



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 43: 1897

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 43: 1897* by Charles Spurgeon

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Apart

A Sermon

(No. 2510)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, March 28th, 1897,

Delivered By

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Thursday Evening, July 16th, 1885.

"And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart."—Zechariah 12:12-14.

True repentance is always accompanied by sorrow. It has been said by some of those of modern times who disparage repentance that repentance is "nothing but a change of mind." These words sound as if there was merely some superficial meaning to them; and so, indeed, they are intended by those who use them, but they are not so intended by the Spirit of God. Repentance may be and is a change of mind; but what a change it is! It is not an unimportant change of mind such as you may have concerning whether you will take your holiday this week or the next, or about some trifling matter of domestic interest; but it is a change of the whole heart, of the love, of the hate, of the judgment, and the view of things taken by the individual whose mind is thus changed. It is a deep, radical, fundamental, lasting change; and you will find that, whenever you meet with it in Scripture, it is always accompanied with sorrow for past sin. And rest you assured of this fact, that the repentance which has no tear in its eye, and no mourning for sin in its heart, is a repentance which needs to be repented of, for there is no evidence of conversion, no sign of the existence of the grace of God. In what way has that man changed his mind who is not sorry that he has sinned? In what sense can it be said that he has undergone any change worth experiencing if he can look back upon his past life with pleasure, or look upon the prospect of returning to his sin without an inward loathing and disgust?

I say again that we have need to stand in doubt of that repentance which is not accompanied with mourning for sin; and even when Christ is clearly seen by faith, and sin is pardoned, and the man knows that it is forgiven, he does not cease to mourn for sin. Nay, brethren, his mourning becomes deeper as his knowledge of his guilt becomes greater; and his hatred of sin grows in proportion as he understands that love of Christ by which his sin is put away. In true believers, mourning for sin is chastened and sweetened, and, in one sense, the fang of bitterness is taken out; but, in another sense, the more we realize our indebtedness to God's grace, and the more we see of the sufferings of Christ in order to our redemption, the more do we hate sin, and the more do we lament that we ever fell into it. I am sure it is so, and that every Christian's experience will confirm what I say.

In the case of these people mentioned by the prophet Zechariah, one of the prominent points about their repentance was, that all in the land were to mourn. They were to look upon Christ whom their sins had put to death, and they were to mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and to

be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In fact, the lamentation which was to accompany this repentance is said to be as great as the mourning of the whole nation when Josiah fell in the battle with Pharaoh-nechoh at Megiddo: "In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon."

Another special characteristic of this mourning described by Zechariah, which also distinguishes genuine repentance for sin, is that it is personal, the act of each individual, and the act of the individual apart from any of his fellows. The watchword of true penitence is this word "*apart*." How it rings out in the text, "Every family *apart*; the family of the house of David *apart*, and their wives *apart*; the family of the house of Nathan *apart*, and their wives *apart*; the family of the house of Levi *apart*, and their wives *apart*; the family of Shimei *apart*, and their wives *apart*; all the families that remain, every family *apart*, and their wives *apart*." Sham repentance can do its work in the mass; it talks about national sin and national sorrow, which generally means the mere notion of sin and the notion of repentance. But when it comes to a true work of the Spirit of God, and men do really mourn for sin so as to obtain pardon, it is a thing in which each individual stands in a personal solitude, as much apart from everybody else as if he had been the sole man that God ever made, and was without father and without mother and without descent, and had himself alone so sinned that the whole anger of God for sin had fallen upon him. A man in this condition gets alone, he bears his sin apart, quitting the company of his fellows, and all the charms that once lured him to destruction; and his lamentation on account of sin is his own sole act and deed. It wells up from his own heart, it is not borrowed from others; but, by the effectual working of the grace of God, everything about it is of himself.

I. It is to this important matter that I now call your attention, and in doing so our first point will be, THE INDIVIDUALIZING EFFECT OF SORROW FOR SIN.

Let me remind you, first, that *this individualizing is seen even when the mourning is universal*. Read the text again: "The land shall mourn, every family apart." If there should ever come such a blessed visitation of grace to England that all men should repent of sin, and mourn over it, yet each man would repent of sin, and mourn over it as much as if he were the only penitent in the entire country. This point is worth noticing, because there are some who fancy that, if there should come a great revival, they would get converted. Perhaps some of you think that, in such a case, you would get into the swim, and be carried onward by it, as people are sometimes borne along in a great crowd. Let me tell you that, if you were thus swept along by the stream, and had not exercised individual repentance of sin, and personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it would be of no value to you. It would be a false religion that you would receive in that way, and it is better for you to recollect and know of a surety that you cannot enter the strait and narrow gate in a crowd, borne in by others, but you must come in separately and distinctly yourself. Why should not that be the case with you even now? When there shall be times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the brightest days that ever shone in Christendom, yet, even then, every true conversion must be an individual one. All true faith that shall ever come to you must be a looking with your own eye; and all drawing near to God in repentance must be the act of your own spirit, under the drawings of the Holy Spirit. Whatever is done by others, even by multitudes of genuine converts, will be of no avail for you; if it is to bring blessing to you, it must be the work of the Spirit of God upon you individually.

Do notice that foundation fact, and let none of us ever forget it; but let this day of mourning for sin, throughout the whole Church of God, be as much a time of mourning for sin, for me and

for you, as if you and I were the only persons in the world who were aware of that sin, or who had felt at all the evil and the wickedness of it. Otherwise, we shall lose all true repentance in the idea of a national repentance, we shall lose all sense of sin in the notion that everybody has a sense of sin, that everybody is humbled in penitence before God, and that everybody is seeking the Lord.

Notice next, that while this apartness is seen when holy mourning becomes universal, *it also is manifest when there are some few households humbling themselves before God*. Even then, when there are only a few repenting households, the separation of one family from another will be seen. The whole of the penitents are separate from the ungodly around them, they are distinguished as those who are mourning before God; yet even then, each individual family will be separated the one from the other. If it should come to pass that the families of this church should begin unitedly to mourn by reason of the great sin of the times,—and I heartily hope that it may be the case,—yet even then, if it is true sorrow for sin, there will be a distinctness between one family and another family; there will be a sort of idiosyncrasy around the mourning for sin in this house, or in that house, which will distinguish the mourners there from all others. You can manufacture man-made things by the gross; but God's creations are made one by one, he puts his seal of variety upon all that he creates. Painters can make *replicas* of their great works, and you may see here and there copies of paintings that are, stroke for stroke, the same, but God does not repeat himself. There is a distinctness about the face of every man and every woman; you may mistake one man for another, but it is from casual observation, or from partial knowledge; but a man's own wife does not make a mistake about who is her husband; his child knows which is his father, and does not mistake another man for him. So, whatever resemblance there may be, there is a difference which is readily discernible; and if it is so in the natural face of a man, much more is it so in spiritual features. One man differs from another, and one family differs from another, and, consequently, in the mourning even when it becomes general throughout all the families of Christ, yet each family still keeps itself somewhat apart from the rest, and differs from every other.

This individualizing is further seen *in the distinction between family and family when both fear the Lord*. In our text, we have quite a little list of families given in order to make this truth clear. Each family has its peculiar sin, and a specialty must be made in confessing it.

There is, first, the family of the house of David, that is, the royal household; and the house of David was, as kings went in those days, a superior household. Kings' households have not often been of much account; but David's, though it was a long way off being perfect, was better than the best of the ungodly royal houses in those days. Yet there was something for the house of David, and all the kings of the house of David, to mourn over; for the sins of royalty are royal sins, and those are sins indeed which come from those who wear crowns, and are leaders among the sons of men. Hence, the family of the house of David must mourn apart.

Next, we are told that the family of the house of Nathan shall mourn apart. Take that to be the family of a prophet; the family down at the Manse, if you like. There is some particular sin in the minister's household which makes it proper that his family should mourn apart. Or, it may refer to the family of that good man in the church who is distinguished for his walk with God; yet, even in his family, there is a something which, when God the Holy Spirit visits it as a Spirit of intercession and of mourning for sin, will cause it to mourn apart.

There will be something about each household which it does not like to tell to others; and even in the house of Levi, which is so near to that of Nathan,—for the prophet and the priest often go hand in hand,—yet, when their families are gathered together to confess sin, Nathan prefers that

the family of Levi should not be at his house, and Levi is anxious that there should be a closed door when he and his household are mourning before the Lord. You will be right if you let the family of Levi represent the household of a gracious people; for now that the priesthood is the common property of all the elect of God, I do not care to distinguish Levi otherwise than as a believing man in whose house there is a church of God, and all whose family are of priestly rank. Still, even there, among the holiest and best of saints, among those devoted to the service of God, among those whose very lives are spent in work for God, there will be some sin that shall make the house of Levi wish to mourn apart from all others.

Then there was to be the mourning of the family of Shimei. We do not know who this Shimei may have been; some commonplace person, perhaps; possibly, his was a household in which there had not been the fear of God. But when the grace of God comes to it, then the house of Shimei begins to mourn apart for its own special sin.

You see, dear friends, that the one blow I have kept striking upon the anvil is this, "apart, *apart*, APART." All this mourning, however similar it might be in the one case to the other, is presented to God separately by each family; and if ever families were marked off the one from the other by a most manifest line of demarcation, it was in the night of weeping when, as at Bochim, they drew near unto God in prayer apart.

Notice, next, that this separateness is carried very far by the fact that, in each case, *it put the family apart, and their wives apart*. These people were one flesh; but when their hearts were made flesh, they had to offer separate supplications. The common sin of husbands and wives should be confessed unitedly, and there is nothing more natural, more beautiful, and more edifying, than for husbands and wives to pray together, to confess sin together, and to offer thanksgiving together. In all these they may be most fittingly one; yet there is and there must be some sin which the man shall bring before God, and before God alone, feeling that even his dearest one would be an intruder in that act of personal mourning for sin; and when the Spirit of God is in the woman's heart, she feels that, though she has no earthly secret from her husband, yet there is something between God and her soul into which even her husband cannot enter. Her mourning for her sin, when she first seeks the Saviour, would be hindered by her husband's interposition, so she gets alone; and his mourning for sin, when he first seeks the Saviour, or when afterwards he is conscious of some backsliding, and longs to return to his Lord, must be apart and alone. No, ye dearest ones, when we enter into the closet, and shut to the door, you must enter your closet, and shut to the door; for, in the dealing of a soul with God, it must be One and one, the one Mediator standing between them twain, but no other individual interposing. This family or that family was to mourn apart as a family; but then the individuals composing each family were also to be separate in their confession before the Most High: "every family apart, and their wives apart."

II. Now, secondly, HOW DOES THE INDIVIDUALITY GENERALLY SHOW ITSELF?

Well, in many ways. So truly is mourning for sin a personal thing, that each individual sees most his own sin, and feels himself to be alone as to *character*. That man who has truly repented of sin believes that, under some aspects, he is the greatest of all sinners. He is not so absurd as to charge himself with certain sins which he never committed, which probably he never had the opportunity to commit; but he is wise enough to see that our guiltiness before God not only depends upon the act committed, but upon the will to commit it, and upon the spirit, and very much upon the light against which a man has sinned, and upon the peculiar circumstances of favour and mercy which the man himself may have forgotten, but which prove him to have been most ungrateful in

the commission of sin. I do not know about your sin, dear brother; you may be worse than I am, but I do know my own sin so far as to feel that I hope you are not worse than I am, and to believe that I myself must take no other place than among the guiltiest, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Hence, each man's confession is necessary apart, because there is a different character in it.

Generally, mourning for sin is separate as to *place*. When a man is under a sense of sin, he likes to get quite alone. I knew one who, in his soul-trouble, resorted to a saw-pit; many have hidden behind a haystack, some have gone into the barn. Into all manner of queer nooks and corners we go when we are mourning for sin, but solitude has wonderful charms to a bleeding heart. You feel above all things that, even if it be the open street, you must get into some sort of solitude,—if necessary, even the awful solitude of being lost in a crowd. Thus, man recognizes the individuality of his sin by wishing to get apart even as to place.

And I am sure that it is so as to *time*. True mourning for sin is not a matter of hours and days. You cannot say, "Now it is time for me to mourn over my sin, and I must keep on so many minutes, and then have done." Ah, no, dear friends! When a man is ill, when he is consumptive, or has a bad cough, if he comes to chapel, you think to yourself that you would like him to cough during the pauses in the service, and not at other times; but, poor soul, he cannot help himself, he must cough when he *must* cough. And when a man has a groan in his soul, he cannot groan according to the position of the sun. He cannot take down a book of prayers, and say, "Now is the time for the confession of sin; and now is the time for this, and now is the time for that." He cannot follow the rules that may have been best in somebody else's case. All the time some are praising God, he will be still mourning; and when others are lamenting with broken hearts, he is smiting his heart to think that it will not lament, and will not break. The things of eternal life cannot be set according to carnal time; they will come according to their own way; and thus, every man and every woman must mourn for sin apart, and there is no regulating them by the movements of the clock.

Not only are they separate as to place and time, but they get apart as to *manner*. Some can weep over their sin; but others could not shed a tear if they were offered the world for it. Some are silent in their agony; others cry aloud. One man feels that his heart is broken; another envies him, and wishes that his hard heart would break. One person is full of misery on account of sin, another says,—

"If aught is felt, 'tis only pain,
To find I cannot feel."

There is a separate form of mourning about each true penitent, and let no one say of himself, "I have not mourned for sin because I have not mourned as somebody else has done." Perhaps, if you had been exactly like somebody else, there might be a suspicion that you were a mere copyist, and not an original work of the grace of God. So, true mourning differs in its manner.

Do you not also know, dear friends, that each person who mourns for sin has his own *secret*,—a secret which he must not tell to anyone but the Lord? It were a pity that he should tell it to human ears. There is a something in each individual case into which a stranger cannot enter. You may have read John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, and you may have noticed that most of his biographers say that Bunyan's account of himself was generally blackened by a morbid consciousness,—which also shows how little they know about the matter, for the man who has led the purest life, when he is brought before God by the humbling influence of the Holy Spirit, is the man who almost invariably considers himself to have been viler than anybody else. It is possible that John Bunyan was not

worse than any other gipsy tinker, he may have been a great deal better, that is to say, in the judgment of the blind bats that try to see what he was like; but he knew himself better than they knew him, for he had seen himself in the strong light of the Holy Spirit. God had turned the bull's-eye of the great lantern of the law full into the man's face, and so he had a better idea of his own character than you and I have; and what he did tell us is not all he knew, he would not have dared to tell it all, it would have been wrong that he should. As there are words in heaven so high that it were not lawful for a man to utter them, so are there words down here in the deep corruption of our fallen spirits that it were not lawful for a man to utter save in the ear of the Most High. Therefore, each individual must mourn apart.

III. Our time is running so fast, that I must go on to notice, thirdly, HOW WE ACCOUNT FOR THIS INDIVIDUALITY. Why is it that each man thus mourns apart?

Well, in part, it is to be accounted for by *that natural and justifiable shame which prevents our confessing all our sins before others*. I take it to be an awful violation of the natural delicacy of the human mind when any person is invited to make oral confession to a priest. I can myself scarcely conceive of anything that could be more degrading to the heart, and more injurious to the conscience, than the infernal brazenness of heart that permits anybody to attempt such a thing. As the inspired prophet would have said, they must have "a whore's forehead" before they can dare to unmask their hearts before their fellow-men. No, no, brethren, such a thing must not be so much as named among us; what shame remains in us, ought to prevent such a shameful or shameless thing as that. Hence, our mourning must be apart.

Secondly, in such a case, *the heart desires to go to God himself, and the presence of anybody else seems like an intrusion between our soul and our God*. The man looks around the room, he is afraid that somebody may come in and disturb his devotion, so he turns the key in the door. "Now," he says, "my God, it is to thee that I would speak. I should not like a dog to hear what I have to say to thee, now that I come, and honestly and openly lay bare my heart for thine inspection, hating the very garment spotted by the flesh, and desiring to be washed thoroughly from mine iniquities."

Further, *the man is conscious that his guilt has been all his own*. He dissociates himself, when he truly repents, from everybody else. He does not think of laying the blame on those who tempted him, or on ungodly parents who neglected his education. He looks for nobody to be his scapegoat except the appointed Scapegoat. He says, "I have sinned and done this evil in thy sight, O my God, and I stand before thee alone to confess it"; and therefore he gets the pardon of his guilt.

This, indeed, is *a sure sign of sincerity*. If thou canst only pray in public, thou dost not pray at all. If thou canst only join in the general confession, thou hast uttered a public lie. Thou art only right before God when it is thine own sin, felt in thine own heart, confessed by thyself before thine own God, unknown to anybody else, and altogether known to him.

Dear hearers, have you all done this? Have you all repented of sin? I am glad that so many are willing to spend a week-evening in listening to the gospel, and I always have hope that there is some religious sense about you that leads you to this mid-week service; but still, permit this personal question,—Has religion been to you only a family matter? Are you what you are because your mother was so or your father was so? Are you of this religion or that because it is the national faith,—because your pedigree has brought down with it your creed? This will not do. Remember, you have to be born alone, you will have to die alone, you will have to be judged alone, and you must be born again alone; and therefore, there must be for yourself a personal sense of sin, a personal seeking to Christ, a personal acceptance of pardon through the precious blood. Is it so with you

all? Our days are running swiftly away; we are all getting older, and coming nearer to the end of life. If you have never confessed sin, I entreat you to do it now. If you have never been delivered from its terrible curse, seek to be delivered now; ere you close your eyes in what may be the last sleep you shall ever know, confess your sin, and trust in Jesus. O God, help us each one separately thus to come to thee! It is with this plea that I close my discourse, let us make personal, complete, and searching investigation into our own case before God; let us go before him with our own personal acknowledgments, with nothing borrowed from others; let us not make a masquerade of religion, but let us go before God as we are, and confess our sinful state, and seek pardon for the sake of him who died, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

And then, dear friend, if you have really made this confession, and have found peace with God, then go forth, and try to bring others. Having lighted your own torch, let it not burn in your private chamber only, but go through the street with it; go into the darkest place, and let that light flame forth; but take care that it is not dimmed by any repetition of the sin you acknowledge. It is no use pretending to mourn for sin, and then to keep on in it.

"Repentance is to leave
The sin we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve
By doing so no more."

May true holiness spring out of your repentance, and may this go side by side with an earnest endeavour, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring others to repent apart as we have done, through him whose cross is the sole hope of sinners, who himself, living and pleading for sinners at the Father's right hand, is the one lone star that makes glad the midnight of our guilt. Oh, look ye away from self to Christ! If your confession of sin is offered without thought of him, away with your confession of sin. Repentance is nothing apart from Christ. Look to him through your tears, through your depression of spirit, and say, "Just as I am, I cast myself at those dear feet that bled out life for me, and look up to the riven side which is the one cleft of the rock where the sinner may hide himself away from the tempests of eternal wrath."

God bless you, beloved! May we meet in heaven to sing together, though on earth we must mourn apart, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Jesus and His Brethren

A Sermon

(No. 2516)

Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, May 9th, 1897,

Delivered By

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's-day Evening, October 4th, 1885.

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life."—Genesis 45:1-5.

I NEED not say to, you beloved, who are conversant with Scripture, that there is scarcely any personal type in the Old Testament which is more clearly and fully a portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ than is the type of Joseph. You may run the parallel between Joseph and Jesus in very many directions, yet you need never strain the narrative so even much as once. I am not about to attempt that task on the present occasion; but I am going to take this memorable portion of the biography of Joseph, and to show you how, in making himself known to his brethren, he was a type of our Lord revealing himself to us.

It seems that, at last, Joseph could bear the suspense no longer. He knew who his brethren were, he knew which was Benjamin, and which was Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, and the rest, and he recollected all the story of their early days together; but, they did not know him. They thought him some mysterious potentate, some great ruler of the land of Egypt—as indeed he was, but they did not know so much about him as he knew about them. Consequently, there was a distance between him and them, and his loving heart ached to bridge that gulf by manifesting himself to them. It is the way of love to desire to make itself known.

Now, in a still higher sense, the Lord Jesus Christ knows all about those in this place whom He has redeemed with His precious blood. The Father gave them to Him from before the foundation of the world, and he took them into covenant relationship with Himself of ever the earth was. Often has He thought of these His beloved Ever since these redeemed and chosen ones have been born into the world, He has watched them so carefully that He has counted the very hairs on their heads. His delights have been with the sons of men, and He has looked forward, and foreseen all that would happen to them. They are so precious to Him, as the purchase of His heart's blood, that they have never taken a single wandering step but His eye has tracked the mazes of their life. He knows them altogether—knows their sins, knows their sorrows, knows their ignorance of Him, knows how sometimes that ignorance has been willful, and they have continued in the dark when they might have walked in the light; and now, at this moment, speaking after the manner of men,

the heart of Christ aches to manifest Himself to some of them, He wants to be known, He thirsts to be known, He can only be loved as He is known, and He pines for love, and so He pines to manifest Himself to His loved ones. Ay, and there are some of them who do know Him already in a measure, but their measure is a very little one; it is but as a drop compared with the great deep sea. I have been praying, and am praying still, and I am not alone in the prayer, that this very hour, the Lord Jesus may be pleased to manifest Himself to His own blood-bought ones. To all who have been called by His grace already, and to many not yet called to Him, may He come in the fullness of His own glorious revelation, and make Himself known; for know ye not this—that the revelation of Christ in the Word will not save you unless Christ be revealed in you and to you personally? Nay, more than that; the Christ born at Bethlehem will not save you unless that Christ be formed in you the hope of glory, He must Himself come to *you*, and make himself known to *you*. It will not suffice you to read about his healing the sick, He must touch *you* with His hand, or you must touch the hem of His garment with your hand; but somehow there must be personal contract between yourself and the Lord Jesus Christ, or else all that He did will avail nothing to you. Let this be our prayer now—that to each man and woman and child here the Lord may graciously make himself known.

I. Notice, first, that THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, LIKE JOSEPH, REVEALS HIMSELF IN PRIVATE FOR THE MOST PART.

Joseph cried, "Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren." It would not have been seemly for this great ruler to lose all command of himself in the presence of the Egyptians. His heat was carried away with love to his brothers, and the cry that he lifted up was so loud that the people in other parts of the palace could hear that something strange was going on; but he could not bear that they should all should stand around, and gaze with curious eyes upon their ruler as he unbosomed himself to his brothers. They would not have understood it, they might have misrepresented it; at any rate, he could not bear that the scene of affection which was now to be enacted should be witnessed by strangers, so he cried, "Cause every man to go out from me."

My dear friends, do you really want savingly to see and know the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you never yet beheld Him by the eye of faith? Then, permit me to exhort you to be *literally much alone*—searching the Scriptures, and much alone in private, secret prayer. That gracious revelation of Himself to you as bearing your sins, and putting away your guilt, will nor be likely to come to you until you get a little time in private, where you call quietly meditate upon your Lord and His great atoning work. The mischief of this busy London is that we are fretted and worn with incessant occupations; we should all of us be much stronger and better if we saw less of the faces of men and more of the face of God. But for a penitent sinner, who desires to behold his pardon written in the smiling countenance of Christ, there must be solitude. You must rise earlier in the morning, and get a half-hour to yourself then, or you must sit up later at night, or you must steal out of bed at the dead of night, or you must even resolve that you will not go to your business until the first business of finding Christ is ended once for all. I feel persuaded that, with some of you at least, there will be no peace to your heart, and no comfortable sight of Christ, until you have gone upstairs, and said, "Here, alone, with every man put out and every wandering thought excluded, will I bow the knee, and cry, and look, and hope, and believe, until I can say, 'I have seen the Lord; I have looked to Him whom I have pierced, and I have seen my sin put away by His death upon the tree.'"

Further, I want you to notice, not only the excellence of solitude in general, but *the benefit of a kind of mental solitude*. Brethren, if in the house of God, in the midst of the assembly, the Lord Jesus Christ is ever to manifest Himself personally to us, it must be in a kind of mental and spiritual solitude. I believe that the preacher will never succeed in winning a soul if he tries to make himself prominent in his own preaching. An old man, who was accustomed to catching trout in a certain stream, was asked by one who had been fishing in vain, "Have you caught any fish today?" "Yes, Sir," he said, "I have a little basketful." "Oh!" said the other, "I have been fishing all day long, and I have taken none." "No," said the man, "but there are three rules about catching trout, which, Perhaps you have not observed. The first is—Get quite out of sight; and the second is—Get still more out of sight, and the third is—Get still more out of sight than that; and you will catch them so." And I believe that it is just so in preaching. If the preacher can get quite out of sight, and still more out of sight, and yet still more out of sight, then he will be the means of bringing souls to Christ. And you, dear friends, will only see Him well in any kind of preaching when you try to forget the man. I mean that remark to apply in two ways. Perhaps the preacher is one whom you dearly love, and you expect much from him. Well then, forget him, expect nothing from him, but look away from him to your Lord. Or perhaps the preacher's voice has no particular charm for you, the man is not very bright in his utterances; well, forget him, and try to see his Master. Forget the preacher for good and for bad, for better and for worse, and get to the Lord Himself.

There is a story told of Mr. Erskine having preached on one occasion before the communion, and a good woman, a child of God, heard him with such delight, and was so much fed and satisfied, that she left her own pastor, and went some miles on the next Lord's day to go and hear him again. That morning, he was dreadfully dry and barren, or at least she thought that he was. There was no food for her whatever; and being not a very wise woman, she went in to tell him so. She said, "Oh, Mr. Erskine, I heard you at the communion with such delight; you seemed to take me to the very gates of heaven, and I was fed with the finest of the wheat; so I have come this morning on purpose to hear you, and I confess that I have got nothing out of you!" So he said, "My good woman, what did you go for last Sabbath-day?" "I went to the communion; Sir." "Yes, you went to the communion; that was to have communion with the Lord?" "Yes," she said, "I did." "Well," said Mr. Erskine, "that is what you went for, and you got it; and the Lord blessed my word to you, and you had communion with Him. Now, what did you come here for this morning?" "I came to hear you, Sir." "And you have got what you came for, there is nothing in me." "Think of this story when you are remembering the Lord's servants, and forgetting their Master Himself. I do believe that, as you are sitting here, you whose eyes have already been opened by the Spirit of God, if you will but say, "Cause every man to go out from me; shut to the door, I have entered into my closet even while in the pew; I am alone now, and I desire to see no man save Jesus only," you shall see Him, for He manifests Himself to His people all alone. Oh, that each one here would say, "There is nothing but Christ that I desire to see, there is nothing else I wish to remember, I would think only of my Lord Jesus; may He be pleased to reveal Himself to me!"

II. The second remark I have to make is this—when the Lord Jesus Christ reveals Himself to any man for the first time, it is usually in the midst of terror, and **THAT FIRST REVELATION OFTEN CREATES MUCH SADNESS.**

When Joseph made himself known to his brethren, and said to them, "I am Joseph," "they were troubled in his presence." Judah had made a very plaintive speech when it was threatened that Benjamin should be detained in Egypt, and all the brothers were in deep trouble; so that, when the

great ruler said to them, "I am Joseph," they were not filled with joy by his words, so we read, "His brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence." He was Joseph, their brother, and he loved every one of them; yet "they were troubled at his presence." It was the best thing that could have happened to them to be in the presence of him who was sent of God to save their lives with a great deliverance; yet "they were troubled at his presence."

And you and I recollect, perhaps, when, under a deep sense of sin and sorrow, we had our first perception of Christ's salvation, instead of being glad at it, we were "troubled at his presence." "Why!" we said to ourselves, "this Christ is He whom we have despised, and rejected, and crucified." There did not seem, at first, much comfort for us in the manifestation of Christ. One said, in order to cheer us, "He died for sinners." "But," we answered, "surely not for such sinners as we are." Even the very sound of that blessed word "salvation" grated on our ears, because we thought we should be like the fabled Tantalus, up to our neck in water which we could not drink, or surrounded by fruit which we could not have pluck. "He may have died for others," we seem to say, "but scarcely for us." "We were troubled at his presence." Even the house of God, to which we continued to go, was a place of terror to us and we cried, like Jacob did at Bethel, "How dreadful is this place!" In the worst sense of that word, it really was "dreadful" to us, full of dread although we believed it to be "none other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven." We said, "What right have we to be in the house of God? How can we expect to enter heaven even though its gate is so near to us?" We heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, but we sorrowfully exclaimed, "Ah, that is only too true! He will pass by, He will stop to look at us." We heard that precious text, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life"; yet we said, "What is it to believe in Him? How can we believe in Him?" The light seemed shifting all around us, but our eyes were blind to it; the music of heaven was sounding in all its sweetness, but our ears were closed to its melody; everlasting love was coming near to us, yet our hearts did not open to receive it; and therefore we could not answer Christ, for we "were troubled at his presence."

Dear friends, if any of you are in this sad state, do not therefore be driven away from our Jesus, our greater Joseph but still stand in His presence, even though you are troubled at it, for that experience, though it be bitter, is a bitter sweet. There may be trouble in Christ's presence, but there is a far greater trouble in being driven front His presence, and from the glory of His power. So keep standing just where you are, even though you stand trembling, for by-and-by, and perhaps this very hour, He will graciously reveal Himself to you, and you shall no longer tremble at His presence, but, on the contrary, you shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, as you perceive that this Joseph, this Jesus, is your Brother, your Saviour, your Friend, your all in all.

III. Now, thirdly, though the first appearance of Jesus, like that of Joseph, may cause sadness, THE FURTHER REVELATION OF THE Lord JESUS CHRIST TO HIS BRETHREN, BRINGS THEM THE GREATEST POSSIBLE JOY.

If you look at this passage when you are at home, you will perhaps say to yourself, "The second time that Joseph spoke to his brethren, he had not much more to say than he said the first time," for then he said, "I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?" And the second time there was as much the same burden in his language: "I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." So, when Christ reveals Himself in grace to any poor heart, *the revelation, for substance, is much the same as at the first, yet there is a great difference.* When, for the first time, I heard the gospel to my soul's salvation, I thought that I had never really heard the gospel before, and I began to think that the

preachers to whom I had listened had not truly preached it. But, on looking back, I am inclined to believe that I had heard the gospel fully preached many hundreds of times, before, and that this was the difference—and that I then heard it as though I heard it not; and when I did hear it, the message may not have been any more clear in itself than it had been at former times, but the power of the Holy Spirit was present to open my ear, and to guide the message to my heart. O dear friend, if you have heard me preach Christ crucified, and you have not yet seen Christ cried, your soul's salvation, I pray that you may do so now! I do, not suppose that word, there will be any difference in the sermon, or in the truth proclaimed; the difference will be that, in the one case, it has not reached your heart, and in the other case it will. O blessed Master, speak comfortably to the hearts of sinners, and to the hearts of thy people, too. Make the old, old gospel to be new to us by clothing it with a new power within our hearts and consciences, and throughout our lives!

Yet, there were some differences in the words which Joseph uttered to his brethren. If you turn again to the narrative, you will see that he began his second speech by saying to them, "Come near to me, I pray you." *There was a longing for nearness to those he loved*, and that is the point of my sermon at this time. I want you, who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but who are, nevertheless, His elect, His redeemed ones, to come near to Him now by an act of faith, and trust Him with yourselves, your souls, your sins, and everything else. Stand not back through shame or fear, ye chief of sinners, for he says, "Come near to me, I pray you. 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I Will give You rest.' "As for you who are His brethren already, come you near to Him, for to you also he says, "Come near to me, I pray you." Oh, if our Lord were actually here in bodily presence—and I can almost picture Him in the loveliness and glory of Divine Majesty—if He were to stand here, and say to us, "Come near to me, I pray you," we would, with solemn reverence, bow before Him, but we would with joyful obedience come near to Him, and try to hold Him by the feet and worship Him. Would not each one of you press forward to come near unto Him? I am sure that you would; well, that is what you have to do in a spiritual fashion. We know not Christ after the flesh, but we do know Him after the Spirit. So, come near to Him, dear brethren in Christ; believe in Him again as you did at the first, look to Him again as if you have never looked before. Worship Him as your Lord and Your Redeemer, prostrate yourselves before Him, and adore Him as the Son of God revealed in our midst; come near to Him. Then talk to Him; tell Him all that is in your inmost heart. Unburden to Him your cares and your doubts; ay, and come near to Him with your fondest affection, and say to Him now, in the silence of your spirit, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Come near to Christ with all your tears of penitence, come near with your alabaster box of gratitude, come near with the kisses of your lips of love, come near with your whole heart's purest affection, and come now, for that is what He invites you to do. It is a part of His manifestation of Himself to you that you should endeavor to come near to Him. Cry, "Stand back, O self! Stand back, O devil! Stand back, all care for the world! Stand back, even care for the church just now! My heart must come near unto her Lord, and sit like a dove on His finger, and be satisfied to look with her gentle eyes at the beauties of His countenance." God help us so to do, in response to our Lord's gracious invitation, "Come near to me, I pray you."

Then, as of to help us to come near *our Lord*, in this revelation, declares His relationship to us. The speaker in the type says, "I am Joseph your brother"; and the Lord Jesus Christ, though He is Head overall things to His Church, and King and Lord of death and hell, yet says to everyone who believes in Him, "I am your Brother; I am your kith and kin; Head of the family, but still of

the family; and touched with the feeling of your infirmities, for I was in all points tempted like as you are." Do not imagine, concerning the Lord Jesus, that there is only a fanciful or sentimental brotherhood between Him and You. It is a real brotherhood; there is no such brotherhood under heaven, so complete and true, as that which exists between Christ and every blood-washed soul, for it is not a brotherhood according to the flesh, but an everlasting, spiritual brotherhood. An eternal union of the closest and most vital kind is established between Christ and every one who believes in Him.

We do not reckon it hard do we, to win a brother's heart? If we have been a little cold towards a brother, his heart soon warms to us again; and as for our Lord, if we have not seen Him of late, if any of us have not loved Him as we should, if we are saying, "We are troubled at His presence, we hardly dare come to His table," may He say to us, "Come near to me, I pray you; I am your Brother. Come near, come nearer, nearer still. I am pleased when you are near." Come with your sin and your lukewarmness; come just as you are, as you came to Him at the first; and He will receive you, and will manifest Himself unto you as He does not unto the world.

In addition to revealing his relationship, which was a great motive for inviting his brethren to come near, *he also told them a secret*. He said, "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." I think he mentioned that to show them that he must be Joseph their brother, for who else in all the world knew of that shameful action on their part? I do not suppose that the Midianite merchants, who bought Joseph, knew that he was sold by his own brethren; or if they did know, there were none of them in Pharaoh's palace, for they were Ishmaelites, and they had gone their way to traffic somewhere else. All who knew of that wicked transaction were Joseph and his brothers, so by this password he lets them know that there was a sort of freemasonry between them. This was the sign, "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." It made them blush, I dare say; and it must have made them mourn; but it also made them feel, "Yes, that is our brother; nobody but Joseph would know that we sold him into slavery." And, dear friends, have you never seen your Well-beloved as He reads your heart? I have known Him read mine from the first thought in it to the last, and I have thanked I Him as He has read it, for I have said, "Lord, Thou hast read that book right through, and now Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love thee. Alas! I did sell thee into Egypt; there was a day when I chose Egypt and its pleasures rather than 'Thyself; and there have been days since when I have sold Thee again into Egypt by treating Thee with lukewarmness, and giving myself up to other lovers. Yes, Lord, I have sold 'Thee to the Ishmaelites by doubting Thee and mistrusting Thee; and by my sins I have stripped Thee of thy many-colored garment, and by my own folly I have let Thee go away from thy Father's house, and from the chamber of her that bore Thee. 'Thou knowest all this, my Lord, but I know Thee, too, because Thou knowest me so well."

Then notice that, when Joseph thus revealed himself to his brethren, he did not say more till he had *sweetly put away till their offenses against him*. They had been troubled because they knew that they had sold him into Egypt, but he said to them, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither." So Jesus says to His loved ones, who have grieved Him by their evil deeds, "Be not grieved, for, I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.' Be not angry with yourselves, for I will receive you graciously, and love you freely. Be not angry with yourselves, for your sins, which are many, are all forgiven; go, and sin no more. For my name's sake, will I defer mine anger; wherefore, 'Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like

crimson, they shall be as wool.' " Many of you know the way our Saviour talks; I pray that He may just now make every believer sure that there is not a sin against him in God's Book of remembrance. May you, dear friends, be clear in your conscience from all dead works! May you have the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, to keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus, and in the clear white light of your Saviour's glorious presence, may you see the wounds He endured when suffering for your sins! Then will you sing with the disciple whom Jesus loved, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Last of all, Joseph was not satisfied with thus revealing himself to his brethren, and assuming them of his forgiveness, but *he promised them rich supplies for the future*. To my mind, this was the next best news to his message of forgiveness. He said to them, in effect, "You have had two years of famine. It is only through me that you have been preserved alive; you have come down to Egypt with your asses and your sacks, and you have taken home provender to my father and to your households; but there are yet five more years in which there will be no plowing and no harvest. What will become of you? What little you had in store, is already all consumed. God has sent me here that, through those five years, I may nourish you. You shall come down, and live in Goshen, on the fat of the land of Egypt, and you shall never have any want, for all the treasures of the land of Egypt are mine, and I will take care of you, you shall never know any lack." In like manner, beloved, your Lord stands, and says to you, "You will have many more troubles yet." Some of my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, who are here, will be in heaven before five more years have expired; they have good reason to be very grateful to God. But to some of its who are younger, it may be that God has appointed many a year to abide here; but our Saviour lives.

"He is at the Father's side,

The man of love, the Crucified;"

and the arrangements of providence are in His hand, and all that providence shall be over-ruled for us. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." You will be in Egypt for a while longer, dear friend, but you will be in the Goshen of Egypt, and the good of all the land is yours. Oh, what a blessing it is to think that we have a Brother who reveals Himself to us as the Universal Provider, who will not let us have a want, but will take care that, before our need comes, the supply shall be ready, and we shall have nothing to do but to rejoice in Him who careth for us!

Let not that sweet thought take away from your minds what I want to be the center of all the meditation, namely, that you should come near to your Lord. We never use a crucifix; we should think it sinful to do so. Neither do I want to have an imaginary crucifix, by trying to set Christ before you so that you should picture Him mentally; but I want Your faith to do much more than imagination can. The Lord Jesus Christ is spiritually here in the midst of us, according to His gracious promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"; and He hears me speaking these words at this moment, I am as sure of it as if I saw that mystic presence with my natural eyes. If I did see Him, I know that I should fall at His feet as dead, and the rest of this service would have to be spent in awe-struck silence by everyone that did behold Him. But, O thou Son of God and Son of Mary, Jesus Christ our Saviour, we trust Thee wholly and alone to save us, and we love Thee with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; and as we live *by* Thee, we pray thee to help us to live *for* thee, to live *to* thee, to live *like* thee, and by-and-by to live *with* Thee! We could almost wish that we might now fall down and kiss thy dear feet, but Thou art not here in visible presence; for Thou hast gone up into the glory; but Thou art here spiritually, and we

come to Thee, and say, "Lord, Thou art ours, and we are thine; we will hold to Thee, and will not let Thee go."

"Sun of my Soul, thou Saviour dear,
It is not night if thou be near."

Come, stay with me while yet the evening shade shall linger, till death's dark night comes on, and then, instead of night, let the morning break upon my gladdened eyes because it is Thyself that has come, the life, the resurrection, and not death at all! Come, beloved, can you not get nearer to your Lord? Can you not speak familiarly with Him? Can you not whisper into His ear the story of your love?

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,"
and help us now to come near to Jesus! Amen and Amen.