friend of men. Now, it is a part of the covenant that God hears prayer, that God answers our petitions, that He meets us in a way of reconciled love, that He speaks to us in tones which the spirit can hear though the ear cannot. Thank God for a blood-besprinkled mercy-seat. What should we do if we had not that as our meeting-place with the thrice-holy Jehovah?

Then, within the ark, underneath the lid, if we could have looked in, we should have seen the law, *the two tables of stone*, which represent *law fulfilled in Christ*, and henceforth laid up in His heart, and laid up in our hearts, too, if we delight in the law of God after the inward man. Now, this is our joy, that the law of God has nothing against the believer. It is fulfilled in Christ, and we see it laid up in Christ, not to be a stone to fall upon us to grind us to powder, but beautiful and fair to look upon as it is in the heart of Christ, and fulfilled in the life of Christ. I rejoice in the covenant which contains in it stipulations all fulfilled, and commands all executed, by our great Representative.

Together with those tables of the law there was laid up a rod, a rod which had originally been a dry stick in the hands of Aaron, but when it was laid up before the Lord it budded, and blossomed, and brought forth almonds. So, in the covenant of grace, we see *the kingdom established and flourishing in Christ*, and we rejoice in it. Oh how pleased we are to bow before His fruitful sceptre! What wonderful fruit we gather from that blessed rod! Reign, reign, Jesus, reign! The more Thou dost rule us, the more Thou art absolute Sovereign of our hearts, the happier shall we be, and the more shall we delight ourselves in Thee. There is no liberty like complete subjection beneath the sway of Jesus who is our Prophet, Priest, and King.

Then, by the side of that rod there was laid up *the golden pot full of manna, the provision made for the wilderness*. Let us rejoice that there is in the covenant all the provision that we need. God has laid up for us in Christ all our spiritual meat, all the food that we shall ever need between here and heaven. "Feed me till I want no more," we cry to our blessed covenant Representative, and He will do so.

Then, over the top off the ark, sat *the cherubim with outstretched wings*, as, I think, *representing how the angels are in league with us, and with the angels all the forces and powers of the universe*. This day, the beasts of the field are our friends, and the stones of the field have ceased to be our foes. Child of God, you may travel by land or sea; you may go where you will; for everywhere you are in your Father's house. All that you see about you is a friend to you, since you are a friend to God. I often wonder that the earth bears up ungodly men. It must groan beneath the weight of a swearer; it must want to open and swallow him up. But with the gracious man, the man who fears God, all things are at peace; and we may know it to be so. "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." We do not often enough realize, I think, the friendship of all God's creatures to those who are His children. St. Francis, thought he was a Romish monk, yet had a true idea when he used to regard the sparrows and other birds of the air, and even the dogs in the street, as his friends and his brothers, and talked to them as such. And Luther was much of

the same mind when he opened His window, and listened to the chirpings of the robins in the early spring, and felt that they had come to teach the theological doctor some lesson which he had not learned. Oh yes, oh yes, we are quite at home anywhere, now that God is our God! True, the earth travaileth, and is in pain, and the creation suffers and will suffer till Christ comes again; but still her travail is our travail, and we are in sympathy with her, and when she doth reflect the glory of her God she is our looking-glass in which we see our Father's face.

Thus, I think, I have shown you that there is much to be seen in the ark of the covenant. God give us grace, like the angels, to fix our eyes upon it! "Which things the angels desire to look into." We have more to do with the ark of His covenant than they have; let us be more desirous even than they are to look therein.

IV. I close with this fourth point. THE COVENANT HAS SOLEMN SURROUNDINGS. Listen: "There were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail."

When the people entered into covenant with God on Sinai, the Lord came down upon the top of the mount, and there were thunderings, and lightnings, and voices, and an earthquake. There were all these tokens of His presence, and *God will not leave the covenant of his grace without the sanctions of His power*; that thunder, that lightning, that storm?all these are engaged to keep His covenant. When they are wanted, the God who smote Egypt with great hailstones, the God who made the Kishon to sweep his enemies away, the God who made the stars in heaven to fight against Sisera, will bring all the overwhelming forces that are at His command to the help of His people, and the fulfilling of the covenant which He has made with them. O you who are His people, fall back in confidence upon the God who has treasures of snow, and hail, and the dread artillery of storms and tempest! Most of you, my hearers, have never seen a great storm yet, nor heard in its majesty the thunder of God's power. You must be in the tropics to know what these can be, and even then you would have to say, "These are but parts of His ways." Oh, how the Lord can shake the earth, and make it tremble even to its deep foundations when He pleases! He can make what we call "the solid earth" to be as weak as water when He doth but lift up His finger. But all the power that God hath?and it is boundless?is all in that right hand which has been lifted high to heaven in the solemn oath that He will save His people. Wherefore, lean upon God without the shadow of a doubt. He may well put all your fears to rest even by the thunder of His power.

Then reflect that there is another side to this truth. You who are not in covenant with God, you who have not believed that Jesus is the Christ, you who have never fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you, you who refuse the divine mercy which comes to you through the bleeding person of the suffering Christ, do remember that there will be for you the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the voices, and the earthquake, and the great hail, for these set forth *the terrors of eternal law, overthrowing God's adversaries*. You have no conception of what God will do with the ungodly. False teachers may smooth it down as much as they like, but that Book is full of thunderbolts to you who refuse God's mercy. Listen to this one text: "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Can you sport with that? Listen to another: "Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies!" What will you say to that, or to this? "And again they said Alleluia. And her smoke rose up forever and ever." "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever

receiveth the mark; of his name." That they talk as if we invented these terrible words, but we do not; we merely quote the Scriptures of truth, and they are terrible indeed to the wicked. That they should make men start in their sleep, and never rest until they find a Saviour. A Universalist once said to a Christian man that, whatever he did, God would not punish him, and the other replied, "If I spit on your god, I suppose he will not punish me. If I curse him, if I defy him, it will all come right at last?" "Yes," said the Universalist. "Well," answered the other, "that may be the character of your god; but don't you try that kind of thing with my God, the God of the Scriptures, or else you will find that because He is love He cannot, and He will not, suffer this world to be in anarchy, but he will rule it, ;and govern it, and He will punish those that refuse His infinite compassion." So I beseech you, my hearers, fly to Jesus at once; weary, and heavy-laden, look to Him, for He saith especially to you, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." The Lord add His blessing to the truth I have tried to preach to you, the sweet and the terrible alike, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Hebrews 9.

Verse 1. *Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.*

That is to say, a material sanctuary, a sanctuary made out of such things as this world contains. Under the old covenant, there were certain outward symbols. Under the new covenant, we have not the symbols, but we have the substance itself. The old law dealt with types and shadows, but the gospel deals with the spiritual realities themselves.

2, 3. *For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread' which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;*

All this was by divine appointment; the form of the rooms, the style of the furniture, everything was ordained of God; and that not merely for ornament, but for purposes of instruction. As we shall see farther on, the Holy Ghost intended a significance, a teaching, about everything in the old tabernacle, whether it was a candlestick, or a table, or the shewbread.

4, 5. *Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.*

It would not have been to the point which the apostle had in hand, so he waived the explanation of those things for another time.

6-8. *Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Ghost this signifying.*

It is from this sentence that I am sure that the Holy Ghost had a signification, a meaning; a teaching, for every item of the ancient tabernacle and temple; and we are not spinning fancies out of idle brains when we interpret these types, and learn from them important gospel lessons. "The Holy Ghost this signifying,"?

8. *That the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:*

It was necessary that you should take away the sacred tent, the tabernacle, ay, and take away the temple, too, before you could learn the spiritual meaning of them. You must break the shell to

get at the kernel. So God had ordained. Hence, there is now no tabernacle, no temple, no holy court, no inner shrine, the holy of holies. The material worship is done away with, in order that we may render the spiritual worship of which the material was but the type,

9. *Which was a figure for the time then present,*

Only a figure, and only meant for "the time then present." It was the childhood of the Lord's people; it was a time when, as yet, the light had not fully broken in upon spiritual eyes, so they must be taught by picture-books. That they must have a kind of Kindergarten for the little children, that they might learn the elements of the faith by the symbols, types, and representations of a material worship. When we come into the true gospel light, all that is done away with; it was only "a figure for the time then present."

9. *In which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience:*

All those rites could only give a fleshly purity, but they could not touch the conscience. If men saw what was meant by the outward type, then the conscience was appeased; but by the outward sign itself the conscience was never comforted, if it was a living and lowly conscience.

10. *Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.*

These ordinances were only laid upon the Jews?not upon any other people?and only laid upon them until the better and brighter days of reformation and fuller illumination.

11. *But Christ?*

Oh, how we seem to rise when we begin to get near to Him, away from the high priests of the Jews! "but Christ"?

11. *being come an high priest of good things to come,*

Not of the shadows, but of the good things themselves: "an high priest of good things to come,"?

11. *by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;*

That tabernacle was His body, which was not made with hands, nor yet formed by carnal generation as our human tabernacle is. This greater and more perfect tabernacle was made according to the power of an endless life.

12. *Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*

The Jewish high priests went once a year into the Holy of Holies. Each year as it came round demanded that they should go again. Their work was never done; but "He entered in once," and only once, "into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." I love that expression, "eternal redemption"?a redemption which really does redeem, and redeems forever and ever. If you are redeemed by it, you cannot be lost; if this redemption be yours, it is not for a time, or for a season, but it is "eternal redemption." Oh, how you ought to rejoice in the one entrance within the veil by our great High Priest who has obtained eternal redemption for us!

13-15. *For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*

When you come to deal with Christ, you have to do with eternal things. There is nothing temporary about Him, or about His work. It is "eternal redemption" that He has obtained for us, it is an "eternal inheritance" that He has purchased for us.

16, 17. *For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.*

Or, "Where a covenant is, there must also be the death of him who covenants, or of that by which the covenant is established." Or read it as we have it in our version, for it seems as if it must be so, although we are loathe to give the meaning of "testament" to the word, since its natural meaning is evidently covenant: "Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth"; or, if you will, while the victim that was to confirm the covenant lived, the covenant was not ratified; it must be slain before it could be thus effective.

18-22. *Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*

There is no truth more plain than this in the whole of the Old Testament; and it must have within it a very weighty lesson to our souls. There are some who cannot endure the doctrine of a substitutionary atonement. Let them beware lest they be casting away the very soul and essence of the gospel. It is evident that the sacrifice of Christ was intended to give ease to the conscience, for we read that the blood of bulls and of goats could not do that. I fail to see how any doctrine of atonement except the doctrine of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ can give ease to the guilty conscience. Christ in my stead suffering the penalty of my sin?that pacifies my conscience, but nothing else does: "Without shedding of blood is no remission."

23. *It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these;*

These things down below are only the patterns, the models, the symbols of the heavenly things; they could therefore be ceremonially purified with the blood which is the symbol of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

23, 24. *But the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hand, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:*

He never went within the veil in the Jewish temple; that was but the symbol of the true holy of holies. He has gone "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

25-28. *Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto mere once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;*

There is no need that He should die again, His one offering has forever perfected His people. There remains nothing but His final coming for the judgment of the ungodly, and the acquittal of His redeemed.

28. *And unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

Christ's second coming will be "without sin," and without a sin offering, too, wholly apart from sin, unto the salvation of all His chosen. May we all be amongst those who are looking for Him! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"?327, 228, 193.

Kept From Iniquity

A Sermon

(No. 2432)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-day Morning, September 29th, 1895,

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,

On Thursday Evening, September 22nd, 1887.

"I kept myself from mine iniquity"?Psalm 18:23.

IN our reading we had a very wonderful description of God's delivering mercy towards his servant David. He was very peculiarly tried in the court of Saul; he deserved so well of the king that it was doubly hard for him to be treated so ill. He had been the deliverer of his country when he slew Goliath, yet he was hunted as if he had been the grossest of malefactors. He had to fly for his life, like a partridge upon the mountains, and all the while, no doubt, Saul and his partisans accused him of all manner of evil. There was scarcely any bad thing which they did not attribute to David; but he was upright before God, and he dared to challenge the investigation of the Most High, for he was sincere and true to the core. He proved by his conduct that he was so; for when Saul was in his hands, on two memorable occasions when he might readily have taken his life, he disdained to do so. He would not put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and in great grace, in his own good time, God was pleased to deliver his servant. If men blow out the candle of a Christian's reputation, God will light it again; if he does not do so in this life, remember that at the resurrection there will be a resurrection of reputations as well as of bodies: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." It is, after all, of very small account what is said by men whose breath is in their nostrils. "They say. What do they say? Let them say." Let them say till they have done saying; it little matters what they say; yet, to a sensitive spirit, like that of David, the tongue is a very sharp instrument, it cutteth like a razor, and pierceth even to the bones. He felt, therefore, the slander of many, and was sometimes greatly troubled by it. However, God was pleased to work a very marvelous deliverance for him. It seemed as if the Lord would sooner shake the earth to atoms, and crush the arches of heaven, than fail to deliver his servant. He will do so still, depend upon it. "He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

David attributes his providential deliverance to the mercy of God by which he had been kept clear in his conduct: "I kept myself from mine iniquity." Whatever you do, if you do right, God will see you through; but, whoever you may be, if you turn aside to crooked ways, you will soon fall into a bog. If you try to carve for yourself, you will probably cut your own fingers. He who thinks that he can do better by suppressing truth, or by speaking falsehood, or by acting contrary to the dictates of his conscience, will find that he has made a great mistake. Do thou so trust in God as to hold to thine integrity. "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." Ponder the path of thy feet, and God will bring thee through as surely as he is alive, which is saying much more than if I said as surely as thou art alive; for, as the Lord liveth, before whom we stand, he will not forsake the righteous, nor cast off them that serve him faithfully.

This is the passage we have to consider, "I kept myself from mine iniquity." Here is, first, *a personal danger*: "mine iniquity." And, secondly, here is *a special guard*: "I kept myself." And then, thirdly, here is *a happy result*. David could say, as he looked back upon his life, "I kept myself from mine iniquity." There was no boasting in this declaration; but as his enemies accused him falsely, like an honest man he defended himself, for he was able truthfully to say, "I kept myself from mine iniquity."

I. Well now, here is, first, A PERSONAL DANGER: "mine iniquity."

This is a dreadful possession to have in the house; a man had better have a cage of cobras than have an iniquity, yet we have each of us to deal at home with some special form of sin. It is said that there is a skeleton in every house. I do not know whether that is true; but I do know that there is something very much allied to a skeleton, that is, the body of this death with which we all have to deal; and it takes a special shape in each good man. There is some particular sin which he may call "mine iniquity." Not only is there the general iniquity which affects the whole race, but each man has his own particular form of it: "All we like sheep have gone astray; *we have turned every one to his own way.*" There is a general sin, but there is a particularity in it, too; each man has his own way of sinning, so that he can speak of "mine iniquity."

Let us think of the particular form of iniquity with which some of us have to do. It takes its speciality, perhaps, *from our natural constitution*. He who judges all men alike does them an injustice. There are some who have but little tendency to a particular form of evil, but they have a very great inclination towards some other sin. Some are sanguine; they are expecting great things, and they fall into the sin of expecting to drink sweet waters from the cisterns of this world. There are some of quite another temperament, who are inclined to despondency, perhaps to suspicion; they may fall into mistrust, or various forms of unbelief, and even into despair, which will be very grievous to the God who is ever gracious. There are some men who, from their very parentage, are inclined to drunkenness or to unchastity. There are others, favoured by God with a godly ancestry who, if they were left to themselves, would not probably fall into either of these forms of sin, yet they might be proud of their own integrity, and proud of their own uprightness; and is not pride as great a sin as those more open transgressions? Depend on it, my dear friend, thou hast some tendency peculiar to thyself, and there is a special point where thou liest open to the attacks of temptation. Happy will that man be who so knows himself that he sets a double watch against that postern gate through which the adversary is apt to creep in the dark. Peculiar constitutions may lead to special forms of sin, and it behooves the godly man to keep himself from his own iniquity.

Our tendency is to decry the particular form of sin that we find in others. We hold up our hands as if we were quite shocked. Better look in the looking-glass than look out at the window. Looking out of the window, thou seest one for whom thou art not responsible; but looking in the glass, thou seest one of whom thou must give account to God, and thou wilt do well to ask God to keep that one. Thou wilt, likely enough, within a day's march, not see a much worse man than he is, if thou dost know him well. I remember Mr. Berridge's quaint joke. He had, hanging round his room, the portraits of many ministers; and he would say to his friend, "Here is Whitefield, here is Wesley, here is So-and- so;" and then, leading his visitor to a looking-glass, he would say, "Here is the devil." Yes, he is somewhere about there where thou art looking. If thou lookest long enough, thou mayest detect some of his handiwork at any rate, for there is something of his work about us all. Sin, therefore, may be something peculiar to constitution.

But any man may also know that "mine iniquity" may be *engendered by education*. How impressible we are in childhood! We bear the print of our mother's fingers when we are fifty years of age, and it is not gone from us even when we are old and grey-headed. Things that were done at our father's home are likely to be done in our own home. Things that we saw, things that we heard, when we were very young, may abide with us, and help to shape our whole life. May God help us so to look back upon our early training as to discover the defects of it, and, not laying the sin upon others, which would be a wicked perversion of the truth, yet let us recollect that, as we lived in a sinful generation, we have acquired some taint therefrom, and we have need to watch against the sins which were taught us when we were young, especially any of you who have been rescued by grace out of homes of drunkenness and debauchery! I bless the Lord that there are many here who have been brought by sovereign grace out of very dens of iniquity. There are some here who are, so far as they are aware, the only ones of all their household who know the Lord; and when they go home to-night, it will be a great pain to them, as they cross the threshold, to think how very different the atmosphere will be from that in the house of God where they have worshipped. Well, my dear brother or sister, we sympathize with you in your trial, and pray the Lord that you may carefully watch and that you may be kept from your iniquity.

No doubt there are certain forms of iniquity which grow *out of our particular condition*. The young man has his iniquity; it is not the iniquity of the aged. The young man is tempted to sinful pleasure, the old man to covetousness. Each period of life has its own special snare. Pray, I beseech you, young people, middle-aged people, old people, pray the Lord that you may be kept from the peculiar iniquity of that part of the life-passage through which you are going. He who quits the shores of England for Australia may ask the guardian care of God while yet the white cliffs of Albion have scarcely melted from his view. Let him ask God's blessing as he passes through the middle passage of the Suez Canal; but let him not forget to pray when the captain tells him that, within a few days, he will come in sight of the southern shore. No, all along we need keeping.

It is so with our condition of life as to our outward circumstances. The rich man has his temptations. Few know how great they are, or they would not be so eager after riches. It is as hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. It is a natural impossibility, for so many difficulties surround the possession of riches; but with God all things are possible. Yet the poor man will not find that he has a much larger hole to go through. His straitened circumstances will not materially help him. Agur did well to pray, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." There are peculiar trials in each condition; and even the middle way between the two is not without its own special temptations; so that, whether thou hast much or little, pray God that thou mayest keep thyself from thine iniquity.

There are iniquities which come through prosperity. I have never yet prayed to God to preserve me in going up in a balloon, for I have never had any idea of entering one; but whenever you prosper very greatly, and especially when you prosper very fast, you are very like a man going up in a balloon. If people knew the danger, they would send in prayers to the Monday night prayer-meeting, asking that the Lord would have mercy upon the man who is greatly prospering, for there are very peculiar trials surrounding that condition. Oh, that men might be kept from that cleaving to the world and letting the Saviour go, which so often follows upon great success in life!

But equally must he pray who is in adversity. Oh, the ills of adversity! The worst ill of all is the tendency to doubt God, and to put forth your hand unto iniquity in order to remove the heavy load. Pray the Lord, thou who art losing everything, that he will keep thee from thine iniquity. Thou

needest not pray, like Pharaoh, "Take away the frogs;" but pray like David, "Take away mine iniquity." That is the prayer of the true child of God.

I may be speaking to some who have great talents. Well, you have need to pray, "Lord, keep me from mine iniquity," for great talent is a very dangerous thing for a man to possess, a charge which needs great grace. And, if thou hast but one talent, thine iniquity may be to wrap it in a napkin, and hide it in the earth. There is a temptation in the one talent as well as in the five. Therefore, pray the Lord to keep thee from that iniquity which is often the accompaniment of the particular condition in which thou art found.

Brothers, there are some of you who have need to pray this prayer in reference to your calling. I do not think that any calling is free from temptation, but there are some positions in which the temptation is very terrible. I need not go into those which surround many of you in trade, when everybody seems to "cut the thing fine," as they say, and to cut the truth much finer than anything else, and say a great deal that is not true, under the notion that somehow or other it will help his business. If there be customs in your trade which all others follow, and which you know to be wrong, do not adopt them; but say, "Lord, keep me from mine iniquity." You need not begin to say, "Those grocers, those milk-dealers, those publicans, all have their iniquities." Think about your own; quite enough iniquities may crowd into your shop without your thinking about the shops of other people. Pray the Lord that you may be kept from your iniquity.

And, O beloved, what iniquities there are which surround us all in daily life! Into what company can you go without being tempted? In this city, at the present time, the position of a Christian is very much like that of Lot in Sodom. I speak what I do know; I do not exaggerate the conditions which surround the lives of some Christian working-men and Christian working-women who are not able to let their children go into our streets by reason of the filthiness of the language that they would hear. Even round about this house of prayer is a very cauldron of iniquity, so that many say, "We cannot live there, and we do not know where to live to keep our children out of the temptations which now surround them." I say not that one age is worse than another, but I do say that the peculiar trials of to-day should make Christians walk very near to God; and, instead of loosening and relaxing the lines of our religious profession, let us tighten them as much as ever we can, and seek to be thoroughly Nonconformist, not conforming to the world, to be out and out Dissenters, dissenting from the ways of this ungodly generation.

Still, to help you to find out your iniquity, I will make one or two more remarks. It is likely to be *that iniquity which thou hast oftenest fallen into in thy previous life*. What has been thy sternest struggle? Against quickness of temper? Then, that is thine iniquity. Doubt and mistrust? That is thine iniquity. Has it been covetousness? Has it been slowness to forgive any who have offended you? Has it been gossiping and mixing untruth with your talk? That is your iniquity. Whatever it is which hitherto has stained thy life, that is probably the thing which will stain it again unless thou dost watch, and call in the power of the Holy Spirit for thy protection. That sin which you find yourself readily committing, which you drift into without any effort, ay, which you drift into when you are making a great many efforts not to do it, that is your iniquity. That which you have returned to after having smarted for it, that which you have vowed you would never be guilty of again, and which yet has in a moment, like the bursting forth of some hidden spring of water, carried thee away with a rush, that is thine iniquity. Oh, how canst thou keep thyself from it unless God shall keep thee? Cry unto the Most High to enable thee to keep thyself from thine iniquity. That is thine

iniquity which has overtaken thee even after thou hast prayed against it, and laboured against it, that thou hast concluded that surely thou wilt never do it again, and yet thou hast done it.

Let me tell you one thing more; *that which you do not like to hear condemned*, that which you do not like the preacher to mention, that which makes you to wriggle in your seat, and feel, "I wish he would not say that, he is coming too closely home," that is your iniquity. And if thou canst not bear that thy wife should speak to thee about it, or that thy brother or thy sister should give thee a friendly word of advice concerning it, that which thou art most loath to hear, probably has to do with thine iniquity. We may often judge ourselves by this test. It is that which thou art most loath to hear that thou hast most need to hear; instead of being angry with him who points it out to thee thou shouldst be willing to pay him for doing it. When you go to your doctor, and ask him to examine you, if he says, "There is something a little amiss with the heart, or with the lungs," do you knock him down? Do you get into a passion with him for telling you the truth? No, you give him his guinea, and thank him even for imparting evil news. And should we not thank those who rebuke us, and tell us of our faults? When God sendeth thee not a faithful friend, I pray him to send thee an honest enemy, who will deal straightly with thee, and let thee know where thy weakness is, that thou mayest then cry to God, "Lord, keep me from mine iniquity."

II. Now, secondly, in our text there is A SPECIAL GUARD: "I kept myself from mine iniquity."

Someone may perhaps say, "I have a special temptation, but I am going to set a guard against it." Let me ask you first who you are; are you a child of God? Have you passed from death unto life? If you say, "No," I am not referring to you in this part of my subject. You must be born again, you must go by faith to Jesus Christ, and ask for cleansing in his precious blood, and renewal by the Holy Spirit; but I am now talking to the child of God, the man who has spiritual life. I speak to you, my dear brother, because you can, by God's grace, keep yourself from your iniquity. How are you to do it?

Well, first, you must *find out what it is*. You must get a clear idea of your own iniquity. Ask the Lord to search you, and try you, and know your ways. When you have found out what that iniquity is, then endeavour to *get a due sense of its foulness and guilt in the sight of God*. Ask the Lord to make thee hate most that sin to which thou art most inclined. Remember that thou art a child of God; it ill becomes thee to be friendly with any of the King's enemies. Remember that Christ has bought thee; thou belongest to him, thou shouldst not be the slave of any sin, thou must not be such if the life of God be in thee. The life of God in the soul hates sin; thou canst not take pleasure in any sin if thou art indeed a regenerate man or woman. Therefore, I say to thee, seek to get a sight of the heinousness of thy particular sin and the danger which attends it, that, as thou hast an extraordinary horror of it, thou mayest set that over against thy tendency to it.

Then, *be resolved in the power of the Holy Spirit that this particular sin shall be overcome*. There is nothing like hanging it up by the neck, that very sin, I mean. Do not fire at sin indiscriminately; but, if thou hast one sin that is more to thee than another, drag it out from the crowd, and say, "Thou must die if no other does. I will hang thee up in the face of the sun." Strive against thine anger; strive against thy covetousness; strive against thine envy; strive against thine evil temper, thy malice, if that be thy fault; for there are some who are very slow to forgive. Strive against it till thou gettest thy foot upon its neck. "I cannot do it," says one. Why, the Lord has said that he will bruise Satan under our feet shortly! Surely, if you are to have the devil under your foot, you can get all sin under your feet by God's help; and you must do it. It is a part of that work that must be wrought in us to bring every thought into captivity to divine grace. You are not able to

subdue the least sin apart from Christ; but, by the help of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing that can master thee. I tell thee that, if thou let any sin master thee, thou wilt be lost. If any sin should remain unconquered, thou art ruined; for this is the way of salvation, the absolute conquest of every sin through the grace of the Holy Spirit. It must be so with thee ere thou canst enter heaven, and thou art able to overcome it in the power of Jesus Christ. If thou hast an iniquity that more than another haunts thee, then keep away from all that tempts thee to it. Is there a house where thy company is much liked, but where thou art never able to come away without having fallen into sin? Keep away from that house. It is often one of the most essential things in young converts that they should quit the company in which they once sported. You may go into some company to do good; but mind that you are strong enough to resist the evil, for it does not always do for those who have but little strength to attempt to pull others out of the fire; they may be themselves pulled into it. No, come ye out from among them, be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing. You have no business to be in that place where it becomes almost necessary that you should sin; that necessity should warn you not to go there.

The true path of safety is to *pray and believe against all sin*. We conquer sin by faith in Christ. This is the axe that will cut down the upas tree, and there is no other that will do so. Believe thou in Jesus Christ the Saviour, who died for thee; and then believe in him as living again, and willing to help thee in every conflict against sin. Go thou, having Christ crucified with thee, and ask him to crucify thy sin, and nail it up to his cross. So thou shalt be helped to overcome; but there must be care, and prayer, and watchfulness, and trust, and continual looking up to the Lord for grace. Only so can you say, "I kept myself from mine iniquity."

III. Thirdly, I conclude with A HAPPY RESULT.

David says, "I kept myself from mine iniquity." He does not say that he could not sin, but that he would not, and he did not. When a wicked man gets old, he may say, "I do not sin like those young people." No, because you cannot; it has been well said that there is many an old man who, if you could put young eyes in him, would look the same way as he used to do. That is not what we want; it is not the failure to commit a sin because your passions have grown colder, or your strength has left you; it is a change of heart that is wanted. "I kept myself from mine iniquity;" that is, "though it would try to tempt me, and did so, and I might have yielded to it, yet by the grace of God I would not yield."

I do pray, my brothers and sisters, that, if we live ten, twenty, thirty, or fifty more years, we may be able to say, without any boasting, but in deep humility before God, "By his great grace, by trust in Jesus, I kept myself from mine iniquity," because, if we do so, *see what a blessing it will be to us*, for it will be to us a reason for our being brought out of the trouble. If when you are in need, if when you are under temptation, God helps you to keep straight, you will come out all right at the last. What a number of stories I might tell here of young men, who were great losers at first by being godly; but they kept themselves right, and they had to thank God for it ever afterwards. I know, at this present moment, a personal friend who was a banker's clerk. On a certain day, he was told to do something which he judged to be, speaking plainly, dishonest; and he told the manager that he could not do it, whereupon he received a month's notice. It was a country bank, and he was not sent about his business at once; and he had to turn the matter over. He had a wife and children; and when he went home, it was not easy to tell the wife that the excellent situation that he held would be vacated within a short time. But he stood fast in his integrity, he said that he was sure God would bring him safely through, and he never had even the slightest thought of doing other

than he had said he would do. It was within twelve months that he obtained the situation of manager for that very bank, and it belongs to him at this moment; he very speedily became a man in a much better position than he could have expected to have obtained, simply from the fact that it had been proved that he could be trusted. It is not always so; some people have to be a long time under a cloud; but, in the long run, if thou as a child of God wilt but stand fast, God will not let thee be a loser. If he does, it shall be thy glory to lose everything sooner than tarnish thy character. Thou shalt find it a greater joy to lose all things for Christ than it would be to gain the whole world by doing anything that was wrong. If you are able to say, "I kept myself from mine iniquity," then you shall also be able to say with David, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised."

Next, if you act thus, *it will be a triumph of divine grace*. Brethren, we want to show the world what grace can do, and every member of the church ought to feel that he is put upon his behaviour to prove what the grace of God has done in him. What credit is brought to Christ by professed Christians who are so like worldlings that, if you put them under a microscope, you could not tell the difference between them? If you can do what worldlings do, you shall go at last where worldlings go. If grace does not make you to differ from them, it is not the grace of God, it is all a sham. We ought to feel that Christ's honour is in danger by our ill behaviour, and so live that we can glorify our Father who is in heaven by our good works, keeping ourselves from our iniquity.

For again, *this will be our best testimony to others*. It is well to preach as I do, with my lips; but you can all preach with your feet, and by your lives, and that is the most effective preaching. The preaching of holy lives is living preaching. The most effective ministry from a pulpit is that which is supported by godliness from the pew. God help you to do this!

And, lastly, *what a sweet peace this will give to your conscience!* Though we know we are saved by grace, hear this, ye ungodly. There is no way of salvation for you, or for us, but by the grace of God through Jesus Christ; yet when we are saved, the evidence to our own soul of that work of grace upon our nature is very sweet when we can say, "I have kept myself from mine iniquity." A well-spent life, a life that is pure, a life that has been consecrated to usefulness, a life in which there has not been a turning aside to the right hand or to the left, helps us to lie down with comfort upon our dying bed, and bid farewell to all our dear ones and feel that we are leaving behind us the legacy of a gracious example in which we do not glory, but for which we give God the glory, and thank and praise his holy name. Begin at the cross; there is the source of your salvation. Then go, and live like the living Saviour. God help you to do so, for Christ's sake!

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