CHARLES SPURGEON SERMONS (63 VOLUMES) PART1 - VOLUME 1

by C.H. Spurgeon

The first volume of the first part of Spurgeon's complete sermon collection, containing sermons preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. This massive collection represents one of the largest bodies of published sermons by a single preacher in Christian history.

100 Chapters

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Chronicles 34:15-18-19 #3303 - A Very Early Bi

A VERY EARLY BIBLE SOCIETY

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A SERMON

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~ON BEHALF OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY~

"And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered

the book to Shaphan. . .Then Shaphan the scribe told the king,

saying, Hilkiah the priest has given me a book. And Shaphan

read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes."

2 Chronicles 34:15; 2 Chronicles 34:18-19.

HILKIAH had found THE BOOK and it was a more important find than if he had discovered a mine of diamonds, or perpetual motion, or a new world! Oh, that Book, that wonderful Book! Was there ever anything like it under Heaven? Well may it be a power when we come to think of what it is—the Book of the Law of the living God! How reverently did he lift it from its hiding place, remove its dust and commence to read its title and contents! This particular Book of the Law was probably the first five Books of Moses, commonly called the Pentateuch. Some have thought that it was only the Book of Deuteronomy, but it is too late in the day for us to decide with confidence its exact form. We know that it was "a Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses" (2 Chronicles 34:14), probably an autographed copy by Moses. Of that we cannot be sure, but whatever hand may have written the letters, what a Book the Law of the Lord is! The Old Testament is a Divine light which has led multitudes of saints to the Lord's right hand—and its luster is not dimmed by the New Testament, but increased thereby. Not one tittle of it has failed, or shall fail—it lives and abides forever! Taking an enlarged view of the Law of the Lord today and holding in our hands two Testaments, both the Old and the New, what a marvelous Book the Bible is! Earth does not contain an equal wonder!

It is a Book which has God for its Author, for though there are many authors and the Book is divided into many treatises, yet it is all of one as to its innermost authorship, since holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. A Divine originality runs through it all—marks of the Divine Mind abound in every portion and the Holy Spirit still inspires it all and breathes it into the hearts of believing readers. Matthew and Mark, and Luke and John are here, but we scarcely observe them as compared with the higher light, the Light of God which illuminates every page! The Book is saturated with a heavenly life!

What God has written is to be received with the utmost reverence. It is a pity that so many treat this Sacred Volume as they would treat any ordinary book. They sit on the throne of judgment and sway the scepter of criticism, as if they would call God, Himself, to their bar! Surely they have never heard in their heart and conscience the sound of that question, "Who are you that replies against God?" If God is not its Author, this Book is a gross imposture and the sooner we treat it as such the better! But if God is its Author, let us bow before it obediently and accept it as our Infallible Directory.

As it has God for its Author, so it commends itself to us as inestimably precious because it has God's mind for its matter. In this Book of the Lord the chief subject is Himself and His ways and His Grace towards us, His creatures. Here the Lord does not so much explain His works as His own personal ways, thoughts and designs to our fallen race. He does not take the pen in hand to explain to us what He has written in the stone book, or to open up to us what He has printed in letters of light in yonder constellations, but to reveal His glorious Grace which He has caused to dwell in all its fullness in Christ Jesus our Lord! He has left us to find out what we may of visible things—a happy and healthful exercise for our minds, but He had something nobler to tell us when He inspired this Book. Herein He has told us His thoughts of man and of the Man, Christ Jesus. His thoughts upon our sin and the ruin that comes of it. His thoughts as to how we may be saved and what shall come out of that salvation. The windows of this Book look towards Heaven and truly they are windows of agate—themselves precious and giving us a view of still more precious things! Its doors open into eternity and its gates lead into Glory. Every page points to holiness and felicity and attracts us thereto. Precious Book! I would say of you what David said of Goliath's sword "There is none like that. Give it to me." You are marrow and fatness, honey, wines on the lees well-refined—yes, manna of angels and water from the Rock, Christ Jesus! Of all soul medicines you are the most potent! Of all mental dainties you are the sweetest! And of all spiritual food you are the most sustaining!

As the Book has God for its Author, and God's mind for its matter, so does it become invaluable to us because it is directed to us. It is not a letter written from God to the angels, nor is it sent to a race of beings alien from ourselves. This Book is for men and it is directed not to our curiosity, nor to any of our lower faculties, but to the soul of our life, to the vital spirit of our manhood! It is God's Word to the innermost man—to our immortal part. He speaks here not only to our ears, but to our souls. He directs His teaching not to that part of us which shall die, but to that part of us which shall never cease to be, but shall be immortal as Himself! If ever a man ought to concentrate all his faculties and pray to be in the best mental order, it should be when he comes to study the Word of God upon matters which concern his noblest being. God grant, therefore, that in our hearts we may feel deep reverence for this marvelous Book which we shall not now lose as Israel almost lost it—whose copies will never become scarce, as they were in Josiah's day. The Word of the Lord

will always be precious, but not through scarcity of copies, now that the Bible Society is scattering them thick as autumn leaves! They will always be gems for value and yet as pebbles of the brook for multitude!

He that reads this wondrous Book aright may well value it because of the blessings which it will bring him. It will tell him how to be rid of all his sin and free himself from the slavery of Satan. It will teach him how to bear his present burdens and quit all needless cares. It will be a guide to him through the maze of life, a pillow for the bed of death! It will give him joy and peace through believing when the thickest troubles shall gather round about him, and it will make him ready for the future world when brightest glories shall shine upon him! Whatever you need for time or for eternity, this Book shall either give it to you, or point you to Him who has it ready to give to you if you will bend your knee before Him! It is a golden mine of the Truth of God and infinitely more—it is a treasury of blessings and delights, and even then I have not fully described it. It has for you, O sheep of the Lord, all that your Good Shepherd sees that you have need of! Here are the green pastures wherein He makes you to feed and to lie down—and here flow the still waters, whereof if a man drinks, he shall never thirst, but shall joy and rejoice in God forever! I do not wonder that Hilkiah and Shaphan had the same value for the smaller Book which we Believers in Christ have for the larger edition of it—for even a fragment of it is priceless! I do not wonder that they considered their treasure to be worthy of being brought before the king. If they had discovered where hidden coffers had been concealed by Solomon and the great kings that succeeded him, they would not have procured so glorious a present for the king of Judah as when they suddenly stumbled upon this Book of the Law of the Lord!

I. Tonight I shall try to speak of the whole question under three heads. And the first will be this—here is an instance of that PECULIAR PRESERVATION which God has extended to the Scriptures which He has Inspired. It would seem, from this narrative, that copies of the Word of God had become extremely rare, for no other copy was known to exist. If anyone had known where there was a copy of the Pentateuch, the priest would have known, or the pious king's secretary would have been informed of it. These appear to have been gracious men, learned men—and men to whom the people came—surely if such a thing was procurable, they would have possessed a copy of the Law of the Lord. Perhaps the faithful scattered up and down through Israel and Judah had copies of the Book, but they had grown so accustomed to conceal them from their persecutors that they kept the secret to themselves. If there were other copies, they were not known to those who had the best means of discovering them.

Volume 58 3When Hilkiah discovered this copy of the Word of God, he was greatly surprised and overjoyed. What a singular Providence it was that the Book was not quite destroyed! How fortunate that the one copy should have been left! It is believed by many—and I think that their belief is correct— that this was a standard copy. If it was not the original, yet it was an authorized transcript which was to be regarded as the correct text—and it had been laid up in the Ark of the Lord for that purpose. Perhaps in some dark hour, for fear that it would be discovered even in the secret shrine of the tabernacle, a priest had hidden it away. The tradition is that it was buried beneath a heap of stones when Ahaz was seeking out copies of the Word to destroy them. By the Divine Providence of God this one standard copy had been preserved and now came to light! It may have been hidden carefully and then Providence had provided the caretaker. It may have been thrown away carelessly—then Providence had made even that carelessness to be the

means of preserving the treasure. In any case, the Law was still among men and it had now fallen into careful and reverent hands. The God who gave it had preserved it!

Now look along through all the ages and if you are a reverent Believer in the Word, you will be filled with grateful wonder that the Sacred Roll has been preserved to us! Through what perils it has passed and yet, as I believe, there is not a Chapter of it lost—no, nor a verse of any Chapter! The misreading of the copies are really so inconsiderable and are so happily corrected by other manuscripts, that our Bible is a marvel in literature for the comparative ease with which the correct text is discoverable! It seems to me that God's Divine Care has extended itself to the whole text, so that, with far less care than would be needed by any classic author, the very words of the Holy Spirit may be known! As the wings of cherubim overshadowed the Mercy Seat, so do the wings of Providence protect the Book of the Lord! As Michael guarded the body of Moses, so does a Divine Care secure the Books of Moses! I invite lovers of history and of famous books to look into the interesting story of the immortality of Scripture. Let us think of that special preservation with reverent gratitude.

The God of Israel had given rules for the preservation of the Scriptures, but they had evidently fallen into disuse. It is expressly laid down in the Book of Deuteronomy that each king was to copy out the Book of the Law for himself. We have no evidence that any of them did so! Most of the ordinances of the Lord to His chosen people were neglected almost as soon as they were given. Even in the wilderness, during 40 years, the rite of circumcision, which lay at the base of everything, was unobserved! The feast of tabernacles was not kept for many and many a year. And the Passover, the most solemn of all rites, was not carefully celebrated— indeed, it had never been properly observed from the days of Samuel to the days of Josiah! It had been altered and debased from its original form. Alas, Christian ordinances have suffered from the some tendency to change! This proves the depraved nature of man, and his unwillingness to walk in the path of obedience. The plan of preserving the Sacred Book by the kings' copying it had fallen into disuse and, therefore, the extreme scarcity of manuscripts around the court—yet even then, the Word did not fail!

Nor was the Scripture alone in danger from the neglect to preserve it, but furious persecutions had been raised against the Holy Volume. The haters of it slew the Prophets, broke down the memorials of God's goodness to His people and polluted the Holy Place of the Most High—and their rage did not spare His statutes. The Law must be destroyed, or they would still be rebuked. You know, Brothers and Sisters, how from century to century that church which has no foundation in the Word of God has, with desperate determination, hunted after every copy of the Inspired Volume to destroy it! It is not very long ago since that unchangeable church called the Scriptures "dangerous pastures." Who and what must the shepherds be who use such language concerning the Law of the Lord? But with all their burnings, they have not destroyed the Book! With all their inquisitions and torture chambers, faith in Scripture has survived! Still the Book teaches and preaches with a Divine Unction and Authority. What Popery could not do, infidelity shall not do! Infidelity, some years ago, was going to blot out the name of Jesus from under Heaven! Its boastful champion said that he was but one man, but in a few years he would undo all that was accomplished by the 12 Apostles! His name is left to curse—the work of God goes on better than ever it did and the grand old Book is scattered everywhere, falling fast and thick as snowflakes in the time of winter! I might almost say that the copies of the Bible are in number comparable to the

sands of the sea! Think of nearly a million penny Testaments being scattered in a single year in this one land! These are leaves of the Tree of Life for the healing of the nations! There is a blessing in every line of the Sacred Record both for the present age and for years to come. This Word will abide among men till time shall be no more. God be thanked for it!

The passage before us is a very beautiful instance of how under every difficulty, when every regulation has been neglected, and the utmost fury goes forth against the Word, yet the Word lives and abides forever! The fact is that Providence is the ally of Revelation. From the Word of the Lord, Creation began—by the Word of the Lord Creation is sustained and everything seems to know the source from which it came—and every creature lends itself to the preservation of that grand Word by which it exists! Depend upon it, Brothers and Sisters, the Book is not alone—God is always with it! God has put a wall of fire around the Revelation of His will and with Omnipotence He guards it against all who would harm it! God is always with those who tremble at His Word. And when there shall come times of darkness and of sorrow, and you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, never question what the end will be, for "the Word of the Lord endures forever." He that sits on the floods as King forever and ever, will so order all things that His Word shall have yet greater sway and His Gospel shall conquer the hearts of men!

Volume 58 5But, oh, how should we love the Book, and how should we stand up for it, and guard it jealously, since God has guarded it so well! Let every man of God be like Solomon's valiant men of Israel who watched about the bed of the king, each man with his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night—for there is much fear just now for the Truth of God. I mean, of course, to us poor puny beings there is danger—there is no fear in the great heart of the Eternal! There is no fear as to the accomplishment of His purposes, for He is strong in power and not one fails. What our fathers preserved with their blood, we will preserve with our lives. That which bore them to a martyr's death, singing as they went, we will not consent to throw away! If any man has another gospel, let him keep it—I am satisfied with mine. If any man has found another bible, let him read it—I am satisfied with my mother's old Bible and the Bible of my ancestors. If discoveries are to be made concerning a new way of the salvation of men, let them make them who care to do so—the old way has saved me and the old way has saved multitudes of others—and therein shall I abide, God helping me, come what may! And so will you, my Brothers and Sisters—and together we will rejoice that God preserves His Book and continues to give His Holy Spirit with it! God will uphold His Truth that is in this Book and the men that hold that Truth shall be upheld. "Forever, O Lord, your Word is settled in Heaven!" And similar eternal settlements are made for all whose hope is fixed upon that Word!

II. Having glanced at this, I ask you to think for a little upon another point—THE COMMENDABLE COMMUNICATION CONCERNING THIS BOOK. Hilkiah finds it. Hilkiah hands it to the royal secretary, whose name was Shaphan. Shaphan reads a bit of it and makes quite sure that it is what it professes to be—and then immediately he goes with it to the king. The king holds a Bible-reading with him and when the king has read the Scared Roll, himself, he summons all the people and reads the Book to them. The point is this—if you have found the Word of God, make it known to others! Keep not this honey to yourself!

Hilkiah handed to Shaphan the Book without note or comment. It was the Book with no apocryphal matter rolled up with it. It was the Book of the Law of God in its purest state. He who found the

Book delighted in it, but he passed it on—and the next passed it on and the next passed it on—and the next circulated it still further. All the nation soon heard of what was written in the Book. The handlers of the Volume do not appear to have tarried long. Hilkiah rejoiced and said to secretary Shaphan, "I have found the Book of the Law!" And Shaphan did not delay a month, but went straight away to let the king know. And the king, after he had tore his clothes, expressed his sorrow for national sin and enquired at the hand of the Lord's Prophetess, published the Divine message to the people and read the Law to them. The moral is—continually make known God's Holy Word! If you have obtained light, let your brother light his candle at your candle. If you have seen anything of God, tell your brother what you have seen. Let not God's Book grow moldy in your own hand, but pass it on and let another read what you have read to your salvation and to your comfort, that he also may be saved and comforted! Let your light shine! Scatter the bread of Heaven! Distribute the balm of Gilead!

How can we do this? Well, I believe that it is the duty of every Christian man not only to preach the Gospel, and to tell to others of his own experience of it, but also literally to pass on the Book, itself. You may possibly make a mistake as to your explanation of it, but you will make no mistake if you give away the Book, itself, and pray the Spirit of God, Himself, to explain it to the reader. Money should be spent by each one of us in scattering Bibles. With Testaments at a penny, who would not give Testaments away? With Bibles so cheap as they are, and withal so beautiful to look upon, many of them, who would not think it a good investment frequently to give to the young, to your relatives, to your friends, a copy of the Book? Suit the size of the copy to the person and so give that your present will be valued. What better marriage gift than a family Bible? What better present for an aged person than one of the large-print Bibles? Oh, what gladness you might give to many a humble cottager by the present of such a Book! I have seen them with their old thumbed Bibles, trying to read them when they have strained their eyes and I have pitied them. We who are getting old know the luxury of a fine large print! You who have the means should take care that there is not an elderly person who, for lack of large type, is unable to read the Word of God! I hope that few houses are without a copy of the Word of God— but while I hope so, I have often had my hopes very rudely dashed to the ground by discoveries of people who possess no Bible at all!

I also fear that millions who possess copies of the Word of God, never think of reading them! I have been at night, not far from here, in the houses of persons thought to be respectable—and there has been death very near and I have said, "Bring me the Bible, that I may read a passage of Scripture." And they have hunted high and low and none has been found! This was not for lack of means to buy, but for lack of care to have! It is for us, at any rate, to endeavor liberally to scatter copies of the Word of God.

You are doing this when you help the man who spends his life in the work of translation. How can there be Bibles to give away in foreign languages until the Book has been translated into them? The scholar must live while he has the work of translation to do. Subscriptions given to the Bible Society are a handing over of the Scriptures to tribes that sit in darkness—who by this means shall see a great light.

If you cannot give away Bibles, I believe you do a good work when you sell them, or give money to help to produce them cheaply. If you cannot afford a whole Bible, something is done when a portion is given away, or a Gospel is left in a cottage. You can never tell what may come of a

single portion of the Word of Gold—yes, of a leaf of it! Instead of regretting, as I have heard some do, that Bibles are sometimes sold for waste paper, and goods are done up in them, I am glad that it should be so! I admire the enterprise of Andrew Fuller, and some others long ago, who printed

Volume 58 7hymns upon papers which were to be used in the sale of cottons and other small wares. They gave those papers to tradesmen that they might do their goods up in them. So long as the Truth of God does but travel, it does not matter how. If you can place the Bible where men may read it, who knows what may result? I knew a friend who, in purchasing his tobacco, found it done up in a passage of the Word of God—and by the perusal of that portion became a converted man! Let us not be afraid of what will become of the Book, for it is quite able to take care of itself—only let us imitate Hilkiah and Shaphan and Josiah, and make it known wherever we have the opportunity! Have you bread to eat while the multitudes are dying of hunger in the streets, and will you eat your morsel alone? Then shame on you! Is the plague mowing down its thousands, and have you medicine that can stop the disease, and do you conceal the recipe and hide the remedy in your own chest? Then shame on you! Do you see millions going down to Hell and have you the good news of how they may escape that place of misery and enter into Glory? And will you not tell it, or will you not hand it on in the form of the Book? Then shame upon you! How is he a Christian who has no sympathy with the Bible Society? How is he a Christian who, in some shape or other, does not spread this matchless Word?

III. And now, lastly, I want to call your attention to the best thing of the whole and that is, notice THE IMPORTANT INFLUENCE OF THIS BOOK WHEN IT WAS READ.

We find that as soon as the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes. First of all, he read it. The Book has no value if it is not read. Nowadays, we do not so much need Bibles as Bible-readers. Are any of you in that condition—that you would not be without a Bible in your house—and yet you never read it? Do you treat this Book as a fetish? Do you reverence words which you do not care to read? Is there some kind of witchcraft about paper and binding in a certain form? Do you think it a very pious thing to put a big Bible under your arm and march to a place of worship with it, and yet never read it? Oh, fall not into such folly! It is the reader and the one who understands the Word who gets the blessing from it! This Book is like a nut—you must crack the nut by reading and meditation—and so get the kernel, or it will not feed your soul!

Now, the first result of this Book upon the king was that he tore his clothes. How many here present, if they would but read the Word and if the Holy Spirit would bless it to them, would have to tear their hearts, if not their garments? You, my Friend, if you are not born-again, if you are not a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, are in such a condition that if you knew your danger, the joints of your loins would be loosened and for fearful astonishment you would be ready to fall to the ground! You are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity, but do not know it! You lie under the wrath of God! The curse of the Law is upon you and you do not know it—and all for lack of reading and believing what this Book would tell you—would tell you most assuredly and Infallibly! I fear there is never a congregation without a considerable number who have need to read this Book, if for nothing else, in order that they might know their real state. There is a prayer which I often pray and I venture to commend it to many here. I pray, "Lord, let me always know the worst of my case." I cannot bear the idea of being self-deceived, of fancying that I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing when, in God's sight, I am naked, poor and miserable! Read your

Bibles, that you may be honest with yourselves—that you may not deceive by thinking that you are something when you are nothing! That is the first effect of the Word. "Oh," you say, "it would make me miserable even to read it." Very likely it would, but by such misery you would come to sure and healthful happiness. By such a disturbance you would come to a lasting and acceptable peace.

After the king had tore his garments, he then began to enquire after the God who had sent this Book. Now, notice this. If any of you have never done this, pray that you may read the Book—yes, read the more terrible parts of it as well as the more cheering portions—in such a way that, having read it, you may seek this God who thus speaks to you in loving faithfulness. Endeavor to learn of Him how you may be saved. Labor to know Him personally, for it is written, "Acquaint now yourself with God and be at peace." It is of no use to be acquainted with the Scriptures if you are not acquainted with God! You may read the Scriptures till you perish unless you see God in the glass of Scripture, for it is to Him that you must come! A personal Christ must have personal dealings with a personal sinner, or else there will be no personal salvation. And the value of the Book lies mainly in this—that it does not let you stop at itself, but it points as with a finger of light to the Cross, and with a still small voice it whispers, "There your hope lies. Look there!" The Lord Jesus takes up the cry of the Book and utters that gracious command, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth." O that you would look and live! Scatter the Bible, Christian people, in order that it may be like a sharp two-edged sword to kill self-righteousness and that it may also be a finger of love to point sinners to the Cross of Christ!

After this happened and Josiah began to understand the Book, he entered upon a reformation. I will not say how many things in England need reformation, but certainly we need it in a great many forms— ecclesiastical, doctrinal, social, moral and political. The Bible is the greatest of reformers. You thought, perhaps, I should have applied that term to Luther, or Calvin, or Zwingli—but this is the reformer that reformed Luther! This is the teacher that instructed Calvin! This is the Prophet that fired the heart of Zwingli! While this Book is extant, error will always be in danger of overthrow. An open Bible, and men may quibble and criticize, and invent new doctrines if they please—but this is the Rock on which they will split. As God lives, His Truth must live! And all that is of man's imagining and scheming, and that comes not out of this Book shall be broken to pieces! The grass withers, but the Word abides.

Volume 58 9"Whoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." If you seek to have the social fabric purged of the leprosy which now eats into its very walls, scatter this Book! If you want to uplift the fallen and to purify the defiled, scatter this Book that men may be cleansed by it! If you want to see the Church of God made one and her various dividing errors put away, scatter this Book! If you desire to see a blessed unity in the Truth, scatter this Book! If you would dispense a perfect blessing, scatter the Bible, for all good lies here! We need no novel teachings to restore the Glory of the Church—we only need to come back to the purity of Scripture! That great Reformation which broke down all the idols in Judah and Israel came of the discovery of this Book! And there remains for us at this day no better means of reform and revival! God send to England this choice mercy, that it may become a Bible-reading nation, a Bible-loving nation, a Bibleobeying nation—and that shall be the best thing that can happen to our native land. God grant it!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

2 Chronicles 34:14-33.

Verse 14, 15. And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a Book of the Law of the LORD given by Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. This was a very remarkable find. Of all the discoveries that they might have made, they could have discovered nothing that would work so much good to all the people as this "Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses."

16-19. And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to your servant, they do it. And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen. Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest has given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes. Such was his horror upon discovering how they had all sinned and how many terrible judgments were to be inflicted upon them because of all that long time of sin, that he tore his clothes.

20, 21. And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found. Oh, that all who read God's Book now would do as young Josiah did! If there is any difficulty in a book, the short way to get to understand it is to enquire of the author. And, surely, never is there greater wisdom than having read any of the deep mysteries or solemn threats in this Volume and feeling ourselves staggered by them, we enquire of the Lord concerning them! I believe that there is many a puzzling passage in the Bible on purpose that we may be driven to enquire of the Lord about it. If the Book were all so easy of understanding that at the first reading of it, we could comprehend all its meaning, we might, perhaps, stay away from God—but He has purposely given us many dark sentences and made the sense to be somewhat obscure in order that we may wait upon His enlightening Spirit and so obtain instruction, for the Spirit of God is more useful to us even than the Word itself is! Great as the blessing of the Book is, the blessing of the living Spirit is still greater and anything is good that drives us to Him. That which had influenced the mind of Josiah was the terror of the Book.

21-28. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book. And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe, (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college), and they spoke to her to that effect. And she answered them, Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Tell you the man that sent you to me, Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah: because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched. And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to enquire of the LORD, so shall you say unto him, Thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender, and you did humble

yourself before God, when you heard His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbled yourself before Me, and did tear your clothes, and weep before Me, I have even heard you, also, says the LORD, Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, neither shall your eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again. When God selects an instrument for His own service, how well He tunes it for the use to which it is to be put! Here is a woman, a married woman, and she is selected to be the Lord's Prophetess to the king—but never has any man spoken more bravely than she did. Her opening words show a holy courage which is lifted above all fear of men—"Thus says the Lord God of Israel, Tell you the man that sent you to me," for before God kings are only men and though Huldah was only a subject of Josiah, see with what real dignity God's ordination had invested her. Josiah was not to succeed in the reformation of Israel. He was true and sincere, but the people were steeped in hypocrisy, formality and idolatry—and they did not go with the king in all his root and branch reforms. They still clung in their hearts to their idols and, therefore, they must be destroyed and the nation must be carried

Volume 58 11 away captive. It was, however, a very singular promise that God gave to Josiah—"I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace." Yet he was mortally wounded in battle, so how could that promise be fulfilled? You know how it could be! However we may die—if sword or plague or fire consume the saints among the rest of mankind—their very deaths and graves are blessed! There was no fighting about Josiah's grave—he was buried in peace. Pharaoh-Necho had killed him, but he did not destroy the land—and Josiah was allowed to be buried amid the great lamentations of a people who only began fully to appreciate him when he was taken away from them!

29, 30. Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the Book of the Covenant that was found in the house of the LORD. That was a grand Bible-reading, with a king for reader and all his princes and all his people gathered to listen to the Word of God! What could he have said better, had he been the greatest of orators? To read out of this blessed Book must surely be to the edification of the hearers.

31-33. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments, and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the Covenant which are written in this Book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the Covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their father.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 2

Chronicles 34:27 #748 - Self-Humbling

SELF-HUMBLING

NO. 748

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 5, 1867,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself

before God when you heard His words against this place,

and against the inhabitants, and you humbled

yourself before Me, and you tore your

clothes, and wept before Me; I also have

heard you, says the Lord."

2 Chronicles 34:27.

JOSIAH was very earnestly engaged in a devout work for God—he was cleansing, beautifying, and repairing the Temple at Jerusalem. While this was being done, a copy of the Book of the Law being found, it was carried to the king, and the king at once diligently perused it. While reading it he discovered certain terrible penalties threatened to idolaters and other offenders, and knowing that his subjects had for successive years been guilty of the offenses thus condemned, he felt persuaded that the righteous judgments of God would come upon them. Greatly alarmed, though himself personally innocent of the guilt, he tore his clothes, wept, and humbled himself before the Most High.

Now, it seemed a strange thing, did it not, that so good a man, personally clear from blame, engaged in one of the holiest of works with a sincere heart devoting himself to the cause of his God, should meet with so sad and depressive a discovery just in the very midst of his prosperous labors? Was there not another time that the Law could have been sent to him with its condemning power? Were there not other offenders far more grossly erring than he who might have been humbled? Why need this king, with his large, royal, tender heart all consecrated to God, to be set a weeping and to be made to go softly in the bitterness of his soul just in the very moment of enthusiastic and successful labor?

I take it that the reason was this—God had much love towards Josiah, and, having honored him to rebuild the Temple, He knew the natural tendency of the human heart to pride, and therefore, with a holy jealousy for one whom He loved so well, He sent him this discovery of the Book of the Law

to keep him humble at the time when otherwise he might have been exposed to peril by the lifting up of his heart. You remember, beloved Friends, the case of Hezekiah, when God raised him up from the sick bed. It is said he rendered not recompense to God according to the benefit received, for his heart was lifted up within him. And then God sent him a message by the Prophet to tell him that the treasures of his house should be carried away into Babylon and his sons should be captives to serve the king of Babylon. Thus the Lord administered a check after the sin had broken out.

But in the case before us, the Lord preferred a preventive to a cure, and sent a check before the mischief had occurred, and so the holy worker became also the humble penitent—and there was blended in the life of Josiah, like the blending of the drops of rain with the gleams of sunlight— a fair rainbow of many virtues. For you see him toiling for his Lord with all his might and yet bowing himself in dust and ashes, as an humble suppliant before the Throne of heavenly Grace. Learn from this that you and I, in the midst of a career of success from God, when our heart is most pure and most right, must not therefore expect that all things will go smoothly, but may rather, for that very reason, expect to experience humiliating circumstances.

Like Paul, when favored with an abundance of revelations, we may expect a "thorn in the flesh," lest we should be exalted above measure. Disclosures of our own weakness and sinfulness are often made to us at the very time when God is honoring us most. In order that our vessel may be able to endure a strong and fair wind of Divine favor, the Lord in infinite wisdom causes us to be ballasted with grief or trial. This morning I cannot enter into the whole of my text, but I shall ask your attention to Josiah's humbling himself. In this matter we shall note, first, the acceptable act. Secondly, the powerful reasons which exist for our imitating it. And, thirdly, the encouraging results which followed—some of them are clear in his case, and others we may expect in our own.

I. First, we have to speak upon THE ACCEPTABLE ACT which Josiah performed. I say an act, not a Grace or a state. It is not said that Josiah was humble. He was so, or he would not have trembled at God's Word. All Graces are in all Christians in a measure. In every Christian there is the germ of every virtue. Just as in every well-formed child there is every muscle and sinew, and nerve and bone. Although all are far from being developed, yet they are there. So in each Christian there exists humility, with all the kindred Graces, though it is as yet in some scarcely perceptible, and in others is far removed from perfection.

Josiah certainly possessed the Grace of humility. It is not said that his soul was in a state of habitual humility, although he ought to have been. We ought always to be, in a certain sense, in the valley of humiliation. Pride is never to be excused in the Believer. There is never a moment when we may safely be lifted up. Always lowly should we be in our own esteem. He that thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, deceives himself. And as we are always nothing in ourselves, it would be well for us to know and to feel this, and not to be self-deceived or lay a flattering unction to our hearts. What is mentioned in the text is an act, not a Grace, not a state, but an act. We have before us the Grace of humility in Josiah, acting after its own nature to produce the state of humility in his soul.

He humbled himself, that is, he set to work to cure himself of any remaining pride, and to educate in himself the humility which the Grace of God had worked in him. He humbled himself. He confessed his share in the sin which God condemned. He acknowledged on his own part the

justice of God in threatening such punishments. He stripped himself of his royal array. He made no mention of services which he had rendered to God in the Temple. He mentioned not his own generosity in having given of his treasures to the decorations of the House of the Lord. He came as that poor publican is described as coming in our Lord's famous parable, not "daring to lift so much as his eyes towards Heaven, but smiting upon his breast, and crying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

So that, Brethren, I want you, this morning, not so much to enquire whether you have humility, for I know that if you are Believers, humility is somewhere in your heart. I do not ask you whether you are in an humble state this morning—it may be you are not. But I want you to accompany me in an act of humiliation—in the bowing of your souls before the Lord— each man and each woman, according to the experience of each, bowing low and reverently before the majesty of the Most High that we may obtain from God the mercies which each of us may need.

1. Concerning this action, then, I have to mention, in the first place, that it was a real and personal act. The text says, "Because your heart was tender, and you did humble yourself." You did not talk about humbling yourself, but you did humble yourself. You did not bid others do it, but you did humble yourself. It became to you a personal matter of obligation, and you did not postpone that obligation, or look at it, and commend it, and say, "When I have a more convenient season, I will send for you." You did humble yourself, really, sincerely, truly, and in very deed—you did, in your own proper person, bow yourself to the very dust before the Most high."

Brethren, I fear lest the habit of preaching to you may lead me to forget my personal share in this and other holy exercises. I pray God it may not! And on the other hand it is possible that you may criticize the style in which I address you, and so may forget that my style is not the business in hand. We are now to have respect to a very solemn obligation of which our text reminds us. I pray you let us come honestly to the work, and may God's Holy Spirit help us, and may each one here be willing now to have it said of him, "You did humble yourself."

2. Observe, too, that as the work was real and personal, so it was voluntary. "You did humble yourself." It is not said that God humbled him, by which it is not implied that the Grace of God did not assist him, that the Spirit of God was not the author of his humility, but it is implied that God did not by any overt and open judgment of Providence cause Josiah to be humbled. Have you ever noticed the difference between being humble and being humbled? Many persons are humbled who are not humble at all. Pharaoh was humbled, oh, how humbled, when he saw that even the flies and lice could vanquish both himself and his men-at-arms!

How humbled was he when he found that the God of Heaven could send plague after plague upon him, and make the proud lips that said, "Who is Jehovah that I should obey His voice?" cry, "Entreat the Lord that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail!" He must have been humbled, but he was not humble! And when the chill waters rolled over him in the Red Sear and he died with a proud spirit he had been humiliated to the last degree. Even so, God may humble some of us. He may take away our property, and we may be humbled by being poor. He may be pleased to strip us of that which is now the object of our boasting, and we may be humbled by its loss.

But the duty to which I call you this morning is that of humbling yourselves before judgment comes to deal with you, as, mark you, it surely will unless you attend to the gracious precept, and humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. We must all either break or bow. Let us bow cheerfully. "Let us kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and we perish from the way." It is a voluntary humiliation of soul which is inculcated by the example of Josiah, and may the Spirit of God make us willing in the day of His power, that we may willingly humble ourselves before God.

3. It was, moreover, a sincerely devout act on the part of Josiah. He humbled himself, we are told, "before God." It is true he did put on sackcloth and tear his clothes, and his humiliation was apparent to men, but the soul of his humbling was before God alone. It is vain to put on sackcloth and to bow your head like a bulrush before man, unless your heart abases itself before God. Outward mourning and fasting are not humiliation—neither does God care for them if the heart is absent. "Tear your hearts, and not your garments." Let your souls be humbled and your spirits contrite.

Dear Friends, we need more and more to walk in our religion before God. Away with that holiness which consists in respect to the forms and customs of society! Away with that religion which flaunts itself before the staring eye of a fellow mortal. We need that Divine Grace which has respect to the God who sees in secret! We need more and more, in fact, of spiritual worship, for they who worship God the Spirit must "worship Him in spirit and in truth." Your hymns are no songs of praise unless they are sung unto God! Your prayers are no prayers unless you seek the face of the God of Israel! And your humbling is nothing but another form of pride unless your souls have a reverent and deep respect unto the Lord.

4. Once again, the act on the part of Josiah was a very deep and thorough one. He did not try to humble himself, but he did it. This I gather from the repetition of the fact in the text. Where Inspiration mentions a thing twice, it is because God would have our notice drawn to it. It is written, "You did humble yourself before God." And again, "And humbled yourself before Me." It was not garment-tearing merely, it was heartbreaking! Josiah was really broken in heart. He did not struggle to get himself down where he should be—he was down—at the foot of the Mercy Seat he cast himself as a true broken-hearted penitent.

Brethren, it is an easy thing to say, "I would be humble," but to be humble before God is another thing. To begin the sacred work of humiliation before the Most High is no great thing. But to continue in it until at last you can say, "Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O God"—this is a blessed work, and you need the assistance of the Spirit of God in it! We are all, at certain times, conscious of our weakness, but we forget the humbling fact—our humility is like the morning cloud and the early dew which passes away. To have this inwrought into the spirit till the whole heart becomes thoroughly self-mortified and pride is excluded and shut out—this it is that we want—and this it is that will win the blessing.

Beloved Friends, let me say to you that the Grace of humility, of which I spoke in the first place, is exceedingly sweet before God, and where it does not exist, a man cannot humble himself. Let me also remark that the state of humility is much more blessed than the mere act of humiliation and should be the condition of every Christian at all times. We ought always to walk humbly before the Lord. But if we are not in the state of humility, we must exercise the act of humility in order to bring us into it.

We ought always to be clean but as we are not always so, through contact with this evil world, there must be a time for cleansing. So we ought to be always humble, but as we are not so, there must be a time for humbling ourselves. Now, let no man or woman in this place be exempt from the work before us, for here is a king, an eminent person, and yet he humbles himself! Sons of the earth, will not you do the same? Here is one engaged in the greatest of works, yet he humbles himself! Let no pastor, no minister, no elder, no deacon—let no earnest evangelist, let no successful laborer as a private Christian, fancy himself excused. Josiah bowed! Who dares stand erect?

Let each heart in its own place bow before the Most High. Here is one who was pure in his life. He feared God and died in the act of fulfilling his treaty with his eastern allies—defending his country against the tyrant Pharaoh-Necho—who sought to keep him from the battle by pretending to have been sent by God. He lived a saint, and died as a patriot king might wish to die, and yet he humbles himself before the Most High! O Friends, do not we perceive that this example demands of us immediate imitation? The Lord lead us into it.

II. Grant me your earnest attention while I give a few POWERFUL REASONS why we should perform the same act as this, which is recorded of Hezekiah.

1. My Brethren, reasons for humbling ourselves are more abundant than the time allowed me in which to urge them upon you. In the first place, a deep sense and clear sight of sin, its heinousness, and the punishment which it deserves should make us lie low before the Throne of God. We have sinned. We have erred and strayed from His ways like lost sheep—we who are now present. We have sinned as Christians. Alas that it should be so! Favored as we have been, we have yet been ungrateful— privileged beyond most we have not brought forth fruit in proportion. Who among us, though he may long have been engaged in the Christian warfare, will not blush when he looks back upon the past?

As for our days before we were regenerate, may God blot them out— may they be forgiven and forgotten. But since then, though we have not sinned as before, yet there has been this peculiar aggravation of our sins that we have sinned against light and against love—light which has really penetrated our minds, and love which we have been able to recognize and in which we have rejoiced. Oh, the atrocity of the sin of a pardoned soul! An unpardoned sinner sins, to my mind, cheaply, compared with the sin of one of God's own elect ones, who has had communion with Christ and leaned his head upon Jesus' bosom.

Look Brethren, at David! Many will talk of his sin, but I pray you look at his repentance and hear his broken bones, as each one of them moans out its dolorous confession! Mark his tears as they fall upon the ground, and the deep sighs with which he accompanies the softened music of his harp! We have erred. Let us, therefore, seek the spirit of penitence. Look, again, at Peter! We speak much of Peter's denying his Master. Remember, it is written, "He wept bitterly." Have we no such offenses to weep over? Are there no denials of our Lord to be lamented with tears?

Think, Brethren, these sins of ours deserve nothing less than the hottest Hell! These sins of ours, before and after conversion, would consign us to the place of inextinguishable fire if it were not for the Sovereign mercy which has made us to differ, snatching us like brands from the burning! Is there no help here towards the work of soul-humbling? My Soul, bow down under a sense of your

natural filthiness and worship your God!

2. Let us reflect upon another humbling subject—our origin and our end. Here are we, the offspring of a day! We are unclean things brought out of an unclean thing—children that are corrupters—the seed of evildoers! What are we at the best but mere animated earth? And before long we shall be brought into that lowly bed where the worms shall be under us, and the worms shall cover us! We shall become a puff of wind, a handful of brown dust—and shall we glory? We who sprang from nothing, and must go back to nothing, shall we boast in ourselves? O worm of the dust, know yourself, and cease from pride!

3. I would remind you also, my dear Brothers and Sisters, of that Sovereign Grace which has made us to differ. I frequently find that a sense of God's amazing love to me has a greater tendency to humble me than even a consciousness of my own guilt. Think, my Brethren, what you are by Grace! You were chosen of God according to His purpose—chosen, not for good in you, but chosen because He would choose you—because, "He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion." You were "not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood or Christ."

You were so lost that nothing could save you but the sacrifice of God's only-begotten Son! Think of that! And, as Jesus stooped for you, bow yourselves in lowliness at His feet. You are now a child of God! A favorite of the skies, on the road to Glory—with a heritage beyond the black river which shall be yours when suns and moons have paled their waning light. You are to dwell forever near to God and to be like He! Surely the thoughts of such amazing goodness will make the vessel, laden so heavily with mercy, sink in the water even to its bulwarks! Surely you will feel that you must bless and magnify God, because you are less than the least of all His mercies.

4. Further, let me ask you to think of the greatness of God. It is not in my power by words to bring before you that tremendous subject. But if I could put you in the position of Job, when he said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye sees You," you would be certain to add with that Patriarch, "Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."—

"Great God, how infinite are You! What worthless worms are we!"

5. Once more, think of the life and death of the Savior. See your Master taking a towel and washing His disciples' feet! And, follower of Christ, will you not humble yourself? No, see Him all His life long. Is not this sentence the compendium of His biography—"He humbled himself"? Was He not here on earth always stripping—taking off first one robe of honor and then another, till, naked, He was fastened to the Cross, and then emptied out His inmost self, pouring out the floods of His life-blood from His heart, and giving up all for us, till they laid Him penniless in a borrowed grave?—

"His honor and His breath Were taken both away, Joined with the wicked in His death, And made as vile as they."

How low was our dear Redeemer brought! How then can we be proud? Stand, my beloved Brothers and Sisters, at the foot of the Cross and count the purple drops by which you have been cleansed! See the crown of thorns! Mark still the relics of the spit on those blessed cheeks! Go round the Cross and mark His scourged shoulders, still gushing with encrimsoned rills! See hands

and feet given up to the rough iron and His whole self to mockery and scorn! See the bitterness, and the pangs, and the throes of inward grief showing themselves in His outward frame! Hear the shrill shriek, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" and if you do not lie prostrate on the ground before that Cross, you have never seen it. If you are not humbled in the Presence of Jesus, you do not know Him.

I pray the Lord bring us in contemplation to Calvary, and I know our position will no longer be that of the inflated, pompous man of pride, but we shall take the humble place of one who loves much, because much has been forgiven him. I would, however, warn the inexperienced Believer concerning this act of humbling—do not make mistakes about it. Do not mistake sham humility for real humility. There is a cant of humility which is infamous. People will say in prayer, "Your poor dust," and use all sorts of depreciating expressions when they are as proud as Lucifer! They will say before the Lord things concerning themselves which they are very far from believing, for from their manner and bearing it is clear that their estimate of themselves is far from being too low. There are others who think that laziness is humility. They cry, "Oh, I could not do this! I could not do the other!" when they might do it, and should do it, and ought to do it, and could do it, God the Holy Spirit helping them. But they shirk every duty because they have a sense of inability, and they cover their idleness with the mantle of supposed humility. Moses was rebuked by God very strongly when he made excuses and would gladly have avoided going into the great work to which the Lord had called him. Let us not raise questions with our God when He calls us to labor, but let us say, "Here I am, send me." Do not fall into that miserable counterfeit humility, but like men, use all your strength for Jesus!

Again, do not mistake unbelief for humility. "I hope I am." "I trust I am," and expressions of that kind, savor far more of distrust of God than of humility of spirit, for the best form of humility is compatible with the highest degree of faith. In fact, that is not true faith, but spurious, which is not humble. And that is not genuine humility of the loveliest type which is not confident in God. Faith and humility should always walk together. Let the Grace in you be real Grace, and to that end ask the Spirit of God to work it in you.

Let me add, dear Friend, if you find it difficult to humble yourself before God, stand to it the more earnestly, for the more difficult it is, the more you need it. If your soul were humble it would easily humble itself, but because it is proud, it needs humbling. And for this reason it finds the duty irksome and displeasing to the flesh. Mortify your pride, my Brothers and Sisters! Let your souls be mortified on account of sin! And if you cannot yourself do it, you know where your strength lies—fly to your Master for strength and you shall have enabling Grace.

Again, let me say, in order to humble yourselves exercise all your faculties. Let your memory bring before you your past offenses. Let your understanding form a proper judgment of your position as a creature, as a sinner, and now as a dependent servant. Your understanding will greatly help you, for true humility is forming a just estimate of oneself—and to humble oneself is to bring oneself down to the place where one ought to be. Let your hopes and your fears, let your affections and your passions, let all the powers of your intellect and heart agree to this—that now before God you will humble yourself as Josiah did. I have given you the reasons. May God apply those reasons with power by His Holy Spirit!

III. Lastly, I have to encourage our friends to this duty by ENCOURAGING RESULTS. I think it was Bernard, or one of the preachers of the Middle Ages who said, "There is one thing to be said for humility, that it never can by any possibility do one harm." If a man goes through a door, and he has the habit of stooping his head, it may be the door is so high there is no need for stooping, but the stooping is no injury to him. But if the door should happen to be a low one, and he has the habit of holding up his head, he may come into sharp contact with the top of the door! True humility is a flower which will adorn any garden. This is a sauce with which you may season every dish of life, and you will find an improvement in every case. Whether it is prayer or praise, whether it is work or suffering, the salt of humility cannot be used in excess.

1. But there are positive advantages connected with it, for, first, humiliation will often avert judgment. How many times in the history of the Israelites, when they were given over to their enemies, their humbling themselves at once drove away the invaders and set them free from the scourge? Perhaps some of the most remarkable cases which I can quote are those of wicked men, for their cases show the power of humiliation with God where there is nothing else to work upon Him.

Rehoboam had set up a false worship, and "did evil in the sight of the Lord." Therefore God was provoked with Rehoboam and with Judah, and Shishak, the king of Egypt, came up and ravaged Judea, and was about to capture Jerusalem. But we read that Rehoboam and Judah humbled themselves before God, and the Lord said that Shishak should not touch Jerusalem, and moreover the Lord visited the land with favor, and it is said, "also in Judah things went well." This mercy was granted, not because of any good thing in Rehoboam or his people, but only because they humbled themselves.

A more remarkable case, still, is that of Ahab. Ahab had killed Naboth to obtain his vineyard. And when he entered that vineyard, stained with innocent blood, Elijah met him with the cutting question, "Have you killed, and also taken possession?" And Ahab's proud and haughty spirit was cowed with fear of Elijah, and he cried, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Elijah delivered the terrible sentence of God to him, that the whole of his household should die, and that Jezebel should be eaten by dogs in that very vineyard. Ahab could no longer, after hearing that sentence, keep up his bronze countenance. And we read, "And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly."

Then the Lord said unto Elijah, "Do you see how Ahab humbles himself before Me? Because he humbles himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days." So that this basest of all men, this wicked Ahab, whose name stands infamous in the Chronicles of the Kings, yet obtained a blessing from God when he humbled himself! As for God's people, when the Lord has been about to strike them, He has usually stayed His hands when they have humbled themselves. See the case of Hezekiah, which we have already mentioned. Hezekiah humbled himself, it is said, because of the pride of his heart, and the Lord said this evil should not be brought upon him in his day. And Josiah, in this case, also turned aside the sword of the Lord from the Israel of his own day because he humbled himself.

My dear Friends, you are under the paternal discipline of God and He will make you feel His chastening rod! But if you humble yourselves, you put the rod away. You know, with your own

children, if you feel compelled to chasten, yet, when you see softness and tenderness of heart and a sweet readiness to confess the fault, it goes against your heart that the rod should be used, and you put it away, for humble sorrow is all that you wanted to produce. And if the effect is there already, there is no need of further sternness. So the Lord turns away the chastisement from His people when they humble themselves.

2. Humiliation of soul always brings a positive blessing with it. The old philosophers were accustomed to assert, as a law of matter, "Nature abhors a vacuum." This old dictum is out of date nowadays, but it is still true spiritually. So, then, if you and I empty ourselves, depend upon it, God will fill us! Divine Grace seeks out and fills a vacuum. Make a vacuum by humility, and God will fill that vacuum by His love. He who desires sweet communion with Christ should remember the words of the Lord, "To this man will I look, even to Him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My Word."

"He has respect unto the lowly: but the proud He knows afar off." Stoop, my dear Friend, if you would climb to Heaven! Do we not say of Jesus, "He descended that He might ascend"? So must you! You must go downwards, that you may grow upwards, for the sweetest fellowship with Heaven is to be had by humble souls, and by them alone. I believe that God will deny no blessing to a thoroughly humbled spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven," with all its riches and treasures. The whole treasury of God shall be made over by deed of gift to the soul which is humble enough to be able to receive it without growing proud because of it.

3. Further, my dear Brethren, the act of humiliation will be very blessed to you and to me because it will improve our spiritual health. To humiliate yourself is as necessary in this wicked world as it is for traveler's through African jungles to take, every now and then, a draught of quinine. The bitterness of humility is a tonic to the spirit. I know of no man who is so courageous before his fellow man as he that bows before his God. My knee shall bend to God, and God alone. But if my knee never bends to God, you may depend upon it, it will soon be bending when I do not want it to do so—it will tremble before the face of man.

If you fear God with a deep and powerful fear, you shall fear nobody else. You should be able to say, before a fierce tyrant like Nebuchadnezzar, with the three holy children, "Be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up." The fear of God is the death of every other fear. Like a mighty lion, it chases all other fears before it. Nothing makes a man so vigorous and strong, with the exception of faith, as humility! And even faith itself cannot be strong where humility is weak.

4. Once more, usefulness will be promoted by humility. There are some professors whom God cannot bless because they would grow intolerably proud if they were blessed. I heard a dear Brother say that he believed God blessed us all up to the full measure and extremity of what it was safe for Him to do, and I believe He does so. If you do not get a blessing, it is because it is not safe for you to have one! If our heavenly Father were to let you be successful in His holy war, you would run away with the crown yourself—and meeting with an enemy you would fall a victim—and so you are kept low for your own safety.

When a man is sincerely humble, and never ventures so much as to touch a grain of the praise, there is scarcely any limit to what God will do for him. Humility makes us ready to be blessed by

the God of Grace, and fits us to deal with our fellow men. Everybody gets as far as ever he can from a proud man. I confess, myself, I have a great pleasure in seeing proud men—when I can hardly discern them with a powerful telescope! Nearer than this would be far less agreeable. We mind not how near we come to gentle and meek spirits, for these are company for angels.

Proud spirits do not like to deal with great sinners. "Stand by, I am holier than you," is not the language for a man who would be useful. What do you think, would a Pharisee make a city missionary? Look at the fine gentleman, bloated with self-importance! What a useful preacher he would make, would he not? Send him after the poor fallen girls at midnight meetings! Better send a peacock! "Stand by, I am holier than you." Why the man who feels thus is out of place in the service of God—he is more fit to play lackey to the world's vanities, than to talk of being a soldier of the Cross.

Just as the excess of pride disables, so an abundance of humility of spirit will fit you for any kind of Christian work to which the Holy Spirit may call you. Let us humble ourselves then, dear Friends, that God may exalt us in due time by giving us to see the result of our work. I know not how to plead any further, but I commend to the Holy Spirit for fulfillment. My deeply anxious desire for myself and for you, my Brothers and Sisters in the common faith, is that we may all be brought, like Josiah, to humble ourselves before God.

There is yet a word which I desire to speak to those who are not saved. I do not say to you, begin with humbling yourselves. Your hope lies in Jesus Christ. "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all you ends of the earth." That is the Gospel. Your salvation lies not in you but in Jesus. At the same time, an humble and a contrite spirit will be a very ready way of leading you to Christ, and therefore I beseech you, cultivate this spirit. There is a story narrated in the classic history of Augustus Caesar that a most troublesome pirate had destroyed many of the Roman vessels, and therefore Caesar, having hunted him in vain for some time, offered a reward of ten thousand talents for the pirate's head.

Now the pirate, knowing the case to be hopeless, and perhaps somewhat relenting, came himself before Caesar and laying his head down before him in the dust, he said, "Ten thousand talents! I have brought the pirate's head." Caesar looked at him with astonishment, and said, "You have trusted the generosity of Caesar, and no man shall trust that in vain. You are pardoned. Here are the 10,000 talents, too." Now, Sinner, I would advise you to follow his example. Shrewd and sensible was that—be you as wise. God will have your head of you, no, your soul—but go yourself with it, submit yourself! After that evil May day in our English history when the apprentices had done so much mischief by destroying the foreigners' houses and burning them, in a riot, a commission sat to try them, and a number of them were summoned to the Guildhall. But when they appeared with ropes about their necks, confessing that they deserved to be hanged, a free pardon was accorded to very many of them. Come, poor Soul, the Lord will never swing you up if you will put the rope round your own neck. If you will bring your own head, He will never take it off your shoulders. Come just as you are, confess the wrong, and trust to the liberality of God in Jesus Christ and you shall not find Him condemning. You proud ones who are self-righteous will perish, but you who are humble, by trusting in Jesus, shall be saved!

Yonder is a sinking ship! The vessel is going down rapidly, and I see two men equally anxious for life. One of them puts on his garments, heavy with gold lace. He loads himself with jewels. He fills

his pockets with his gold and his silver, and leaps into the sea. You know what will become of him! He has weighted himself for destruction. But here is another who takes off not only such jewelry as he may have upon him, but he strips himself even to his last rag and then casts himself naked into the sea. If any man can swim, it is he.

So you do the same, poor Soul! If you have a rag of self-righteousness, off with it! If you have anything whatever of your own to depend upon, off with it! And if any man can swim in the sea of Divine Love, you are the man! And, let me add, a naked spirit was never drowned there. Lay hold on Jesus with nothing of your own in your hands, and "you shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck you out of His hands." May God bless these words to us all for His love's sake. Amen.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Chapter 3

Chronicles 35:2 #1513 - Cheer Up-My Comrades

CHEER UP, MY COMRADES!

NO. 1513

[Read January 1, 1880.]

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"And Josiah set the priests in their charges and encouraged them

to the service of the house of the Lord"

2 Chronicles 35:2.

JOSIAH, as you remember, in the early part of his reign set his face

against the idolatries that prevailed, to root them out of the land. He then bent his thoughts upon repairing and beautifying the Temple. After that it was his heart's aim to restore the sacred services, to observe the solemn feasts and to revive the worship of God after the due order, according to the words of the Book of the Covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. Our text tells us something of the method with which he went to work and it may well serve us as a model. The first thing is to get every man into his proper place and the next thing is for every man to have a good spirit in his present place so as to occupy it worthily.

I will suppose, dear Friends, that in the Providence of God you are in your place and that by the direction of God's Spirit you have also sought and found the precise form of usefulness in which you ought to exercise yourself. Tonight it shall not be my business to arrange you, but assuming that it is well for you to stay where you are, my goal shall be to encourage you to do your work for your Lord without being cast down. I am hardly going to preach so much as to talk to different persons who are discouraged in the work of the Lord, that we may rouse them up, rally them round us and encourage them to keep rank.

I. And, first, I would speak a little to THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY CAN DO NOTHING. They will tell me that in such a sermon not a sentence can concern them. If I am to encourage men to the service of the house of the Lord, it will be in vain for them, as they can do nothing at all. Well, dear Friends, you must not take that for granted! You must make quite sure that you cannot do anything before I may venture to speak to you as if it were a matter of fact, for sometimes there is a need of a way because there is a lack of will.

Though I do not go so far as to allege that this is your case, we know too well that "cannot" often does mean "will not"—and not to have triumphed may mean that you have not tried. You have been so discouraged that you have excused yourself for inaction and your inaction has grown into

indolence. If a man, under the notion that he could not lift his right hand, constantly kept it still, I should not wonder if, after weeks and months, it would become a matter of fact that he had not the power to use it! It might actually stiffen for no reason but because he had not moved it. Do you not think that, before your muscles get rigid, it would be well to exercise them by attempting some kind of service? Especially you younger folks—if you do not work for the Lord almost as soon as you are converted, it will be very difficult, afterwards, to make you take to it. Aptitude, I have often noticed, comes with employment and through negligence and sloth people become enervated and helpless. You say that you cannot move your arm and so you do not move it. Take heed, for by-and-by your pretense may become the parent of real powerlessness.

But I will take what you have said as being true. You are ill. The vigor you felt in the bright days of health fails you now. You have to suffer pain, weariness and exhaustion. You are often detained at home and home seems, now, a gloomy hospital all day long, rather than a genial hostelry when evening shadows fall. Little indeed, therefore, can you do—so little that you are apt to reckon it as nothing at all. The thought is a burden to you. You wish you could serve the Lord. How constantly you have dreamed of the pleasure since you have been denied the privilege! How willing your feet would be to run! How ready your hands would be to labor! How glad would your tongue be to testify!

You envy those who are able and you would gladly emulate and excel them. Not, indeed, that you harbor ill-will against them, but you devoutly wish that you could do some personal service in the cause of your Master. Now, I want to encourage you, first, by reminding you that the Law of the Son of David is the same as the Law of David, himself, and you know the Law of David about those that went to the battle. There were some that were lame and some that were otherwise incapable of action and he left them with the baggage. "There," he said, "you are very weary and ill—stay in the camp—take care of the tents and the ammunition while we go and fight."

Now, it happened, once, that the men that went to fight claimed all the spoil. They said, "These people have done nothing! They have been lying in the trenches—they shall not carry off a share of the booty." But King David, then and there, made a law that they should share and share equally—those that were in the trenches and those that engaged in the fray. "As his part is that goes down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarries by the stuff—they shall share alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel." Nor is the Law of the Son of David less gracious. If by sickness you are detained at home—if for any other reason, such as age or infirmity, you are not able to enter into actual service—yet if you are a true soldier and would fight if you could and your heart is in it, you shall share even with the best and bravest of those who, clad in the panoply of God, encounter and grapple with the adversary!

And, Brothers and Sisters, you have no reason to envy, though you may admire to your heart's content, all who are diligent and successful in the service of Christ! Let me remind you of a Law of the kingdom of Heaven with which you are all familiar—"He that receives a Prophet in the name of a Prophet shall receive a Prophet's reward." In truth, it is a splendid appointment to be a servant of the Lord. David thought so, for you often read, at the commencement of his Psalms—"A prayer of David, the servant of God," though you never read, "A prayer of David, the king of Israel," for he thought more of being enrolled a servant of God than of being entitled a king of Israel!

Health and strength, ability and opportunity to fulfill a mission for the Master are much to be desired, but these are not always to be taken as reliable evidence of personal salvation. A man may preach admirably and he may work marvels in the Church and, yet, he may not be a partaker of saving Grace. Therefore, when the disciples came back from preaching and said, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through Your name," the Lord said, "Nevertheless, in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven." Judas was among them! Judas cast out devils! Judas preached the Gospel and yet Judas was a son of perdition and is lost forever. Because you cannot do much you must not infer that, therefore, you are not saved, for if you were to be among the chief of Christian workers it would not prove that you were certainly a child of God.

Do not fret, then, because you are shut out from the cheerful activities in which others share, for, as long as your name is written in Heaven and your heart truly follows after the Lord, you shall have an abundant recompense at the Last Great Day, even though here you are doomed to be a sufferer rather than a worker! But to me, it seems more than possible that some of you, dear Friends, whose minds are tinged with melancholy, have painted your own lot in deeper shades than the justice of the case deserves. Is your life, indeed, a dull routine, which, for lack of busy change and lively enterprise, leaves no record behind? I do not think so! "The rich relics of a well-spent hour" do sometimes pour around your path a stream of light that cheers your eyes, though it may escape your notice.

Are you patient under your sufferings? Do you try to keep the flesh in subjection, to govern your spirit, to refrain from murmuring and to foster cheerfulness? That, my Friend, is doing a great deal! I am sure that the holy serenity of a suffering child of God is one of the best sermons that can ever be preached in a family. A sick saint has often been more serviceable in a house than the most eloquent Divine could have been. They see how sweetly you submit to the Divine will, how patiently you can bear painful operations, how the Lord gives you songs in the night. Why, you are greatly useful! I have sometimes been called to visit bedridden persons who have been unable to rise for many, many years and it has been within my knowledge that their influence has extended over whole parishes! They have been known as poor pious women or as experienced Christian men and many have gone to visit them.

Christian ministers have said that they derived more benefit from sitting half-an-hour talking to poor old Betsy than they did from all the books in their library and yet Betsy said that she was doing nothing! Look at your case in that light and you will see that you can praise God upon your bed and make your chamber to be as vocal for God as this pulpit ever can be! Besides, dear Friends, do you not think we frequently limit our estimate of serving God to the public exercises of the sanctuary and forget the strong claims that our Lord has upon our private fidelity and obedience? You say, "I cannot serve God," when you cannot teach in the school or preach in the pulpit—when you are unable to sit on a committee or speak on a platform—as if these were the only forms of service to be taken into account!

Do you not think that a mother nursing her baby is serving God? Do you not think that men and women going about their daily toil with patient industry, discharging the duties of domestic life, are serving God? If you think rightly, you will understand that they are. The servant sweeping the room; the mistress preparing the meal; the workman driving a nail; the merchant casting up his

ledger ought to do all in the service of God. Though, of course, it is very desirable that we should each and all have some definitely religious work before us, yet it is much better that we should hallow our common handicraft and make our ordinary work chime with the melodies of a soul attuned for Heaven! Let true religion be our life and then our life will be true religion! That is how it ought to be. "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him."

So, then, let the stream of your common life, as it flows on obscure, unobserved, be holy and courageous—and you will find that while "they also serve who only stand and wait"—you shall not be neglected or overlooked who simply sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His Words when you can do no more. This is service done for Him which He can appreciate! Know, too, my dear Sister, that by your sorrows the Lord has drawn out your sympathies. You, my dear Brother, know that by the discipline which has chastened you, you have learned to be a comforter. Do you say, then, that you cannot do anything? I know a few secrets about you that you forget. You do not reckon yourself up as we reckon you. Did you not try to cheer a poor neighbor the other day by telling of the Lord's goodness to you when you were very sick?

Look at those sacred tears falling from your eyes for a fellow creature's pain. Is it not your habit, poor sufferer as you are, to let drop just a few words for your Master to others in the same condition whenever you can? You tell me that you cannot do anything? Why, dear Hearts, the refreshing of God's saints is one of the highest works in which anyone can be occupied! God will send Prophets to His servants at times when they need to be rebuked. If He wants to comfort them, He generally sends an angel, for that is angel's work!

Jesus Christ Himself, we read, had angels sent to minister to Him. When? Was it not in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He was bowed down with sorrow? Comforting is not ordinary work—it is a kind of angelic work. "There appeared unto Him an angel strengthening Him." A Prophet was sent to warn the Israelites of their sin, but when a Gideon was to be encouraged to go and fight for his country, it was the Angel of the Lord that came to him. So I gather that comforting work is angel's work. You, dear kind Christian men and women, who think that you are not able to do anything but to console with cheery words some souls cast down and sorely dismayed—you are fulfilling a most blessed office and doing work which many ministers find it difficult to perform.

I have known some who have never known suffering or ill-health and when they try to comfort God's weary people, they are dreadfully awkward over it. They are like elephants picking up pins—they can do it, but it is only with an agonizing effort. God's tried people comfort each other with love—they take to the work as a fish to water. They understand the are of speaking a word in season to him that is weary and when this is the case, they may not complain that they are doing nothing!

And yet, Beloved, you who thought that you did nothing and now perceive that you are really useful, will, I hope, perceive that there is still a wider region into which you may advance. Breathe tonight the prayer of Jabez, who was more honorable than his brethren, because he was the child of his mother's sorrow. This was the prayer—"Oh that You would bless me, indeed, and enlarge my coast"! Ask God to open up to you a larger region of usefulness and He will do it!

II. Now let me address a few words to another class of workers WHO THINK THAT THEY ARE LAID ASIDE. "Dear Sir," says one, "I wish you would encourage me. I used to be useful, once. At least I was recognized as one of a band of men who worked together right heartily. But since I have changed my residence I am unknown in the neighborhood where I am living and I seem to have dropped out of the ranks. I have done little or nothing lately and I feel uneasy about it. I wish that I could get to work."

My dear Brother, I hope you will. But do not waste five minutes in thinking it over. These times need so much Christian effort that when a man asks me, "How shall I do work for Christ"? I am accustomed to say, "Go and do it." "But what is the way to do it?" Start at once. Get at it, my Brother! Do not be out of harness a minute. But suppose that you are obliged to stop a while—do not let your interest in the cause of our Lord and Master decline! Some of the best of God's workers have been laid aside for long periods. Moses was 40 years in the desert doing nothing. A greater than He, our blessed Savior, Himself, was 30 years—I will not say doing nothing, but certainly doing no public work.

When you are in a retired and inactive position, be preparing for the time when God brings you out again. If you are put away on the shelf, do not rust there, but pray the Master to brighten you up so that when He comes to use you again, you may be fully fitted for the work which He has in hand for you. While you must be laid aside, I want you to do this—pray for others that are at work. Help them. Encourage them. Do not get into that peevish, miserable frame of mind which grudges and undervalues other men's works. Be not like the dog in the manger!

Some people, when they cannot do anything, themselves, do not like anybody else to be diligent and laborious. Say, "If I cannot help, I will never hinder, but I will cheer my Brothers and Sisters." Spend your time in prayer that you may be fit for the Master's use and, meanwhile, be prompt in helping others. You remember that at the siege of Gibraltar, when the fleet surrounded it and determined to storm the old rock, the governor fired red-hot shot down upon the men of war. The enemy did not at all admire the governor's warm reception! Think about how it was done. Here were gunners on the ramparts firing away and every man in the garrison would have liked to do the same. What did those do who could not serve a gun? Why, they heated the shot—and that is what you must do. Generally I am the master gunner here—heat my shot for me, if you will. Keep the furnace going, so that when we do fire off a sermon it may be red-hot through your earnest prayers! When you see your friends sitting in the Sunday school, or standing out in the street working for God, if you cannot join them, yet say, "Never mind. I will heat the shot for them. My prayers shall not be lacking, if I can contribute nothing else." That is counsel for you who are, for a while, laid on the shelf.

III. Others there are who are much discouraged because THEY HAVE BUT SMALL TALENT. "Oh," they say, "I wish I could serve Jesus Christ like Paul, or like Whitefield—that I could range the country, through, proclaiming His dear name and winning thousands of converts. But I am slow of speech and dull of thought and what I attempt produces little or no effect." Well, Brother, mind that you do what you can. Do you not remember the parable of the men who had talents entrusted to them? I do not want to lay undue stress upon the fact that it was the man who had one talent who buried it. Yet why is he represented as doing so? I think it was not because the men of two and five talents do not sometimes bury theirs, but because the temptation lies most with the

one-talent people.

They say, "What can I do? What is the use of me? I may be excused." That is the temptation. Brothers and Sisters, do not be entangled in that snare! If your Lord has only given you one talent, He does not expect you to make the same interest upon it as the man does with five. But He still expects His interest and, therefore, do not wrap your talent in a napkin. It is but with strength imparted by His Holy Spirit that any of us can serve Him! We have nothing to consecrate to Him but the gift we have first received from Him! You are weak. You feel it. But what does your God say to you? "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord." He can make you useful though you have no extraordinary endowments!

Grapeshot may do great execution, though it cannot compare with a grenade or bomb shell. A sinner may be brought to Christ by the simple earnestness of a peasant or an artisan without calling in the aid of a professor's learning or a preacher's eloquence! God can bless you far above what you think to be your capacity, for it is not a question of your ability but of His aid! You have no self-reliance, you tell me. Then take refuge in God, I entreat you, for you evidently need more of the Divine succor. Go and get it—it is to be had. He girds the weak with strength. "The young men shall faint and be weary, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Why, I think you are more likely to do good than if you had five talents, for now you will pray more and you will depend more upon God than you would have done if you had possessed strength of your own!

One other word. As you are not enriched with many talents, mind you economize those you have. Do you know how merchants and tradesmen who have only a small capital in business manage to compete with those who have larger means? They try to turn their money over every day. The one who sells fruit from a cart cannot afford to deal out his goods to gentlemen who will pay him in three months. Not he. He must get his money at the cart and then go and buy another stock tomorrow morning and turn it over or else he could not make a living with so small a capital. If you have only nine pence, make it "nimble" and you will get as much profit out of a nimble nine pence as another out of a lazy crown!

Activity often makes up for lack of ability. If you cannot get force by the weight of the ball, get it by the velocity with which it travels. A little man with one talent all ablaze may become a perfect nuisance to the devil and a champion for Christ! As for that great Divine with his five talents, who marches on so sleepily, Satan can always overmatch him and win the day. If you can but turn over your one talent again and again, in the name of God, you may achieve great wonders! And so I would encourage you in the work of the Lord.

IV. With workers WHO ARE UNDER GREAT DIFFICULTIES I would now have a word. I have known the day when perplexities pleased me, dilemmas afforded me delight and instead of declining a difficult task I rather liked it. Even now I enjoy puzzling over a problem and attempting what others decline. Nothing good in this world can be effected without difficulty. The biggest diamonds lie under heavy stones which sluggards cannot turn over. That which is easy to do is hardly worth doing. In the face of difficulty the man of ardent, persevering spirit braces up his nerves, sharpens his wits and brings all his powers into play to achieve an objective that will reward His efforts.

Have you great difficulties, dear Friend? You are not the first worker for God who has had difficulties to encounter. Let us go back to Moses. He was to bring Israel out of Egypt, but his path did not appear very plain. He must go before Pharaoh and issue God's command. Pharaoh looked him through when he said, "Let My people go." The haughty monarch was greatly surprised to hear anybody, especially a Hebrew, talk like that and so he bade him be gone. But Moses returns with, "Thus says the Lord, Let My people go" and his courage was not even, then, crowned with immediate success. There must be plague upon plague, plague upon plague, till at last proud Pharaoh's heart was broken, the Israelites were saved from the hand of him that hated them and Egypt was glad when they departed!

This, however, was but the beginning of the mission of Moses. His was a life of difficulty—the meekest man, but the most provoked—and until he got to the top of Pisgah and his gracious Master kissed away his soul, the Prophet of Horeb was never done with difficulties. Any good thing, I say, especially any good thing done for God, must be surrounded with difficulties and resisted by adversaries. Look at Nehemiah and Ezra and Zerubbabel and those that built Jerusalem the second time. These good men worked zealously, but Sanballat and Tobiah were jeering and jesting and trying to tear down the wall. If you build a city without difficulty, it is not Jerusalem. Be sure of that.

As soon as ever you begin working for God, you will find a great power working against you. If you encounter opposition, take it as a good sign! When our young men go to a provincial town to preach and I want to know how they are getting on, after listening to their story, I ask, "Has somebody slandered you yet? Do the newspapers denounce you as fools?" If they say, "No," I conclude that they are not doing much. If Christ's cause is prospering, the world will reproach the soul-winner! If you do damage to the devil's kingdom, he will roar at you! Should your course be smooth, it is because he says, "There is nothing to disturb me in that man's monotonous talk. I need not let fly the fiery darts of calumny at him—he is a chip in the porridge, I will leave him alone."

Such a man generally goes through life very comfortably. People say, "He is a quiet, inoffensive sort of man." We do not need such soldiers in the service of Christ! "What a disagreeable person!" said a king, once, of an officer whose sword rattled on the floor. "That sword of his is most offensive." "Sire," said the officer, "that is exactly what your Majesty's enemies think." When ungodly persons say that we are troublesome, we are not broken-hearted at being out of their good graces. If the king's enemies think us troublesome, we reckon it to be high praise! When you, my dear Brother, meet with opposition, encounter it with prayer. Exercise more faith.

Antagonists ought never to hinder your going forward in the cause of Christ. Diamond must cut diamond. There is nothing so hard in this world but you can cut it with something harder. If you ask God to steel your soul up to the conquering point and to make your resolution like an adamant stone, you can cut your way through an alp of diamond in the service of your Lord and Master! Let me inspirit you in the face of assailants. The forces ranged against you might be stumbling blocks to fools, but they shall only prove a stimulus to men! One day your honor shall be the greater and your reward shall be the higher because of these adverse elements. Therefore be brave and fear not but advance in the strength of God.

V. Gladly would I now speak a passing word of comfort to another class of workers—THOSE THAT ARE NOT APPRECIATED. I am not going to say much because I have not much sympathy with them. Yet I know that the smallest slight chafes those who are overly sensitive. They murmur, "I do my best and nobody thanks me." You think yourself a martyr and complain that you are misrepresented. Be it so, dear Friend! That was your Master's lot and it is the lot of all His servants. This is a cross we must all carry, or we shall never wear the crown! Do you fancy that this is a new experience? Look at Joseph. His brothers could not stand him and yet it was he that saved the family and fed them in time of famine!

Look at David. His brothers asked why he had left the charge of the sheep to come down to the battle, suspecting that the pride of his heart had brought him among the soldiers and the flags. Yet nobody could bring back Goliath's head but that young David! Take a lesson from the ruddy hero. Take no notice of what people say about you. Go and bring back the giant's head! A good adventure is the best answer to evil accusations. If you are serving the Master, let their slander stir you up to more selfconsecration. If they cry out against you as too forward, serve the Lord with more vigor and you will antidote the venom of their tongues! Did you enter into Christ's work in order to be honored among men? Then retire from it, for you came with a wrong motive.

But if you enlisted purely to bring honor to Him and to win His smile, what more do you need? What more do you need? Be not, therefore, disheartened because you are not applauded. Be certain of this, that to be kept in the rear rank is often necessary to future eminence. If you take a man and put him in front and pat him on the back and say, "What a great man he is," he will make a false step before long and that will be the end of your hero! But when a man is brought forward by God, he is often one whom everybody criticizes, finds fault with and declaims as an impostor—and the banter he is exposed to serves as ballast for his mind! When he comes off with success he will not be spoiled with conceit, for the Grace of God will make him bow with gratitude.

The sword that is meant for a princely hand to split through skull and backbone in the day of battle must be annealed in the furnace again and again—it cannot be fit for such desperate work until it has passed through the fire many times. Do not ask to be appreciated! Never be so mean as that. Appreciate yourself in the serenity of conscience and leave your honor with your God!

VI. I must speak now, in the last place, a little more at length to THOSE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE THEY HAVE HAD SO LITTLE SUCCESS. It was my great delight, a few evenings ago, to meet a splendid band of men and women who are the Sunday school teachers of this Church. You will think it strange that I did not, till then, thoroughly estimate the extent of their work as I had never added up the total of the various schools. But when I did so and found that they served up to 6,000 children, I felt full of joy! I shall run over with delight if they increase to 12,000 in another 12 months! For so large a district, this would not be too many, but still, our present number is most encouraging.

Now, I know that some of our teachers are working away in back streets, in rooms not connected with any place but this and we hardly knew of them because they were pursuing their simple, unobtrusive labors so quietly. Are there any of you who fear that you have toiled in vain and spent your strength for nothing? I would entreat you, dear Friends, not to be satisfied with casting in the Seed unless you reap some good results, yet do not be so faint-hearted as to give up because of a little disappointment. Though you cannot be satisfied without fruit, yet do not cease to sow

because one season proves a failure. I would not have our friends, the farmers, abandon agriculture because this year they have a bad crop! If they were to measure their future prospects by the present failure, it would be a great pity.

If you have preached or taught, or done work for Christ with little success until now, do not infer that you will always be unsuccessful! Regret the lack of prosperity but do not relinquish the labor of seeking it. You may reasonably be sorrowful, but you have no right to despair. Nonsuccess is a trial of faith which has been endured by many a trusty servant who has been triumphant in the issue. Did not the disciples toil all night and catch nothing? Did we not read, just now, of some who cast the net and yet took no fish? Did not our Lord say that some seed would fall on stony ground and some among the thorns and that from these there would be no harvest?

What good did Jeremiah do? I have no doubt he labored and God blessed him, but the result of his preaching was that he said, "The bellows are burned in the fire." He had blown up the fire till he had burnt the bellows, but no man's heart was melted! "Woe is me," said he, "Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears"! I do not know what was the result of Noah's ministry, but I do know that he was a preacher of righteousness for 120 years and yet he never brought a soul into the ark except his own family. Poor preaching we may count it judging by the influence it exerted—and yet we know that it was grand preaching such as God commended! Do not, then, grudge the time, or the strength you lay out in the service of our great Lord because you do not see your efforts thrive, for better men than you have wept over failure!

Remember, too, that if you really do serve the Lord thoroughly and heartily, He will accept you and acknowledge your service, even though no good should come of it. It is your business to cast the bread on the waters—if you do not find it after many days, that is not your business! It is your business to scatter the Seed. No farmer says to his servant, "John, you have not served me well, for there is no harvest." The man would say, "Could I make a harvest, Sir? I have plowed and I have sowed. What more could I do"? Even so our good Lord is not austere, nor does He demand of us more than we can do. If you have plowed and if you have sowed, although there should be no harvest, you are clear and accepted.

Did it never strike you that you may be now employed in breaking up ground and preparing the soil from which other laborers who come after you will reap very plentifully? Perhaps your Master knows what a capital plowman you are. He has a large farm and He never means to let you become a reaper because you do the plowing so well. Your Master does not intend you to take part in the harvest because you are such a good hand at sowing and as He has crops that need sowing all the year round, He keeps you at that work. He knows you better than you know yourself! Perhaps if He were once to let you get on the top of a loaded wagon of your own sheaves, you would turn dizzy and make a fall of it—so He says, "You keep to your plowing and your sowing and somebody else shall do the reaping."

Perhaps when your course is run you will see from Heaven, where it will be safe for you to see, that you did not labor in vain nor spend your strength for nothing. "One sows and another reaps." This is the Divine economy. I think that every man that loves his Master will say, "So long as there does but come a harvest, I will not stipulate about who reaps it. Give me faith enough to be assured that the reaping will come and I will be content." Look at William Carey going to India—his prayer being, "India for Christ." What did Carey live to see? Well, he saw good-speed enough to

rejoice his heart—but he certainly did not see the fulfillment of all his prayer.

Successive missionaries have since gone and spent their life on that vast field of enterprise. With what result? A result amply sufficient to justify all their toil, but, as compared with the millions that sit in heathendom, utterly inadequate to the craving of the Church, much less to the crown of Christ! It does not much matter how any one man fares. The mighty empire will revert to the world's Redeemer and I can almost trace, in the records of the future, the writing of, "These are the names of the mighty men whom David had," as the valiant deeds of His heroes are chronicled by our Lord. When old St. Paul's cathedral had to be taken down in order to make room for the present noble edifice, some of the walls were immensely strong and stood like rocks. Sir Christopher Wren determined to throw them down by the old Roman battering ram. The battering ram began to work and the men worked at it for hours and hours, day after day, without apparent effect. Blow after blow came on the wall! Tremendous thuds made bystanders tremble! The wall continued to stand till they thought it was a useless operation. But the architect knew. He continued working his battering ram till every particle of the wall felt the motion and, at last, over it went in one tremendous crash! Did anybody commend those workmen who caused the final crash, or ascribe all the success to them? Not a bit! It was the whole of them together! Those who had gone away to their meals, those who had begun days before had as much honor in the matter as those who struck the last blow.

And it is so in the work of Christ. We must keep on battering, battering, battering and at last—though it may not be for another thousand years— the Lord will triumph! Though Christ comes quickly, He may not come for another 10,000 years, but in any case idolatry must die and the Truth of God must reign. The accumulated prayers and energies of ages shall do the deed and God shall be glorified! Only let us persevere in holy effort and the end is sure. When a certain American general was fighting, they said, "What are you doing"? He said, "I am not doing much, but I keep pegging away." That is what we must do! We cannot do much at any one time, but we must keep on. We must keep on pegging away at the enemy and something will come of it, by-and-by.

Possibly, dear Friends, some of you who think you have had slender success may have had a great deal more than you know. Others there may be whose lack of success should suggest to them to try somewhere else, or else try some other method. If we cannot do good in one way, we must do it in another. Bring the matter before God in prayer. Cry mightily to Him, for He will help you to do it and His shall be the glory! When He has laid you low. When He has taught you how inefficient you are. When He has driven you in despair to rely implicitly upon Him—then it may be that He will give you more trophies and triumphs than you ever dreamed of!

Anyhow, whether I prosper in life or not is not my question. To bring souls to Christ is my main endeavor, but it is not the ultimate proof of my ministry. My business is to live for God, to lay aside self and give myself up wholly to Him and if I do that I shall be accepted whatever else may happen. I wish we had the spirit of that brave old man who was condemned to the stake. They were going to burn him. He knew that the sentence was to be carried out the next morning, but with a soul full of courage and with a merry heart, he sat the last thing at night talking with his friends—firewood and fire to face in the morning, remember—and he said to one of them, "I am an old tree in my Master's orchard. When I was young I bore a little fruit, by His Grace. It was unripe

and sour, but He bore with it and I have grown mellow in my older days and brought forth some fruit for Him, by His Grace. "Now the tree has grown so old that my Master is going to cut it down and burn the old log. Well, it will warm the hearts of some of His family while I am burning." And he even smiled for joy to think that he might be put to so good a use! I want you to have that spirit and to say, "I will live for Christ while I am young—I will die for Him and warm the hearts of my Brothers and Sisters." You know that the persecutions of those martyr days begat such heroism and gallantry among disciples as prudent people in peaceful times can scarcely credit. It is said of the old Baptist Church over in the City that the members went to Smithfield early one morning to see their pastor burn. And when someone asked the young people what they went there for, they said that they went to learn the way.

That is splendid! They went to learn the way! Oh, go to the Master's Cross to learn the way to live and die! See how He spent Himself for you and then sally forth and spend yourselves for Him! "Though Israel is not gathered, yet shall you be glorious in the sight of the Lord." Though you may think that you do not succeed, your whole-hearted consecration shall be your honor in the day of the Lord! By your hallowed life and your humble service, you shall bring Glory to His name! O Lord, set us in our charges and encourage us in the service of Your house! "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; establish the work of our hands: yes, the work of our hands establish it." May the blessing of our covenant God rest upon you, my Brothers and Sisters, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 21:1-25.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

BELOVED FRIENDS—On this first day of the New Year I salute you with hearty good wishes and pray that every blessing may attend your future steps. I beg, also, on my own behalf, your prayers that through another year my ministry may be more edifying to the saints, more persuasive with sinners and more acceptable to the Lord. I thank the Great Healer that this day smiles upon me and sees me free from pain, reviving in strength and restored in spirit. I shall hope soon to be at work again. Oh for an anointing with fresh oil! Yours to serve in hearty earnest,

C. H. SPURGEON

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Chapter 4

Ezra 4,14 #1097 - Good Cause for Great Zeal

GOOD CAUSE FOR GREAT ZEAL

NO. 1097

A SERMON DELIVERED

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace,

and it was not meet for us to see the King dishonored,

therefore have we sent and informed the king."

Ezra 4:14.

THE facts of the case were these. Under Zerubbabel, the Jews, who had returned from Babylon, commenced to rebuild Jerusalem. There were in the land certain half-and-half persons, somewhat like the Samaritans, who were neither Jews nor Gentiles and they asked, at first, that they might join in the building of Jerusalem. This was refused, the Jews determining to keep themselves pure from all association with the heathen or semi-heathen. So indignant were these people at this that they wrote Artaxerxes, the king, to tell him that he was very little aware of what was going on in Judea, for the Jews had always been, from time immemorial, a troublesome people, and now they were beginning to build their city again. And as soon as it was built they would, in all probability, revolt against King Artaxerxes and give him much trouble, as their fathers had done to kings before him.

Now, in writing that letter they showed themselves wise in their generation, for they told the king in the words of our text that they were moved by gratitude to write to him. It was false—but hypocrites often use the best of words and employ the best of sense to cover their deceit. They said that they, themselves, were sustained from the king's palace and, therefore, they could not bear that the king should be dishonored—for this reason they had written to tell his majesty that the Jews were building this wall and they trusted that, for his own honor's sake, and for his subjects' sake, he would stop them.

Now let me take these words right out of those evil mouths and put them into my own and into yours. They will suit us well if we turn them to the great King of kings. We may truly say, "Now because we have maintenance from the King's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the King dishonored, therefore have we sent and informed the King." The text will enable me to speak on three points. First, here is a fact acknowledged— "we have maintenance from the King's palace." Here is, secondly, a duty recognized—"it was not meet for us to see the King dishonored." And, thirdly, here is a course of action prescribed—"therefore have we sent and informed the King."

I. Now, beloved fellow Believers, the words of our text may be used by us while we acknowledge a very gracious fact—WE HAVE MAINTENANCE FROM THE KING'S PALACE. How true this is of all God's people, in all respects, you will be abundantly ready to acknowledge. Both the upper and the nether springs from which we drink are fed by the eternal bounty of the great King. Up to now we have been supplied with food and raiment. Sometimes we may have been reduced to a pinch, no doubt, and the question has arisen, through the infirmity of our nature and fermented with the irritability of our unbelief, "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and with what shall we be clothed?"

But we have dwelt in the land and verily we have been fed and I have no doubt that to many of you it has been peculiarly gratifying to receive the loaf, as it were, immediately from your Father's hands. You have known what poverty has meant and then there has been to you a peculiar sweetness in the daily bread which, in answer to prayer, has been sent to you. Although we do not drink of the water from the Rock, or find the manna lying at our tent door every morning, yet the Providence of God produces for us quite the same results. We have been fed and satisfied and, at any rate, many of us, in looking back, can say, "my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life."

Therefore we have to now, even in temporal things, been made to feel that we have been maintained from the King's palace. But it has been in spiritual things, Beloved, that our continual experience of the King's bounty has been most notable. We have a new life and therefore we have new needs and new hunger and a new thirst—and God has maintained us out of His own palace as to this new life of ours. O Beloved, we have had great hunger at times, after heavenly things, and He has "satisfied our mouth with good things," and our youth has been "renewed like the eagle's." We have had huge needs—bottomless deeps of need we have had. And yet, great God, the treasures of Your Grace have been everlasting mines, deep as our helpless miseries were, and boundless as our sins.

Why, sometimes we have been drawn aside from our steadfastness and we have needed mighty Grace to set us on our feet again—and to make us once more, "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"—and we have had it, have we not? We have sought it and we have found it! Our shoes have been iron and brass and as our days so has our strength been. Up till this moment we have found that underneath us are the everlasting arms. In looking back upon all the way wherein the Lord our God has led us, we can sing of the beginning of it, we can sing of the middle of it and we believe we shall sing of the end of it—for all through we have been maintained out of the King's palace. This is matter of fact both as to things temporal and things spiritual.

Beloved, it is a great mercy that you and I have been maintained out of the King's palace as Believers because, where else could we have been maintained? Where else, I ask you? As to spiritual things, to whom could we go but unto Him who has been so good to us? What empty wells ministers are if we look to them! If we look to their Master, "the rain also fills the pools," and we find that there is supply in the preached Word for our consolation. But have you not often known what it is to find that even God's servant under whom you have been fed does not meet your case? He is meeting the case of hundreds of others, perhaps, but somehow he misses you—there is no food for your soul!

Yes, and the books you once read with so much comfort appear to have lost their flavor, their aroma and their sweet savor, and, I may add, even the Word of God itself, though it is unchanged, appears to be changed sometimes to you. But God, the God of Israel, your God, oh, how graciously has He still supplied you! "All my springs are in You," my God. And had they been elsewhere they long ago would have failed. Who else could supply our needs but Jehovah? As the king of Israel said to the woman in the famine of Samaria, "If the Lord does not help you, how can I help you out of the barn-floor or out of the winepress?"

There is no help for the child of God if his heavenly Father should shut the granary door. If out of the King's palace there came no portions of meat in due season, we might lay down and die of despair! Who could hold us up but God? Who could guide us but God? Who could keep us from falling into Perdition but God? Who could, from hour to hour, supply our desperate needs but God? Is it not, then, right well for us— abundantly well—that we have had our maintenance from the King's palace?

While we turn over this very sweet thought, we may remember that our maintenance from the King's palace has cost His Majesty dearly. He has not fed us for nothing. We do not know what was the expenditure in gold of King Solomon, every day, to supply all his court with wine and oil, with meal and fine flower, with sheep and fat oxen, harts and roebucks, venison and fatted fowl. But we do know that Solomon's cost was nothing at all compared with the vast expense at which we are sustained by the munificence of God! It cost Him His own dear Son at the very first. We should not have begun to live if He had spared His Son and kept Him back from us!

But the choicest treasure in Heaven, the Koh-i-noor of God's regalia, He was pleased to spend for our sakes that we might live! And ever since then we have been fed upon Jesus Christ Himself. No other food would be adequate to our necessities. His flesh is meat, indeed! His blood is drink, indeed! This is the most royal dainty conceivable, for a soul to feed upon the Son of God! And yet we have fed upon Him these many years. Let us bless and magnify our bounteous God, whose infinite favor has thus supplied our needs.

And while He spares nothing for us, but gives everything to us, let us not keep back anything from Him. With such a generous God, generosity seems to be so natural that it ought to be spontaneous. The highest—the most ardent—form of service would seem to be but a trifling recompense for the immense expense which the Lord has been at in supporting us these many years. May I ask you to think over the kind of portion and maintenance you have had from the King's palace? Such thoughts will stir your gratitude. Beloved, we have had a bountiful supply! God has never stinted us. As the sun throws out his wealth of heat and light and does not measure it by the consumption of men, but throws it broadcast over all worlds—even so does God flood the world with the sunlight of His goodness and His saints are made to receive it in abundance.

If you have ever been stinted it is not by God—you have stinted yourself. Our receptive faculty may be small, but His giving disposition is abundant. Floods of mercy, oceans of love has He poured out for us. O, what a bountiful maintenance have we had! Enough and to spare. Our imagination could not have conceived greater wealth than is ours in the Covenant of Grace—for all things are yours—the gifts of God! God being ours, the Infinite is ours! The Omniscient is ours! The Omnipotent is ours! O, what a bountiful portion we have! And we have had an unfailing portion. As there has been much of it, so it has always come to us in due season. Times of need

have come, but the needed supply has come, too.

If there is any Believer here that has reason to testify against his God, let him do it. Have you ever rested on Him and found Him fail you? Did you ever trust Him in vain? Are His promises false? Has He left you in the deep waters? When you passed through the fires did the flames kindle upon you? Have you found your God a wilderness? Has He been barrenness in the day of your extremity? No, Beloved, our God has been bountiful and He has continued His bounty—not good by fits and starts, but ever gracious to us. I am desirous, if this were the proper place, to stop and tell what I know of this. But then, surely, many older saints here might interrupt me and say, "Let me speak of it."

I remember once trying to speak of the great goodness of God in the pulpit, when my venerable grandfather, who is now in Heaven, was sitting behind me. He pulled my coattail and bid me stop, for he thought he could talk upon that better than I could! And, indeed, he could, because of his deep experience of the faithfulness of the living God! It is a great delight and benefit to younger men to hear their gray-headed sires stand up and say what they have known and what they have proved of God's eternal goodness! But I think we can say, whether young or old, if we have known His name a few years—

"When trouble, like a gloomy cloud, Has gathered thick and thundered loud, He near my soul has always stood, His loving kindness, oh, how good!"

He has been a faithful Friend to us—we have been right well maintained from the King's table.

While the supply has thus been bountiful and continuous, it has ennobled us. For consider how great a thing it is, to be supported from a king's palace—but it is the greatest of all privileges to be living upon the bounty of the King of kings—and "Such honor have all the saints." Even the feeble Mephibosheths that are lame in their feet shall eat at the King's table! The Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, makes all His little ones to be like the ewe lamb of the parable which was fed out of the man's own cup and did lie in his bosom! Even those that are weakest and meanest have this high honor—to be supplied by Royalty, itself, with all that they need!

Lift up your heads, you that hang them down. You poor desponding saints that think yourselves less than the least of all, you are, every one of you, King's sons! You are all gentlemen commoners upon the King of kings! Your diet is better than that of the angels! God will sooner let Gabriel starve than you—

"Never did angels above, know Redeeming Grace and dying love"

Yet that is your daily bread, your morning meal and evening feast! Be glad! Have you little of temporal good? Well, but your Father sends it to you. Do you mourn that you have so little spiritual good? Bless Him that you have any, for it is God that sends it to you! You would have had none if it were not for His Infinite Grace! Therefore praise Him for what you have and confidently ask Him for more.

And there is reason for good cheer in this, dear Friends, that we have such a soul-satisfying portion in God. A soul that gets what God gives him has quite as much as he can hold and as much as he can need. He has got a portion that might well excite envy! If the world did but know how happy and blessed Christians are, they would count them up in the royal family and they

would envy them beyond all others. There is nothing in the worldling's estate to envy. The more he has, the worse it will be for him to leave it. His fine gardens and lawns and parks will make it hard to die. The greater his earthly honor the worse will be his eternal dishonor. It must be to him a horrible thing to have had such a high flight and then to have all the greater fall because of it.

"Fret not yourself because of evildoers, neither be you envious because of the prosperity of the wicked." What, after all, becomes of him that prospers in his way? "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree; yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yes, I sought him, but he could not be found." The place that has known the ungodly and the lands they have called by their own name, soon become oblivious of their memory. Their record has perished quickly and they, themselves, have gone back "to the vile dust from where they sprang." But you have eternity to be your heritage! You have Heaven to be your portion! The few drops of gall that are in your cup today shall soon be rinsed out and it shall be full of the nectar of celestial thrones!

Be content, now, with your brown bread and hard fare a little while, for you shall eat the delicacies of angels! Yes, and by faith you do even now feast upon the fat things full of marrow and the wines on the lees wellrefined, which your God sends to you from the King's palace! Let us rejoice, dear Brothers and Sisters, if we are, any of us, downcast tonight, for our maintenance is from the King's palace and what can we need more?—

"Father, I wait Your daily will. You shall divide my portion still. Grant me on earth what seems You best, Till death and Heaven reveal the rest."

Thus we acknowledge the fact with lively interest and devout gratitude— "We have maintenance from the King's palace."

II. Now, secondly, here is A DUTY RECOGNIZED—"It was not meet for us to see the King dishonored." No doubt you will see the force of the argument without need of much explanation. It is good reasoning. If they were fed from the king's palace it was not right that they should stand by and see the king dishonored. The reasoning comes home to us. If we are so favored—we, who are Believers—with such a choice portion, it is not right for us to sit down and see our God dishonored.

And here I will notice some things which dishonor God and which we are bound not to put up with. By every sense of propriety we are bound not to see God dishonored by ourselves. It is well to begin at home. Are you doing anything that dishonors your God, Believer—anything at home, anything in your daily avocation, anything in the way of conducting your business? Is there anything in your conversation, anything in your actions, anything in your reading, anything in your writing, anything in your speaking that dishonors God? Seeing that you are fed from the King's table, I beseech you, let it not be said that the King got damage from you! If there is a traitor, let him be found somewhere else, but not among the Lord's own chosen!

You are bought with blood—will you trample on that blood? The Crucified One died for you—will you crucify Him afresh and put Him to an open shame? You will soon be where Jesus is. Would you blush to see His face and to stand in His Presence? What? And shall it ever be said that you bring dishonor upon Jesus? God has given you a portion above the angels and will you fill the devils' mouths with laughter and cause them to have a reason to glory against God? May that be far from you, my Brother! The Lord grant us Grace to feel that if we are maintained from the King's

palace it is not right for us to cause the King dishonor!

Perhaps that dishonor may come from those who dwell under our roof and live in our own house. I charge you that are parents and masters, to see to this! Do not tolerate anything in those over whom you have control that would bring dishonor to God. Remember Eli—he did not restrain his sons and they behaved shamefully. They were the minister's sons and because they were not restrained, God overthrew Eli's house and did such terrible things that the ears of him that hears might well tingle! Joshua said, "And for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." We cannot impart to our children new hearts, but we can see to it that there shall be nothing within our gates that is derogatory to the religion of Jesus Christ. I charge you, see to it!

But you cannot control your children, you say. Then the Lord have mercy upon you! It is your business to do it and you must do it, or else you will soon find they will control you! And no one knows what judgment will come from God upon those who suffer sin in children and servants to go unrebuked. No, if we are maintained from the King's palace, let us not see the King dishonored. Let the same holy jealousy animate us among those with whom we have influence—as, for instance, among those who wish to be united with us in Church fellowship. It is the duty of every Church to try, as far as it can, to guard the honor and dignity of King Jesus against unworthy persons who would intrude themselves into the congregation of the saints, of those who are called, chosen, and faithful.

We are deceived, and always shall be, for the Church never was infallible. But still let no negligence of our practice supplement the infirmity of our judgment. Because ungodly men will creep in unawares, we are not, therefore, to cooperate at their entrance. To allow persons to come to the Communion Table who do not even profess to be born-again is a clear act of treason against the King of kings! To receive into our membership persons of unhallowed life, unchaste, unrighteous—of licentious life and lax doctrine, such as know not the Truth of God as it is in Jesus—would be to betray the trust with which Christ has invested us! That must not be and every Church member is bound to do his best to guard the Church against that which would render her unclean in the sight of God! If you are maintained from the King's table, it is not meet that you should see the King dishonored. We are under sacred obligations to maintain the Statutes and Testimonies of the Lord. And, oh, how the King is dishonored by the mutilation and misrepresentation of His Word! Therefore, dear Brothers and Sisters, we are always bound to bear our protest against false doctrine. I am sometimes accused of saying sharp things. The charge does not come home to my conscience with very great power. If anybody said I spoke smooth things I think it would oppress me a great deal more. As long as there are evils in this world, God's ministers are bound to protest against them! That man who, as he goes through the world, can say, "Hail, fellow, well met!" with everybody and extol the modern Diana of charity—universal charity, false charity, charity towards the false—that man, when he comes to stand before his Maker, will find it hard to give his account. In these days, when nobody believes anything, when everybody has subscribed to the belief that black is white and white is black, and colors are nothing at all but imaginary distinctions, it is time that somebody should believe something! And a little sharpness of speech might not only be excused, but commended, if we had but men who spoke what they did know and testified honestly to the Truth of God which they had received.

Everyone here present who is maintained from the King's palace, is bound to fight against every doctrine which insults the King. When I see a man pretending to be a priest and assuming that he has power to forgive sins and to dispense pardons and indulgences, I do my best to unmask the deceiver and to speak against his imposition, less I might be accounted accessory to his crime, chargeable with his guilt and be made partaker of his condemnation! Therefore, let every Englishman, let every Protestant and, above all, let every Christian denounce priestcraft of every sort and in every Church, whether among Romanists, Anglicans, or Dissenters. Down with it!

There is only one Priest and He is in Heaven!! And none of us have any power to offer any sacrifice for sin, or any power to absolve our fellow men. Whether you accuse us of being censorious or not, the profanity appalls us, the duplicity that is taken ill by it amazes us and the sincerity with which we love the Gospel inflames us to make our protest heard! If we do not speak out about this crying perversion of the Truth of God, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves!

Then there are some in these days who deny the divinity of Christ and there can be no terms of peace between us and them. I remember a remark of a Unitarian doctor, which I thought eminently correct. He said of a certain Calvinist, who was accused of speaking sharply against Unitarians, "Quite right and so he ought, because if the Calvinist is right the Unitarian is not a Christian at all. But if the Unitarian is right the Calvinist is an idolater, because he worships one who is a man and is not the Son of God."

If what we hold is true, it is not possible that the man who denies the Deity of Christ can be a Christian, nor can there be for him a hope of salvation. He deliberately refuses the only way of escape from the wrath to come. I can understand a man getting to Heaven as a Roman Catholic, notwithstanding all his errors, because he believes in the Divinity of Christ and relies on the expiatory Sacrifice of His death, with whatever superstitions his creed may be overlaid. But I cannot understand, nor do I believe, that any man will ever enter those pearly gates who, in doubting or discrediting the Deity of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, renounces the sheet-anchor of our most holy faith and dares to face his maker without a Counselor, without an Advocate, without a plea for mercy!

It is time we said so, and spoke out plainly. This is no theme for trifling. Courtesies are thrown away upon antagonists whose cause is treason! Nor are we the men who should practice reserve, for if we are maintained from the King's palace, we are cowards if we do not stand up for our King! Then there have been attacks made in modern times upon the doctrine of Substitution. If the doctrine of Substitution is not true, I am a lost man— therefore, tooth and nail, will I fight for it! No other hope beneath the skies have I, except in the expiatory Substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ. If He did not suffer in my place, the Just for the unjust, then flames of Hell must be my portion. Therefore I can never give up that Truth of God, for it is giving up my own salvation. But it has been revealed, and I cling to it with the most implicit credit.

Do you tell me that "modern thought" assails it? How, and with what weapons, I ask? Is it with argument, with proof, or with any countersuggestion? Oh, no, it is merely met with vague questionings, idle quibbles and impertinent sneers—a style of answer that affects much, though it affirms nothing! I pray you, Brothers and Sisters, wherever you are, defend this fundamental doctrine of our most holy faith—that the Lord Jesus Christ has laid down His life to make atonement for the sins of His people. Or should we be confronted with any other form of false

doctrine, or should we be haunted with any kind of skepticism—(skepticism! An anomalous thing, which is without form and void)—are we to stand with mealy mouths and say, "Yes, Brethren, you are of that opinion, and I am of the other"?

No, but opinion is light as a bubble when judgment is pronounced by the supreme court from which there is no appeal. What do you think? Is there no fact? Is there no Truth? Is the Word of God, "yes," and, "no"? Has it come to this, that it is to be shuffled like a pack of cards, or shaped like a nose of wax as every man may please? Oh, no! By the ever-living God there is Truth somewhere and that Truth we will find out if we can! And, having found it, we will hold it fast. Let us, in the day of battle, use our standard—and if our arm is torn off, we hope the standard will not fall but that others will be found to hold it up as there were in the brave days of yore—when our fathers burned at the stake for these things, or went to the galleys, or perished amidst the Alps sooner than the Truth of God's own Word should be without witnesses among the sons of man!

Hear none of these things in your hearts with tolerance, but hold fast to the things which you have been taught and hold them fast in faith and love to Christ Jesus! Those who have their maintenance from the King's palace ought not to allow the Lord to be dishonored by a neglect of His ordinances. Brothers and Sisters, I remind you, who are Believers, the Lord Jesus has given you only two symbolic ordinances. Take care that you use them well. Follow Him in what He did, when He said, "Thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness." Be baptized in His name! Follow Him to the Communion Table. He said, "This do you, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." Be obedient, I pray you, to His gracious Word, and suffer not the King's precept to be trifled with!

Again, if we are, indeed, His courtiers, let us take care that He is not dishonored by a general decline of His Church. When churches go to sleep when the work of God is done deceitfully—for to do it formally is to do it deceitfully—when there is no life in the Prayer Meeting—when there are no holy enterprises afloat for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom, then the world says, "That is your Church! What a sleepy set these saints are!" O, let not the King be thus dishonored! Brothers and Sisters, bestir yourselves! May this Church never settle upon its lees, or fall into slumber as it grows older. May God grant it may grow more earnest! May there be ever here regiments of stalwart men who shall fight for King Jesus and not be ashamed—and may the Church be full of life and vigor till Christ Himself shall come.

When we sleep with our fathers, may there be others found better than we are to maintain the cause and crown rights of King Jesus. And oh, dear Friends, how can we tolerate it that so many should dishonor Christ by rejecting His Gospel? We cannot prevent their doing so, but we can weep for them! We can pray for them! We can plead for them! We can make it uncomfortable for them to reflect that Believers are loving them and yet they are not loving the Savior! If you are fed from the King's palace it is not right that you see, with dry eyes, the King dishonored!

If you hear a man swearing in the streets, mourn and lament it! If you see the Sunday desecrated, grieve over it! If you behold drunkenness, do not laugh at it! If you hear lascivious songs, do not smile at them! Everything that is evil should be painful to a Believer and it ought to be an incessant sorrow to us that souls are perishing!—

"Did Christ over sinners weep, And shall our cheeks be dry?"

Privileged as you are, Beloved, you ought to love your Master so that the slightest word against Him should provoke your spirit to holy jealousy. III. Our last point is this—A COURSE OF ACTION PURSUED— "Therefore," says the text, "have we sent and informed the king." How shall we do that? Doubtless we act as it well becomes us, when we go and tell the Lord all about it? "Informed the king"!—but does He not know? Are not all things open to Him from whom no secrets are hid? Ah, yes, but when Hezekiah received Rabshakeh's blasphemous letter He took it and spread it before the Lord! It is a holy exercise of the saints to report to the Lord the sins and the sorrows they observe among the people—the griefs they feel and the grievances they complain of—to spread before Him the blasphemies they have heard and appeal to Him concerning the menaces with which they are threatened.

Yes, you may report to the Lord the false doctrine that is preached and the foul sophistry that is printed in these days. Such plain statements might become mighty pleas with God that He should arise, assert His cause and do His own work. Lord, You know that this day the Deity of your Son has been insulted—the Inspiration of Your Word has been denied. You know the power of Your Holy Spirit has been ridiculed, Your eternal love has been denied, Your infinitely blessed Sovereignty has been scoffed at! O Father, You know the atoning blood has been made a subject of contempt! Arise, O God, plead Your own cause! Behold, all over the world men are mad upon their idols! They give themselves to falsehoods and to lies.

O God of Truth, arise and avenge Yourself! Have You not said, "Ah, I will ease Me of My adversaries"? Do this, then. Give glory to whom glory is due and let not the name of Jesus be forever cast out as evil by ungodly men! This ought to be the constant pleading of the Church—"Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?" O, it ought to be! Day and night cry about all this! The sin of this London, oh, if we felt it, it would weigh us down—the drunkenness of London, the lust of London, the oppression of London, the wickedness of every shape that reeks, as from a dunghill, from this great city—O God, will You always bear it? Will You not rise and change all this? Will You not give power to Your Gospel that a gracious reformation may be made?

Tell the Lord about it! Inform the King! After those people had informed the king, they took care to plead with him. As I have already told you, they apprized him that the city of Jerusalem was a very troublesome city and therefore it ought not to be rebuilt. Plead with God! Plead with God! Plead with God! That praying is poor shift that is not made up of pleading. "Bring forth your reasons," says the Lord. Bring forth your strong arguments. O, what prayers were those of John Knox, when he seemed to say to God, "Save Scotland for this reason—for that reason—for another reason—for yet one more reason"—the number of his motives still multiplying with the fervor of his heart! So did he labor with God as though he pleaded for his life and would not let Him go until he had gained his suit for Scotland!

Why, Scotland's knowledge of the Truth of God is due, doubtless, beyond everything else to John Knox's prayers, which even now are ringing in Heaven! He, "being dead, yet speaks." O, for men of that caliber and that mind in this country, thus to plead for London! O, what a gem would London be in Christ's crown! If Christ had but London, surely out of this great city, which is the very heart of the world in many respects, there would go streaming forth rivers of health and life and blessing to the utmost ends of the earth! Spread London's case, then, before God, and plead with the Most

High!

And when you have done it, do not go away and make your prayers into a lie by contrary actions, or by refraining from any action at all! He that prays hard must work hard, for no man prays sincerely who is not prepared to use every effort to obtain that which he asks of God. We must put our shoulder to the wheel while we pray for strength to put it in motion. All success depends upon God—yet He uses instruments, and He will not use instruments that are useless and unfitted to the work! "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves. But our sufficiency is of God, who has made us able ministers"—therefore let us be up and be stirring, for if we are maintained from the King's palace, it is not meet that we see the King dishonored, but it is due to Him that we should seek His Glory.

Now, I would that every one of you knew what it was to be maintained from the King's palace, but alas, there are some here that have never eaten the King's bread and will be banished from the King's Presence if they die as they are. But, O remember, the King is always ready to receive His rebel subjects and He is a God ready to pardon. "Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and you perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little." "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." That is the way of reconciliation—to put your trust in Him. And if you do put your trust in His dear Son, you are reconciled to Him! You shall be maintained out of His palace, and then, I trust, you will live to His Glory. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms 119:49-64.

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Chapter 5

Nehemiah 1:11 #2714 - Those Who Desire

THOSE WHO DESIRE

NO. 2714

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1901.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, APRIL 11, 1880.

"O Lord, I beseech You, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer

of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who

desire to fear Your name."

Nehemiah 1:11.

NEHEMIAH was earnest in his prayer for the good of his sorrow

stricken nation, but he did not make the mistake of thinking that he was the only praying man in the world. He said, "Be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who desire to fear Your name." In this one respect, I like Nehemiah better than Elijah. They were both noble men and greatly concerned for the highest welfare of their fellow countrymen, but, at one time at least, Elijah did not have a true or a fair estimate of things as they really were. He even presumed to say to God, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and slain Your Prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." Nehemiah, however, acted on another and a more hopeful principle. When he had presented his own personal supplication, he felt certain that there were others who were also praying to the Lord, so he said, "Be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who desire to fear Your name."

You know, dear Friends, that Elijah was quite wrong in his calculation, for God said to him, "I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him." There were, hidden in caves, or in other parts of the country, thousands who feared God and bowed the knee to Him alone. Let not any of us fall into the mistake that Elijah made. Do not you, my Brother, claim to be the solitary Prophet of God, and say, "I only am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." There are quite as good men as you are elsewhere in the world and there are other people who are as earnest in prayer as you are. If you get to supposing that you are the only man left who holds sound doctrine, you will become a bigot. And if

you think that you are the only praying man on the earth, you will most likely prove to be self-righteous! If you fancy you are the only man who has a deep spiritual experience, probably you will be doing a great wrong to others of your Lord's servants and speaking evil of those whom He has accepted. It is better far to believe, with Nehemiah, that your suppliant voice is not a

Volume 47 1solitary one—and that there are many who, like yourself, cry day and night unto God.

I think it would be better to go even a little further and to believe that if you are earnest, there are others who are still more earnest, and that if you possess a deep-toned piety, there are some who have even more than you have. So, instead of separating yourself from your Brothers and Sisters in Christ, as though you stood first and foremost—hope and believe that you are only one small star in a great constellation—one tiny speck in the milky way of Divine Light with which God still studs the evening sky of this world's history. Take a hopeful view of things and you will be more likely to be near the mark than if you judge others severely and imagine yourself to be the only faithful servant of the Lord.

It is quite clear that Nehemiah valued the prayers of others, for he pleaded with God, "Be attentive"—not only "to the prayer of Your servant," but also "to the prayer of Your servants, who desire to fear Your name." Beloved Friends, there is a great value in the prayers of God's people, so we ought to set great store by them. If you ever wish to do me a good turn, pray for me! And if you would be the means of blessing your fellow Christians, incessantly pray for them! You may think that your petition is of small account, but it is the many "littles" that make up the great whole. A pinch of incense from each worshipper will fill the House of the Lord with sweet perfume. Small lumps of coal cast into the glowing furnace will still further increase its heat. Do not think that we can afford to lose your prayers, whoever you may be, but cheerfully contribute it to the general treasury of the Church's devotion.

It seems to me that the persons to whom Nehemiah referred may be regarded as rather weak servants of God, for they were those who desired to fear His name. Perhaps it could not actually be said that they did fear it, but they desired to do so. Still, Nehemiah felt grateful even for their prayers and we cannot afford to lose the prayer of a single godly child, or of the most feeble Christian among us. Do not ridicule him about his shortcomings and say that his prayer is useless. No, my dear weak Brother, we need your supplication! Even Abraham could not afford to lose the prayer of Lot, for Abraham's prayer, alone, did not save a single city of the plain—but poor miserable Lot was able to bring just the last ounce of intercession that turned the sacred scale—he contributed a very little prayer and thus one city was saved from destruction. Well, then, if Lot's prayer was needed at the back of Abraham's mighty plea in it, perhaps the petition of the very least among us may, in God's judgment, suffice to turn the scale in some other instance! The Lord may say, "The prayers of My people have prevailed now that this last one has added his request." If one of you should stay away from the Prayer Meeting and thus not contribute your share to the supplication of the whole Church because you think you are not a person of much consequence, it may be that yours is the last prayer which is needed to complete the chain so that it would prevail even as Lot's did. We shall certainly not lose any blessing if you add your prayers to ours, but we shall gain by them! We wish, therefore, to offer to God not only the prayers of any servant of His who is strong, as Nehemiah was, but also the prayers of any of His servants who desire to fear His name. I am now going to speak concerning those of whom it is said that they desire to fear God's

name. I have already described them as being rather feeble folk, yet all who are included in this class are not alike weak. Still, as a rule, it does indicate an early stage of the working of God's Grace when we can only say of them that they desire to fear God's name. The two remarks I shall make upon the text are these. First, that this description includes all who have any true religion. And, secondly, that this description includes many grades of Grace.

I. First, then, THIS DESCRIPTION INCLUDES ALL WHO HAVE ANY TRUE RELIGION—they desire to fear God's name.

For, first, true religion is always a matter of desire. If you do not desire to fear God, you do not fear Him. If you do not feel any desire after that which is right in God's sight, you have not anything at all right in your heart.

Some have a religion that is all a matter of custom. They go to a certain place of worship simply because they were brought up to go there. Their father went before them and their grandfather went before him—so they follow in their steps as a mere matter of form. If we were to say to them, "Now, do whatever you like. Do not take any notice of what anybody else has done, or is doing, but just please yourself"—in all probability they would not go any longer—or if they did, it would be from sheer force of custom. These are the people who say that our Sundays are very dull and that our religious services are—well, I need not repeat what they say of them—but they do not enjoy them, for they have in their hearts no desire towards fearing God, or towards His worship in the public assembly. They would be far happier if they could go to some place of worldly amusement, or idly loiter by the seaside, for the worship of God's House is a weariness to them, and they are glad when the Sabbath is past.

If this is true of any of you, dear Friends, do not deceive yourselves about your real condition, for it is clear that you have not any religion at all! If your presence in the sanctuary is not a matter of your own deliberate choice. If you do not desire to fear God's name, there is nothing in it that is acceptable to the Most High, for God abhors the sacrifice where the heart is not found! What blessing can result from your coming into His courts and rendering only hypocritical worship? What are you doing, after all, every Sabbath, but sending into God's House the mere pretense of a man, if your heart is not here! Your coat is here. Your flesh is here. But not your very self and, therefore, the form of worship is a mere mockery!

There are others, whose fear of God arises entirely from dread. They dare not go to bed at night without offering some sort of prayer—not because they have any real desire to pray, or to commune with God, but through fear as to what might happen if they omitted their usual form! They would not allow a Sunday to pass without attending the means of Grace at least once—not because they have any desire to go, or any delight in the services of God's House—but because they are afraid not to go. Yet we must always remember that the religion of dread is not the religion of Christ. That which you do because you are afraid to act otherwise is no evidence of a renewed heart—it is, rather, the proof that you are a slave, living in dread of the lash, and that you would act far otherwise if you dared! But the child of God loves his heavenly Father and delights to worship Him. Oftentimes, when the Sabbath is about to close, he says—

"My willing soul would stay In such a frame as this, And sit and sing herself away To everlasting bliss!"

He delights in the worship of God! It is his element, his pleasure, his treasure—and he loves it without measure!

So, dear Friends, by this test shall you judge yourselves, for true religion is always a thing of desire. I do verily believe that attendance at public worship in this Tabernacle is a thing of desire to very many. I see people walking to some places of worship in such a sad and solemn way that they look as if they were going to be flogged or burned. But I notice how joyfully most of you trip along when you are coming here. You are glad when the Sabbath arrives and you look forward to it with delight. May it always be so with you, for you may rest assured that there is no worship which is so acceptable to God as that which we, from our heart, desire to render to Him!

And so, dear Friends, I come back to the assertion that all true religion must be a thing of desire. And not only is this generally true, but if you dissect piety and devotion, you will find that every part of it must be a matter of desire. Take repentance, for instance, and I am sure I may say that there never was a man who repented who did not desire to repent. The Holy Spirit never makes anyone repent without his desiring to do it—that would be an impossible thing. So is it with faith—no man believes against his will—to the saving of his soul. There must be a desire to trust Christ, or else there cannot be true faith. In like manner, no man ever loves God without a desire to do so. It would be an absurdity even to talk of such a thing! Indeed, there is no Christian Grace which can be exercised without the desire to exercise it. So, there is no act of worship which can be performed aright unless it arises from desire. A man never really praises God until he desires to do so. You cannot sit still and say, "I joined in praising God involuntarily."

Desire is also the very life-blood of prayer. An unwilling prayer would be a hollow mockery. If I pray that which I am forced to pray, I insult God. So is it with the observance of the ordinances of the Christian religion. The time was, you know—and not very many years ago—when no man could be a member of a corporation, or could be employed in the service of Her Majesty unless he would take what some people still erroneously call, "the sacrament." Cowper truly said that they made the ordinances of Christ into a picklock of office! But do you suppose that a man who took "the sacrament" in order that he might be made into a mayor, or a sheriff, or a member of Parliament ever had, in that act, any real communion with Christ? It is all but blasphemous to suppose such a thing! The right observance of the ordinance must be a matter of a Christian's own free will—the Grace of God must make him desire thus to show forth his Lord's death. Anyone who pretends to observe either of the ordinances of Christ from any motive but holy desire makes a mockery of them and certainly does not use them aright. Desire must be at the back of every religious act, or else there is nothing at all in it. It is so in the case of almsgiving. Always take heed that you do not give to the poor, or to any charity, or to the funds of the Church simply because you are asked to do so, for, unless you really desire to give what you appear to present, you have not, in God's sight, given it at all! If, in your heart of hearts you feel, "I wish I had dodged round the pillar, or gone down the other aisle, and so escaped having to give," you have not truly offered anything to God. The shrewd Scotchman's remark was quite right when a man said to him, "I have given a half-crown to the collection when I only intended to give a penny," and asked if he could have it back. "No," said the Scotchman, "when it is once in, it is in for good." "Well," said the man, "I shall get credit for halfa-crown, at any rate " "Oh, no you won't!" said the canny Scot, "you only intended to give a penny and you will not get credit for any more than that."

There is another thing that is worthy of observation. That is, wherever there is this holy desire, even if there is no power to carry it into action, the desire is itself so much the very essence of true religion that God accepts it. Desire is acceptable, for instance, in the matter of almsgiving even where no alms can be given. According to what a man has, and not according to what he has not, is the measure of acceptance for his gift. David, you remember, wished to build the temple, but God would not let him carry out that great work because his hands had been stained with blood. Yet the Lord said to him, "Whereas it was in your heart to build an house unto My name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son that shall come forth out of your loins, he shall build the house unto My name." And God accepted the will for the deed and blessed David accordingly. This principle may afford encouragement to any of you who perhaps feels, "I cannot do much for the Lord's cause, but I am quite willing to do all that I can." Be ready to give or to act whenever you have the power—and God, our gracious Lord—will take the will for the deed whenever your desire cannot be translated into action.

But remember one solemn fact, and that is that wherever there is a man who has not even the desire to fear God, there is condemnation. Such a man must indeed be dead in trespasses and sins! If that is your case, my Friend, you have never repented and you say that you do not desire to repent. You have never believed in Christ Jesus and you confess that you have no desire to do so. You have never, in spirit and in truth, worshipped the God who made you and you have no desire to do so. You have never confessed your sin and sought pardon for it, and you say that you have no desire to do so. Well, you scarcely need, I think, that I should pronounce over you the sentence of condemnation which God's Word declares to be yours! Does not your own conscience tell you how far you must be from the right road when you are not honest and you say, "I do not want to be honest"? What a confirmed rogue such an individual must be! If a man says, "I am not chaste in life and I do not want to be chaste," you know how debauched he must be when he not only sins, but finds pleasure in the iniquity, and boasts that he has no wish to be delivered from the evil! God have mercy upon you, my Friend, if that is your case! But I pray you to stand convicted of your guilt and to cry unto God to change your heart, and renew your will, and make you at least to desire to be right, for where that desire is really cherished, there is something good and hopeful about you. But where there is not even a desire after that which is right and pure, and holy—what can we say but, "Woe be unto you unless you repent"?

II. Now, in the second, place, I want to show you that THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OUR TEXT—"Your servants, who desire to fear Your name"—INCLUDES MANY GRADES OF GRACE.

It does not, however, include some who would like to be included in it. Here is, for instance, a man who says, "I am not a Christian, but I sometimes desire to be one." Yes, my Friend, that is on Sunday night when you are in the company of God's people. But what about Saturday nights? What about Friday night when you received your week's wages? You did not desire to be a Christian, then, I think—at least when you got home to your wife and family, they could not suppose, from the way you walked, that you had any desire of that sort!

Here is another man who says, "I desire to be a Christian," yet he is contemplating attendance at some playhouse or other each night in the week, and he is arranging to spend a great part of his time in the company of the ungodly. I say frankly that I do not believe in that man's desire to be

saved. My Friend, your goodness is like the early cloud or the morning dew—we sometimes have a faint hope concerning you, but while your desires come and go as they have done, there is a text of Scripture that just suits you, and we advise you to take it home to yourself—"The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing." You are like a man lying in bed and all the while saying, "I desire to plow my field, but I do not mean to get up at present." The sun has long risen. Indeed, it is high noon, but he still says, "I desire to plow my fields, but I do not intend to get up just yet." And so he sleeps on through the whole day. He keeps on saying that he desires to plow his field and to sow it, but the weather is not favorable—it is either too hot or too cold—it is too dry one day, and too wet another, so he goes on desiring and does nothing. The man is a fool, or something worse and, alas, we have many such foolish folk who are always desiring, and desiring, and desiring and yet nothing comes of their desires!

There is a tombstone erected in memory of a prince who died some little while ago—I will not say where he used to live, but his principality was badly managed, I should think, for he never did a good thing in his life except by mistake. No one ever credited him with having done any good. And when he was dead, they put upon his tombstone this inscription, "He was a man of excellent intentions." Yes, and that is all that will be able to be said of many others when they come to die, "They were men of excellent intentions—sometimes."

Such people are very different from those to whom Nehemiah referred in his prayer—"O Lord, I beseech You, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who desire to fear Your name." Who are those who are included in this description?

Beginning at the bottom, I should say, first, the man who has an earnest desire to be right. I remember once asking a man if he was a Christian, and he answered, "I am very sorry to say that I am not saved. But, oh, Sir, I do wish that I were!" I looked at him with much yearning in my heart and I saw how earnestly he meant what he had said. And I then went on to enquire why he was not a Christian if he longed to be one, because the great point is to get men to desire to be saved—and when they do desire it, what is there to hinder them from having the blessing? When a boat is guided by a rudder, it only needs that the rudder should be turned in a particular way and the boat will turn at once. And when a man's heart is so turned that he says, "I really desire to be right with God, I long to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ"—when that is not merely a passing fancy, but when he can truly say, "I am always desiring this. I earnestly and vehemently desire it"—why, such a man is not far from the Kingdom of God!

There is, however, this remark to be added—he must not be content with that desire, but must carry it into action. Suppose that it is time for me to eat my dinner and that I sit down at the table with the meat before me and say, "I desire to eat"—and yet I simply sit looking at the meat? I have my knife and fork ready and I say that I am earnestly desiring to eat—would not anyone who was near me say, "Then, why do you not eat? There is the meat before you. Help yourself!" Ah, dear Friend, that is what I have long tried to induce you to do in the matter of food for your soul. Do you not know that all the provisions of the Gospel are free to all who desire to partake of them? If you have a willing mind, you may come and you will be heartily welcome! There is nothing to hinder you, for all that there is in Christ is free to all who will come to Him. Every soul that really desires to have Christ can have Him!

Perhaps someone asks, "How may I take Him, then?" Why, simply by trusting Him and entrusting yourself to Him. You know how I have often put it to you, using that verse in which the Apostle Paul says, "The Word is near you, even in your mouth." Then swallow it if it is in your mouth! Let it go down into your inmost being—that is all you have to do—take it into your very soul. I do not know of a more beautiful emblem of faith, after all, than that idea of swallowing the Truth of God, receiving it, eating and drinking it—taking Christ, who is the Truth, into your inmost self. Only trust Him and you will no longer cry, "I desire to fear the Lord," for it will be true that you do really fear Him.

Now we will go up a stage higher. There are some, included in this number of those who desire to fear God, who really do fear Him, but are afraid they do not, so they dare not say that they fear God, but they confess that they desire to fear Him. Now this is a kind of holy modesty which, if it is not carried too far, is even commendable. The first thing that certain men in Greece did was to call themselves sophists, or wise men. When they grew wiser, they called themselves philosophers, that is lovers of wisdom and, sometimes, a man who at first calls himself by a very big name, when he gets to be really bigger, is content with a smaller title. I have known some people who have been very sure about their own conversion, but I did not feel anything like so sure about them. And I have known others who were never sure about their own safety, but always felt a sacred anxiety lest they should not be right, yet I felt quite sure about them, for I always saw in them the marks and evidences of deep sincerity and holy watchfulness. There are many of God's true children who hardly dare call themselves by that privileged name. But there are others who are very sure about their position, to whom we would commend the words of the poet, Cowper—

"Come, then, a still, small whisper in your ear— He has no hope who never had a fear; And he that never doubted of his state, He may, perhaps—perhaps he may—too late."

There is such a thing as never doubting when you ought to doubt. But, on the other hand, I do not want our dear modest friends always to be saying, "I hope and I trust," yet never to get any further. Why, surely the Word of God is very plain, and the way of salvation is very simple! "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life." Then, if you believe on Him, you have everlasting life! The man who really trusts Christ loves and fears God—and if you love Him and can say, "Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You," then you are a God-fearing man. If you are relying for salvation upon Jesus Christ and have no other trust, then you need not say, "I hope I am saved." You may be sure that you are saved. Still, God forbid that I should ever seem to condemn those whom God accepts, so, if all you dare to say is that you desire to fear Him, give me your hand, my Brother! Give me your hand, my Sister—though you are weak and feeble, and your enjoyment of the things of God is but slender, you are in the King's family, one of the redeemed and your prayer is needed to be united with ours, so let us have it and God will accept it!

Let us advance a step further. Those who desire to fear God are found among those who know that they do fear Him and dare to confess it, but who, nevertheless, are afraid that their imperfections are so abundant that their religion still lies more in the region of desire than of attainment. I remember being in the company of a person who was talking very much about his own growth in Grace. If I remember rightly, he said something about a higher life that God gives to all His people and he boasted very much about his own attainments. There was another Brother there who said nothing, so the first speaker turned to him, and asked, "Have not you got any

religion." "Yes," he meekly replied, "but I never had any to boast of." I would rather join with the second man than the first! The man who does not believe that he might be any better has very little good at present. He who thinks that he has got to the end of perfection is probably at the wrong end of it. No, no, my Brothers and Sisters, those of us who fear God most, also desire to fear Him! We have repented, but we want to have a deeper repentance. We do believe in Jesus, but we long to have a stronger faith. We hope to have a brighter, clearer hope than we, at present, possess. We do serve God, but we wish to serve Him ten times as much as we have ever done. Have I any zeal? Oh, that the zeal of His house might eat me up! Am I a saint? Oh, that I might be more fully sanctified and that sin might be more thoroughly overthrown! There is yet very much left to be desired in the best of us—there is great room for further progress and we must keep on pressing forward toward that which is before, and forget that which is behind! In this sense, then, we are all among those who desire to fear God's name even when we do fear it.

Let us advance another step. There are some who desire to fear God's name in a sense which, no doubt, was intended by Nehemiah. The poor Jews at Jerusalem could not worship God as they wished to do—there was no temple, no altar, no sacrifice. They could not carry out the ceremonials and festivities which God had ordained, so they desired to show that they feared God's name more publicly and more openly, and to do it more thoroughly and with greater freedom and less hindrance. I daresay I am speaking to some dear child of God who says, "That is just my case— I desire to fear God's name, but I am hampered in many ways." You have conscientious convictions and you are placed, just now, where you cannot carry them out. You are as yet under age, perhaps, and parental authority is interposed, and you say, "I cannot do what I believe to be right, but I do desire to fear God's name." Hold on to that, dear Brother, dear Sister, and do all that you can do, and God will enlarge the place of your footsteps, by-and-by!

I have known servants who could not get out to the House of God and other persons placed in positions in the family where they could not enjoy the means of Grace, and persons living in villages where they have been obliged, if they went to any place of worship at all, to go where the Gospel was not preached. If that is your case, you may well say that you desire to fear God's name and want more liberty and greater scope. And though you may, at this present moment, be like Naaman the Syrian, and have to bow in the house of Rimmon, I wish you would not do it—I wish you would give up Rimmon and his house! But, still, with all the imperfections with which your circumstances surround you, I know some of you, who are God's true children, are in a dreadful fix and do not know what to do. I want to include you within the lines of those whom God will bless so long as you desire to fear His name.

Cry mightily to God about it and He will yet bring you better days. The Apostle Paul said that if a man who was a slave was converted to God, and he could not lawfully get out of his position, he could glorify God as a slave. And you may do the same wherever your lot may be cast. Make it the subject of prayer that you may be able to serve God whatever happens. Perhaps you dwell in Mesech. When you go home tonight, you cannot gather at the family altar, you cannot mention Christ's name in the house where you live without setting blasphemous tongues going, directly. Let it be your desire that God will place you in other circumstances—and if He does, then carry out what you desire. Do not let the associations in which you are placed cause your piety to degenerate, lest, when God gives you enlargement, you should not have an enlarged heart at the same time and continue to live as you are now when there will be no excuse for your doing so!

To close my discourse, let me say that the very highest form of devotion we can ever reach is included in the description in the text, "Your servants who desire to fear Your name," for I find that some of our translators and expositors read it, "who delight to fear Your name." There is not much variation in it, after all, because to desire to fear God's name is much the same thing as doing it as a matter of delight. Come, Beloved, God grant that we may all get to be of that number who delight to fear His name! May we be of those to whom it is a pleasure and a joy to be the soldiers of the Cross, the followers of the Lamb—to whom prayer is recreation, to whom praise is Paradise, to whom the service of God is Heaven! We are not now slaves, but happy children who delight in God, and joy in Him! And we can sing with our sacred poet—

"I need not go abroad for joys, I have a feast at home! My sighs are turned into songs, My heart has ceased to roam. Down from above the blessed Dove Is come into my breast, To witness Your eternal love, And give my spirit rest."

O yes, we delight to fear God! Our misery is that we cannot fear Him as we would. Our sorrow is if we ever fall into sin. A child of God cannot find pleasure there. He may be led into sin, but he will be whipped for it, and he will whip himself for it. He will groan, and cry, and sigh to think how wrong he was to go astray. But his greatest delight is in the Law of the Lord and in His Law does he meditate day and night.

Thus I have shown you that this description comprehends all ranges and grades of Grace. God grant that we may all come in under the description, and may we then take care to present our prayers with those of all who fear God's name. Be at the Prayer Meetings whenever you can and I beg you to pray at home, and to join the people of God wherever prayer is offered, even though some of you, at present, only desire to fear His name. And may the Lord bless you all, for His dear name's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Nehemiah 1:1-11.

Verses 1, 2. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came

to pass in the month, Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan, the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. Nehemiah was in a high office in Shushan, the palace of King Artaxerxes, but his heart was at Jerusalem. He therefore remembered the very date, "in the month Chislev," when some of his brethren came from Judah to visit him, for he was more interested in their coming than in any transaction of the court in which he was, for a while, employed. Observe the subject of this good man's conversation—"I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem." Whenever Christian people meet together, they ought to make the subject of their mutual discourse an enquiry as to the progress of the Kingdom of God in the place where they respectively dwell. If you have come up from the country, we want you to tell us about the work of God in your village, or in the town to which you reside—are there many conversions there? We also will tell you about the work in London. Thus should Christian brethren commune with one another and ask concerning Christ's Kingdom among men, and the progress that His Gospel is making.

3. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. They gave a correct description of the real state of affairs in Jerusalem. They did not color it, but they stated the actual facts. It is well, sometimes, to tell our Christian brethren about the low estate of Zion. Where things are not prospering as they should, it is best to say so, and not to try to smother up the truth and give a false report.

4. And it came to pass, where I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven, This good man was greatly affected by the sad news which he heard. He was not indifferent to the condition of his countrymen. He did not say, "We are getting on very well here. I am a Jew and I am in the palace of Artaxerxes, but I cannot do anything to help my Brothers and Sisters. You, who are away there at Jerusalem, must do the best you can." No. Nehemiah said no such thing! He looked upon himself as being part and parcel of the whole Jewish race, just as every true Believer should regard all Christians as being near akin to himself. We are not 20 churches, Brothers and Sisters, nor two hundred—our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head, and we are members of that one body which is His Church. We ought to sympathize with all who are in Christ and, especially, if the cause of God is not prospering in any place, we should do as Nehemiah did—he wept, and mourned, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven. He tells us what he said in his prayer. These are, as it were, the shorthand notes of his supplication.

5, 6. And said, I beseech You, O LORD God of Heaven, the great and terrible God that keeps covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments: let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant, which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You: both I and my father's house have sinned. This is quite a model prayer. How earnest it is and how truthful! Nehemiah recognizes the terrible side of God's Character as well as His mercifulness. He evidently had right views of God. Some people try to explain away all the passages of Scripture which represent God as a terrible God. Whether they know it or not, they will find this course of action to be a great source of weakness to them in dealing with the ungodly. Nehemiah calls Jehovah "the great and terrible God," but he adds, "that keeps covenant and mercy for them that love Him." He tells us that he prayed before the Lord day and night. Of course he had to attend to his daily duties, so that he could not always be upon his knees, but his heart was praying even while he was engaged with other matters. And as often as he could, he retired to his room, so that he might cry out unto God. Please observe that he makes a confession of "the sins of the children of Israel." It is our duty as Christians, as it were, to take the great load of the sins of the nation upon ourselves and to make confession of them before God. If the guilty ones will not repent, we must repent for them. If they will not confess their sins, we must confess their sins as though we stood in their place. Nehemiah very pathetically says, "and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You." And then coming still more closely home, he adds, "both I and my father's house have sinned."

7-9. We have dealt very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, I beseech You, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: but if you turn unto Me, and keep My commandments, and do

them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost parts of the heavens, yet will I gather them from there, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there. He quotes the Covenant and he pleads the promise of Jehovah! Now, there is no means of getting a man to do us a favor so powerful as this, to quote his own promise. "You said You would do it." So, here Nehemiah says, "Remember, I beseech You, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses."

10-11. Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I beseech You, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who desire to fear Your name. And prosper, I pray You, Your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. That is, in the sight of King Artaxerxes to whom he was about to speak.

11. For I was the king's cupbearer. He counts this as a high privilege, that he would be able to speak for his people to the great king who would give him the opportunity to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—63 (Son_3:1-11), 116 (Son_3:1-11),

39.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 6

Nehemiah 2:4 #1390 - Brief-Silent Prayer

BRIEF, SILENT PRAYER

NO. 1390

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 9, 1877,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"So I prayed to the God of Heaven."

Nehemiah 2:4.

Nehemiah had made inquiry as to the state of the city of Jerusalem and the tidings he heard caused him bitter grief. "Why should not my countenance be sad," he said, "when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers, lies waste and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" He could not endure that it should be a mere ruinous heap—that city which was once beautiful and the joy of the whole earth! Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak to other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise.

No, it occurred to him that he should do something himself. This is just the way that practical men start a matter. The unpractical will plan, arrange and speculate about what may be done, but the genuine, thoroughgoing lover of Zion puts this question to himself—"What can you do? Nehemiah, what can you, yourself, do? Come, it has to be done, and you are the man that is to do it—at least, to do your share. What can you do?" Coming so far, he resolved to set apart a time for prayer. It never left his thoughts for nearly four months! Day and night Jerusalem seemed written on his heart, as if the name was painted on his eyeballs. He could only see Jerusalem. When he slept he dreamed about Jerusalem. When he woke, the first thought was, "Poor Jerusalem!" and before he fell asleep again his evening prayer was for the ruined walls of Jerusalem.

The man of one thing, you know, is a terrible man—and when one single passion has absorbed the whole of his manhood, something will be sure to come of it. Depend upon that. The desire of his heart will develop into some open demonstration, especially if he talks the matter over with God in prayer. Something did come of this. Before long Nehemiah had an opportunity. Men of God, if you want to serve God and cannot find the propitious occasion, wait awhile in prayer and your opportunity will break on your path like a sunbeam! There was never a true and valiant heart that failed to find a fitting sphere somewhere or other in God's service. Every diligent laborer is needed in some part of His vineyard. You may have to linger. You may seem as if you stood in the market idle because your Master would not engage you, but wait there in prayer—and with your heart boiling over with a warm purpose—your chance will come.

The hour will need its man and if you are ready, you, as a man, shall not be without your hour. God sent Nehemiah an opportunity. That opportunity came, 'tis true, in a way which he could not have expected. It came through his own sadness of heart. This matter preyed upon his mind till he began to look exceedingly unhappy. I cannot tell whether others noticed it, but the king whom he served, when he went into court with the royal goblet, noticed the distress on the cupbearer's countenance and said to him, "Why is your countenance sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart."

Nehemiah little knew that his prayer was making the occasion for him. The prayer was registering itself upon his face. His fasting was making its marks upon his visage and, though he did not know it, he was, in that way, preparing the opportunity for himself when he went in before the king. But you see, when the opportunity did come, there was trouble with it, for he says, "I was very sore afraid." You want to serve God, young man. You want to be at work. Perhaps you do not know what that work involves. It is not all pleasure. You are longing for the battle, young soldier—you have not smelled powder, yet, and when you have been in a battle and have had a few cuts, or a bullet or two have pierced you—you may not feel quite so eager for the fray!

Yet the courageous man sets those things aside and is ready to serve his country or his sovereign. And so the courageous Christian puts all difficulty aside and he is ready to serve his comrades and his God, cost what it may! What if I should be sore afraid? Yet so let it be, my God, if thus there shall be an opportunity to seek and to secure the welfare of Jerusalem for Your servant who longs to promote it with all his heart. Thus have we traced Nehemiah up to the particular point where our text concerns him. The king, Artaxerxes, having asked him why he was sad, he had an opportunity of telling him that the city of his fathers was a ruin. Thereupon the king asks him what he really wishes. By the manner of the question he would seem to imply an assurance that he means to help Nehemiah.

And here we are somewhat surprised to find that instead of promptly answering the king—the answer is not given immediately—an incident occurs, a fact is related. Though he was a man who had lately given himself up to prayer and fasting, this little parenthesis occurs—"So I prayed to the God of Heaven." My preamble leads up to this parenthesis. Upon this prayer I propose to preach. The fact that Nehemiah prayed challenges attention! He had been asked a question by his sovereign. The proper thing, you would suppose, was to answer it. Not so. Before he answered, he prayed to the God of Heaven. I do not suppose the king noticed the pause. Probably the interval was not long enough to be noticed, but it was long enough for God to notice it—long enough for Nehemiah to have sought and have obtained guidance from God as to how to frame his answer to the king.

Are you not surprised to find a man of God having time to pray to God between a question and an answer? Yet Nehemiah found that time. We are the more astonished at his praying because he was so evidently perturbed in mind, for, according to the second verse, he was very afraid. When you are fluttered and put out, you may forget to pray. Do you not, some of you, account it a valid excuse for omitting your ordinary devotion? At least, if anyone had said to you, "You did not pray when you were about that business," you would have replied, "How could I? There was a question that I was obliged to answer. I dared not hesitate. It was a king that asked it. I was in a state of confusion. I really was so distressed and terrified that I was not master of my own emotions. I

hardly knew what I did. If I did not pray, surely the omission may be overlooked. I was in a state of wild alarm."

Nehemiah, however, felt that if he was alarmed, it was a reason for praying, not for forgetting to pray! So habitually was he in communion with God, that as soon as he found himself in a dilemma, he flew away to God, just as the dove would fly to hide herself in the clefts of the rock. His prayer was the more remarkable on this occasion because he must have felt very eager about his objective. The king asks him what it is he needs and his whole heart is set upon building up Jerusalem. Are you not surprised that he did not at once say, "O king, live forever! I long to build up Jerusalem's walls. Give me all the help you can"? But no, eager as he was to pounce upon the desired objective, he withdraws his hand until it is said, "So I prayed to the God of Heaven."

I confess I admire him! I desire, also, to imitate him. I would that every Christian's heart might have just that holy caution that did not permit him to make such haste as to find ill-speed. "Prayer and provender hinder no man's journey." Certainly, when the desire of our heart is close before us, we are anxious to seize it. But we shall be all the surer of getting the bird we spy in the bush to be a bird we grasp in the hand if we quietly pause, lift up our heart and pray the God of Heaven! It is all the more surprising that he should have deliberately prayed just then because he had been already praying for the past three or four months concerning the same matter. Some of us would have said, "That is the thing I have been praying for—now all I have to do is to take it and use it! Why pray any more? After all, my midnight tears and daily cries, and setting myself apart by fasting to cry unto the God of Heaven—after such an anxious conference, surely, at last, the answer has come! What is to be done but to take the good that God provides me and rejoice in it?"

But no, you will always find that the man who has prayed much is the man who prays more. "For unto everyone that has, shall be given, and he shall have abundance." If you do but know the sweet art of prayer, you are the man that will be often engaged in it. If you are familiar with the Mercy Seat, you will constantly visit it—

"For who that knows the power of prayer But wishes to be often there?"

Although Nehemiah had been praying all this while, he nevertheless must offer another petition. "So I prayed to the God of Heaven." One thing more is worth remembering, namely that he was in a king's palace and in the palace of a heathen king, too—and he was in the very act of handing up to the king a goblet of wine. He was fulfilling his part in the state festival, I doubt not, among the glare of lamps and the glitter of gold and silver. He was in the midst of princes and peers of the realm. Or even if it were a private festival with the king and queen only, yet still men generally feel so impressed on such occasions with the responsibility of their high position that they are apt to forget prayer.

But this devout Israelite, at such a time and in such a place, when he stands at the king's foot to hold up to him the golden goblet, refrains from answering the king's question until first he has prayed to the God of Heaven! There are the facts and I think that seems to prompt further inquiry. So we pass on to observe the manner of this prayer. Well, very briefly, it was what we call a brief prayer—prayer which, as it were, hurls a dart and then it is done. It was not the prayer which stands knocking at Mercy's door—knock, knock, knock—but it was the concentration of many knocks into one. It was begun and completed, as it were, with one stroke! This brief prayer I desire

to commend to you as among the very best forms of prayer.

Notice how very short it must have been. It was introduced—slipped in—sandwiched in between the king's question and Nehemiah's answer. And, as I have already said, I do not suppose it took up any time at all that was appreciable—scarcely a second. Most likely the king never observed any kind of pause or hesitation, for Nehemiah was in such a state of alarm at the question that I am persuaded he did not allow any demur or vacillation to appear. The prayer must have been offered like an electric flash, very rapidly, indeed! In certain states of strong excitement it is wonderful how much the mind gets through in a short time. You may, perhaps, have dreamed and your dream occupied, to your idea, an hour or two at the very least. Yet it is probably—no, I think certain—that all dreaming is done at the moment you awake. You never dreamed at all when you were asleep—it was just in that instant when you awoke that the whole of it went through your mind.

As drowning men, when rescued and recovered, have been heard to say that while they were sinking they say the whole panorama of their lives pass before them in a few seconds, so the mind must be capable of accomplishing much in a brief space of time. Thus the prayer was presented like the blinking of an eye—it was done intuitively, yet it was done—and it proved to be a prayer that prevailed with God. We know, also, that it must have been a silent prayer and not merely silent as to sounds but silent as to any outward signs—perfectly secret. Artaxerxes never knew that Nehemiah prayed, though he stood, probably, within a yard of him. He did not even move his lips as Hannah did, nor did he deem it right, even, to close his eyes. The prayer was strictly within himself offered to God.

As in the innermost shrine of the Temple—in the Holy of Holies of his own secret soul—there did he pray. Short and silent was the prayer. It was a prayer on the spot. He did not go to his chamber, as Daniel did, and open the window. Daniel was right, but this was a different occasion. Nehemiah could not have been permitted to retire from the palace just then. He did not even turn his face to the wall or seek a corner of the apartment. No, but then and there, with the cup in his hand, he prayed unto the God of Heaven—and then answered the question of the king. I have no doubt from the very wording of the text that it was a very intense and direct prayer. He says, "So I prayed to the God of Heaven." That was Nehemiah's favorite name of God—the God of Heaven.

He knew to whom he was praying. He did not draw a bow at a venture and shoot his prayers anyway, but he prayed to the God of Heaven—a right straight prayer to God for the thing he needed—and his prayer sped, though it occupied less, perhaps, than a second of time. It was a prayer of a remarkable kind. I know it was so, because Nehemiah never forgot that he prayed it. I have prayed hundreds of times—thousands of times—and not remembered any particulars, afterwards, either as to the occasion that prompted or the emotions that excited me. But there are one or two prayers in my life that I can never forget. I have not jotted them down in a diary, but I remember when I prayed, because the time was so special and the prayer was so intense—and the answer to it was so remarkable!

Now, Nehemiah's prayer was never, never erased from his memory. And when these words of history were written down he wrote that down. "So I prayed to the God of Heaven"—a little bit of a prayer pushed in edgeways between a question and an answer—a mere fragment of devotion, as it seemed, and yet so important that it is put down in a historical document as a part of the history

of the restitution and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem! And it was a link in the circumstances which led up to that event of the most important character. Nehemiah felt it to be so and, therefore, he notes the record—"So I prayed to the God of Heaven."

Now, Beloved Friends, I come, in the third place, to recommend to you this excellent style of praying. I shall speak mainly to the children of God—to you that have faith in God. I beg you often, no, I would ask you always to use this method of brief, silent prayer. And I would to God, also, that some here who have never prayed before would offer a brief, silent prayer to the God of Heaven before they leave this house—that a short but fervent petition, something like that of the publican in the temple, might go up from you—"God be merciful to me, a sinner."

To deal with this matter practically, then, it is the duty and privilege of every Christian to have set times of prayer. I cannot understand a man's keeping up the vitality of godliness unless he regularly retires for prayer, morning and evening at the very least. Daniel prayed three times a day and David says, "Seven times a day will I praise You." It is good for your hearts, good for your memory, good for your moral consistency that you should hedge about certain portions of time and say, "These belong to God. I shall do business with God at such-and-such a time and try to be as punctual to my hours with Him as I should be if I made an engagement to meet a friend."

When Sir Thomas Abney was Lord Mayor of London, the banquet somewhat troubled him, for Sir Thomas always had prayer with his family at a certain time. The difficulty was how to leave the banquet to keep up family devotion. But so important did he consider it that he vacated his chair, saying to a person near that he had a special engagement with a dear Friend which he must keep. And he did keep it and returned, again, to his place, none of the company being the wiser, but he himself being all the better for observing his habit of worship!

But now, having urged the importance of such habitual piety, I want to impress on you the value of another sort of prayer—namely, the short, brief, quick, frequent prayers of which Nehemiah gives us a specimen. And I recommend this because it hinders no engagement and occupies no time. You may be measuring off your calicoes, or weighing your groceries, or you may be casting up an account and between the items you may say, "Lord, help me." You may breathe a prayer to Heaven and say, "Lord, keep me." It will take no time. It is one great advantage to persons who are hard pressed in business that such prayers as these will not, in the slightest degree, incapacitate them from attending to the business they may have in hand!

It requires you to go to no particular place. You can stand where you are, ride in a cab, walk along the streets, be the bottom sawyer in a saw pit, or the top one and yet pray just as well such prayers as these. No altar, no Church, no so-called sacred place is needed! Wherever you are, just a little prayer as that will reach the ear of God and win a blessing. Such a prayer as that can be offered anywhere, under any circumstances. I do not know in what condition a man could be in which he might not offer some such prayer as that. On the land, or on the sea, in sickness or in health, amidst losses or gains, great reverses or good returns, still might he breathe his soul in short, quick sentences to God! The advantage of such a way of praying is that you can pray often and pray always. If you must prolong your prayer for a quarter of an hour you might possibly be unable to spare the time, but if it only needs a quarter of a minute, why, then, it may come again and again and again and again—a hundred times a day!

The habit of prayer is blessed, but the spirit of prayer is better. And the spirit of prayer it is which is the mother of these brief, silent prayers and, therefore, do I like them because she is a plentiful mother. Many times in a day may we speak with the Lord our God. Such prayer may be suggested by all sorts of surroundings. I remember a poor man once paying me a compliment which I highly valued at the time. He was lying in a hospital and when I called to see him he said, "I heard you for some years, and now whatever I look at seems to remind me of something or other that you said, and it comes back to me as fresh as when I first heard it." Well, now, he that knows how to pray brief prayers will find everything about him helping him to the sacred habit! Is it a beautiful landscape? Say, "Blessed be God who has strewn these treasures of form and color through the world, to cheer the sight and gladden the heart."

Are you in doleful darkness and is it a foggy day? Say, "Lighten my darkness, O Lord." Are you in the midst of company? You will be reminded to pray, "Lord, keep the door of my lips." Are you quite alone? Then you can say, "Let me not be alone, but be You with me, Father." The putting on of your clothes, the sitting at the breakfast table, the getting into the conveyance, the walking the streets, the opening of your ledger, the putting up of your shutters—everything may suggest such prayer as that which I am trying to describe if you are but in the right frame of mind for offering it.

These prayers are commendable because they are truly spiritual. Wordy prayers may, also, be windy prayers! There is much of praying by book that has nothing whatever to recommend it. Pray with your heart, not with your hands. Or, if you would lift hands in prayer, let them be your own hands, not another man's. The prayers that come leaping out of the soul—the gust of strong emotion, fervent desire, lively faith—these are the truly spiritual prayers and no prayers but spiritual prayers will God accept. This kind of prayer is free from any suspicion that it is prompted by the corrupt motive of being offered to please men. They cannot say that the secret prayers of our soul are presented with any view to our own praise, for no man knows that we are praying at all! Therefore do I commend such prayers to you and hope that you may abound in them.

There have been hypocrites that have prayed by the hour. I doubt not there are hypocrites as regular at their devotions as the angels are before the Throne of God—and yet there is no life, no spirit, no acceptance in their pretentious homage! But he that prays brief prayers—whose heart talks with God—he is no hypocrite! There is a reality, force and life about his prayers. Brief, silent prayers are of great use to us. Oftentimes they check us. Bad-tempered people, if you were always to pray just a little before you let angry expressions fly from your lips, why many times you would not say those naughty words at all! They advised a good woman to take a glass of water and hold some of it in her mouth five minutes before she scolded her husband. I dare say it was not a bad recipe, but if, instead of practicing that little eccentricity, she would just breathe a short prayer to God it would certainly be more effectual and far more Scriptural.

I can recommend it as a valuable prescription for the hasty and the peevish—for all who are quick to take offense and slow to forgive insult or injury. When in business you are about to close in with an offer about the propriety of which you have a little doubt, or a positive scruple, such a prayer as, "Guide me, good Lord" would often keep you back from doing what you will afterwards regret. The habit of offering these brief prayers would, also, check your confidence in yourself. It would show your dependence upon God. It would keep you from getting worldly. It would be like sweet perfume burnt in the chamber of your soul to keep away the fever of the world from your heart.

Besides, this type of prayers actually bring us blessings from Heaven. Brief prayers, as in the case of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham. As in the case of Jacob when he said, even in dying, "I have waited for Your salvation, O God"—prayers such as Moses offered when we do not read that he prayed at all and yet God said to him, "Why cry you unto Me?" And brief prayers such as David frequently presented—these were all successful with the Most High. Therefore abound in them, for God loves to encourage and to answer them! I might thus keep on recommending brief prayer, but I will say only one more thing in its favor.

I believe it is very suitable to some persons of a peculiar temperament who could not pray for a long time to save their lives. Their minds are rapid and quick. Well, time is not an element in the business—God does not hear us because of the length of our prayer—but because of the sincerity of it. Prayer is not to be measured by the yard, nor weighed by the pound. It is the might and force of it—the truth and reality of it—the energy and the intensity of it. You that are either of so little a mind or of so quick a mind that you cannot use many words or continue long to think of one thing, it should be to your comfort that brief prayers are acceptable.

And it may be, dear Friend, that you are in a condition of body in which you cannot pray any other way. A headache such as some people are frequently affected with the major part of their lives—a state of body which only the physician can explain to you—might prevent the mind from concentrating itself long upon one subject. Then it is refreshing to be able again and again and again—50 or a hundred times a day—to address one's self to God in short, quick sentences, the soul being all on fire. This is a blessed style of praying!

Now, I conclude by mentioning a few of the times when I think we ought to resort to this practice of brief prayer. Mr. Rowland Hill was a remarkable man for the depth of his piety, but when I asked at Wottonunder-Edge for his study, though I rather pressed the question, I did not obtain a satisfactory reply. At length the good minister said, "The fact is, we never found any. Mr. Hill used to study in the garden, in the parlor, in the bedroom, in the streets, in the woods, anywhere." "But where did he retire for prayer?" They said they supposed it was in his chamber, but that he was always praying—that it did not matter where he was, the good old man was always praying! It seemed as if his whole life, though he spent it in the midst of his fellow men doing good, was passed in perpetual prayer!

You know the story of his being in Walworth, at Mr. George Clayton's chapel, and of his being seen in the aisles after everybody was gone, while he was waiting for his coachman. There was the old man toddling up and down the aisles, and as someone listened, he heard him singing to himself—

"And when I shall die, receive me I'll cry, For Jesus has loved me, I cannot tell why. But this thing I find, we two are so joined, He won't be in Heaven and leave me behind."

And with such rhymes and ditties, and choice words, he would occupy every moment of his life! He has been known to stand in the Blackfriars' road with his hands under his coat tails, looking in a shop window, and if you listened you might soon perceive that he was breathing out his soul before God! He had got into a constant state of prayer! I believe it is the best condition in which a man can be—praying always, praying without ceasing, always drawing near to God with these brief prayers.

But if I must give you a selection of suitable times I should mention such as these. Whenever you have a great joy, cry, "Lord, make this a real blessing to me." Do not exclaim with others, "Am I not a lucky fellow?" but say, "Lord, give me more Grace and more gratitude, now that You do multiply Your favors." When you have got any arduous undertaking on hand or a heavy piece of business, do not touch it till you have breathed your soul out in a short prayer. When you have a difficulty before you and you are seriously perplexed. When business has got into a tangle or a confession which you cannot unravel or arrange, breathe a prayer! It need not occupy a minute, but it is wonderful how many snarls come loose after just a word of prayer.

Are the children particularly troublesome to you, good woman? Do you seem as if your patience was almost worn out with the worry and harassment? Now for a brief prayer! You will manage them all the better and you will bear with their naughty tempers all the more quietly. At any rate your own mind will be the less ruffled. Do you think that there is a temptation before you? Do you begin to suspect that somebody is plotting against you? Now for a prayer. "Lead me in a plain path because of my enemies." Are you at work at the bench, or in a shop, or a warehouse where lewd conversation and shameful blasphemies assail your ears? Now for a short prayer! Have you noticed some sin that grieves you? Let it move you to prayer! These things ought to remind you to pray.

I believe the devil would not let people swear so much if Christian people always prayed every time they heard an oath. He would then see it did not pay. Their blasphemies might somewhat be hushed if they provoked us to supplication! Do you feel your own heart going off the lines? Does sin begin to fascinate you? Now for a prayer—a warm, earnest, passionate cry, "Lord, hold me up!" Did you see something with your eyes and did that infect your heart? Do you feel as if "your feet were almost gone and your steps had well near slipped?" Now for a prayer—"Hold me, Lord, by my right hand." Has something quite unlooked-for happened? Has a friend treated you badly? Then, like David, say, "Lord, put to nothing the counsel of Ahithophel."

Breathe a prayer now! Are you anxious to do some good? Be sure to have prayer over it. Do you mean to speak to that young man about his soul? Pray first, Brothers and Sisters. Do you mean to address yourself to the members of your class and write them a letter this week about their spiritual welfare? Pray over every line, Brothers and Sisters. It is always good to have praying going on while you are talking about Christ! I always find I can preach better if I can pray while I am preaching. And the mind is very remarkable in its activities. It can be praying while it is studying— it can be looking up to God while it is talking to man! And there can be one hand held up to receive supplies from God while the other hand is dealing out the same supplies which He is pleased to give! Pray as long as you live! Pray when you are in great pain—the sharper the pang—the more urgent and importunate should your cry to God be. And when the shadow of death gathers round you and strange feelings flush or chill you, and plainly tell that you near the journey's end, then pray! Oh that is a time for brief prayer! Short and pithy prayers like this— "Hide not Your face from me, O Lord." Or this, "Be not far from me, O God" will doubtless suit you. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," were the thrilling words of Stephen in his extremity! And "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit," were the words that your Master, Himself, uttered just before He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. You may well take up the same strain and imitate Him.

These thoughts and counsels are so exclusively addressed to the saints and faithful Brothers and Sisters in Christ that you will be prone to ask. "Is not there anything to be said to the unconverted?" Well, whatever has been spoken in their hearing may be used by them for their own benefit. Now let me address myself to you as pointedly as I can. Though you are not saved, yet you must not say, "I cannot pray." Why, if prayer is so simple, what excuse can you have for neglecting it? It needs no measurable space of time. Such prayers as these, God will hear, and you have, all of you, the ability and opportunity to think and to express them if you have only that elementary faith in God which believes "that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Cornelius had, I suppose, got about as far as this when he was admonished by the angel to send for Peter, who preached to him peace by Jesus Christ to the conversion of his soul! Is there such a strange being in the Tabernacle as a man or woman that never prays? How shall I expostulate with you? May I steal a passage from a living poet who, though he has contributed nothing to our hymn books, hums a note so suited to my purpose and so pleasant to my ear that I like to quote it—

"More things are worked by prayer Than this world dreams of. Therefore let your voice Rise like a fountain, flowing night and day! For what are men better than sheep or goats, That nourish a blind life within the brain, If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer, Both for themselves and those who call them friend? For so the whole round world is every way Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

I do not suspect there is a creature here who never prays because people generally pray to somebody or other. The man that never prays to God such prayers as he ought, prays to God such prayers as he ought not! It is an awful thing when a man asks God to damn him—and yet there are persons that do that! Suppose He were to hear you? He is a prayerhearing God!

If I address one profane swearer here I would like to put this matter clearly to him. Were the Almighty to hear you—if your eyes were blinded and your tongue were struck dumb while you were uttering a wild imprecation—how would you bear the sudden judgment on your impious speech? If some of those prayers of yours were answered for yourself—and if some that you have offered in your passion for your wife and for your child were fulfilled to their hurt and your distraction—what an awful thing it would be!

Well, God does answer prayer, and one of these days He may answer your prayers to your shame and everlasting confusion. Would not it be well now, before you leave your seat, to pray, "Lord, have mercy upon me. Lord, save me. Lord, change my heart. Lord, give me to believe in Christ. Lord, give me now an interest in the precious blood of Jesus. Lord, save me now"? Will not each one of you breathe such a prayer as that? May the Holy Spirit lead you to do so! And if you once begin to pray aright I am not afraid that you will never leave off, for there is a something that holds the soul fast in real prayer.

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END OF VOLUME 23

Chapter 7

Nehemiah 2:12 #3364 - Surveying the Field

SURVEYING THE FIELD

NO. 3364

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JULY 24, 1913.

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"And I arose in the night, I, and some few men with me: neither told I

any man what God had put into my heart to do at Jerusalem:

neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon."

Nehemiah 2:12.

NEHEMIAH, it seems, prepared himself for action by taking a survey of the necessities of the case. Although he lived before our Savior's day, he certainly acted upon one of our Savior's maxims about counting the cost, lest, after having begun to build, we should not be able to finish. I like to picture to myself that man of God going by moonlight round all the waste places of the city, compelled here and there to dismount by reason of rubbish, clambering over the fallen stones, leaping, sometimes, with agility from crag to crag of the city's walls—getting in his mind a clear idea of all the city's desolation—and feeling in his heart the pressing, heavy weight and burden of the responsibility which God had thrust upon him. If he had begun his work carelessly and thoughtlessly, he might have failed in it, but having begun months before with prayer, having been guided by Providence so far, yet even now the very first step he must take is a personal survey of the work and a thorough personal acquaintance with the necessities of the case.

Now, I know that there are here, on the weeknight at the service, many who love the Master and are anxious to do something in His cause. And I thought I might very profitably commend to them the example of Nehemiah in this respect. We shall consider Nehemiah, then, first as a fine example to those who would seek the good of the Church at large. Secondly, a pattern to any of us laboring in any one distinct sphere. And thirdly, I think I may apply the same principle in reference to the personal work which is being done in our own hearts. And before we conclude our meditation, I may ask you to take a quiet ride around the desolations of your own spirit and so get a clear view of what must be done before you shall become a city inhabited by God to His praise and Glory! First, then, dear Friends, I suppose I have here, as Nehemiah had, a few men and women earnest, resolved—disinterested men and women who are willing—

I. TO SEEK THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH, OF THE CHURCH AT LARGE.

Such men will allow the word of exhortation when I say to them, first, you and I are in the service of the great Church of God and we must, like Nehemiah, firmly resolve that we will do it. Our heart must be set upon this thing. It must not be with us a mere fancy which we have taken up as we might have taken up any other. It must not even be of a spasmodic kind, but our heart must be set towards the Church of God because it is the home of our love, the place of our birth, the bride of Christ, the hope of the world, the pillar and ground of the Truth of God! If we have not such a view of the work to be done and a resolve that it shall be done— we certainly shall not succeed in it.

And, my Brothers and Sisters, we must, like Nehemiah, be quite clear that we have no sinister motives, no selfish ends to be answered! Nehemiah was in a high and good position as chamberlain or cup-bearer to the king, but he gave up that and left Shushan to the desolations of Jerusalem—a long and toilsome journey. Even when the city was built, though the place was the beloved of his heart, yet he does not seem to have had any prospect of remaining in it, for the king had set him a time for his return. And though he did stay there 12 years, yet it must have been by successive furloughs that he obtained this absence from the palace, so that he had no selfish objective whatever. If the city were built, he would not dwell in it. And if the Temple-glories were restored once more, he would but once look upon them and then return again to the city of his employment and to the palace of the alien king at Shushan.

God will not bless us to the Christian Church if we want to make a party to ourselves, or to take to ourselves the leadership. He will not acknowledge us in the work if we are merely seeking our own esteem, good name and fame under cover of a zeal for righteousness and for the Glory of God. No! There must be a resolution, but the resolution must be based on something better than the objectives of personal aggrandizement. There must be a devotion to God and a complete and perfect dedication and consecration of our souls to the good of the Church and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Supposing that we have already, by Divine Grace, been called into such a condition? Then, further, we must learn, like Nehemiah, the art of waiting. He first prayed about Jerusalem, but he did not cease to hope. And when he came to the holy, though wasted city, he did not rush to the work at once, as our hot blood too often suggests to us to do. He knew that "raw haste" was "half-sister to delay." He was there three whole days in which nothing was attempted. He did not seize a trowel in his hand and hasten at once to work, letting other people come and join him if they pleased, but he rode alone all round the walls to inspect the damage and to estimate the cost in sacrifice and toil to repair it. We must be eager to labor, but we must also learn to wait. God's servants will find that their Master does not always give them instant and immediate success, but that He is often pleased to glorify Himself by testing their faith. If you are a soldier, you must not expect to be always in the fight, but must sometimes lie, perhaps for tedious days and even weary months, in the trenches, just as our army had to lie before Sebastopol—worn out with waiting, anxiously wishing for the order to charge. So our heavenly Lord, our great Captain, sometimes teaches us patience, making us wait until the time shall come to do and dare. Fellow Christian, young man or aged Believer, I am persuaded you will need to have in the midst of your toil for Jesus, to hear the word, "You must wait. Trust in the Lord and wait patiently for Him."

But after he had waited, Nehemiah set a further example to us. He felt that he could act alone. Throughout the whole Book of Nehemiah you are struck with the singleness of the man and the potency of his individuality. He is quite prepared, if no one else will rise up to serve God, to serve Him by himself! And yet at the same time he never refuses the help of others. "And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem." He who would serve God to any purpose must be willing to serve Him all alone. If you cannot stand the brunt of being forsaken, you will scarcely do to be a soldier of the Cross. Those whom Christ will greatly use must learn to be misunderstood, to be misrepresented by their Brothers and Sisters and in their more daring projects to be looked upon as being perfectly beside themselves. Yet they must count this among the cost and to be still prepared to stand to their work. Paul says, "At my first answer, no man stood with me, but"—sweet and mighty encouragement to your faith if you are alone!—"nevertheless, the Lord stood with me." Now, I think we shall find that it is not easy to couple the independence of a noble mind with the willingness to accept help from the few and the feeble, who at the very first are willing to gather around you. A man is apt to say, "No! I can act alone. These will but hamper me." And yet let us always remember that, though God has usually worked by one man, and though almost all the great wonders of the olden times were accomplished by personal courage and were feats of personal faith, yet at the same time He has frequently been pleased to ally to the one man a company of others, without whom the one man would have been feeble, indeed! Take the case of Gideon. We are told of "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and, of course, Gideon leads the van, but what would Gideon have done without the men that lapped? Those few and feeble folk with their pitchers and their torches must go with Gideon—and God will bless Gideon through them—and the world through the man and those who follow him! We must be willing, therefore, to take any help God may offer to us, and not be very particular about what that help is, so long as we are assured that God has sent it to us. We must be willing to lay aside our individual and sole reliance to come down from the high place of personal independence and work side by side with others, if it is the Lord's will.

Then, further, my Brothers and Sisters, if you and I should now have in our minds some great work for God, we must be quite sure that we do not indulge in any boasting. Oh, great things are going to be done! Oh, the wonderful prospectuses that some people have brought out of wondrous things that were going to regenerate the world—and the only

Volume 59 3purpose they have served up to now has been to increase the work in some printing office! Nothing else has come from many of them. And you know there are people who really, by their own talk, should have turned the world upside down by now, but they have not done anything of the sort as yet. Perhaps the time may not yet have come, but with them it seems as if it never will come or could come! Nehemiah says, "Neither told I any man what my God had put into my heart to do at Jerusalem." You will often find it best not to commit your plans to others. If you want to serve God, go and do it and then let other people find it out afterwards. You have no need to tell what you are going to do and, I may add, there is no need for your telling what you have done, for very, very frequently God withdraws Himself when we boast of what is being done. One of the greatest injuries to the revival in the North of Ireland a few years ago was that it was made to be a kind of show thing and people said, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts," and after awhile the Glory departed—not because the workers on the spot, themselves, desired any such

vainglorying, but because some who were not of a like spirit gave occasion to the flesh in this respect. We must mind and take care that when we work for God, we keep always before us that we are not working as unto men and do not need men's praise, but unto the Lord is the offering presented and the Lord alone shall have it!

I have not yet come to this midnight ride of Nehemiah's, but I think it important to mention that he is again a pattern to us in our work for the Church of God in that he was absolutely sure that what he was doing was right. He speaks of the thoughts and longings that he had as something which God had put into his heart to do. Get quite clear and assured of that, my Brothers and Sisters, or else go home. If you are not certain that the work you are about was given to you of God, and as positively and distinctly given to you as the work was given to Isaiah when the seraph touched his lips with the live coal from off the altar, you have no business to enter upon the work at all, for your whole strength will lie in a full conviction that your Master has sent you.

And now having brought the man before you, let me exhort you, dear Brothers and Sisters, if you long for the good of the Church of God, to quietly take a walk round about her. Count her towers. Mark her palaces and her bulwarks. Do not go out and take notes and jottings as to what the world says Christ's Church is, or ought to be! Do not go with the view of seeing faults where there are none and railing at Christianity generally. That is a very heathenish practice, into which some persons constantly fall. But go with this solemn intent as before God, "Now, if I am to be serviceable to the Church in any large measure, I must know what her present condition is." My own solemn conviction is that a painstaking, judicious investigation into the present state of the Christian Church will have the result of perfectly appalling you! It has been said, and there are abundant facts to prove it, that probably during the last 200 years, instead of Protestantism, taking it in the large sense of the word, making any increase in the world, it has rather been diminishing and that Popery has increased! It is also, I believe, very certain to any of you that like to read the reports of many missionary societies, that the number of conversions worked under the missionaries abroad is so insignificant that it scarcely keeps up to the number of converts in years past! We have heard of a missionary returning after 12 years of labor and, on being asked if he knew of one heathen being converted under him, said he did not know of one! We feel that the whole field of missionary work everywhere—with but the exception, perhaps, just now of Southern Africa and of the labors of some in China—is just simply working without results. Not but what we ought to work all the same if we have no results, for even then we must not fall back.

And the Church of God in England is just the same. There is no increase. We know it is a matter of statistical fact that our own denomination, with the exception of London and one Welsh county, has made no progress whatever during the last 12 months. Statistics prove it to be in the same position now as then. The whole mass of Methodism, which was once so potent for good, has, I think, only received 100 increase on the year before—and it is questionable whether they have increased at all. So it is everywhere. New Churches are built, but what is the information we get? Why, in several built in the poorer districts, the whole congregation might go into the vestry, and so the buildings are now practically useless, seats without occupiers because some of the preachers are men that cannot be understood by the common people. If they preach the Gospel—and often they do not—they preach it after such a dull and lifeless fashion that it is not worthwhile going to listen to it! Now, if this is so, we must get the fact, saddening as it is, well worked into our hearts. The errors of some Churches, the division of others, and the general coldness and deadness—oh,

if we did but keenly realize these, I am persuaded that many of us would cry day and night unto God that He would make bare His arm in the midst of His own Church! We should not go in and out of our pews feeling happy and comfortable because our own Church may be prospering and because in our sanctuary souls are being saved—but there should be great searching of heart for the state of Zion! There should go up a weeping and a wailing unto God, until the set time to favor her. Even the set time should come because her children take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof! I would encourage you to get a clear view of the Church at large and then, in God's strength, go forward to any work which God has given you for her good.

We shall not need much time, in the second place, to indicate that this is also—

II. THE RIGHT METHOD OF PROCEEDING WITH REGARD TO ANY SERVICE WHICH, IN OUR SPHERE, WE ARE RENDERING TO CHRIST.

Brothers and Sisters, I hope you are all working for Christ. If Christ has saved you, can you do otherwise than live to your Savior? If, indeed, your sins are all put away by His precious blood. If you are wrapped in His spotless righteousness and accepted in the Beloved, I do trust that

Volume 59 5the love of Christ compels you to tell others of the way of salvation, and to seek to bring in the wandering sheep of the house of Israel! Now, if I am right in my belief that you are engaged in some departments of Christian service, I am sure I shall be judicious in saying to you—take a thorough investigation of the work in which you are engaged. If it is to teach a class of children, lay those children on your heart! Think a great deal about them. Think about them by night, as Nehemiah thought of Jerusalem, and remember that they have souls, that those souls are under condemnation—that nothing but the precious blood can deliver them— that if they are not so delivered, sooner or later those boys and girls of yours will perish! Yet said our Lord, "It is not your Father's will that one of these little ones should perish." Get that solemn fact thoroughly worked into you. Mothers, fathers, you have children committed to your care. You are longing for the conversion of these little ones. Now I want you to get a full estimate of the character of each child! You have peculiar opportunities of riding around, as it were, your little city. Mark the different constitutions, the special weaknesses and defects of that boy and the blemishes and sins of that girl—and always keep this before your minds—that your children, like the children of others, need the regenerating of the Holy Spirit and the saving Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ! Do not take a light view of sin in your children any more than sin in others' children. The hate of God against sin is as real and intense in their case as in others until they are born-again! When you sit down to breakfast with them, think, "Ah, my dear child, I shall not meet you in eternity unless you are brought to the Cross !" Look the girl in the face, as you see her growing up to womanhood, and say to yourself, "Ah, my Lord! In mercy bring her to sit at Your feet as Mary did, and learn of You, or else she shall be no joy to me, for I must be parted from her in the world to come."

Take, I say, a full survey of each child's condition and of its future ruin—and you will be most likely to be a blessing to the child if with your whole heart you are thus earnest and careful.

Now, my dear Hearers, most of you are working with me in this place. Let us now go around the walls of this Tabernacle and find you out, as it were. Well, here are a great number of Church members—between three and four thousand—all professors of religion! But are all saved? Ah, there is an inquiry! We know they are not! We have used our best judgment in this question. We

have urged upon them continually to make no profession unless they are sincere, but alas, the sad faces of some and their ultimate departure from the Truth of God prove that they went out from us because they were not of us! I know this is one of the worst parts of the wall with me. There is no grief that stings our heart like this, when Demas forsakes Christ, having loved this present evil world, or when some—overtaken by the lusts of the flesh, or the pride of life—crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame! It is a mercy when such hypocrites are found out and put away, but oh, it is a grievous injury to the Church which they have disgraced! Then, next, let us think of this. There are a number of people who always occupy these seats. They belong to them—they are their seats and they have been sitting in them, some of them, ever since the house was built! And some of them were in the former house and have been under our ministry now for these 13 years. And yet some of them are not saved! A gentleman told me the other day he was surprised to hear that the Church was half as large as the congregation—or more, and he said, "That is a very great thing!" "No," I said, "that is a very little thing, for when we were at Park Street the Church was larger than the congregation." That is to say, there were more saved souls among us than there were seats for hearers, so that the members of the Church could not all come at any one time. And my soul will not be satisfied until this Tabernacle becomes much too small to hold the Church if they were all to come together at one time. I shall be very glad, indeed, if they swarm off and go elsewhere, and form other churches. I shall be most happy if they do that! But still, I shall always be looking forward to seeing all those saved who have sittings here. You know that at Park Street it came to this—on one occasion when a man wanted to take a seat, he came to me and said—I remember him well—"Sir, I understand that if I take a sitting here, I should be expected to be converted, but I cannot count upon that." "No, my good Friend," I said, "I know not, but still, if you take a seat, let us hope you will be." "Oh," said the man, "is that what was meant? I heard somebody say that when persons took seats, you expected them to be saved." Well, some do, and why should we not? Ought we not to expect that if they hear the Gospel preached, God will bless it to them?

We do trust that day will soon come, but meanwhile we may go around this place and say that a great many who have seats here are unblessed, unsaved, have no desires after Christ, but are dead while they live!

Well, then, you are painfully struck, in the next place, with the many casual hearers who come here and are not saved. It was once well said by someone, that if sinners were scarcer than they are, we would think a great deal more of them! If there were only one unsaved soul now remaining in London, why, the whole Church would be awake and in earnest to pray for that one soul! But when I say to you that, Sabbath after Sabbath, these aisles are thronged, and these pews, too, and that yet a very large proportion of the congregation remain unconverted—why, you hear it and you say, "Well, it is a very sad fact"—but it does not impress your hearts! We do not get the same impression of human ruin that Nehemiah got as he rode round Jerusalem. I wish we could. I wish we could think it over, resolve it in our minds and resolve it yet again until it came to be painful to us to think that so many human beings to whom the Gospel is preached should reMal. callous to its influence! And so many to whom Christ, Himself, shall become a savor of death unto death, and not of life unto life!

Volume 59 7Thus would I urge each Brother and Sister here, who is working for Christ, to get a clear view of the needs of the case.

And now, lastly, I shall be happy if I shall be successful in this last point. It will be well for us, individually, to—

III. TAKE A LITTLE JOURNEY AROUND THE CITY OF MANSOUL WITHIN.

Let me speak to every professor here. You say, "I am a Believer in Jesus." Well, Brother, Sister, then you can have no objection to look within, to search your heart! Ride around your soul. How about the tower of prayer? Is that well kept? Are you much with God in secret? And how about the castle of communion? Do you maintain fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ? How about the gate of humiliation? Do you bow before the Lord, humbly acknowledging what you owe to Him, or has pride been pulling down the cornerstone thereof? How about the gate of holy zeal? Is that wide and in good care, or has it been burned with fire and taken away? And what about the wall of your love? Does that stand erect as it used to do? Have you not heard of one of old of whom it was said, "Gray hairs are here and there upon him, and he knows it not"? May not that be your case? If you will spend an hour or two tonight when all are asleep. If you should lie awake and commune with your own heart upon your bed, it might be a wondrous blessing to you! If you shall honestly look at yourself, not flatteringly. If you shall determine to know, as God shall teach you, the worst of your case. If you should desire to see which Grace is fainting, which holy passion expiring, which sacred feeling ready to die—oh, it shall be well with you! Examine yourself, whether you are a Christian! This is a duty which cannot too often be performed. Ask the Lord to examine you. Say to Him, "Try my reins and my heart: search my inward soul: see if there is any wicked way in me: and lead me in the way everlasting."

Oh, that some men would be more careful about the garden of their souls! But they let the weeds grow and they see them not! Like the sluggard, they do not want to see what will involve so much toil, but tossing upon the bed of presumption, from side to side, they dream of comforts and consider themselves to be safe, while all the while presumption is stealing away from them all their goods and making their garden to be a wilderness! Come, you slumberer, up! God help you up! Mistake no longer presumption for assurance! Recollect that assurance will stand the fullest examination, but if you dare not examine yourself, depend upon it—you are a presumptuous soul! I suggest this to the professor.

And now I want to suggest the same thing to some of you who are unconverted. Some of you, perhaps, who have come in here tonight do not often listen to the Gospel and you wonder what I am doing, talking about riding around a city. Well, I want you to ride around yourselves, as it were, to take stock of your heart—to make calculations about your present state. Now, I will venture to say that some of you are not happy. You know you are not. You do not seem as if you had anything to live for, but to work hard at the shop, or to go to business. If you make money, it does not satisfy you. Time was when if you went to the theater, you spent a very glorious night, but now if you go there—well, it seems a very dreary sort of stuff to you—and the enjoyments you once got on with so well are very empty things to you now. I am glad to hear it! I am glad to hear it! I should like you to keep on thinking about this, and you would soon find that, in addition to the world's not satisfying you, you need a great deal more to content you than this world can ever give you! I wish, dear Friends, you would think of yourselves, for when we get men to think, the battle is half won! Thoughtless persons are on the outskirts of Hell, but thoughtful persons God blesses! Heedless and Too Bold went on and fell over the precipice and were dashed to pieces, but he who, being

checked, waked and said, "Where am I? I do not know," and began to look about him, found himself just on the brink of ruin. But he had just time enough to start back and so was saved.

My dear Friend, if you are not a converted person, do you not know that all your past life has been a waste? God made you, but you have never served Him! Why, if you make a tool, you expect it to be of use to you. God made you, but you never serve Him. If you keep a dog or a cat, you expect to have some pleasure from the creature. God has been keeping you all these years and what have you ever done for Him? If a man keeps a horse, it does him service, and when God makes a man, it is but reasonable that the man should do Him some service—and yet you have not. So your life has been a dead waste as to its noblest ends. And as for the present—why, that is no better! You are not living as you wish to live, and as for the future—no, no, no—do not say, "I won't think about that." Be a wise man and do think of it! You cannot escape the future any more than I can. You and I must die—and after death the Judgment follows— and an appearance before God. Now, my dear Hearer, be bold enough to look ahead. Oh, but you do not like the prospect! Well, but nevertheless gaze upon it, for it will be for your soul's good to know what it is to die without Christ and to rise again without Christ! And when you have got an estimate of that, it may be you will say, "No, I cannot endure this! Jesus, I throw myself into Your arms. Save me, and I shall be saved!" Oh, that men would but take stock of their souls and it would do them good. What a routing-out there is of corners! What long, long hours of extra toil at our great shops to take stock. Nobody thinks of going on in business without taking stock every now and then, or if he did, he would soon find himself in the Bankruptcy Court. Every good trader knows there must be a stock-taking. Why should not men take stock of their souls? How is it that here they say, "Oh, let well enough alone! I daresay it is all right," and so at last wake up and find themselves eternal bankrupts with nothing wherewith to pay, shut up in the prison out of which they can never escape?

May God the Holy Spirit press home these words so feebly spoken. And if any sinner here shall be led by the sight of himself to tremble before God, let him remember and rejoice that there is life for a look at the

Volume 59 9Crucified One! Whoever trusts in Christ is saved! Rest wholly in Him. Cast yourself upon Him. As the swimmer gives himself up to the water, that it may support him, so do you, and thus shall the Grace of God that brings salvation appear unto you!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Nehemiah 1:1-11; Nehemiah 2:1-8.

Verses 1, 2. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left in captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. This good man was, of course, one of the banished Jews, but he had greatly prospered. He had risen in the empire of Ahasuerus until he had come to be great—even to be one of the chamberlains of the empire. But his heart was towards his poor people—his fellow Jews that were in poverty. Now, whenever God exalts a Christian in a temporal position, he ought not to disown his poor brethren, but his heart should go out towards them to see what he can do for them. It is a shame for any man to forget his country.

Does not the Pole still say, "No, Poland, you shall never perish"? And we admire such patriotism. And the same feeling should be in every Christian breast. We should love the Church of God even as Nehemiah loved the chosen race from which he had sprung. So when he met with Hanani, the conversation was all about the poor brethren that remained at Jerusalem.

3. And they said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. A sad story they had to tell! Ezra had assisted in somewhat rebuilding the Temple, but little had been done for the private dwellings and for the walls and public buildings of the city. It was in a sad and wretched state—and the Jews were despised and reproached. Nehemiah was a great man, but he was sorry to hear this. He felt as if he was a fellow sufferer with his poor brethren.

4. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven. Was it his concern? Was it any more his concern than that of other men? Yes, he felt it to be his—and the tender heart which he had towards the people of God made him feel it to be peculiarly his. If nobody else did anything, he must! And, oh, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, whenever you see the cause of God in a sad estate, lay it to heart—weep, lament and pray—feel that you have an interest in it! Christ is your Savior. Of the Church you are a part. These blessed interests of Sovereign Mercy belong to you. Take them to yourself and say, By God's help, I will lay myself out for the progress of His cause. "I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven." 5, 6. And said, I beseech You, O LORD God of Heaven, the great and terrible God, that keeps Covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments—Let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant, which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel, Your servants and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You: both I and my father's house have sinned. He seems to act like a priest for God, taking the sin of the people upon himself and confessing it. If they were hardhearted, and would not confess, he would, and pour out his complaint before God!

7-10. We have dealt very corruptly against You, and have not kept Your commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments which You commanded your servant Moses. Remember, I beseech You, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations. But if you turn unto Me and keep My commandments and do them: though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the Heavens, yet will I gather them from there and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there. Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. You see what an admirable prayer this is. There is a full confession of sin—an acknowledgment of the Justice of God in having punished His people. But then there is a quoting of the Divine Word—a putting of the Lord in remembrance that He had made such-and-such a promise! That is the very backbone of prayer! If you go to the bank, the main part of the transaction is to put the check—the note of hand—upon the counter. You get no money otherwise! So when you go in prayer, the main part of prayer must lie in pleading the promise, "You have said it. You have said it." Hold God to His word with a sacred daring of faith. "You have promised. You have declared. Now be as good as Your word." Then notice another plea he has. He says he is pleading for God's servants—His redeemed—redeemed by great power! Oh, it should always

make us feel strong in prayer when we recollect that God's people are very dear to Him and He has done great things for them—therefore He loves them and for those whom He loves, surely He will work great deliverances! These are arguments. There ought to be great argument in prayer if we hope to prevail.

11. O Lord, I beseech You, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name, and prosper, I pray You, Your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. That was king Artaxerxes, whom he rightly viewed as a man, for, great as he was—all-potent king of Persia—yet still but a man! Nehemiah consoles himself in the prospect of having to go in before him to ask favor at his hands.

11. For I was the king's cupbearer.Nehemiah 2:1. And it came to pass in the month Nisan. Three or four

months after he began to pray.

Volume 59 11 1. In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. We have in some of the old slabs and carvings some singular pictures of the dainty way in which the kings of Persia and Media were served by their cupbearers. They always spilled a little wine upon their left hand and drank first, for fear the king should be poisoned. So the greatest men of the different provinces of the empire were called by turns to act this part before the king. It was a piece of State ceremony.

1. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. And there was a law—one of those stupid Median laws—that no man was to come before the king with a sad countenance. It was supposed that the king must be so serenely happy, himself, that none might come there unless they were happy, too. Nehemiah had been able to obey this rule, but on this occasion he did not because he could not.

2-6. Therefore the king said unto me, Why is your countenance sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, and said unto the king, Let the king live forever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father's sepulchers, lies in waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what do you make request? So I prayed to the God of Heaven. And I said unto the king, If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you would send me unto Judah, unto the city of my father's sepulchers, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him). Who was probably, Queen Esther and, therefore, abundantly agreeable that such a work should be done for her own nation. "The king said unto me."

6. For how long shall your journey be? And when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me: and I set him a time. He was a valued servant. They did not wish to part with him. And if he would go for a time to do this business, yet they took steps to assure he would return. There are some servants that I know of, who, if they were to go away, their masters would not be particularly anxious that they should come back again! It is well when a man is so in favor with God that his piety acts upon his ordinary life and he becomes in favor with men, also. That is a poor, miserable religion that does not make its possessor a good servant. Yes, in whatever station of life we may be placed, we ought to be far more valuable to those round about us on account of our fearing God! May we always be of such a character that if we were gone, we should be missed. "I set him

a time."

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 8

Nehemiah 3:8 #3281 - The Broad Way

THE BROAD WALL

NO. 3281

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1911.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The broad wall."

Nehemiah 3:8.

IT seems that around Jerusalem of old, in the time of her splendor, there was a broad wall which was her defense and her glory. Jerusalem is a type of the Church of God. It is always well when we can see clearly, distinctly and plainly that around the Church to which we belong there runs a broad wall.

This idea of a broad wall around the Church suggests three things, separation, security and enjoyment. Let us examine each of these in its turn.

I. First, the SEPARATION of the people of God from the world is like that broad wall surrounding the holy city of Jerusalem.

When a man becomes a Christian, he is still in the world, but he is no longer to be of it. He was an heir of wrath, but he has now become a child of Grace. Being of a distinct nature, he is required to separate himself from the rest of mankind, as the Lord Jesus Christ did, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." The Lord's Church was separated in His eternal purpose. It was separated in His Covenant and decree. It was separated in the Atonement, for even there we find that our Lord is called "the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe." An actual separation is made by Divine Grace, is carried on in the work of sanctification and will be completed in that day when the heavens shall be on fire and the saints shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air—and in that last tremendous day He shall divide the nations as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats! And then there shall be a great gulf fixed, across which the ungodly cannot go to the righteous, neither shall the righteous approach the wicked.

Practically, my business is to say to those of you who profess to be the Lord's people, take care that you maintain a broad wall of separation between yourselves and the world. I do not say that you are to adopt any peculiarity of dress, or to take up some singular style of speech. Such affectation genders, sooner or later, hypocrisy. A man may be as thoroughly worldly in one coat as in another—he may be quite as vain and conceited with one style of speech as with another. No,

he may be even more of the world when he pretends to be separate than if he had left the pretense of separation alone. The separation which we plead for is moral and spiritual. Its foundation is laid deep in the heart and its substantial reality is very palpable in the life.

Every Christian, it seems to me, should be more scrupulous than other men in his dealings. He must never swerve from the path of integrity. He should never say, "It is the custom—it is perfectly understood in the trade." Let the Christian remember that custom cannot sanction wrong and that its being "understood" is no apology for misrepresentation! A lie "understood" is not, therefore, true. While the Golden Rule is more admired than practiced by ordinary men, the Christian should always do unto others as he would that they should do unto him. He should be one whose word is his bond and who, having once pledged his word, swears to his own hurt, but changes not. There ought to be an essential difference between the Christian and the best moralist, by reason of the higher standard which the Gospel inculcates and the Savior has exemplified. Certainly the highest point to which the best unconverted man can go might well be looked upon as a level below which the converted man will never venture to descend!

Moreover, the Christian should especially be distinguished by his pleasures, for it is here, usually, that the man comes out in his true colors. We are not quite ourselves, perhaps, in our daily toil, where our pursuits are rather dictated by necessity than by choice. We are not alone— the society we are thrown into imposes restraints upon us. We have to put the bit and the bridle upon ourselves. The true man does not then show himself—but when the day's work is done, then the "birds of a feather flock together." It is with the multitude of traders and commercial men as it was with those saints of old, of whom, when they were liberated from prison, it was said, "Being let go, they went unto their own company." So will your pleasures and pastimes give evidence of what your heart is and where it is. If you can find pleasure in sin, then in sin you choose to live and, unless Grace prevents, in sin you will not fail to perish! But if your pleasures are of a nobler kind and your companions of a more devout character. If you seek spiritual enjoyments. If you find your happiest moments in worship, in communion, in silent prayer, or in the public assembling of yourselves with the people of God, then your higher instincts become proof of your purer character and you will be distinguished in your pleasures by a broad wall which effectually separates you from the world!

Such separation should be carried, I think, into everything which affects the Christian. "What have they seen in your house?" was the question Isaiah asked of Hezekiah. When a stranger comes into our house, it should be so ordered that he can clearly perceive that the Lord is there! A man ought scarcely to tarry a night beneath our roof without gathering that we have a respect unto Him who is invisible and that we desire to live and move in the light of God's Countenance. I have already said that I would not have you cultivate singularities for singularity's sake, yet as the most of men are satisfied if they do as other people do, you must never be satisfied until you do more and better than other people, having found out a mode and course of life as far transcending the ordinary worldling's life as the path of the eagle in the air is above that of the mole which burrows under the soil!

This broad wall between the godly and the ungodly should be most conspicuous in the spirit of our mind. The ungodly man has only this world to live for—do not wonder if he lives very earnestly for it. He has no other treasure—why should he not get as much as he can of this? But you, Christian,

profess to have immortal life, therefore your treasure is not to be amassed in this brief span of existence. Your treasure is laid up in Heaven and available for eternity. Your best hopes overleap the narrow bounds of time and fly beyond the grave—your spirit must not, therefore, be earthbound and groveling, but soaring and heavenly! There should always be about you the air of one who has his shoes on his feet, his loins girded and his staff in his hand—the air of a pilgrim ready to be off and away to a better land! You are not to live here as if this were your home. You are not to talk of this world as though it were to last forever. You are not to hoard it and treasure it up as though you had set your heart upon it—but you are to be on the wing as though you had not a nest here and never could have—but expected to find your resting place among the cedars of God, in the hilltops of Glory!

Depend upon it, the more unworldly a Christian is, the better it is for him. I think I could mention several reasons why this wall should be very broad. If you are sincere in your profession, there is a very broad distinction between you and unconverted people. Nobody can tell how far life is removed from death. Can you measure the difference? They are as opposite as the poles. Now, according to your profession, you are a living child of God, you have received a new life, whereas the children of this world are dead in trespasses and sins. How palpable the difference between light and darkness! Yet you profess to have been "sometimes darkness," but now you are made "light in the Lord." There is, therefore, a great distinction between you and the world if you are what you profess to be! You say, when you put on the name of Christ, that you are going to the Celestial City, to the New Jerusalem—but the world turns its back upon the heavenly country and goes downward to that other city of which you know that destruction is its doom—your path is different from theirs. If you are what you say you are, the road you take must be diametrically opposite to that of the ungodly man. You know the difference between their ends. The end of the righteous shall be everlasting Glory, but the end of the wicked is destruction. Unless, then, you are a hypocrite, there is such a distinction between you and others as only God, Himself, could make—a distinction which originates here and is to be perpetuated throughout eternity! When the social diversities occasioned by rank and dependency, riches and poverty, ignorance and learning, shall all have passed away, the distinctions between the children of God and the child

Volume 57 3ren of men, between saints and scoffers, between the chosen and the castaway, will still exist! I pray you, then, maintain a broad wall in your conduct, as God has made a broad wall in your state and in your destiny!

Remember again, that our Lord Jesus Christ had a broad wall between Him and the ungodly. Look at Him and see how different He is from the men of His time. All His life long you observe Him to be a stranger and a foreigner in the land. Truly, He drew near to sinners—as near as He could draw—and He received them when they were willing to draw near to Him. But He did not draw near to their sins. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners." When He went to His own city of Nazareth, He only preached a single sermon and they would have cast Him headlong down the hill if they could. When He passed through the street, He became the song of the drunkard, the butt of the foolish, the mark at which the proud shot out the arrows of their scorn! At last, having come to His own and His own having received Him not, they determined to thrust Him altogether out of the camp, so they took Him to Golgotha and nailed Him to the tree as a malefactor, a promoter of sedition. He was the Great Dissenter, the Great Nonconformist of His age! The National Church first excommunicated and then executed Him. He did not seek

difference in things trivial, but the purity of His life and the truthfulness of His testimony roused the spleen of the rulers and the chief men of their synagogues. He was ready in all things to serve them and to bless them—but He never would blend with them. They would have made Him a king. Ah, if He would but have joined the world, the world would have given Him the chief place—as the world's prince said on the mountain—"All these things will I give You, if You will fall down and worship me." But He drives away the fiend and stands immaculate and separate even to the close of His life! If you are a Christian, be a Christian! If you follow Christ, go outside the camp! But if there is no difference between you and your fellow man, what will you say to the King in the day when He comes and finds that you have on no wedding garment by which you can be distinguished from the rest of mankind?

Moreover, dear Friends, you will find that a broad wall of separation is abundantly good for yourselves. I do not think any Christian in the world will tell you that when he has given way to the world's customs, he has ever been profited thereby. If you can go and find an evening's amusement in a suspicious place and feel profited by it, I am sure you are not a Christian, for, if you were really a Christian, it would pain your conscience and unfit you for more devout exercises of the heart! Ask a fish to spend an hour on dry land and I think, did it comply, the fish would find that it was not much to its benefit, for it would be out of its element— and it will be so with you in communion with sinners. When you are compelled to associate with worldly people in the ordinary course of business, you find much that grates upon the ear, that troubles the heart and annoys the soul. You will be often like righteous Lot, vexed with the conversation of the wicked—and you will say with David—

"Woe's me that I in Mesech am A sojourner so long! That I in tabernacles dwell To Kedar that belong."

Your soul will pine and sigh to come forth and wash your hands of everything that is impure and unclean. As you find no comfort there, you will long to get away to the chaste, the holy, the devout, the edifying fellowship of the saints! Make a broad wall, dear Friends, in your daily life! If you begin to give way a little to the world, you will soon give way a great deal. Give sin an inch and it will take a mile. "Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves," is an apt motto of economy. So, too, guard against little sins if you would be clear of "the great transgression." Look after the little approaches to worldliness, the little giving in towards the things of ungodliness—and then you will not make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.

Another good reason for keeping up the broad wall of separation is that you will thereby do most good to the world. I know Satan will tell you that if you bend a little and come near to the ungodly, then they also will come a little way to meet you. Yes, but it is not so! You lose your strength, Christian, the moment you depart from your integrity. What do you think ungodly people say behind your back if they see you inconsistent to please them? "Oh," they say, "there is nothing in his religion but vain pretense! The man is not sincere." Although the world may openly denounce the rigid Puritan, it secretly admires him. When the big heart of the world speaks out, it has respect to the man that is sternly honest and will not yield his principles—no, not a hair's breadth! In such an age as this, when there is so little sound conviction, when principle is cast to the winds and when a widespread tolerant laxness, both of thought and of practice, seems to rule the day, it is still the fact that a man who is decided in his belief, speaks his mind boldly and acts according to

his profession, is sure to command the reverence of mankind! Depend upon it, woman, your husband and your children will respect you none the more because you say, "I will give up some of my Christian privileges," or, "I will go sometimes with you into that which is sinful." You cannot help them out of the mire if you go and plunge yourself into the mud! You cannot help to make them clean if you go and blacken your own hands. How, then, can you wash their faces? You young man in the shop, and you young woman in the workroom, if you keep yourselves to yourselves in Christ's name, chaste and pure for Jesus, not laughing at jokes which should make you blush, not mixing up with pastimes that are suspicious, but on the other hand, tenderly jealous of your conscience as one who shrinks from a doubtful thing as a sinful thing, holding sound faith and being scrupulous of the Truths of God—if you will so keep yourselves, your company in the midst of others shall be as though an angel

Volume 57 5shook his wings and they will say to one another, "Refrain from this or that just now, for So-and-So is here." They will fear you in a certain sense. They will admire you in secret. And who can tell but that, at last, they may come to imitate you?

Would you tempt God? Would you challenge the desolating flood? Whenever the Church comes down to mingle with the world, it behooves the faithful few to fly to the Ark and seek shelter from the avenging storm! When the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair to look upon, then it was that God said it repented Him that He had made men upon the face of the earth—and He sent the deluge to sweep them away! A separate people God's people must be and they shall be! It is His own declaration, "The people shall dwell alone; they shall not be numbered among the nations." The Christian is, in some respects, like the Jew. The Jew is the type of the Christian. You may give the Jew political privileges as he ought to have. He may be adopted into the State as he ought to be. But a Jew he is and a Jew he must still be. He is not a Gentile, even though he calls himself English, or Portuguese, or Spanish, or Polish. He remains one of the people of Israel, a child of Abraham, still a Jew, and you can mark him as such—his speech betrays him in every land. So should it be with the Christian! Mixing up with other men, as he must in his daily calling. Going in and out among them like a man among men. Trading in the market. Dealing in the shop. Mingling in the joys of the social circle. Taking his part in politics, like a citizen, as he is. But, at the same time, always having a higher and a nobler life, a secret into which the world cannot enter and showing the world, by his superior holiness, his zeal for God, his sterling integrity and his unselfish truthfulness—that he is not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world! You cannot tell how concerned I am for some of you that this broad wall should be kept up, for I detect in some of you, at times, a desire to make it very narrow and, perhaps, to pull it down altogether! Brothers and Sisters, beloved in the Lord, you may depend upon it that nothing worse can happen to a Church than to be conformed unto this world! Write "Ichabod" upon her walls, then, for the sentence of destruction has gone out against her. But if you can keep yourselves as—

"A garden walled around, Chosen and made peculiar ground"—

you shall have your Master's company, your graces shall grow, you shall be happy in your own souls and Christ shall be honored in your lives!

II. Secondly, the broad wall round about Jerusalem INDICATED SAFETY.

In the same way, a broad wall round Christ's Church indicates her safety, too. Consider who they are that belong to the Church of God. A person does not become a member of Christ's Church by Baptism, nor by birthright, nor by profession, nor by morality. Christ is the Door into the sheepfold! Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is a member of the true Church. Being a member of Christ, he is a member, consequently, of the body of Christ which is the Church. Now, around the Church of God— the election of Grace, the redeemed by blood, the peculiar people, the adopted, the justified, the sanctified—around the Church there are bulwarks of stupendous strength, munitions which guard them safely. When the foe came to attack Jerusalem, he counted the towers and bulwarks, and marked them well. And after he had seen the strength of the holy city, he fled! How could he ever hope to scale such ramparts as those? Brothers and Sisters, Satan often counts the towers and bulwarks of the New Jerusalem! Anxiously does he desire the destruction of the saints, but it shall never be. He that rests in Christ is saved! He who has passed through the gate of faith to rest in Jesus Christ may sing with joyful confidence—

"The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes! That soul, though all Hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"

The Christian is surrounded by the broad wall of God's power. As God is Omnipotent, Satan cannot defeat Him. If God's power is on my side, who shall hurt me? "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

The Christian is surrounded by the broad wall of God's love. Who shall prevail against those whom God loves? I know that it is vain to curse those whom God has not cursed, or to defy them whom the Lord has not defied, for whomever He blesses is blessed, indeed! Balak, the son of Zippor, sought to curse the beloved people and he went first to one hilltop and then to another, and looked down upon the chosen camp. But, aha, Balaam, you could not curse them, though Balak sought it! You could only say, "They are blessed, yes, and they shall be blessed!"

God's Law is a broad wall around us and so is His justice. These once threatened our destruction, but now the justice of God demands the salvation of every Believer. If Christ has died instead of me, it would not be justice if I also had to die for my sin. If God has received the full payment of the debt from the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, then how can He demand the debt again? He is satisfied and we are secure!

The immutability of God, also, surrounds His people like a broad wall. "I am God, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." As long as God is the same, the Rock of our salvation will be our secure hiding place.

Upon this delightful Truth of God we might linger long, for there is much to cheer us in the strong security which God has given in Covenant to His people. They are surrounded by the broad wall of electing love. Does God choose them and will He lose them? Did He ordain them to eternal life and shall they perish? Did He engrave their names upon His heart and shall those names be blotted out? Did He give them to His Son to be His heritage and shall His Son lose His portion? Did He say, "They shall be Mine, says the Lord, in the day when I make up My jewels," and shall He part with them? Has He who makes all things obey

Volume 57 7Him, no power to keep the people whom He has formed for Himself to be His own peculiar heritage? God forbid that we should doubt it! Electing love, like a broad wall, surrounds

every heir of Grace!

And oh, how broad is the wall of redeeming love! Will Jesus fail to claim the people He bought with so great a price? Did He shed His blood in vain? How can He revive enmity against those whom He has once reconciled unto God, not imputing their transgression unto them? Having obtained eternal Redemption for them, will He adjudge them to everlasting Hell? Has He purged their sins by Sacrifice and will He then leave them to be the victims of Satanic craft? By the blood of the Everlasting Covenant, every Christian may be assured that He cannot perish, neither can any pluck him out of Christ's hands! Unless the Cross was all a gamble, unless the Atonement was a mere speculation, those for whom Jesus died are saved through His death! Therefore "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

As a broad wall which surrounds the saints of God is the work of the Holy Spirit. Does the Spirit begin and then not finish the operations of His Grace? Ah, no! Does He give life which afterwards dies out? That is impossible! Has He not told us that the Word of God is the incorruptible Seed which lives and abides forever? And shall the powers of Hell or the evil of our own flesh destroy what God has pronounced immortal, or cause dissolution to that which God says is incorruptible? Is not the Spirit of God given to us to abide with us forever—and shall He be expelled from that heart in which He has taken up His everlasting dwelling? Brothers and Sisters, we are not of their mind whom are led by fear or fallacy to hazard such conjectures! We rejoice to say with Paul, "Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." We delight to sing—

"Grace will complete what Grace begins, To save from sorrows or from sins. The work that wisdom undertakes Eternal mercy never forsakes."

Almost every Doctrine of Grace affords us a broad wall, a strong bastion, a mighty bulwark, a grand munition of defense! Take, for instance, Christ's suretyship engagements. He is Surety to His Father for His people. When He brings home the flock, do you think that He will have to report that some of them are lost? Not so!

"Here am I," will He say, "and the children that You have given Me. Of all whom You have given Me, I have lost none." He will keep all the saints even to the end! The honor of Christ is involved in this matter. If Christ loses one soul that leans upon Him, the integrity of His crown is gone— for if there should be one believing soul in Hell, the Prince of Darkness would hold up that soul and say—"Aha! You could not save them all! Aha! You Captain of Salvation, You were defeated here! Here is one poor little Benjamin, are Ready-to-Halt that You could not bring to Glory, and I have him to be my prey forever!" But it shall not be! Every gem shall be in Jesus' crown! Every sheep shall be in Jesus' flock! He shall not be defeated in any way, or in any measure, but He shall divide the spoil with the strong, He shall establish the cause He undertakes, He shall eternally conquer! Glory be unto His great and good name!

III. The idea of a broad wall—and with this I close—SUGGESTS ENJOYMENT.

The walls of Nineveh and Babylon were broad—so broad that there was found room for several chariots to pass each other. Here men walked at sunset and talked and promoted good fellowship. If you have ever been in the city of York, you will know how interesting it is to walk around the broad walls there. But our figure is drawn from the Orientals. They were accustomed to come out

of their houses and walk on the broad walls. They used them for rest from toil and for the manifold pleasures of recreation. It was very delightful, when the sun was going down and all was cool, to walk on those broad walls. And so, when a Believer comes to know the deep things of God and to see the defenses of God's people, he walks along them and he rests in confidence. "Now," he says, "I am at rest and peace. The destroyer cannot molest me. I am delivered from the noise of archers in the place of the drawing of water and here I can exercise myself in prayer and meditation. Now that salvation is appointed for walls and bulwarks, I will sing a song unto Him who has done these great things for me. I will take my rest and be quiet, for he that believes has entered into rest. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Broad walls, then, are for rest, and so are our broad walls of salvation!

Those broad walls were also for communion. Men came there and talked with one another. They leaned over the wall and whispered their loving words, conversed of their business, comforted one another, related their troubles and their joys. So, when Believers come unto Christ Jesus, they commune with one another, with the angels, with the spirits of just men made perfect, and with Jesus Christ their Lord, who is best of all! Oh, on those broad walls, when the banner of love waves over them, they sometimes rejoice with an unspeakable joy in fellowship with Him who loved them and gave Himself for them! It is a blessed thing, in the Church of Christ, when you get such a knowledge of the Doctrines of the Gospel that you can have the sweetest communion with the whole Church of the living God!

And then the broad walls were also intended for prospects and outlooks. The citizen came up on the broad wall and looked away from the smoke and dirt of the city within, right across to the green fields, the gleaming river and the far-off mountains! They delighted to watch the mowing of hay, or the reaping of corn, or the setting sun beyond the distant hills. It was one of the common enjoyments of the citizen of any walled city to come to the top of the wall in order to take views afar. So, when a man once gets into the altitudes of Gospel Doctrine and has

Volume 57 9learned to understand the love of God in Christ Jesus, what wide views he can take! How he looks down upon the sorrows of life! How he looks beyond that narrow little stream of death! How, sometimes, when the weather is bright and his eyes are clear enough to let him use the telescope, he can see within the Gates of Pearl and behold the joys which no mortal eye has seen and hear the songs which no mortal ear has heard, for these are things, not for eyes and ears, but for hearts and spirits! Blessed is the man who dwells in the Church of God, for he can find on her broad walls places from which he can see the King in His beauty and the land which is very far off!

Ah, dear Friends, I wish that these things had to do with you all, but I am afraid they have not, for many of you are outside the wall! And when the destroyer comes, none will be safe but those who are inside the wall of Christ's love and mercy. I would to God that you would escape to the gate at once, for it is open. It will be shut—it will be shut one day, but it is now open. When night comes, the night of death, the gate will be shut and you will then come and say, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" But the answer will be—

"Too late, too late! You cannot enter now."

But it is not too late yet! Christ still says, "Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it." Oh, that you had the will to come and put your trust in Jesus, for if you do, you shall be saved! I cannot speak to some of you about security, for there are no broad walls to defend you. You have run away from the security. Perhaps you have been patching up with some untempered mortar a righteousness of your own which will all be thrown down as a bowing wall and as a tottering fence. Oh that you would trust in Jesus! Then would you have a broad wall which all the battering rams of Hell shall never be able to shake! When the storms of eternity shall beat against that wall, it shall stand fast forever!

I cannot speak to some of you about rest, and enjoyment, and communion, for you have sought rest where there is none. You have got a peace which is not peace. You have found a comfort which will be your destruction! God make you to be distressed and cause you by sore stress to flee to the Lord Jesus and so to get true peace, the only peace, for, "He is our peace." Oh, that you would close in with Christ and trust Him! Then you would rejoice in the present happiness which faith would give you! But the sweetest thing of all would be the prospect which should then unfold to you of the eternal happiness which Christ has prepared for all those who put their trust in Him!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Psalms 71:1-24. Verses 1-8. In You, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me in Your righteous, and cause me to escape: incline Your ear unto me, and save me. Be You my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: You have given commandment to save me; for You are my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For You are my hope, O Lord God, You are my trust from my youth. By You have I been held up from the womb: You are He that took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You. David had enjoyed the mercy of God from his very birth. We are apt to forget the tender care of God over our infancy, but we ought to remember it—and it will be a great comfort to us if we come to a second childhood, to remember how kindly God took care of us in the first!

7-11. I am at a wonder unto many, but You are my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your honor all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength fails. For my enemies speak against me, and they that lay wait for my soul. They take counsel together, saying, God has forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him. Surely that ought to have been the reason for letting him alone! With right-minded persons it would have been so, but the devil and his children are arrant cowards and their argument is, "Persecute and take him: for there is none to deliver him." You might as well expect tenderness in a wolf as anything like bravery and chivalry in a persecutor!

12-14. O God be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonor that seek my hurt. But I will hope continually, and will yet praise You more and more. [See Sermons #2318,

Volume 39—GOD'S PUPIL, GOD'S PREACHER—AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY and #3271, Volume 57—GOD,

THE CHILDREN'S TEACHER—Read/download both sermons, free of charge, at

http://.] How was he going to do it? Already his mouth was filled with God's praise, so, surely he would fill his whole life with it, and his actions which would speak more loudly than his words, would bear daily testimony to the goodness of God.

15, 16. My mouth shall show forth Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof. I will go in the strength of the Lord God—"This shall be my praise; my very movements, my goings, my progress shall be in the 'strength of the Lord God.'"

16, 17. I will make mention of Your righteousness, even of Yours only. O God, You have taught me from my youth. Here is the same kind of argument again—"O Lord, I went to school to You, so I must teach others what You have taught me."

17. And until this time have I declared Your wondrous works. "You made me a preacher, and I have stuck to my word. Until this time have I declared Your wondrous works.'"

Volume 57 11 18-20. Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not until I have showed Your strength unto this generation and Your power to everyone that is to come. Your righteousness, also, O God, is very high, who has done great things: O God, who is like unto You? You, who have showed me great and sore troubles, shall quicken me again. "You shall not merely deliver me from my great and sore troubles, but You shall give me more life, You 'Shall quicken me again.'" Divine quickening is the best remedy for a troubled heart.

20. And shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth. "Though I seem to be like a man buried in the depth of the earth, You will bring me up again."

21, 22. You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. I will also praise You—God blessing us and we in return blessing Him— so it ought to be. The more God does for us, the more we ought to do for Him! Is it not so, Brothers and Sisters? Is not this a good argument? Are you carrying it out? Let your conscience answer.

22, 23. With the psaltery, even Your Truth, O my God: unto You will I sing with the harp. O You Holy One of Israel. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto You. Singing unto God ought to be the happiest of exercises! When it is done in a doleful, dolorous way, it is not singing, but groaning.

23. And my soul, which You have redeemed. "The sprinkled blood is on my soul and, therefore, it shall leap for joy. Rescued from captivity, bought back from slavery, "my soul, which You have redeemed, shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto You."

24. My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the daylong: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.

[See Sermon #998, Volume 17—MORE AND MORE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, athttp://www.spurgeongems.org.]

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 9

Nehemiah 3:15 #790 - King's Gardens

KING'S GARDENS

NO. 790

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, DECEMBER 29 , 1867,

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The king's garden."

Nehemiah 3:15.

THERE have been many very famous king's gardens, such as those "hanging gardens" in Nineveh, in which Sardanapalus delighted himself, and that remarkable garden of Cyrus in which he took such great interest, because, as he said, every tree and every plant in it had been both planted and tended by his own royal hand. Imagination might bid you wander among the beauties of the celebrated villas and gardens of the Roman emperors, or make you linger amid the roses and lilies of the voluptuous gardens of the Persian caliphs but we have nobler work in hand.

I call you to come with me to orchards of pomegranates, to beds of spices, camphor with spikenard, calamus and cinnamon, myrrh and aloes, and trees of frankincense. I am not about to speak of the gardens of any earthly monarch, for we can find far fairer flowers and rarer fruits in the gardens of the King of kings, the resorts of His Son, the Prince Immanuel. There are six of these "king's gardens" to which I shall conduct you, but we shall not have time to tarry in more than one of them.

I. The first of these king's gardens was THE GARDEN OF PARADISE, which was situated in the midst of Eden. You will read of it in the book of Genesis. It was doubtless a fairer place than we have ever seen and much more marvelous for beauty than we can imagine. It was full of all manner of delights—a fruitful spot in which the man who was set to keep it would have no need to toil, but would find it a happy and refreshing exercise to train the luxurious plants. No sweat was ever seen upon his happy brow, for he cultivated a virgin soil. Abundance of luscious fruits ministered to his necessities. He could stretch himself upon soft couches of moss and no inclement weather disturbed his repose.

No winter's wind scattered the leaves of Eden! No summer's heat burned up its flowers! There were sweet alternations of day and night, but the day brought no sorrow and the night no danger. The beasts were there, yet not as beasts of prey, but as the obedient servants of that happy man whom God had made to have dominion over all the works of His hands. In the midst of the garden grew that mysterious Tree of Life, of which we know so little, literally, but of which, I trust, we know much in its spiritual meaning, for we have fed upon its fruits and have been healed by its leaves.

Hard by it stood the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, placed there as the test of obedience. Adam's mind was equally balanced—it had no bias to evil—and God left him to the freedom of his will, giving this as the test of his loyalty, that, if obedient, he would never touch the fruit of that one tree. Why need he? There were tens of thousands of trees, all of which bowed down their branches with abundant fruit for his hunger or his luxury. Why need he desire that solitary tree which God had fenced and hedged about?

But, in an evil hour, at the serpent's base suggestion—we know not how soon after his creation—he put forth his hand and plucked from the forbidden tree! The mere plucking of the fruit seems little to the thoughtless, but the breaking of the Maker's Law was a great offense to Heaven, for it was man's throwing down the glove of battle against his Creator, and breaking his allegiance to his Lord and Master. This was great, great in itself and in its mischievous effects, for Adam fell that day, and he was driven out of Eden to till the thankless, thorn-bearing soil. And you and I fell in him and were banished with him. We were in his loins. He was "the father of us all," and on us he has brought the curse of toil, and in us all he has sown the seeds of iniquity!

Let it never be forgotten that in connection with the garden of Eden we are not now a pure and sinless race, and cannot be by nature, however civilized we may become. Men are born no longer with balanced minds, but a heavy weight of original sin in the scale. We are averse to that which is good. The bias of the mind of man, when he is born into the world, is towards that which is evil and we as naturally go astray as the serpent naturally learns to hiss, or the wolf to tear and to devour. Ah, Brothers and Sisters, beware of thinking too little of the Fall. Slight thoughts upon the Fall are at the root of false theologies. The mischief that has been worked in us is not a trifling matter, but a thing to be trembled at.

Only the Divine hand can reclaim us. The house of manhood has been shaken to its foundations—each timber is decayed—leprosy is in the tottering wall. Man must be made new by the same creating hand that first made him, or he never can be a dwelling place fit for God. Let those who boast of their natural goodness look to the garden of Eden and be ashamed of their pride—and then examine their own actions by the glass of God's most holy Law—and be confounded that they should dream of purity! How can he be pure that is born of woman? "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing? Not one."

As our mothers were sinful, such are we and such will our children be. As long as men are brought into the world by natural generation we shall be "born in sin and shaped in iniquity." And if we are to be accepted by God we must be born again and made new creatures in Christ Jesus. Alas, then, alas, for that first king's garden! The flowers are gone and the birds have ceased to sing! The winter's winds howl through it and the summer's sun scorches it! The beasts of prey are there. Perhaps the very site of it, which is now unknown, may be a den of dragons, an habitation for the pelican of the wilderness and the bittern of desolation! Fit image, if it is so, of our natural estate, for we were altogether given up to desolation and destruction unless One mighty to save has espoused our cause and undertaken our redemption.

II. The second king's garden to which I will introduce you is very different from the first, but it yields more fragrant spices and healthier herbs by far. It is THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE—the garden of the olive press, in which the Lord Jesus Christ was the olive, and God's anger against sin was the press. Take off your shoes, for the place where you stand is holy ground! 'Tis night.

Yonder are 12 men walking and talking sweetly as they walk. Observe One, a mysterious, majestic Person, who is evidently superior to the rest. It is the Son of Man.

Hush! It is the Son of God, and as He talks you can hear words like these, "I am the Vine, you are the branches. Abide in Me and I in you." We will conceal ourselves behind that group of olive trees and will see what is to happen here. This is the place where that mysterious Son of God was often to be found with His disciples. Just as God walked in the first garden in Eden, so the Son of God walked in the second garden. And as God in the first garden communed with man, so of the second garden it is written Jesus oftentimes resorted there with His disciples. Look, He has dismissed eight of them. He has told them to wait yonder and on He goes with only three—Peter, and James, and John—the chosen out of the 11— and speaking to them, and bidding them watch, He leaves them, and is all alone.

Let us draw as near as we may. We see the Son of God in prayer, and as He prays His earnestness gathers strength. He is striving with an unseen enemy—struggling like a man who would overcome an adversary, wrestling so vigorously that He sweats—but it is a strange sweat! "His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground." He is beginning to drink the cup of Jehovah's wrath which was due to our sins—a cup which we could not have emptied even through eternity, though every drop of it had been a Hell.

Christ is downing the wrath-cup, and as He trembles under the fiery influence of the draught of worse than wormwood and gall, He cries, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me." But He recovers Himself and His prayer is, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Backwards and forwards you see Him go like a man distracted. Three times He looks to the disciples for comfort, but they are slumbering. And then again He returns to His God and casts Himself upon His face, with strong crying and tears, pouring out His soul in blood before high Heaven—such is the anguish of His tortured heart!

Behold here the beginning of our redemption. Jesus then began to suffer in our place, atoning for our iniquity. The mischief of Eden fell upon Gethsemane. The mist of sin rose up in the garden of Paradise, and as it rose it gathered and collected into a black tremendous storm cloud, and then it burst, with flashes of lightning and with claps of thunder, upon the great Shepherd of the sheep, that we, who deserved to be overwhelmed by the tempest, might find fair weather in the rest which remains for the people of God. Perhaps no sight that was ever beheld of men or angels, except the Crucifixion, was more tremendous than the agony of Gethsemane!

It must have been a terrible spectacle to have seen martyrs in the fire, or men and women devoured by lions and bears in the Roman amphitheatre, but then to the Christian's eyes there was a pleasure mingled with these ghastly sights, for God sustained His faithful ones. They clapped their hands amidst the fire! They sang when the wild beasts were leaping upon them! Such holy joy beamed from their countenances that their Brethren were comforted rather than distressed, and saints wished to be there with them that they might die as they died and win the martyr's crown!

But, when you look at Christ in the garden, you miss the help which the martyrs had. God forsakes Him! He must tread the winepress alone, and of the people there must be none with Him. Yes, and yet, dark as that night was—the darkest night that ever fell upon this world—it was the mother of

that Gospel light of finished redemption which now enlightens the Gentiles and brings glory unto Israel!

Let us leave the King's garden, then, with feelings of deep repentance that we should have made Jesus suffer so, and yet with holy gladness to think that thus has He redeemed us from the ruins of the Fall.

III. I claim a moment's thought for the GARDEN OF THE BURIAL AND THE RESURRECTION. In Joseph's garden, in the new tomb, the Beloved of our souls slept for awhile and then arose to His Glory-life. Detained of death He could not be, for He was no longer a lawful Captive. He had finished His work and earned His reward, and therefore the imprisoning stone was rolled away. He is not here, for He is risen! The seal is broken, the watchmen are dispersed, the stone is removed, the Captive is free!

What comfort is here, for, as Jesus rose, so all His slumbering saints shall likewise leave the tomb. His Resurrection is the resurrection of all the saints. Wait but awhile and the tomb shall be no longer the treasury of death. So surely as the Lord came forth from the sepulcher to glory and immortality, all His saints are justified and clean. None can accuse us now that the Lord has risen, indeed, no more to die. His one offering has perfected forever all the chosen ones and His glorious uprising is the guarantee of their acceptance. Faith delights in the garden where Magdalene found her unknown, yet well-known, Lord, and where angels kept watch and ward over the couch, which the immortal Sufferer had relinquished. Henceforth it is to us a King's garden, abounding with pleasant fruits and fragrant flowers.

IV. And now I desire to take you to a fourth king's garden. You will not have far to go. Put your hand on your bosom and your finger will be on the latch of its door. It is THE GARDEN OF THE HUMAN HEART. The heart is a little garden—little, apparently, but yet so extensive that it is all but infinite—for who can tell the limit of the heart of man? How fardarting the imaginations and the affections of the soul of man may be? Now, this little-great thing, the human heart, is meant to be a garden for God.

Did I say it was a garden? It should be so, but alas, by nature it scarcely deserves the name, for I perceive it to be all overgrown with weeds—thistle and briar, deadly nightshade, and nettles, and I know not what besides—spring up everywhere. I see trees, but they drop with poison, like the deadly upas, whose drip is death. There are no luscious fruits, but instead the grapes of Gomorrah and apples of Sodom. This loathsome den of festering evils is what should have been God's garden, but it is a tangled wilderness of all manner of noxious things! Thorns, also, and thistles does it bring forth. What must be done to this neglected garden? What heavenly horticulture can be used upon it to reclaim it from its desert state? God, the great Farmer, must come and turn it over after His own fashion. The rough plow of conviction must be dragged through it. The spade of trouble must break up the surface and smash to pieces the clods, and kill the weeds. And fire must burn up the rubbish. Has that ever been done in the garden of your heart, dear Hearer? Have you ever had your soul plowed and cross-plowed and harrowed with sorrow till you were driven well-near to despair? Have you seen your sweet sins killed so that you could not take pleasure in them any longer, but desired to be clean rid of them? That must be done if the garden is to be reclaimed and made worthy of the Divine Owner.

Then when the soil is broken up and the clods are turned there must be seed sown, and the planting of slips from the Tree of Life and seeds from the nurseries of Heaven—seeds that shall turn to flowers which shall be full of sweet perfume, acceptable to Christ. The seeds of faith, love, hope, patience, perseverance, and zeal must be carefully cast into prepared soil by the Holy Spirit's hand, and fostered by the same kindly care. Before the heart can be called a garden fit for the King of kings, these must bud, and blossom, and yield their fruits.

When I regard attentively that garden which was so lately covered over with weeds, but which is now sown and planted, I perceive that the plants grow not well unless the soil is drained. There must be always drained out of us much superfluity of naughtiness and excess of carnal confidence or our heart will be a cold swamp—a worthless plant-killing bog. Affliction drains us. We do not like to have our money or our friends taken from us, and yet the love of these might ruin us for all fruit-bearing if God did not remove them. Besides the draining, there must also be constant hoeing, and raking and digging.

After a garden is made, the beds are never left long alone. The gardener must have his eye upon them or they run to riot. If they were left to themselves, they would soon breed weeds again and return to the old confusion—so the hoe must be constantly kept going if the garden is to he clean. So with the garden of the heart—cleansing and pruning must be done every day and God must do it through ourselves, and we must do it by constant self-examination and repentance, striving in the power of the Holy Spirit to keep ourselves free from the sins which do so easily beset us. I find that the weeds grow fast enough in my soul, and keep me in full employment to check their growth.

Cowper talks about—

"The dear hour which brought me to Your foot, And cut up all my follies by the root."

Surely, good Cowper must have made a mistake! I know mine were never cut up by the roots. When they have been cut down, the root soon sprouts again! They will be cut up by the root one day, as I believe and hope, but till then I must be incessantly watchful. The roots are still there. Alas, alas, alas, that it should be so! O Lord Jesus, help us, or we shall be overgrown with our besetting sins. Corruption still remains even in the heart of the regenerate, and the garden of the King of kings is often overgrown with weeds. But for God it is still a garden—a garden for Jesus to walk in, and there are happy times when He deigns to sit down in the arbor of our souls!

What a royal garden our poor heart then becomes! It may be the body is covered with poor garments. It may be our whole outward man is very sick and faint, but still our manhood is a King's garden when Christ is within and we are kings and priests unto our God as Jesus holds fellowship with us! The angels come into that garden, too, and when the air is still and the noise of outside cares is hushed, we have often enjoyed a little Heaven within our heart, the beginning of the Heaven to which we hope soon to go!

Dear Hearer, do you know what we mean by paradise within, glory beaming in the heart, Heaven in the soul? Jesus can teach you this. The heart is a King's garden, Beloved. Jesus bought it with His precious blood, and He has now, by His Grace, come into it and claimed it to be His own. My Friend, if He has not come to you yet, I hope He will. If you have not given your heart to Him, I hope you may be led to do so by His gracious Spirit. But, if your heart is His, oh, keep it for your

Beloved! Do not give the keys to anyone else! The love of husband, wife and child—each of these is to have its proper place—but the heart's core is the King's garden.

Mark you, it is not the husband's garden, nor the wife's garden, nor the child's garden—the dearest idols we have known must not be set up there—it is the King's garden! I hope you will say tonight, before you go to rest, "O king, come into my garden, and eat my pleasant fruit! Awake, O heavenly wind, and blow upon the garden of my soul, and let all the plants of my new nature give forth their sweetness that my Beloved may be charmed with my company, and that I may be filled with His sweet love."

V. However, I want you to spend most of your time in a fifth garden, and that is THE GARDEN OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH—our garden, and yet the King's garden—planted and flourishing in this place. Follow me in each word of the text. What is it? A garden. The Church of God is a garden. Many thoughts are gathered in that one metaphor like bees in a hive. It is called a garden in the book of Solomon's Song, so I know that we are not wrong in using the illustration.

But what does a garden mean? In the first place it implies separation. A garden is not the open waste, the shrubs, or the common. It is not a wilderness. It is walled around—it is hedged in. Ah, Christian, when you join the Church, remember you, too, become by profession hedged in for King Jesus! I earnestly desire to see the wall of separation between the Church and the world made broader and stronger. Believe me, nothing gives me more sorrow than when I hear of Church members saying, "Well, there is no harm in this. There is no harm in that," and getting as near to the world as possible. It does not matter what you may think of it, but I am certain that Divine Grace is at low ebb in your soul when you even raise the question of how far you may go in worldly conformity.

We are to avoid the very appearance of evil, and especially just at this festive season of the year, this Christmas, when so many of you are having your parties, your children's sports, and all that kind of thing. I would have you doubly jealous, do remember, Church members, that you are to be Christians always, if Christians at all. We do not grant dispensations to sin, as the Roman Catholics did in Luther's day. You are always to wear your uniforms as Christian soldiers and never, at any time, say, "Well, I shall do this just now—it is only once a year. I shall do as the world does—I cannot be out of fashion." You must be either out of the fashion, or out of the true Church—remember that, because the place for Christ's Church is altogether out of fashion.

You are called to go forth outside the camp, bearing His reproach. If you want to be in the camp, you cannot be Christ's disciple, for the love of the world is enmity to Christ. You must be a separated one or be lost. If you want to be the common, you cannot be the garden! And if you are willing and anxious to be the garden, why, then, do not attempt to be the common. Keep the hedges up. Keep the gates well bolted—king's gardens must not be left open to thieves and robbers. Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The King's garden is a separated place—keep it so.

The King's garden is a place of order. You do not, when you go into your garden, find the flowers all put in any which way—the wise gardener arranges them according to their tints and hues so that in the midst of summer the garden shall look like a rainbow that has been broken to pieces and let down upon the earth—delightful to gaze upon. All the walks are even, the beds are in

proportion, and the plants well arranged, just as they should be. Such should the Christian Church be—pastor, deacons, elders, members—all in their proper places. We are not a load of bricks, but a house.

The Church is not a mere heap, but it is to be a palace built for God, a temple in which He manifests Himself. Let us all try to maintain order in the household of Christ, and above all things hate discord and confusion. Let us be men who know how to keep rank, maintaining a decent order and regularity in all things. We seek not the order which consists in all sleeping in their places, like corpses in the catacombs, but we desire the order which finds all working in their places for the common cause of the Lord Jesus. May we never become a disorderly, disunited, irregular Church. May there be order in the garden preserved by the power of love and Divine Grace.

A garden is a place of beauty. Such should the Christian Church be. You gather together the fairest flowers from all lands and put them in your garden. And if you see no beauties in the streets, you expect to see them in the florist's beds. So, if there is no holiness, no love, no zeal, no prayerfulness outside in the world, yet we should see these things in the Church! We are not to take the world to be our guide, but we are to excel it. We must do more than others. The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of even the Scribes and Pharisees or they could not enter the kingdom. And the genuine Christian must seek to be more excellent in his life than the best moralist because Christ's garden ought to have the best flowers in all the world! Even the best is poor compared with what Christ's deserves—let us not put Him off with withered and dying plants. The rarest, richest, choicest lilies and roses ought to bloom in the place which Jesus calls His own.

The king's garden is a place of growth, too. I do not suppose the florist would think that soil fit to be a garden in which his plants would not grow. It would be a dead loss to him if the slips remained slips and if the buds never turned to flowers. So in the Church of God. We are not introduced into fellowship to be always the same, always little children and babes in Grace. We should grow in Grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Prayer Meeting should be a school of practical education for our Beloved young members, a place for the young nestlings to try their callous wings. When they try to pray, at first they may almost break down, perhaps, but if they will not give way to a foolish timidity, they will soon get over it and find themselves useful—not merely in public prayer, but in a thousand works of usefulness besides. Growth should be rapid where Jesus is the Gardener and the Holy Spirit the dew from above.

Again, a garden is a place of retirement. When a man is in his garden he does not expect to see all his customers walking down between the beds to do business with him. "No," he says, "I am walking in my garden, and I expect to be alone." So the Lord Jesus Christ would have us reserve the Church to be a place in which He can manifest Himself to us as He does not unto the world. Oh I wish that Christians were more retired, that they kept their hearts more shut up for Christ! I am afraid we often worry and trouble ourselves, like Martha, with much serving so that we have not the room for Christ that Mary had, and do not sit at His feet as we ought to do. The Lord grant us Grace to keep our hearts as closed gardens for Christ to walk in.

This, then, is a poor description of what the Church is. And now, very briefly, whose is it? The Church is a garden, but it is the King's garden. The Church is not mine, nor yours, but the King's. It

is the King's garden because He chose it for Himself—

"We are a garden walled around, Chosen, and made peculiar ground. A little spot enclosed by Grace Out of the world's wide wilderness."

We are the King's because He bought us—Naboth said he would not give up his vineyard because he inherited it. So does Christ inherit us by an indefeasible title. We are His heritage and He has so dearly bought us with His own blood that He will never give us up, blessed be His name!

We are His because He has conquered us. He won us in fair fight and now we acknowledge the validity of His title-deeds, and confess, every one of us, as the members of His church, that we are His, and that He is ours. What a nobility this gives to Christ's Church! I have sometimes heard people talk disparagingly of Church meetings—there may be but few persons present—some of those may be young members and some may be very old. Yet I have been much grieved when I have heard people despise such a Church meeting for Christ would not despise it! Let such beware. Whenever the Church meets, either as a whole or representatively, there is a solemn dignity cast about that assembly which is not to be found in a parliament of kings and princes. Yes, I will say it—if Louis Napoleon could call a senate of all the potentates in this world in Paris and hold a congress there—the whole of them put together would not be worth the snap of a finger compared with halfa-dozen godly old women who meet together in the name of Christ as a Church, in obedience to the Lord's command! God would not be there with the potentates—what cares He for them? But He would be with the most poor and despised of His people who meet together as a Church in Jesus Christ's name. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," is more glorious than ermine, or purple, or crown! Constitute a Church in the name of Christ and meet together as such, and there is no assembly upon the face of the earth that can be compared with it! Even the assembly of the first-born in Heaven is but a branch of the grand whole of which the assemblies of the Church on earth make up an essential part. The Church is the King's garden.

I am going to ask, now, if the Church is a garden, what does it need? One thing it certainly requires is labor. You cannot keep a garden in proper order without work. We want more laborers in this Church, especially of one sort. We want some who will be planters. I had a letter last week from a young woman. I do not know who she is. I do not know where she sits. It may be in the top gallery, it is quite as likely to be in the second—perhaps more likely—and in the arena quite as likely again. She says that she has been here for two years and that she has been very anxious about her soul, and she has often wished that somebody would speak to her but nobody has done so.

Now, if I knew where she sat, I should say to the friends who sit there that I am ashamed of them! As I do not know where she sits, will those of you who love Christ, but who have not been in the habit of looking after others, be so kind as to be ashamed of yourselves, because there is somebody or other to be blamed in this business! If you love Jesus at all, I cannot understand how you can let a person come to this Tabernacle for two years and not speak to them! Somebody has been negligent, very negligent! Whoever it may be, let him see to it! I do not say you can speak upon the best things the first time you see them, though you might try to do that at any rate—but how can you have been silent for two years?

How can this be? You have been here twice every Sunday and that young woman has been here twice. Well, there are 200 times—200 opportunities that you have lost! Two hundred times that you have let that poor soul go away burdened without speaking to her! I need laborers very badly, real hard-working soul-winners! I need planters who can get the young slips and put them where they will grow! I need helpers who will gather up the young lambs, just as they are born, and carry them in their bosom a little while. We need spiritual nurses who will give comfort to the broken-hearted and pour in the oil of consolation into the wounds of poor trembling sinners!

In every Church there ought to be some to watch over those who are planted. When we receive members we ought to look after them! And as one person cannot do it thoroughly—as even the elders and deacons are hardly numerous enough for so great a work—it should be the aim and duty of all the experienced Christians in the Church to fondly tend the younger ones. I believe that many of you do this, and I am very thankful to zealous friends who are not in office in the Church who do a great deal in visiting the sick and watching over the younger members. Only I want all of you to do it! Oh, if everybody were duly anxious about keeping this garden in order, how beautifully trimmed all the borders would be and how few weeds should we find springing up in the beds!

May I ask you, members of the Church, are you doing your duty by the King's garden? You are yourselves His own chosen ones, and He has worked for you so that you have no need to work to save yourselves. But still, you must not be idle, for your Lord has said to you, "Go, work today in My vineyard." Are you doing it? I thank you if you are. If you are not, blame yourselves. There should be a little band in every Church to collect the stragglers. Our vines will grow out of order if they can, but we must deal wisely with them and fasten them up in their places. We must be on the alert when we see backsliding begin. How much can be done by old Christians in trying to stop backsliding among the young! I believe that half the cases that have gone badly might have been stopped by a little judicious forethought.

I say again, what can we, who are the officers of this Church, do with so many? Why, we number more than 3,500 in Church fellowship. But if you will look after each other, and seek wherever you see a little decline or a little coldness, to bring the Brother back, the King's garden will be well cared for. The King's garden needs laborers—may you all labor, and its needs in this respect will be met. Sometimes we need, Brothers and Sisters, to burn up the rubbish and sweep up the leaves. In the best Church there will always be some falling leaves. Somebody gets out at the elbow with another Brother. We are not any of us perfect, even though we get on far more than reasonably well with one another as a Church. I never saw any Church that was really so well knit together in Christian love as we are—but there are always a few leaves about, and not a little dust to be put in the corner and burned.

May I ask a Brother, whenever he sees any mischief, to sweep it up and say nothing about it? Whenever you find that such-and-such a Brother is going a little amiss, talk to him about it quietly. Do not spread it all over the Church and cause jealousies and suspicions. Pick up the leaf and destroy it. When a Brother member has offended you so that you feel vexed, forgive him, for I dare say you will need forgiveness before many days are over. We have none of us, perhaps, the sweetest of tempers, but if we do have the sweetest, the way to prove it is by forgiving those who have not. If every one would seek to make peace there never could be any great accumulation of discord in the King's garden to annoy Him. And when He came walking in He would find it all

beautiful and in good order, and all the flowers blooming delightfully—and He would find His delights with the sons of men.

Now, I have said that the Church needs laborers, but, dear Friends, it needs something else! It needs new plants. I wish I might find some tonight. Our King finds plants for His garden outside the wall. He takes the wild olive branches and grafts them into the good olive, and then the sap changes the nature. A new thing, that! It is not thus in our gardens at home, but wonders are worked in the garden of the King! He transplants weeds from the dunghill and makes them to grow as lilies in the midst of his fair garden. Will you be such a plant? May the Master's love constrain you to desire to be such a one, and, if you desire it, you shall have it! Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you are His! Rest alone upon Him and you are a plant of His right-hand planting, and shall never be rooted up. God grant that you may blossom to the skies.

But, dear Friends, all the laborers and all the new plants would not be what the Church requires if she had not something else—for every garden needs rain, and every garden needs sunshine. This Church, if it had ever so many laborers, could never prosper without the dew of the Holy Spirit and the sunshine of the Divine favor. We have had these blessings to a very great extent. We must pray that we may have more. I should like to know of some of you how long it is since you have been to a Prayer Meeting. Shall I stop and let you count? Well, you have not been just lately because it is Christmas time. Very well, I did not expect to see you. And if I had expected, I should have been disappointed.

But it was not Christmas time last October, and yet you were not here then! Some of you very seldom come at all. If you are lawfully detained at home, I would never ask you to come, or upbraid you for minding your home duties. You have no right to leave legitimate business that ought to be done to come here. But I am certain that some of you are idle and might come if you liked. I pray the Lord to send you a horsewhip in the shape of trouble in your conscience till you do come, for it very much weakens us all in our prayers when our numbers decline!

And whenever people come to despise weeknight services—be sure of it—farewell to the vital power of godliness, for weeknight services are very, very much the stamp of the man. Any hypocrite will come on a Sunday, but a man does need to take some interest in religious services to be found mingling with the people of God in prayer. Am I to believe that some of you do not care whether souls are saved or not? Am I to believe that some of you, our Church members, have no care whether our ministry is blessed or not? Am I to believe that you continue members of a Church in which you take no interest? Am I to believe that it is nothing to you whether Christ is crowned or despised? I will not believe it!

And yet your absence from the meetings for prayer tends to make me fear that it must be so. I beg you correct yourselves in this matter, and as the King's garden needs rain and sunshine and we cannot expect to have it without prayer, let us not forget the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is. Oh, for more prayer! More to pray! And for those who do pray, to pray with more fervor and more constancy in supplication! One favor I would ask. If you cannot come to the Prayer Meetings— and many of you, I know, cannot, and I do not speak to you blaming you—but do pray in the family, do pray in the closet for us. Do not let us become poor in prayer. It is a bad thing to become poor in money because we need it for a thousand causes, and cannot get on without it. But we can do without money better than we can do without prayer! We must have your

prayers. I had almost said, if you do not give us your daily prayers give up your membership, for it is no good to yourselves and cannot be of any use to us. The very least thing that a Church member can do is to plead with God that the blessing may descend. It is the King's garden, and will you not pray for it? It is the King's own garden in which He loves to walk and which He has purchased with His blood—shall not your prayers go up that His Church may flourish, and that His kingdom may come?

And now, lastly, on this point. This King's garden, what does it produce? If there had been time, I meant to have waited while you answered the question as to how much you produced. Sometimes in our garden we have a tree which is so loaded with fruit that we have to put props under it to keep the branches from trembling. There are one or two in this Church of that sort, who bear much fruit for God, and are so weak in body that their very fruitfulness of zeal and earnestness seems as though it would break them. I pray God that with His gracious promise He may prop them up. I am afraid that this is not the picture of most of us. You say to the gardener sometimes, "Will there be any fruit on that tree this season? It is time that it should show." He looks, and looks, and looks again, and at last the good man says, "I think I can see one little one up at time top, Sir, but I do not know whether it will come to much."

That, I am afraid, is the photograph of many professors. There is fruit, or else they would not be saved ones, but it is "a little one." "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be My disciples." May your prayer be not for fruit only, but for much fruit, and may God send it! Remember, if there is any fruit at all, it all belongs to the King. If a soul is saved, He shall have the glory of it. If there is any advance made in the great cause of Truth and righteousness, the crown shall be put upon His head. The keepers of the vineyard shall have their hundreds, but the King Himself shall have His 10,000s time 10,000s, for He deserves it all.

VI. And now, dear Friends, before I send you away, there is one more garden I must mention, but the time is so far past that I shall not keep you to say much about it. It is the GARDEN OF THE PARADISE ABOVE. I shall let God's Word speak to you about that garden, and then have done. "And he showed in a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the Tree of Life, which bore 12 manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light: and they shall reign forever and ever."

In that garden of the Paradise above may we all be found at the last. Amen.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Chapter 10

Nehemiah 4:9 #2254 - The Two Guards Praying and Wa

THE TWO GUARDS PRAYING

AND WATCHING

NO. 2254

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 1, 1892.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 24, 1890.

"Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a

watch against them day and night, because of them."

Nehemiah 4:9.

NEHEMIAH and the Jews with him were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Sanballat and others were angry with them and tried to stop the work. They determined to pounce upon the people on a sudden and slay them—and so put an end to what they were doing. Our text tells us what Nehemiah and his companions did in this emergency—"Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them."

These people had not only to build the wall of Jerusalem, but to watch against their enemies at the same time. Their case is ours. We have to work for Christ. I hope that all of us who love Him are trying to do what we can to build up His Kingdom—but we also need to watch against deadly foes. If they can destroy us, of course they will also destroy our work. They will do both if they can. The powers of evil are mad against the people of God. If they can in any way injure or annoy us, you may rest assured that they will do so. They will leave no stone unturned if it can serve their purpose. No arrows will be left in the quivers of Hell while there are godly men and women at whom they can be aimed. Satan and his allies aim at our hearts every poisoned dart they have!

Nehemiah had been warned of the attack that was to be made upon the city. The Jews who lived near these Samaritans had heard their talk of what they meant to do and they came and told Nehemiah of the plotting of the adversaries. We also have been warned. As our Lord said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat," so has He, in His Word, told us that there is a great and terrible evil power which is seeking our destruction. If Satan can do it, he will not only sift us as wheat, but he will cast us into the fire that we may be destroyed! Brothers and Sisters, "we are not ignorant of his devices." You are not left in a fool's paradise to dream of security from trial and to fancy that you are past temptation!

It was well for these people, also, that, being in danger and being aware of the malice of their enemies, they had a noble leader to incite them to

Volume 38 1the right course to be pursued. Nehemiah was well qualified for his work. He gave the Jews very shrewd, sensible and yet spiritual advice—and this was a great help to them in their hour of need. Beloved, we have a better Leader than Nehemiah! We have our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, and we have His Holy Spirit who dwells in us and shall abide with us. I beg you to listen to His wise and good advice. I think that He will give it to you through our explanation of the text. He will say to you what Nehemiah, in effect, said to these people, "Watch and pray." Although the adversaries of the Jews conspired together—and came to fight against Jerusalem and to hinder the work of rebuilding the wall—Nehemiah says, "Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them."

In the text, I see two guards. First, prayer—"We made our prayer unto our God." The second guard is watchfulness—"We set a watch." When I have spoken on these two subjects, I shall take, as my third topic, the two guards together. "We prayed and we set a watch." We must have them both if we would defeat the enemy!

I. First, then, dear Friends, think of THE FIRST GUARD—"We made our prayer unto our God."

Speaking of this prayer, I would hold it up as a pattern for our prayers in a like condition. It was a prayer that meant business. Sometimes when we pray, I am afraid that we are not transacting business at the Throne of Grace. But Nehemiah was as practical in his prayer as he was in the setting of the watch. Some Brethren get up in our Prayer Meetings and say some very good things—but what they really ask for, I am sure I do not know! I have heard prayers of which I have said, when they were over, "Well, if God answers that prayer, I have not the least idea of what He will give us." It was a very beautiful prayer and there was a great deal of explanation of doctrine and experience in it, but I do not think that God needs to have doctrine or experience explained to Him! The fault about the prayer was that there was not anything asked for in it. I like, when Brethren are praying, that they should be as business-like as a good carpenter at his work. It is of no use to have a hammer with an ivory handle unless you aim it at the nail you mean to drive in up to the head! And if that is your objective, an ordinary hammer will do as well as a fine one—perhaps better.

Now, the prayers of Nehemiah and the Jews were petitions for Divine protection. They knew what they needed and they asked for it definitely. Oh, for more definiteness in prayer! I am afraid that our prayers are often clouds and we get mists for answers. Nehemiah's prayer meant business. I wish we could always pray in this way. When I pray, I like to go to God just as I go to a banker when I have a check to be cashed. I walk in, put the check down on the counter, the clerk gives me my money, I take it up and go about my business. I do not know that I ever stopped in a bank five minutes to talk with the clerks—when I have received my change, I go away and attend to other matters. That is how I like to pray. But there is a way of praying that seems like lounging near the Mercy Seat, as though one had no particular reason for being found there. Let it not be so with you, Brothers and Sisters. Plead the promise, believe it, receive the blessing God is ready to give and go about your business. The prayer of Nehemiah and his companions meant business.

In the next place, it was a prayer that overcame difficulties. The text begins with a long word, "nevertheless." If we pull it to pieces, we get three words—never the less—when certain things happen, we will pray never the less. On the contrary, we will cry to our God all the more! Sanballat sneered, but we prayed, never the less, but all the more because of his sneers! Tobiah uttered a cutting jest, but we prayed, never the less, but all the more because of his mocking taunt. If men make a jest of your religion, pray none the less. If they even become cruel and violent to you, pray none the less—never the less, not a word less, not a syllable less, not a desire less and not any faith less! What are your difficulties, dear Friend, in coming to the Mercy Seat? What hindrance lies in your way? Let nothing obstruct your approach to the Throne of Grace. Turn all stumbling stones into steppingstones and come, with holy boldness, and say, notwithstanding all opposition, "never the less, we made our prayer unto our God." Nehemiah's prayer meant business and overcame difficulties.

Notice, next, that it was a prayer that came before anything else. It does not say that Nehemiah set a watch and then prayed, but, "nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch." Prayer must always be the fore horse of the team! Do whatever else is wise, but not until you have prayed! Send for the physician if you are sick, but first pray. Take the medicine if you have a belief that it will do you good, but first pray. Go and talk to the man who has slandered you, if you think you ought to do so, but first pray. "Well, I am going to do so and so," says one, "and I shall pray for a blessing on it afterwards." Do not begin it until you have prayed! Begin, continue and end everything with prayer, but especially begin with prayer. Some people would never begin what they are going to do if they prayed about it first, for they could not ask God's blessing upon it. Is there anybody here who is going out of this Tabernacle to a place where he should not go? Will he pray first? He knows that he cannot ask a blessing on it and, therefore, he ought not to go there! Go nowhere where you cannot go after prayer! This would often be a good guide in your choice of where you should go. Nehemiah first prayed and then set a watch.

Once more, it was a prayer that was continued. If I read the passage aright, "we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night," it means that, as long as they watched, they prayed. They did not pray their prayer and then leave off and go away, as naughty boys do when they give runaway knocks at a door. Having begun to pray, they continued praying. So long as there were any enemies about, the prayer and the watching were never parted. They still continued to cry to Him who keeps Israel as long as they set the watchman of the night to warn them of the foe.

When shall we leave off praying, Brothers and Sisters? Well, they say that we shall do so when we get to Heaven. I am not clear about that. I do not believe in the intercession of saints for us, but I remember that it is written in the Book of Revelation that the souls under the altar cried, "How long, O Lord?" Those souls were waiting for the Resurrection, waiting for the coming of Christ, waiting for the triumph of His Kingdom, and I cannot conceive of their waiting there without often crying, "O Lord, how long? Remember Your Son, glorify His name, accomplish the number of Your elect."

But certainly, as long as we are here, we must pray! One lady, who professed that she had long been perfect, said that her mind was in such complete conformity with the mind of God that she need not pray any longer. Poor creature! What did she know about the matter? She needed to begin at the first letter of the alphabet of salvation and pray, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

When people imagine they need not to pray, the Lord have mercy upon them!—

"Long as they live, let Christians pray, For only while they pray they live."

The prayer which Nehemiah offered was, next, a prayer that was homemade. There may be some of you who like prayers made for you and it may be that, if all the congregation are to join in the supplication, and every voice is to speak, the prayer must be prepared even as a hymn is. But ready-made prayers always seem to me very much like ready-made clothes—they are meant to fit everybody and it is very seldom that they fit anybody. For real business at the Mercy Seat, give me a homemade prayer, a prayer that comes out of the deeps of my heart, not because I invented it, but because God the Holy Spirit put it there and gave it such a living force that I could not help letting it come out! Though your words are broken and your sentences are disconnected, if your desires are earnest, if they are like coals of juniper, burning with a vehement flame, God will not mind how they find expression! If you have no words, perhaps you will pray better without them. There are prayers that break the backs of words—they are too heavy for any human language to carry.

This prayer, then, whatever it may have been as to its words, was one the pleaders made—"We made our prayers unto our God."

It is very important to notice that it was a prayer that went to the home of prayer—"We made our prayer unto our God." You have heard of the man who prayed at Boston, "the hub of the universe," and the report in the paper the next morning was, that "The Rev. Dr. So-and-So prayed the finest prayer that was ever addressed to a Boston audience." I am afraid that there are some prayers of that sort, that are prayed to the congregation! That is not the kind of prayer that God loves. Forget that there is anybody present! Forget that a human ear is listening to your accents and let it be said of your prayer, "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God."

It is a very commonplace remark to make that prayer must go to God if it is to be of any use, but it is very necessary to make it. When prayer does not go to God, what is the good of it? When you come out of your closet and feel that you have only gone through a form, how much are you benefited? Make your prayers unto your God! Speak in His ear, knowing that He is there, and come away knowing that He has replied to you, that He has lifted up the Light of His Countenance upon you! That is the kind of prayer we need for our protection against our enemies both day and night.

Only once more upon this first point. I gather from the words before me that it was a prayer saturated with faith. "We made our prayer unto— "God"? No, "unto our God." They had taken Jehovah to be their God and they prayed to Him as their God. They had a full assurance that, though He was the God of the whole earth, yet He was especially their God—and so they made their prayer unto the God who had given Himself to them and to whom they belonged by Covenant relationship! "We made our prayers unto our God." Those two little words carry a vast weight of meaning. The door of prayer seems to turn on those two golden hinges—"our God." If you and I are to be delivered from the evil that is in the world—if we are to be kept building the Church of God—we must have for our first guard, mighty, believing prayer such as Nehemiah and his Jewish friends presented unto the Lord.

II. I have now to speak to you about THE SECOND GUARD—"We set a watch against them day and night, because of them."

This setting of the watch was a work appointed. "We set a watch." Nehemiah did not say, "Now, some of you fellows go and watch," leaving the post of watchmen open to any who chose to take it. But they, "set a watch." A certain number of men had to go on duty at a certain point, at a certain hour, remain for a certain length of time and be on guard against the adversary. "We set a watch." Brothers and Sisters, if we are to watch over ourselves—and we must do so—we must do it with a definite purpose. We must not say, "I must try to be watchful." No, no! You must be watchful and your watchfulness must be as distinct and definite an act as your prayer. "We set a watch." Some of you have seen the guards changed in the barracks—there is a special time for each company to mount guard. When you go to bed at night, pray the Lord to guard you during the darkness. In the morning, set a watch when you go to your business. Set a watch when you go to the dinner table. Set a watch when you return home. Oh, how soon we may be betrayed into evil unless we set a watch!

It was a work carefully done, for Nehemiah says, "We set a watch against them day and night, because of them." Those three last words would be better rendered, "over against them," that is, wherever there was an enemy, there he set a watch. They are likely to come up this way. Very well, set a watch there. Perhaps they may shift about and come up this way. Very well, set a watch there. Possibly they may come climbing over the wall in front here. Well, set a watch there. "We set a watch over against them." One brother has a very hot temper. Brother, set a watch there! Another is very morose at home, critical, picking holes in other people's coats. Brother, set a watch there! One friend has a tendency to pride, another to unbelief. Set a watch wherever the foe is likely to come! "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch over against them."

It was a work continued. Nehemiah says, "we set a watch against them day and night." What? Is there to be someone sitting up all night? Of course there is! If Sanballat had told them when he meant to attack them, they might have gone to sleep at other times, but as he did not give them that information, they had to set a watch "day and night." The devil will not give you notice when he is going to tempt you—he likes to take men by surprise—therefore, set a watch day and night.

It was a work quickened by knowledge. They knew that Sanballat would come if he could, so they set a watch. The more you know of the plague of your own heart, the more you will set a watch against it. The more you know of the temptations that are in the world through lust, the more you should set a watch. The older you are, the more you should watch. "Oh!" says an aged friend, "you should not say that—it is the young people who go wrong." Is it? In the Old Testament or in the New, have you an instance of a young Believer who went astray? The Bible tells us of many old men who were tripped up by Satan when they were not watching. So you have need to set a watch even when your hair turns gray, for you will not be out of gunshot of the devil until you have passed through the gate of pearl into the golden streets of the New Jerusalem!

You and I, dear Friends, have need to set a watch against the enemies of our holy faith. Some people ask me, "Why do you talk so much about the 'Down-Grade?' Let men believe what they like. Go on with your work for God and pray to Him to set them right." I believe in praying and setting a watch. We have to guard with jealous care "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." When you find, as you find now, professing Christians and professing Christian ministers denying

every article of the faith, or putting another meaning upon all the words that they must have been understood to bear, and preaching lies in the name of the Most High, it is time that somebody set a watch against them! A night-watchman's place is not an easy berth, but I am willing to take that post for my blessed Master's sake. Those professed servants of Christ who enter into an unholy alliance with men who deny the faith will have to answer for it at the Last Great Day. As for us, Brothers and Sisters, when our Lord comes, let Him find us watching as well as praying!

But, dear Friends, to come home to ourselves, we must set a watch against our own personal adversaries. I hope that, in one sense, you have no personal enemies, that you owe nobody a grudge, but that you live in peace and love towards all mankind. But there are Christian people here who will go to homes where everybody in the house is against them. Many a godly woman goes from the sanctuary to a drunken husband. Many children, converted to God, see anything but what they like to see in their homes. What are they to do in such circumstances? Set a watch!

Dear Woman, how do you know but that you shall be the means of saving your unconverted husband? If so, you must set a watch—do not give him a bit of your mind—you will not convert him that way. And you, dear Children, who have come to Christ and joined the Church, mind that you are dutiful and obedient, for otherwise you will destroy all hope of bringing your parents to the Savior. Set a watch. "Oh!" you say, "if I do a little wrong, they magnify it." I know they do and, therefore, set a watch—be more careful. Set a watch over your temper, set a watch over your tongue, set a watch over your actions. Be patient, be gentle, be loving. May the Spirit of God work all this in you! But there is another set of enemies much more dreadful than these adversaries that are outside us—the foes within—the evil tendencies of our corrupt nature, against which we must always set a watch! Perhaps you say, "How can I do this?" Well, first, know what they are. People who are beginning the Christian life should seek to know where their weak points are. I should not wonder, dear Friend, if your weak point lies where you think that you are strong. Where you think, "Oh, I shall never go wrong there"—that is the very place where you are likely to fall! Set a watch wherever any weakness has appeared and, if you have, in the past in your Christian life, grieved the Holy Spirit by anything wrong, set a double watch there! Where you have tripped once, you may trip again, for you are the same man.

Set a watch, also, dear Friend, whenever you feel quite secure. Whenever you feel certain that you cannot be tempted in a particular direction, that proves that you are already as proud as Lucifer! Set a watch, set a watch, set a watch! Avoid every occasion of sin. If any course of conduct would lead you into sin, do not go in that direction. I heard a man say, as an excuse for drinking, "You see, if ever I take a glass of beer, I seem to lose myself and I must have two or three more." Well, then, if that is the case with you, do not take a glass of beer. "But," one says, "if I get into company, I forget myself." Then, do not go into company! Better go to Heaven as a hermit, than go to Hell with the multitude! Pluck out your right eye and cut off your right hand sooner than that these should cause you to fall into sin! Do not go where you are likely to be tempted.

"Well," says one, "but my business calls me into the midst of temptation." I grant you that your business may compel you to go where there are ungodly men, for how could some live at all if they had not to come into contact with the ungodly?—they would have to go out of the world! Well, then, if that is your case, put on the whole armor of God and do not go without being prepared to

fight the good fight of faith. Set a watch, set a watch, set a watch!

Watch against the beginnings of sin. Remember, Satan never begins where he leaves off—he begins with a little sin and he goes on to a greater one. When he first tempts men, he does not aim at all he hopes to accomplish—he tries to draw them aside little by little—and he works up by degrees to the greater sin he wants you to commit. I do not believe that, at the present time, a Christian man can be too precise. We serve a very precise God—"the Lord your God is a jealous God." Keep out of many things in which professing Christians now indulge themselves. The question is whether they are Christians at all! If we must not judge them—at any rate, let us judge ourselves and settle it, once and for all, that we dare not go where they go—indeed, we have no wish to do so!

Watch for what God has to say to you. In your reading of the Bible, if the Holy Spirit applies a text of Scripture to you with special force, regard it as a hint from your heavenly Father that there is a lesson in it for you. I am often surprised at the way in which the morning text will often instruct me through the whole day. Persons who come to hear the Word of God preached often find that, within two or three days, there is a reason why the preacher delivered that particular sermon—and a reason why they were led to hear it.

Whenever you see a professing Christian going astray from the way of holiness, do not talk about it and so increase the mischief. "It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest." Instead of speaking of another's fall, set a watch for yourself and say, "That is where he slipped and that is where I may stumble if the Grace of God does not keep me." Remember our Savior's words to the three disciples with Him in Gethsemane, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation."

III. I finish by putting THE TWO GUARDS TOGETHER. "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them."

Dear Friends, neither of these two guards is sufficient by itself. Prayer alone will not avail. To pray and not to watch is presumption. You pretend to trust in God and yet you are throwing yourself into danger, as the devil would have had Christ do, when he tempted Him to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple! If you pray to be kept, then be watchful.

Prayer without watchfulness is hypocrisy. A man prays to be kept from sin and then goes into temptation—his prayer is evidently a mere piece of mockery, for he does not carry it out in practice.

Sometimes, however, ignorance may lead to prayer without watching. There are other things which ought not to be omitted. Let me tell you a simple story. There was a little schoolgirl who did not often know her lessons. And there was another girl who sat near her, who always said her lessons correctly. Her companions said to her, "Jane, how is it that you always know your lessons?" Jane replied, "I pray to God to help me and so I know them." The next day, the other little girl stood up, but she did not know her lesson—and afterward she said to her friend, "I prayed to God about my lesson, but I did not know it any better than I did yesterday." Jane said, "But did you try to learn the lesson?" "No," she said, "I prayed about it, and I thought that was sufficient." Of course she did not know her lesson without learning it! In the same manner, you must watch as well as pray. There must be the daily guard put upon tongue, thought and hands—otherwise prayer will be in vain.

I have known some people run great risks and yet say that they have prayed to the Lord to preserve them. I have heard, dozens of times, these words, "I made it a matter of prayer," and I have been ready to grow angry with the man who has uttered them! He has done a wrong thing and he has excused himself because he says that he made it a matter of prayer! A young man married an ungodly young woman and yet he said that he made it a matter of prayer! A Christian woman married an ungodly man and when someone blamed her for disobeying the Word of God, she said that she made it a matter of prayer! If you had really sought Divine guidance, you would not have dared to do what the Scriptures expressly forbid a child of God! Prayer without watching is not sufficient to preserve us from evil.

On the other hand, dear Friends, watching without praying is equally futile. To say, "I will keep myself right," and never pray to God to keep you, is self-confidence which must lead to evil. If you try to watch and do not pray, you will go to sleep and there will be an end to your watching. It is only by praying and watching that you will be able to keep on your guard. Besides, watching grows wearisome without prayer, and we soon give it up unless we have a sweet interlude of prayer to give us rest and to help us to continue watching.

I will not keep you longer when I have said this, put the two together, "Watch and pray," or, as my text has it, "Pray and watch." One will help the other. Prayer will call out the watchman, prayer will incite him to keep his eyes open. Prayer will be the food to sustain him during the night, prayer will be the fire to warn him. On the other hand, watching will help prayer, for watching proves prayer to be true. Watching excites prayer, for every enemy we see will move us to pray more earnestly. Moreover, watching is prayer. If there is true watching, the watching, itself, is prayer. The two blend the one into the other. Beloved Friends, I send you away with my text ringing in your ears, "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night."

But I have not been speaking to all who are here. Some of you do not pray. Some of you cannot set a watch. The message for you is, "You must be born again." You cannot attempt Christian duties till first you have the Christian life. And the only way to get the Christian life is to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to the Fountain which He has filled with His precious blood! Wash there and be clean! And then, quickened by His Spirit, set a watch. I am looking to see some people brought to Christ at this service, for although I have been preaching to God's people, if they will watch for you and pray for you, there will come a blessing to you through their watching and praying!

The Lord grant that it may come to many of you! "Seek you the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him when He is near." May many seek and find the Lord tonight—and may many call upon Him in truth! "Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved." God grant that it may be so to everybody here, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Portion of Scripture Read before Sermon—Nehemiah 4:1-23.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

Nehemiah 4:1-23

Verse 1. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we built the wall, he was angry and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. It was necessary to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem

which had been lying in ruins. They went on pretty briskly, for everyone had a mind to work. There never was a good work yet but what there were some to oppose it—and there never will be till the Lord comes! Sanballat heard what the Jews were doing and he was very angry. "He was angry and took great indignation." He was all on fire with anger that God's work was being continued. 2. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What are these feeble Jews doing? The enemies of God's people generally take to sneering! It is a very easy way of showing opposition.

2. Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? No doubt these questions were thought to be very witty and very sarcastic. The enemies of Christ are generally good hands at this kind of thing. Well, if it amuses them, I do not know that it need hurt us much—for, after all—it is their way of paying homage to God's power!

3. Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him. Such a man as Sanballat never lacks friends. If there is a bad man anywhere, there is sure to be another close at hand. The devil does not make a fire with one stick. When he has set the first one alight, he can generally find more wood to put near it. Tobiah the Ammonite, who was tarred with the same brush as Sanballat the Horonite, was by him.

4, 5. Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity; and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before You: for they have provoked You to anger before the builders. This was righteous indignation, but Nehemiah is not a perfect model for us. He was not only stern, but he mingled with his severity a measure of bitterness in his prayer that we must not imitate. Sometimes, when we have seen men plotting against God, seeking to ruin the souls of others and trying to stop us in our endeavor to build up the Church of God, we have felt such language as this trembling on our lips. It were better, however, for us to bow the knee in humble imitation of our Lord upon the Cross and cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

6. So built we the wall. You half expected to read, "So we stopped building the wall and answered Sanballat and Tobiah." Not a bit of it. They kept to their work and let these two men scoff as they pleased!

6. And all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work. They built the wall as high as they meant it to be, ultimately, but they carried it all round and joined it well together. If we cannot do all we would like to do, let us do what we can—and let us endeavor, as far as possible, to finish off the part that we do, waiting for better times to carry the walls higher.

7. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very angry. They were "angry" before—now they were "very angry." If a work has no opposition from Satan, we may be half afraid it is good for nothing! If you cannot make the devil roar, you have not done him much harm—but the more he roars, the more cause there is for the angels singing the praises of God before the Throne of God!

8. And conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. It is amazing how unanimous bad men can be. It has always struck me as a very startling thing that

you have never heard of any division among the devils in Hell. There are no sects among the devils—they seem to work together with an awful unanimity of purpose in their wicked design. In this one thing they seem to excel the family of God. Oh, that we were as hearty and united in the service of God as wicked men are in the service of Satan!

9, 10. Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. And Judah said—Judah, you know, was the lion tribe. Christ is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." But Judah, instead of being lion-hearted, made a noise more like a mouse than a lion, and Judah said—

10. The strength of the bearers of burden is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. Poor Judah! He ought to have been bolder and braver, but he was not. It is the same today—some who seem to be pillars prove very weak in the hour of trial—and by their cowardice discourage the rest.

11. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. While some were discouraging the people within the city, their enemies, outside the walls, were plotting to take them by surprise and slay them.

12. And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence you shall return unto us they will be upon you. These Jews ought to have been helping to build the wall, but they did not come to the help of the Lord's people. Still, they were sufficiently friendly to tell Nehemiah of the plot that was being hatched by his enemies. God knows how, when His enemies are sinking a mine, to undermine them! If secrecy is necessary to the success of evil, somebody speaks out and tells the story, so that the plot is discovered.

13. Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. When Nehemiah knew the danger to which the people were exposed, he took measures to guard against it. I like the commonsense of Nehemiah. He kept families together. "I set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows." Beloved Friends, I have no greater joy than such as I had last Tuesday when I received five children of one family, all brought to Christ! May the Lord make our families to be the guards of the Church!

14. And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not afraid of them. Fear may waken us, but it must never be allowed to weaken us. We should put on the armor and take the sword and spear and bow when there is cause for fear— we should never dream of running away.

14, 15. Remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nothing, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. There was no fighting, after all! As soon as the enemy knew that their plot was found out, they did not make any assault. One commentator says—"Some men, if they had been delivered from danger, would have returned, every one to the ale-house, but these men returned, every one, to his work." They went back to their building and continued still in the

service of the city.

16, 17. And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants worked in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which built on the wall, and they that bore burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands worked in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. The sword and the trowel both guarded the city and built the wall!

18. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so built. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. What the trumpet was for, we are told directly.

19, 20. And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what places, therefore you hear the sound of the trumpet, resort you there unto us: our God shall fight for us. That is a grand sentence! The moment you hear the trumpet, you are to leave your place on the wall and come to the point where the enemy is attacking us. But Nehemiah does not say, "You shall fight for us," he puts it much better, "Our God shall fight for us." So He will!

21. So we labored in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. They made long days. Christian people do not want merely eight hours a day for Christ. We can sometimes do 18 hours' work for Him in a day—and we wish that we could do twenty-four.

22, 23. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let everyone with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labor on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes. Nehemiah was a good leader. He did not say, "Go." He said, "Come"—and he bore the brunt of the service! Like Alexander, who went with the Macedonians into the rough places, and did the hard work, so did Nehemiah. He and those with him did not put off their clothes, even for sleeping.

23. Saving that every one put them off for washing. Which was necessary, for cleanliness is next to godliness. May the Lord send us more Nehemiahs and plenty of people to work with them who can endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and who will also be good builders of the Church of God!

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Nehemiah 4:10 #1156 - Rubbish

RUBBISH

NO. 1156

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"There is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall"

Nehemiah 4:10.

REMEMBER that Jerusalem had been totally destroyed by Nebuchad

nezzar and what is meant by the destruction by the Babylonians may be inferred from the vast heaps of the dust of powdered bricks and charred wood which have been discovered upon the sites of cities which were utterly razed to the ground by the fierce soldiers of that terrible king. The ruins are frequently so complete that even tradition has forgotten the name of the mound or heap which is the sole memorial to mark the sepulcher of a queenly city. The Babylonians made sure work when they did it, their plowers made deep furrows and their destroyers cried one, to another, "Overturn, overturn, overturn, till not a stone shall abide in its place."

They reaped a nation with their swords as corn is cut down by the sickle and they beat their cities till the ruins were small as the dust of the summer threshing floor. Do you wonder that on the site of Jerusalem there remained much rubbish? Many modern destroyers have done their desolating work most wonderfully and I may venture to quote what I have seen of their doings as an example of the much rubbish with which the foundations of a ruined city are sure to be covered. I have stood upon the Palatine Mount in Rome, where formerly the pale of the Caesars raised themselves in more than imperial grandeur. But what an Alp of fragments! What a mountain of broken walls and columns, and stones peering upward like the natural rock of mother earth!

Houses, convents, palaces have been built upon the mass and for many seasons trees have bloomed and fruited, and gardens have brought forth their harvests above the spot where once the imperial tyrant was known to awe the nations with a nod. To restore the palaces of the Palatine, the first labor would be the unearthing of the foundations—and this would probably be as huge an undertaking as the rebuilding of the palaces, themselves. A mountain must be carried away before a stone can be laid. If you were able to visit the Forum at Rome, you would see, if you were there today, numbers of laborers with horses and carts continually at work taking away hundreds of thousands of tons of rubbish which have covered up all that still remains of the ancient center and heart of Rome.

Jerusalem, I do not doubt, was one vast heap made up of the debris of its houses, of the tower and armory of David, of the palace of the king, and of the Temple itself. And though now, at the period we are about to speak of, the temple had been rebuilt and modern houses covered the site

of the older Jerusalem, yet, when they came to the wall of the city, with the view of thoroughly restoring it, they found it a complete ruin—and such a ruin that the mass which covered it up was difficult to dig through. They could not build the wall because there was so much rubbish.

Now, this, it seems to me, is intended, or at least may justifiably be used, for a type of the work which God's people have to carry on in the name of Jesus and in the power of His Holy Spirit, in the world. We have to build the walls of the Church for God, but we cannot build it for there is so much rubbish in our way. This is true, first, of the building of the Church, which is the Jerusalem of God. And this is equally true of the temple of God, which is to be built in each one of our hearts. Full often we feel discouraged. Though we hear the voice that says, "But you, Beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God," still we are apt to feel that we cannot build this wall because there is so much rubbish.

I. I shall speak first, then, of the great work comprised in THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH. Now, this enterprise is the work of God. He alone can build the Church. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His Glory." And we may build as we may, but "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Still, our full and firm conviction that it is God's working does not at all interfere with the grand Truth of God that He employs agents for the building up of His Church in the world! That, in fact, He has commissioned us, His chosen servants, and sent us into the world, each one according to our ability and opportunity, to labor for Him.

We work because God works by us. We are hindered, however, in this service by the fact that there is much rubbish in the way. It was always so. When Paul began to build for God, and the Apostles went forth as wise master builders, there lay before them, in towering heaps, the old Jewish rubbish—hard to remove, heavy to bear away—and in quantity equal to a huge hill. The foundation was there. Thank God we have not to lay that! That is laid in Christ Jesus, and firmly laid, and "other foundation can no man lay." But the Jews, with their traditions, had overlaid the foundations—they had added to the Word of God. They had put glosses upon it. They had taken away its real meaning and put to it a meaning of their own.

They had invented innumerable rites and ceremonies—and dark and mysterious traditions of the fathers, so that though a man should seek to find out the Truth of God—he could not by reason of the abundance of the confused material and traditional superstition with which they had covered it up. The Apostles had to begin their Gospel labor among their fellow countrymen in the midst of this much rubbish. No sooner did they begin to remove the worthless deposits than the lovers of tradition assailed them, raised a great dust, and became their violent persecutors. They followed them from city to city, scandalizing them and committing all manner of violence against them. You cannot remove ruins without awakening the owls and bats.

The most rotten rubbish upon earth is sure to find some defender. By this rubbish many have gained their wealth and they are full of wrath if any threaten to disturb it. The Apostles soon found that they had fallen upon troublous times, yet by God's help, they cleared away that rubbish and were enabled to build their wall till the New Jerusalem became famous in the earth. They encountered, in the wider world of the Roman empire, the rubbish of old paganism and oh, what rubbish that was! He who is acquainted with the classic writers knows how polluted were the people of their times. Their satirists ascribe vices to them mirthfully which even with tears we would not dare to mention! The superstitions of the age were groveling to a hideous degree—their

very gods were monsters of crime—and their sacred rites orgies of lust and drunkenness.

The priests had successfully endeavored to make vice into a religion and under the pretence of mysterious worship had devised means for pandering to the most base passions of the most corrupt human nature. It is no small mass of rubbish which the student of today sifts over as he researches the Greek and Roman mythology. Men could not discover God, for many gods and many lords stood in the way. Neither could they believe in the simplicity of Jesus Christ because their foolish heart was darkened. "God made man upright, but he has found out many inventions." And all these inventions helped to turn him from his uprightness and to pervert his judgment. Yet those who went before us labored on amidst that foul and noisome rubbish—and were so successful in their earnest excavations—that at this day no one thinks of worshipping Jupiter, or Saturn, or Venus, or Mercury!

These demon-deities have gone to the limbo from where they came. They have been smitten—smitten by the Gospel—and they have withered like grass so that no man bows himself before them anymore. The God of Truth has come—and these bats and owls of the night have thrown themselves into obscurity and oblivion! This rubbish was cleared away and the foundations were built upon by earnest men that went before us, though they had to lay each stone in martyr blood and cement it with agonies and tears.

Moreover, remember that in those early days the Church, in her building, had to encounter mountains of "much rubbish" of the various philosophies of mankind. There was a kind of "feeling after God" in the heathen mind, but this feeling after God was misdirected and proudly selfconfident—and therefore it missed its way—and in the process of thought the more spiritual-minded among men (if I may venture to call men spiritual at all who were not renewed by Divine Grace) invented theories and superstitions which they thought to be exceedingly wise, but which, in fact, were folly, itself, dressed out in the robes of vainglory!

These philosophies had a great following and exercised so powerful an influence that they were felt even in the Church itself. In the writings of the Apostles Paul and John you continually meet with allusions to the great Gnostic philosophy which perverted so many Christians. Ever since that day human wisdom has been a greater curse to the Church than anything else! The ignorance of Christians has never been so evil a thing, bad as it is, as the vain knowledge, the false wisdom with which men have been puffed up in their fleshly minds. It is an ill day when men know too much to know Christ! It is a great misfortune when men are too manly to be converted and to become as little children, and sit at the feet of the great Teacher! Yet there are many professors of religion who talk as if this was their condition and as if they were proud of it.

Even at this present time the outside philosophies of unchristian men infect the Church, spoil her, injure her, dilute the wine of the kingdom, overturn the children's milk and, to a great extent, poison the Bread of Life. Sad that it should be so, but the rubbish of philosophy has always been in the way of the building up of the wall of the Church of God. The story of the Apostolic age may serve as a great comfort to us in these evil times. As they were hindered, so are we, but as they persevered and overcame even so will we, by our great Master's aid. After that lot of rubbish had been cleared away, the task was only begun, for soon after Apostolic times and the first zeal of Christians had gone, there came the old Roman rubbish, which in the end proved a worse hindrance than all which had preceded it.

This Popish rubbish was found in layers—first one doctrinal error and then another and then another, and then another, and then another—till at this time the errors of the Church of Rome are as countless as the stars, as black as midnight and as foul as Hell! Her abominations reek in the nostrils of all good men. Her idolatries are the scorn of reason and the abhorrence of faith! The iniquities of her practice and the enormities of her doctrine almost surpass belief! Popery is as much the masterpiece of Satan as the Gospel is the masterpiece of God! There can scarcely be imagined anything of devilish craftiness or Satanic wickedness which could be compared with her—she is unparalleled as the queen of iniquity. Behold upon her forehead the name, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

The Church of Rome and her teachings are a vast mountain of rubbish covering the Truth of God! For weary years good men could not get at the Foundation because of this very much rubbish. Here and there a Wycliffe spied out the precious Cornerstone and leaped for joy because he could get his foot upon it, and say, "Jesus Christ Himself, elect and precious, is the Stone on which I build my hope." Here and there a John Huss, or a Jerome of Prague, or a Savonarola in the thick midnight, yet, nevertheless, found the Foundation and wept their very hearts out because of the much rubbish which threatened to bury even them while they were seeking Him!

A master excavator was Martin Luther—how grandly he laid bare the glorious foundation of Justification by faith alone! An equally grand worker at this great enterprise was Master John Calvin who laid open long stretches of the ancient foundations of the Covenant of Grace. Well was he supported by his brother of Zurich, Zwingle, and John Knox in Scotland, and others in this land. They cleared away, for a while, some of the rubbish. But there was such a mass of it that they had to throw it up in heaps on either side—and it is beginning to come crumbling down again onto the foundation and to cover it up once more.

A perfect reformation they could not work, and the remnant of the rubbish is now our plague and hindrance. Everywhere the much rubbish is being diligently cast upon the pile by the emissaries of the Evil One, and we can scarcely get to the foundations to build again the gold and silver and precious stones which God commits to us with which to build up His own house. Alas, there is very, very much rubbish! I saw in Rome that the waggoner which took away the earth from the Forum were marked, "Regia Scava." They belonged to the royal excavations and I long to see royal excavators, employed by the King of Kings, get to work to excavate, again, the foundations of the wall of Jerusalem and cart away some of the tremendous heaps of rubbish that still lie upon the walls. God grant we may see good and great work done in this direction before long.

But, beloved Friends, if this rabbinical, pagan, philosophical and Romish rubbish were all gone, still the work would scarcely have begun, for there is yet very much rubbish of other kinds lying hereabout. There is so much rubbish arising from the world, the flesh and the devil, that we are not able to build the wall. Look at human sin. How that impedes us! Oh, if there were no false systems of religion. If priest and scribe were silent. If false prophets and Antichrist were both out of the way, yet the sins of men are a vast and hideous mass of rotten rubbish—and our labors of love are hindered by them. How hard it is to get at human ears—for the world has the first word—and often the last word, with the most of men. Eargate is choked with rubbish!

How harder, still, it is to get at human hearts—for there Satan reigns as in his own palace—and takes care to erect huge barricades and earthworks of the rubbish of carnal lust and pride and

unbelief! Men are wrapped up in indifference to eternal things, like mummies in their bands and gums. They give all their energy to the answering of the question, "What shall we eat and what shall we drink, and with what shall we be clothed?" Immortal as they are, they live only for mortality! Though their grandest destiny lies in eternity, yet all their efforts are bounded by the narrow space of time. Charm, O you charmer, ever so wisely, but this adder has no ear for you! This people, bent on its lusts, will still follow its own devices.

Though Christ beckons with His pierced hand, yet they turn their back on Him—and even He from Calvary cries—

"Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by, Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?"

He is despised and rejected of men! They see no form nor comeliness in Him whose countenance contains within itself all celestial beauty. They cannot be got at by love or law, by tears or terrors, by prayers or preaching! They are absorbed in earthly things. We cannot build the wall for their much rubbish. They are wedded to their sins. They cling to their idols. They will not even think about their soul, or their God, or their Savior. They choose their own delusions and reject their own mercies. It seems as if everything in the world helped them to be this way—for the business of life, the care and the ease, the quiet and the noise, the tumult and the turmoil, alike, ensnare them—all these things are transformed by their alienated hearts into a mass of rubbish!

With one man it is the pursuit, the arduous pursuit of learning. With another an intense greed for gold. With a third, ambition. With a fourth the lust of pleasure. But in each man the heap of rubbish prevents our getting at the heart. We cannot build the wall. Who among us has not often gone back to his God and said, "Who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" And this age of competition seems to make things worse than ever. Some are so poor that they tell us they cannot listen, for they have to work and toil like slaves for their bread merely to keep body and soul together. And as for those who are rich—O God, help the rich! Still it is true and perhaps more true now, than ever, that, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are a mass of rubbish so that we cannot build the wall.

Oh, how sad is the retrospect of the pastor as he remembers the many in whom he could never reach the conscience because of the intervening rubbish! And how mournful is the prospect that lies before him! Our only consolation is that if we cannot build, there is One who can—and if the rubbish is so much that the strength of the bearers of burdens is decaying, yet there is a Strength which is not decayed! There is an arm which is not weary and can perform all that is needed! I am afraid, dear Brothers and Sisters, that in the work of building up the Church the rubbish does not lie all with the sinners, but there is much of it also with the saints. There is very much rubbish among professors, so that we cannot build the wall.

I would be very patient with all men for I need much patience toward myself, but there are far too many, dear Brethren in Christ, who seem to me to spend all their time in diligently doing nothing. I have heard of a man who had, by dint of great patience and much skill, after many days of work, very splendidly carved the image of Caesar on a cherry stone. What a splendid result to have achieved! The exploit was duly reported and chronicled. But what of it? Truly, I have read books which seemed to me to be elaborately learned about nothing of any practical value and to amount

to about as much as a carving on a cherry stone, and no more. What good was to come of it? I am sure I could not tell!

Brothers come out, every now and then, in the religious world, with some new fad and fancy of theirs—some grand discovery that they have made, some wonderful point of doctrine, some marvelous, soul-stirring discovery, as it seems to be to them—and they expect all the world to stand still. They expect all the Churches to be broken up, and I don't know what, until they have exhibited this precious thing—which, when you have carefully looked at it, turns out to be very much like the mouse which was the famous product of the labor of the mountain! It comes to nothing more. There is very much rubbish about, Brothers and Sisters!

And, therefore, for the present distress, if every minister were to keep to preaching Christ and Him Crucified, and nothing else, I think he would do well. And if every Christian man were to just keep to the plain Truths of Scripture and have them worked into his soul by the Holy Spirit—and then speak them out with power and fire for soul-winning, and care for nothing else, he would do well. But there is very much rubbish. A whole evening will be spent by Brethren in discussing a question about as valuable as the famous inquiry of the schoolmen—as to how many angels would be able to stand on the point of a single needle! After discussing it with some little temper, perhaps, and having prayed over it a good deal, too—though I wonder how they dared do so—the whole of it ends in a bag of wind or a bottle of smoke and nothing else.

Had that same time been spent in the visitation of the sick and reclaiming the Arabs of our streets, the lifting up of the ruffianism and the blackguardism of London into something like decency, morality and Christianity, it might have been much better. But there is very much rubbish and I am very much afraid we, all of us, contribute to that rubbish heap a little. We have all some favorite notion, some conceit, some invention of our own, some addition to the Word, some subtraction from it, some impossible theory, some dogma or doctrine of our own inventing than of Bible teaching, and so there is very much rubbish so that we cannot build the wall. Does not one feel inclined, full often, to say, "Oh, how I wish I could get at it—really get at it—get to doing something for God, and Christ, and the souls of men"? Just let the dust cart come and clear the way. These very excellent works upon futurity and profound books upon nothing— yet, let them go, beautifully written as they are—and let us plunge into the middle of affairs and say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, two or three things about this matter by way of comfort. And the first comfort to us is, well, well, the Foundation is laid! The Foundation is laid—and in addition to the Foundation there are goodly rows of precious stones built up. The Lord has not yet laid all the 12 jeweled courses, but the instructed eye may see some of the lower bands of precious stones. Looking back in history I can see a foundation of martyrs built upon Christ, who with the Apostles and confessors make up the lower foundations of jasper and sapphire and chalcedony. I can already see the glitter of those rows of gems upon the wall. Read in the book of Revelation and see how they are described. For the last 1800 years, stone upon stone, without sound of hammer, they have been built and the walls are still rising!

Glory be to God, the Gospel is a success! Notwithstanding the sneer of Sanballat and the cruel speech of Tobiah, the Ammonite, the wall is being built and the Divine eye is upon it! It is God's great piece of architecture and He regards it with delight. Concerning it, it may be said, "I the Lord

do keep it. I will keep it every moment, lest any hurt it. I will keep it night and day." There is, for this building, the Divine decree, "Thus says the Lord, Behold the man whose name is THE BRANCH, He shall build the temple of the Lord, even He shall build the temple of the Lord, and He shall bear the glory." That decree is Omnipotent! It is being fulfilled and shall be fulfilled unto the end!

I see at this moment the master Mason upon the wall and I read concerning Him, "He shall not fail or be discouraged," and I read yet again of Him, "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." I see with Him, moreover, a band of men whose hearts the Lord has touched, and these labor day and night, and cease not—neither will they cease till the walls of Jerusalem are finished. He is the great master Builder, and we, each one of us, bearing both sword and trowel, as we are taught by Him, must be wise builders under His direction. The work is going on, for it is in hands that never weary and it is directed by a mind that never faints!

By firm decrees, also, is it banded and built and cemented, so that it cannot fail, or so much as a stone be cast down. And we have this to encourage us—that God has never yet left a work unfinished! He began the creation. 'Tis true it was not so difficult a task as this building up of His Church, for in the creation, though there was nothing, there was nothing in the way—and He spoke and all things came into existence. Here in the building of the Church there are two works—destruction and creation— the removal of the old and the erection of the new. But, nevertheless, He who said, "Behold, I make all things new," is quite equal to the task to which He has set Himself. And as He did not leave the world half finished, did not make it a garden without a man to live in it—no, did not leave the man unfinished, but made the woman to be his helpmeet—so He will not leave the work of salvation to which He has once put His hand, unfinished, but course upon course shall the jewels be laid.

Emerald shall follow chalcedony. The sardius shall be piled upon the sardonyx. The beryl upon the chrysolyte and the chrysoprasus upon the topaz, till, at length, in the appointed age, the last garnishing of jacinth and amethyst shall crown the wall! And then they shall bring forth the top stone with shouts of, "Grace, Grace unto it." He did not pause when He made the world because He needed fresh strength. He did not wait and say that the undertaking was too much. But its story ran on gloriously through all those wonderful six evenings and mornings until the seventh day came and the Lord rested from all His work. The six days are passing over us, now, with their evening gloom and morning brightness! The Lord is making the new world and He is building up His Church, slowly, as we think—but surely and in fit time and due order.

Wait in patience and possess your souls, for there shall yet come that Millennial Sabbath in which, again, the sons of God shall shout for joy and the angels shall sing because the Word of God is accomplished and His work is done! Have courage, my Brothers and Sisters! Bear your burden in removing the rubbish! Use your sword and your trowel, for the work is the Lord's and it shall be accomplished! If it were ours, woe were the day in which it was laid upon such feeble shoulders! But since it is His we need not indulge a solitary trembling thought, but arise and be of good cheer!

II. Now I change the subject to OURSELVES, awhile, and may God grant we may speak to profit for a few minutes upon that branch of our topic. There is a building going on in us. It is the Spirit's work to edify us. That is to say, to build us up in Divine Grace, and that building up is carried on by the Grace of love. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." We are, each one of us, called to be builders—builders in God's strength, as I have said before—and let that not be forgotten.

But, Beloved, I am afraid most of us have to say, "There is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall." Do you not often feel that you cannot be built up in heavenly Graces because of the rubbish of your own corrupt nature? Oh, What a fall the Fall was! What a total ruin did it make of our moral nature! Brothers and Sisters, do you not discover—I do, almost every day—some fresh heap of rubbish which you hardly knew was there? Points in which we thought ourselves strong turn out to be our weaknesses! There was an infirmity from which we half indulged the thought that we were clear and therefore we were rather severe upon others for having such an infirmity and sin. But at last it broke out in ourselves! It always had been in us, but it had not had the occasion and opportunity. At length the provocation came and the hidden evil was revealed.

Ah, Brethren, much more of such rubbish remains in us! Oh, the rubbish of pride, of unbelief, of evil lusting, of anger, of despondency, of selfexaltation! Brothers and Sisters, it is not worth while to stir it, it is such a foul heap! I have no desire to turn a cinder sifter to it, for there is never a jewel in it that will pay for the sifting! But there it is and the building of Divine Grace does not advance as we would wish because of the corruption which still abides in us, notwithstanding all that some may say.

Then there is oftentimes in Christian people the old rubbish of legal thought, of legal actions, and legal fear. In our old estate we were going to be saved by our own merits. That was our notion. Since our conversion, we doctrinally abhor the idea of any thought of human merit, but experimentally we indulge in it. The legal spirit will come in—like an ill weed it springs up spontaneously in the garden from which Grace uprooted it. Though we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free, yet the flesh often tries to put the old yoke of bondage upon us, so that if Paul were here he would say to us, "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?"

Ishmael tries to domineer over Isaac, Though driven out of the house, he shows his tyrant face at the window. We get the bond slave's dread, yes, and sometimes entertain the bond slave's hope and think that we are to work for wages instead of understanding that the gift of God is Eternal Life, while the only wages we could earn would be the wages of sin, which is death. Oh, the old legal tendency! How deep-seated! How prone to revive! It will scarcely be conceived that sinners should, at the same time, be self-righteous and guilty—but yet it is so, that, abounding as we do in the tendency to sin—we equally abound in the tendency to fancy that in us, that is, in our flesh, there dwells some good thing. Therefore arises another heap of rubbish!

And then old habits—what rubbish they are! You who have been, before your conversion, guilty of gross sin, do you not often find the remembrance of those old times coming over you like a hideous dream? I know some, who, when a hymn is given out, cannot help remembering an old song which they used to sing, which is suggested to them by, perhaps, the holiest word in the Psalm. Yes, and a text of Scripture has sometimes conjured up before their memory a sin which they wished with all their hearts had never occurred, and which they would give their eyes to forget! Yes, the old habits win struggle for mastery and if we do not fall into them, as I pray God we never may, yet will they vex and trouble us! And here, also, the much rubbish prevents the building up of the wall of the Divine life.

So is it with worldly associations. Do you not find that even the common associations of business into which you are obliged to enter do very much heap rubbish upon the wall of your spirit? You

have to meet with ungodly men. You cannot commend their tongues—you may rebuke their language when it becomes profane, but there is very much of talk which is not profane and which we could not very well rebuke—but which, nevertheless, is not sweet with godliness, or savory with Grace, and it damages us. We wish, sometimes, that we were altogether away from worldly men. We cry, "Woe is me that I dwell in Hesech, and tabernacle in the tents of Hedar!" And so, again, as the result of our being in the world, there is very much rubbish.

And I will tell you another kind of rubbish that I think some Brothers and Sisters have quite enough of, if not too much. That is the idea that they have come to be somebody, after all. Many acquire that notion if they are getting on in the world. If God prospers them, they say, "Ah, now I really am a great one and worthy of much honor. I am not now like my poorer Brethren." It is sad to see what fine airs certain prosperous professors give themselves. They forget the rock from which they were hewn. They lift up their horn on high, as if they were more than mortal! That is rubbish, indeed.

And there are some others who have had choice seasons of fellowship with Christ and they have been, for a while, free from temptation. There has been some great breaking up of the great deep of corruption within them and, therefore, they say, "Ah, now I am getting on! I think, somehow, I am getting up to the higher life. I should not wonder that I should be perfect one of these days." Rubbish, Brothers and Sisters! It is all rubbish! Every bit of it—it is not worthy harboring for an instant! It may be very glittering rubbish—it looks amazingly like gold—but, "all is not gold that glitters." Any notion of our own attainments which could lead us, for a moment, to speak of what we are with any degree of complacency is only rubbish! For my own part, I desire constantly to stand at the foot of the Cross, with no other testimony concerning myself than this—

"I the chief of sinners am, But Jesus died for me."

Personal holiness is to be sought for with all our hearts, and it can only be obtained by faith in Jesus Christ—by simple faith in Him.

He gives us power to overcome sin through His precious blood, but, depend upon it, the moment we conclude that we have overcome and can say what Paul could not say—that he had attained and was already perfect—we are in an evil case! Our pride has overpowered our judgment and we are fools! If anyone here is in a condition in which he is able to open his mouth wide in his own praise, I would advise him to fetch a big dust cart, or rather all the dust carts in the parish and take that boasting, every shovel full of it, away! It is of no use to him and it will very soon make such dust as to fly in the eyes and ears of his Christian Brothers and Sisters. We cannot build the wall while there is so much of this proud rubbish!

"In me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing." Low down at the foot of the Cross, in the dust, is still our place—for we are, in ourselves, less than nothing—emptiness, vanity, death! That is our place. Christ is made of God unto you, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption." In Him is all your glorying—and in Him, alone—for if not so, the rubbish will cover up the foundation. Now, I will suppose that some of you are mourning tonight—some of God's people—because of all this rubbish. I want to say this to you. First, dear Brothers and Sisters, thank God that you have the Foundation surely laid. Are you sure of that? I pray you rest not till you are certain of it—

"I know that safe with Him remains, Protected by His power, What I've committed to His hands Till the decisive hour."

"I know whom I have believed." None but Jesus, none but Jesus! There rests our souls' only hope—upon His precious blood and righteousness— every other hope we heartily abhor. Well, the Foundation is laid. Blessed be God for that! When a man is brought to rest alone in Jesus, then there is laid for him in Zion a sure foundation stone, and to that he is cemented by Sovereign Grace.

Now, let us thank God, again, that the building up of His temple in us is His own work. He began it. He dug out and made clear to us our own emptiness. He cast out our self-righteousness and He laid Christ where our self had once been. The Lord did that and He has done everything else which has been done in us that has been worth the doing. I cannot, I am sure no Brother or Sister here can, look upon any step he has ever taken as a real advance in Divine life which was taken in any strength but in the strength of God. Whatever we have done of ourselves had been much better undone, for all that Nature spins will have to be unraveled sooner or later. "Salvation is of the Lord." Jonah learned that in the whale's belly. It was worthwhile getting into the whale's belly to learn. We need to know it through and through. Salvation is of the Lord, alone, and unto Him must be all the praise.

And there is our comfort! It is His work to save us—we are not our own saviors—Christ is the Savior. It is the Spirit's work to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. It is the Bridegroom, not the bride, that is to make the bride fit for her Husband. So says the Scripture. "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself, a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." It is He that presents the bride to Himself and He that makes her fit to be presented. Blessed be God, the work is in sure and competent hands!

And therefore, finally, let us, by Divine Grace, work on in faith, with diligence. In faith, I say, believing our work of faith and labor of love are not in vain in the Lord—believing that prayer is not a vain exercise, that drawing near to God in communion is not a vain thing, that trusting in the Lord is no idle dream—but that surely He will complete what He has begun. But let us add to faith the most earnest endeavors—let us diligently strive to throw away this rubbish! Whatever bad habit obstructs our edification, God help us to conquer it! Whatever sin there is about us, may the blood of Jesus enable us to subdue it! Let us press forward, dear Brothers and Sisters, never content, never satisfied till we wake up in His likeness! And, as we have not all His likeness—not satisfied with ourselves, let us press forward, looking to that which is before us—and forgetting that which is behind. Faith and diligence, by God's good Grace, shall allow us to be built up on our most holy faith—not with wood and hay and stubble—but with gold and silver and precious stones which will abide the fire! Make sure you are built on the Foundation! That is the last and yet the first question—Are you on the Foundation? Some build very rapidly, but they are not on the Foundation. Yes, you have a fine character and you make a noble profession, but is the palatial structure based on the Rock, or on the sand?

Our little children at the seaside will build very fine castles with their wooden spades. But the next tide sweeps all away because it is sand built on sand. I am afraid the religion of multitudes is just like that—sand built on sand. Is that your religion, dear Hearer? Does it consist of Church

attendance, or going to Chapel and Prayer Meetings, and receiving sacraments, and all that? Well, then, it is sand built on sand! But if you are a poor and needy sinner and you have rested your soul on Jesus, and then, renewed in heart by His Spirit, have been zealous for good works—then is it no longer sand built on sand—but the work of the Spirit of God upon the one Foundation which God laid from all eternity, in the Person and the work of His only-begotten Son!

The Lord bless you, every one of you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Nehemiah 4:1-23.

MESSAGE: This sermon I have revised at Mentone after an attack of severe pain from which I am recovering, by God's good hand. I beg, in my great feebleness, to ask the prayers of my friends that I may return to my beloved sphere of labor free from the disease which is my constant cross and that every personal trial may work in me for the good of others by rendering my ministry more deeply experimental. From this delicious retreat I desire Christian love to all the people of God, of whom I am both the servant and friend.

C. H. SPURGEON.

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Nehemiah 5:7 #2123 - Witnesses Against You

WITNESSES AGAINST YOU

NO. 2123

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING,

JANUARY 19, 1890.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I set a great assembly against them."

Nehemiah 5:7.

THE facts are these. At the time when certain of the Jews returned with Nehemiah to Jerusalem, many of them were in very straitened circumstances and, contrary to the Jewish Law, the richer Jews lent them money charging usurious interest amounting to the hundredth per month, or 12 per cent per annum. They took from their poorer brethren their lands, or put a heavy mortgage upon them. And in some cases they took the men, themselves, to be slaves for debts which they had unavoidably incurred. Now, as you know, every Jew was a landholder and his land, if mortgaged for a time, must return free to him in the 50th year—and though a Jew might for a while become a servant to his Jewish brother—yet he must go out free at the end of the 7th year. He could only be bound for a short period of servitude.

Nehemiah called to him, therefore, the elders, nobles and rulers of Jerusalem and showed them how wrong they were to hold their poorer brethren in bondage. "You exact usury, every one of his brother," he said. And he rebuked them sharply for it. When he found that his own words were scarcely powerful enough with them, he gathered together the people and let them all have a voice, for in the many voices there was power. "I set," said he, "a great assembly against them."

Some persons are deaf to the voice of justice until it is repeated loudly by thousands of their fellow men. The silent voice of principle and right they will not hear and the gentle rebuke of some faithful friend they will despise—but when righteousness enlists public opinion on its side—when many are seen to be its advocates, then these very persons will show that they have relics of conscience left and they yield to right demands because they see them not only to be just but to be popular. This is the main point with those of the feebler sort and we turn the scale, if, like Nehemiah, we, "set a great assembly against them."

Now it struck me tonight that I could most properly, without any difficulty whatever, set a great assembly against every unconverted person here and, in addition to calling upon him in the name of God and by the claims of the Truth of God to consider his ways and turn to God, I might summon a great assembly who should testify against the evil course which the unconverted are

pursuing. I shall try to act upon this plan tonight in reference to those who remain unconverted. I would set a great assembly against you! You have not repented of your sins. You have not accepted the salvation which is provided in Christ Jesus. You live without prayer—you seek your own, instead of seeking God.

I set against you the great assembly of all the godly that are upon the earth. They all testify against you! They look upon you with love and anxiety and desire to see you converted. But, while you are as you are, they are against you. Does not the consistent life of every true Christian rebuke you? When you see humble persons devout, gracious—though nothing is said and though they are not eloquent in speech—is not their life eloquent? Do you not feel it? Have you never felt, even in your most careless moods, that it would be better for you if you were as they are?

And when you have seen them remain true and upright under temptation, have you not said within yourself, "After all, there is something in them which I admire and I wish that I possessed the same strong principles to keep me right in the hour of trial"? Every man, after all, in the bottom of his soul, feels the power of godliness—he cannot help it. In the assembly of the righteous, God is greatly feared. The wicked know God's Presence among His people and they fear it, whether they confess it or not. In fact, slander, ridicule and persecution are a form of homage which rebellion pays to obedience—which sin pays at the footstool of righteousness. The evil hate the good because it condemns their evil! They try to make themselves despise it because it makes them despise themselves.

The righteous do not only stand against you in the consistency of their character, but their joy in God rebukes you. If you happen to be an unconverted man and to have had a godly mother, the subject of much weakness and pain, you cannot have forgotten the sacred cheerfulness with which she bore her life-long affliction. Or, if you have lost a Christian wife who enjoyed but little comfort in her life with you, you cannot but remember that pale yet happy face when it bade you adieu and entered into its rest! You know there was a calm about that woman in the time of trouble which you could not imitate—that she took pain patiently which would have startled you into madness—for the power of Divine Grace was in her and made her strong. She, and such as she was, children of God, made calm, peaceful and happy—I set them in an assembly against you and they bear witness against you—because you obey not the living God.

Moreover, they not only bear witness but their very horror at your sin and at your state is a witness against you! I often think that if I really could know the condition of my unconverted hearers, (thoroughly know it), it might be impossible for me to address them. I try to realize the position of some of you and to project my mind into the future which awaits you if you die without God and without hope. I am not about to give any terrible descriptions of the world to come, but remember, the most terrible I could give would fall infinitely short of what the reality must be!

If I could realize that dreadful future more fully, this tongue might be silent through the horror of my heart's emotions. I pray you, therefore, by that terror which we experience in speaking to you, let it stand as a witness against the sin which will bring upon you such misery! We cannot bear to think of that which awaits you! Holy Whitefield, when he began to touch upon that subject, would, with tears streaming down his cheeks, cry, "The wrath to come! The wrath to come!" It was too much for him— he could but repeat those words and there cease!

We feel for you, if you will not feel for yourselves. There are those present who never bow the knee at night without praying for the unconverted with great burden of spirit. I know some here—strong men—whom I have seen overcome with sacred passion when they have agonized for you and for the souls of the ungodly. It has not been merely a plentiful stream of tears bedewing their manly cheeks but their hearts have heaved within their bosoms and their whole being has been convulsed with agony of spirit, lest, perhaps you should perish.

All the praying people in the world I set as an assembly against you! Shall they pray for you and will you never pray for yourselves? Shall horror seize them on account of your sins and shall no horror ever seize you? Shall a godly mother waste—no, it is not waste—shall she spend nights in tears for your soul and will you never weep the tear of repentance? Shall we plead with you with all the eagerness our heart is capable of and search for words with which to plead with you—and feel that we have done all too little when we have done our best to persuade you—shall we do all this and yet will you say, "It is nothing to me. It is nothing to me"? Well, then, if it must be so, I can only say that I set the whole assembly of the living saints upon earth against you! May God let them have some influence over you.

"Ah!" you say, "But there are many hypocrites among them." Very well, they shall go over to your side—you shall be welcome to them—but all the sincere I set against you. "But it is not the sincere, only, that pray." Very well, you shall have all the insincere. Poor company! I wonder you should claim them! But still, every sincere Believer does, as it were, when he pleads with God, protest against you that your knees are never bent and your hearts never cry to God as the Father of spirits.

Some live week after week, and month after month, and year after year without prayer. The very Muslims and heathen rebuke you—they dare not live a single day without their prayers. You are worse than they are! The little chick, as it drinks at the stream, lifts its head as though to thank God. You are worse than the poor fowls. You have become like the swine under the oak which search for the acorns but never think of the tree. You receive the mercies of God but never give thanks to the Giver. O Conscience, if there is conscience left, cry shame upon the man who dares to live without God! I set the prayerful, then, against you.

But next, I have another mighty squadron to call. I set against unconverted men all the inspired writers of the Old and New Testaments. Let them come up, one by one, and speak as they desire to do. Not one has a word of comfort for a man that will not repent of his sins. "Mercy," they will all cry, to the man that accepts the atoning Sacrifice. But if he will not believe in Jesus—with one chorus all the Prophets and the Apostles, too, will say—"Woe, woe, woe, woe unutterable to the man that lives and dies without Christ!" The universal consent of all the men that ever spoke as the Spirit moved them is against the ungodly.

But I mention a larger host than either of these and that is the departed saints. Oh, could you see them this day in their white robes! Could you hear their sacred song, it were a sight worth dying to behold! And the sound—it were worth losing all the voices of earth in the silence of death to hear! But suppose you, an unconverted person, should seek a friend among that blood-washed host? I will picture you beholding them as they stand in their glorious ranks and you say, "I am an enemy to God. I am prayerless. I am impenitent. I am graceless and I intend to remain so— which among you all will be a friend to me?"

Not an eye will glance upon you except with indignation! Not a hand will be put out to grasp you. There! March down that long file—look into those joyous faces and see if you can find among them all a trace of sympathy with your obstinate rebellion! Ask them. Plead with them to come and assist you in your sins, or to comfort you in your impenitence. Is there one that will do it? I set the whole assembly against you! But there stands one—you remember her—for though she is strangely changed and the Beatific Vision makes every part of her shine so gloriously, yet you know her. It was your mother who wept over you in childhood and who died with prayers for you upon her lips!

Ask her whether, if you live and die unconverted, she will be your friend! And that face which you have often gazed upon with affection and which was always full of love to you, is turned from you. What has she to do, even with her child, if that child is an heir of wrath? She loves the Savior too much to side with the Savior's enemies! On earth she could weep and pray for you—in Heaven she has other work to do and has undergone such an absorption into the will of God that if your spirit should pass into another world unrenewed, she, with those dear lips, would say, "Amen!" most solemnly to your condemnation! She, too, will confess with all the army of the faithful that the sentence would be just! There is not one of all you knew on earth who is now in Heaven who can love you unless you are renewed and changed in heart.

I have sought with many of you, many times, to put the Truth of God as plainly as I could and to speak as earnestly as I could. But, once past the portal and you are gone into another world, no preacher shall ever trouble you there. Go down to the shades of death and Hell and no earnest voices shall ever plead with you there. You shall have nobody to ridicule as a fanatic there! You shall hear no sermons of which you can say, "How the man seems to rave!" Ah, no! You shall have other company and other engagements—but all God's ministers will be against you. And, as long as you remain ungodly here, they are against you. I set the whole host of the redeemed in Heaven before you now and challenge you, by all their glory, to turn from the error of your ways lest that glory should only increase your misery by contrast.

I have to add to all these saints on earth and glorified spirits in Heaven, the whole company of the angels. They are the friends and companions of the saints, but they are by no means the friends of the ungodly. They would rejoice over you if you repented—but, while you do not repent, it seems to me as if full often the angels, as they fulfill their errands among us, must feel tempted to cry—"Great God of vengeance, let us draw our swords and let us smite these rebels!" There stands a man who the other day cursed God and dared Him to blast his limbs. If there had been an angel passing by, and doubtless it might have been so, I wonder why he did not pause, suspended in mid-air in very horror! I should not wonder if he felt in his soul that it was poison to him to be near such a man and would gladly have drawn the mighty sword which seraphs wield to cut the man down! The angels are against you. No one of the sacred host is friend to the man who is the foe of God.

The worst is to come—God is against you. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." He would have you saved. He has sworn with an oath, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." But if you will not turn, you must burn! If you will not repent, you must perish! God has said it and He will not lie. Justice demands it and the Judge of all the earth

must be just.

And, to crown all, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is against you if you resolve to be the enemy of God. He loves sinners—He died for sinners. He is ever willing to receive them, but as long as they reMal. impenitent and unbelieving He cannot love their sin—He cannot love them, viewing them in the light of willful, persistent rebels. And when He comes in the latter days, you know what will happen to those that loved not Christ—they will be Anathema Maranatha—cursed by His coming. He Himself will say it and it appalls me to have to remind you of the fact—He Himself, whose gentle lips were like lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, tender as a woman's—He Himself, when He comes, will say, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!"

You will find no friend in Christ in that last tremendous day! He will break you in pieces with a rod of iron as potters' vessels are broken into shivers. So, then, I set this great assembly against you—saints on earth and saints in Heaven—the angels and God, and Christ Himself against you. Who is there for you? Who is there on your side, O enemies of God? It is as dreadful to think of those who are for you as of those who are against you—for those who are for you and on your side are the ungodly like yourselves—and the lost in Hell who are now what you will be, unless you escape!

Is anyone else for you? The devil and his angels, themselves punished for their sins! A grim assembly, surely, those that are for you! I think a man should rise up and say—"I cannot abide in such company as this! Do I sail in this pirate's vessel with such a dreadful crew on board? And Satan for captain? In God's name I will jump overboard and swim to another ship—in this vessel I will never stay and under this black flag I will never fight, let the bribe be as high as it may! I cannot serve Satan, and I will not."

Friends, if such is your language, I stand here, as a servant of Jesus Christ and hold above you the blood-stained banner of Christ's Cross. Oh, you who will take the enlisting money, here it is—come and take it, for whoever receives Christ—receives Him by trusting Him—to him is given power to become a servant of Christ and a soldier of the Cross! And then I shall have no assembly to set against him, but the same august assembly shall be on the side of the man saved by faith in Jesus! God grant that these words may be found useful and Christ shall have the glory!

For a few minutes I will vary the strain but keep closely to the same idea. Some say that sin is a very pleasant and profitable thing. Indeed, many profess to be of that opinion nowadays. I may have some here, particularly some young men just commencing life who are fascinated by the charms of London life and have begun to sip of the dangerous wine which is vended in the house of the strange woman. To them it seems that vice is pleasure. O young Man, I wish I had you in a room alone that I might speak to you, for some things that I would say earnestly to you in private I must but hint at in a public assembly! The results of sin are not such as I can speak of here.

You are under great delusions. If you think sin will give you pleasure, I will set an assembly against you concerning this dream. Oh, what an assembly it would be if I could bring up from the hospitals the wretches who are suffering an earthly Hell from their sins! Have I not seen them? Have I not seen them crawling through the earth—creatures that dare not look up—broken down with hypochondria and desponding and despairing with that despair which nothing but vice ever brings

on man? Have I not seen them when their very bones have rotted through their sin? There are diseases which are the stamp and seal of the curse of the Eternal upon transgression. There are diseases which are the first big drops of the everlasting rain of Hell's tremendous tempest!

If there were a physician or a surgeon here, he could tell you that there are sins which are commonly practiced, which bring on men, even in this life, a penalty most terrible. The furnace of Hell devours, but, like Nebuchadnezzar's guards, men in this life are made to fall down—slain by the powerful heat that glows from the eternal burnings—when God suffers a portion of the results of sin to come upon them in this life. Could I not bring up here tonight, if it were fit and proper, spendthrifts who squandered their early days in all manner of dissoluteness and who have brought themselves to rags and disease?

Go over the Casual Ward—enter the Union House! Spend an evening in a low lodging house and sit down and hear the tales of sons of ministers, of sons of gentlemen, of sons of noblemen—of men that once were merchants, traders, lawyers, doctors—who have brought themselves down by nothing else than their own extravagance and sin. They now eat the bread of pauperism and know the lack, even, of that bitter fare. Don't tell me sin is pleasure! If it is, you can have too much of it and it is bitterness before long—and they are wise who flee from it.

"Well, well," cries one, "We are not all lovers of that kind of sin." Indeed, I hope you are not! I, too, refused such sins, but I had other sins—the world would not call them sins, but they were such—and when, before I found the Savior, I began to discover what sin was, (I speak what I know), my sins, to me in my consciousness, were a little Hell. I know that men who are not saved, sometimes on a dark night, or in sickness, or in trouble, or when alone will permit conscience to work and they feel dreadfully uneasy. Have I not seen your cheeks blanch when you have been told that your friend was dead? When the funeral knell has been tolling—have you not wished yourself in the depths of the forest that you might not hear it? When you have been compelled to sit a little while, alone, you feared to allow your mind to meditate upon eternity—you tried to fly off again to the frivolities of time, though you felt there was nothing in them. Sin is a wretched thing, unsatisfying at best! Even painted sins, with their Jezebel faces, are not truly beautiful. What men call immoralities are wretched in themselves upon the outside—and a grain of common sense will enable a man to see that their misery far exceeds their pleasure. I set an assembly against the man who declares that there is pleasure in iniquity.

On the other hand, it is said that true religion makes people miserable. I would set an assembly against anybody who dares to say that. It was in my mind to ask you who are unhappy through being Christians to bear witness tonight against Christianity—and then I thought, perhaps, I would put it the other way—and let those of you who love the Savior and find consolation and happiness in Him, sing with me one of our joyous hymns! And I guarantee you, Sirs, we would make this great dome resound with hearty music!

Unhappy? Unhappy through being Christians? I have suffered as much of bodily pain as most here present and I know also about as much of depression of spirit at times as anyone—but my Master's service is a blessed service and faith in Him makes my heart leap for joy! I would not change with the most healthy man, or the most wealthy man, or the most learned man, or the most eminent man in all the world if I had to give up my faith in Jesus Christ—tried as it sometimes is! Ah, it is a blessed thing to be a Christian and all God's people will tell you so!

It is oftentimes our lot to go to see the sick, but sick Believers usually cheer our heart. There is a seat just below that used to be occupied by a Beloved Sister, well-known to you, whom I went to visit in her sickness— and I do assure you, when she was in a consumption and near death—I never spent a happier hour than I did with her! And only last week, or 10 days ago, when I sat down with her and she could scarcely speak, yet what she did say was as full of sacred joy as words could compass! She is in Heaven now and Heaven was in her then.

"So much farther on have I got," said she, "to the better land—so many the fewer of these hard breaths to fetch and so many the fewer of these hard pains to bear. I shall soon be where Jesus is!" And she talked as freely about dying and going Home as I should talk of going to my own house when this service is ended. Before she fell asleep yesterday, about 12 o'clock, she said to those about her she felt strangely as if she were going through a river. At one time she said she was in the midst of it, the floods were round about her and soon she said, in intervals of consciousness, "I am going up the other side. The waters are shallower—I am mounting the other bank."

At length she cried, "Jesus is coming for me! I can hear the music of Heaven!" Her heart seemed to be overpowered with some sweet mystic melody which, if it did not enter her soul by the ear, at any rate reached her inmost spirit by some other channel. "I can hear them sing! I can hear them sing!" she said, "And when Jesus comes, don't keep Him waiting for me! Don't wish me to stop. Let me go." She is gone. Never one, I think, suffered more in dying and never had more difficulty in breathing. Thank God they do not often suffer as much as she did—yet there was never one more calm, more comfortable and more joyous on the bed of death than this daughter of affliction!

I believe in God without any evidence except Himself and His own revelation of Himself to my soul—yet I thank God for evidences—and among those most helpful to me are the deathbeds of Believers. It does my soul great good to see the Lord's people depart this life. I grieve that you should be taken away to Heaven, for we need you here, but ah, if the departure of any of you shall be so sweet as those I have been privileged to witness of late, I shall come to my pulpit boldly!

If the religion that I teach makes men and women die like this, I am not ashamed to preach it! If the faith that I have delivered to them, by the power of the Holy Spirit, makes them so triumphant in the last article of death, I will deliver nothing else but still continue to tell them to trust simply in the substitutionary Sacrifice of Jesus Christ and rest wholly and only there. I say, then, by the living saints that do rejoice and by the dying saints who die without a fear, I set an assembly against the man who dares to slander true religion by saying that it does not make men happy!

I had many other things to say, but it were well to leave you where you are, only praying that you, by the shortness of time, by the suddenness of death, by the certainty of judgment, by the terrors of Hell, by the glories of Heaven, by the value of your own souls, by the blood of Jesus and by the glory of the eternal God will cease being His enemies. Seek His face. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned." From that, God save you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah 1:1-20.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—387, 34, 514.

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Nehemiah 9:17 #1272 - A God Ready to Pardon

A GOD READY TO PARDON

NO. 1272

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 9, 1876,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"You are a God ready to pardon."

Nehemiah 9:17.

WHEN a man's conscience is so awakened to the existence of sin that he cannot perceive any plea for mercy within himself, it is his wisdom to look for a plea in the Nature and Character of God. Now, Brothers and Sisters, if we search ourselves through and through, we cannot find anything in our fallen nature which can recommend us to the Most High. If we think that we have a claim upon God's goodness, we are in darkness and deceive ourselves. When the true light comes, it reveals our bareness of all merit or excuse and shows that there is nothing in human nature but that which provokes the Lord.

This is the fact as to our condition while we are unregenerate and, oftentimes, the true Believer, when darkness gathers around him, finds himself to be in much the same condition. His evidences burn dimly, the candle of the Lord seems quenched within his spirit and, worst of all, the sun of Divine favor is not discernible. Then, groping all around, he can discover nothing in himself but that which causes him to sigh and groan. In such a plight he should cast overboard the great anchor of faith and escape from himself to his God. It were well for him always to do so, but especially in the cloudy and dark day.

To whom should he turn for light but to the Sun of Righteousness? Where look for Grace but to the God of all Grace? Where for all but to the All in All? If what I am makes me despair, let me consider what God in Christ is and I shall have hope. That God is merciful, becomes, to sinners, the first point upon which they can fix their hope! That the mercy of God endures forever affords to the saints a most blessed stronghold when inward sin assails the soul. But from where do we learn this supremely consoling Truth of God? How do we know that God is merciful? I scarcely think we could have inferred from His worlds the readiness of God to show mercy.

I have heard a great deal about the attributes of God in Nature—I have, indeed, heard a great deal more than I have ever been able to see. To "go from Nature up to Nature's God" is a very common expression, but it is a very long step, mark you, from the highest Alp of Nature to the footstool of the Throne of God! It will be found much easier to go down from God to Nature, when you once know the Lord, than ever it can be to ascend from the works to the Maker. It is more than questionable whether the best instructed mind could have discovered much of God's Nature from

the universe around—His goodness to obedient creatures we might have gathered—but His mercy to the guilty is there but dimly revealed. Look at this visible universe and you perceive that it is governed by certain fixed laws. If a man offends against these laws, do the laws bend and make allowance for his mistake? Not so—they operate immutably and every violation of them is avenged. The captain makes a mistake of a few points in his steering—there is a current which he has not perceived, or perhaps his compass, itself, is out of gear. Anyway, he is, without any fault on his part, drifted upon a rock. Does the rock move, or is it softened? Or when the ship strikes, is there some miracle by which the timbers are held together? Does some angelic hand undergird the ship and preserve the precious lives?

No, amidst the howling of the pitiless storm, the vessel breaks up and those who struggle best are unable to survive the fury of the sea. Is there any sign of mercy here? Or take another case—the simple countryman, in his ignorance of the laws of electricity, is overtaken by a pelting storm, and to escape from the drenching rain he runs beneath some lofty tree to screen himself beneath its spreading branches. It is a law of Nature that elevated points should attract lightning—the man does not know this—he does not intend to defy his Maker's natural law—but for all that, when the death-dealing fluid splits the tree it leaves a senseless corpse at the foot of it.

The law does not suspend its operations though that man may be the husband upon whose life the bread of many children may depend, though he may have been one of the most guileless and prayerful of mankind, though he may have been utterly unconscious of having exposed himself to the force of a physical law of God, yet still he dies, for he has placed himself in the way of a settled law of Nature. There is scant trace of mercy here! Or it may be that a physician in the pursuit of discoveries which shall alleviate pain, with no ambition except to serve his fellow creatures, no mercenary motive swaying him, endeavors to penetrate into the secrets of Nature and imbibes or inhales a certain noxious drug or pernicious vapor. Will the noxious drug or destructive gas stay its deadly office because of the generosity of the motive of the man who exposes himself to its influence? Ah, not so. The precious life is sacrificed and we hear the sad news that a great physician is no more—Nature having stood fast and firm— and no mercy having been shown to the breaker of her laws.

Now, seeing that these laws move on immutably like the great wheels of a mighty machine, and he that is entangled in those wheels is ground to powder, it does seem as if we had little or no evidence of the mercy of God if we look to Nature, alone—certainly not enough to calm the conscience or allay the fears of the guilty! We admit that there are some tokens for good to the offender, even in Nature, for does not the Lord teach man to set up his beacons upon the headland and anchor his light ships near the sands? And has He not led us up to the formation of lifeboats whereby multitudes of lives have been saved? In the case of death by lightning there is reason to believe that the death is more certainly painless than any other and, again, loftiness need not remain a danger, for the lightning rod has warded off the bolt of Heaven from multitudes of elevated buildings. In the case of most poisons there are antidotes which save lives if they are taken speedily enough and even the poisons, themselves, in certain compounds, turn out to be healing medicines. So there are traces of the pardon of offenses in the mitigating or the removing of penalties even under the iron rule of natural law. Never is a law changed, mark you, in Nature, except in the few instances of miraculous interpositions. And in the moral universe never is a Law changed at all, for Heaven and earth shall pass away but not one jot or one tittle of the Law shall

fail. Still, there are laws which counteract, full frequently, the roughness and the crushing power of other laws and these, like their counterparts in the moral universe, prove that God is merciful.

But, all this being allowed, the light which Nature affords us is, upon this subject, rather conjecture than assurance. My Brothers and Sisters, let us thank God we are not left to mere guesses upon this point. Be thankful we are not left to the sun and to the moon to give us light upon this matter—we have a more sure word of testimony from which you do well if you take heed as unto a light that shines in a dark place. We have this book of Holy Scripture, written by the pen of the Holy Spirit, which tells us over and over again that the God whom we have offended is a God ready to pardon, a God whose mercy endures forever!

I would call your attention to the expression, "a God ready to pardon." Not a God who may possibly pardon, neither a God who, upon strong persuasion, and earnest pleading may, at length, be induced to forgive. Not one who, perhaps, at some remote period, after we have undergone a long purgation, may manifest a mercy which is now in the background, but a God "ready to pardon." He is a God willing and more than willing—ready, standing prepared, or to use another Scriptural expression, "waiting to be gracious." We have a God who stands like a host at a festival which is all provided and prepared, saying, "My oxen and My fatlings are provided, all things are ready, come to the supper."

Not only are all things ready but God Himself is ready! His own heart and hand are ready to bestow pardon upon the guilty ones who come before Him. There is forgiveness with Him that He may be feared. This blessed Truth of God, in the first place, was remarkably seen in the story of Israel—on that we will dwell. And secondly, it is equally true of the Lord at all times. May the Holy Spirit, in mercy, lead us to feel the power of mercy while we speak thereon.

I. First, then, I shall ask your attention to THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL AS SINGULARLY ILLUSTRATING THE READINESS OF GOD TO PARDON. Brethren, the Israelites seem to have been set forward as a picture of all God's people. As the foot of the altar was made of the looking glasses of the women, the polished brass of the mirrors being melted down, so it seems to me as if Israel was intended to be a looking glass in which every one of us might look and see his own image.

I am sure that when I speak of Israel you will perceive that the record speaks of you and draws your portraits to life. They were, in the first place, a people very specially favored, but they were a people as equally ungrateful. To what other nation did God give the oracles of His Truth? What other tribes did He separate unto Himself to be a people in whose midst He would show forth His Glory? What other nation did He bring forth out of the house of bondage with a high hand and an outstretched arm? For what other people did He pour out of Heaven the dread artillery of all His plagues, striking their foes with judgments most terrible? For what other race did He divide the sea that He might lead them through the deep as through a wilderness?

What other armies of men had food to eat which dropped from Heaven? What other hosts were led and guided for 40 years and supplied, without their own labor, without sowing or planting, or reaping, or gathering into barns? Surely the Lord, Himself, was with them and they were favored above all the rest of mankind! Who is like unto you, O Israel, a people chosen of the Lord? But they were just as equally sinful. It scarcely seems to us as if any other nation ever existed who

provoked the Lord so much, for they transgressed against light and love—against instruction and illumination, against wooing and warning—against entreaty and rebuke. They rebelled though they knew that they were highly favored and were conscious that they were a distinguished and elect people.

Their iniquities were committed against a God whose hand they had seen and whose voice they had heard, as He spoke to them from the top of Sinai. They lived amid a blaze of miracles and walked a pathway of marvels. God was in their camp! His Glory shone forth between the cherubim and under the symbol of the fiery cloudy pillar His Presence was revealed to them all. God was round about them for a wall of fire and as the Glory in their midst! And yet, with the Lord before their eyes, they refused to see Him and with all His wonders before them they refused to believe.

You know, dear Friends, that we are always particularly wounded by the unkindness of any to whom we have been especially attentive and generous. We complain, "It was not an enemy, for then I could have borne it, but it was you, a man, my acquaintance, my friend." It hurts to be injured by a child for whom you have endured much self-denial and to whom you have rendered tender love. "Sharper than an adder's tooth is an unthankful child." After this fashion Israel offended and, speaking after the manner of men, the Lord felt it keenly. He was grieved at His heart, because His great goodness to them had been so basely misused. He cries, "O that they had hearkened unto Me," and in another place, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth, I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against Me." Such is the language which Scripture puts into the mouth of the Lord and yet He forgave His provoking people times without number—was He not, indeed, ready to pardon?

Again, the Israelites were absolutely dependent upon God for everything and yet they were proud. Read in the 16th verse, "They and our fathers dealt proudly." If any people in the world ought to have been humble, surely the Israelites were they! They had been slaves in Egypt and lay among the pots in degraded bondage—brick makers all of them. Their backs were raw with the lash of the slave driver and they cried out under the sore oppression. The Lord chose them in the ignorance and debasement which always come with slavery. When He brought them out, they had no treasures but such as they had demanded of their former masters. Their stock of food was very slender and they had to traverse the arid wilderness. Tied up in bundles on their shoulders, they carried a little food, but that was soon spent and every day they had to receive bread fresh from God's own ovens, while as for water they would have perished had it not been for the Rock, whose streams followed them all their way.

They were not a people acquainted with commerce. They had no opportunities for hunting. There were no means for farming and, therefore, if, day by day the manna had not fallen, they would have utterly starved. Yet though they were pensioners upon the daily charity of God and were both fed and clothed by His bounty, still they were proud! I know some others who are much in the same condition and perhaps they are proud, too. Paupers and yet proud! Living on alms and yet boastful! Ah, Brothers and Sisters, this in Israel was very provoking to God, even as it is in us. Those vagrant mendicants thought themselves something and, when they were a little tried, they began to murmur against Moses and to accuse their God of bringing them out into the desert to die!

They were a proud lot, and with full stomachs they rebelled against Moses and their God—though the food in their stomachs was a gracious gift! They refused to do menial tasks as though they were some great ones, while all the while they were no better than so many birds of the air, which have to gather what God's generous hand is pleased to scatter for their daily food. Was He not a God ready to pardon, to have mercy upon a proud people? Is it not always very hard to forgive a haughty-spirited offender? If the offender will humble himself before you, there is less difficulty, but if, being absolutely dependent upon you for everything, the offender, nevertheless, insults you with high words, it becomes very difficult to keep your temper with him. Pride is irritating, yes, abominable! O Lord, when You did forgive the haughtiness of Your erring people, You were, indeed, ready to pardon.

These people, again, deliberately rebelled, for the 16th and 17th verses tell us they, "hardened their necks, and hearkened not to Your commandments, and refused to obey." It was not that they made mistakes. It was not that they fell into errors or were misled. They did not want to do right and refused to know what God's will and mind were. They stopped their ears and closed their eyes. When they asked that the words which the Lord spoke from Sinai might not be spoken to them any more, it was but natural that they should dread the terror of the trumpet sound. But deep down in their hearts there was, also, a distaste for a Law so pure, so holy. Their hearts were set on mischief and they were not to be led in the way of obedience.

They had a ready ear for Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who preached sedition. They were ready to be led into idolatrous ceremonies and lustful acts by Moabite women. But before the Lord they were as bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke! Anybody and everybody they would hearken to, except their God! To Him they had such small regard that they cast His ordinances and precepts behind their backs and sinned again and again with resolute deliberation. They often went astray though often reproved. It was not mere error and mistakes—the set and current of their heart was towards evil. Deliberation adds greatly to the heinousness of sin and it is a sad thing when we have to charge ourselves with this. The repetition of the same offense also shows a state of heart very near akin to determination, for it has all the appearance of a deliberate refusal to watch against temptation and of a fixed resolve to treat the voice of God with indifference. Alas, that we should be so readily decoyed by the baits of evil and so feebly held by the cords of goodness! Lord, when we provoke You in this way be pleased to show Yourself a God ready to pardon.

More than this, we are told that the Israelites were unmindful of what the Lord had done for them—"Neither were mindful of Your wonders that You did among them." They were, by this unmindfulness, led into the great crime of unbelief. You think, my Brothers and Sisters, that if you had seen the Red Sea divided and Israel's hosts led through—while Pharaoh's army was drowned—you would have trusted God all your life. "Oh," you say, "if I had been present and really gathered the manna and eaten it, I could not, I am sure, with such a demonstration before my eyes, have ever fallen into unbelief again."

Well, I leave that question, whether you would or not, having a very shrewd suspicion that your heart is by no means better than that of the ancient unbelievers. At any rate, Israel soon fell back into her chronic unbelief. Within a few days after they had seen the whole host of Pharaoh destroyed, they began to murmur against God and against Moses. And though every day they ate the manna and drank the miraculously given water, yet continually they asked, "Is the Lord among

us or not?" And they were perpetually putting questions such as made Moses demand of them, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" They were cankered to the heart with unbelief. For a moment they had a sort of faith but in another moment they relapsed into infidelity—

"Now they believe His Word, While rocks with rivers flow. Now with their lusts provoke the Lord, And He reduced them low."

At the slightest peril, the slightest trouble to themselves, they began to think that now they were come to a difficulty out of which the Lord could not deliver them and they cried, "Surely, He means to destroy us. He will never bring us into the promised land." Do you know any other people like this? I only need to put out my hand to touch one of the same order! At any rate, since the Lord forgave His people Israel, though they angered Him with their ungenerous mistrust, we see most clearly that He is "a God ready to pardon."

Further on we read that these people committed, in spirit, an act of utter apostasy. They made unto themselves a captain to return to their bondage. They said they would go back to Egypt since there was no hope of their ever conquering Canaan, for the Canaanites were too strong for them. What? Back to slavery? Back to making bricks without straw? Leaving God and His tabernacle and the Glory of His Presence? What do you think they would go back for? What was the attractive bait which lured them? They would return to their taskmasters for the sake of the leeks and the garlic, and the onions, the flavor of which was still in their mouths!

Their soul lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt and they would, to sit down by those savory cauldrons, go back to the ignoble condition of slavery, again, and leave the Lord and all His guardian care. They would forego the goodly land which was but a little way beyond. O foolish people! Ah, Brethren, this is madness, but, alas, is there not in us, even in us, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God? And have there not been times when we, also, have been tempted to return to the beggarly elements of the world and seek contentment in the groveling joys of earth?

Perhaps it was worst of all that the Israelites did accidentally fall into shameful idolatry. They set up the figure of a calf to represent God! They compared their Glory unto the image of an ox that eats grass and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt." God was incensed at this, as well He might be. Nevertheless, at the entreaty of Moses, He did not utterly destroy them. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, it is a shameful thing when we love the creature more than the Creator and dare to set up anything which is dear to us in Jehovah's place! "Little children keep yourselves from idols," but if you have had idols and have been forgiven, then you can see in this history and in your own experience, that the Lord is ready to pardon.

For a minute I desire to show you the opposite side, namely, the Divine goodness. While God forgave this people, He showed His readiness to pardon in the following ways. First, He continued while they were in all these sins to guide them both by night and by day. The 19th verse says, "Yet You, in Your manifold mercies, forsook them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go." Only think of it, that very day they made a calf, when the sun went down the fiery pillar still lit up the camp!

At that very hour in which they said, "We will make to ourselves a captain, and go back to Egypt," the cloud was covering the camp and screening them from the burning heat of the sun! They sinned beneath the shade of special mercy! Oh, if the Lord had said, "Now I will leave you, I will give you no more guidance. Since you will not follow My commandments, go which way you will," should you have wondered? If He had deft them to faint in the heat of the day and grope in the darkness of the night, would you have been surprised? Ah, but let us wonder to think that the Lord has guided us as pilgrims through this desert land! He has still been both sun and shade to us, even to this day, notwithstanding all our sins. Had he deserted us, what countless evils had befallen us! Blessed be the mercy which fails not!

Another marvelously gracious fact was that He continued, still, to teach them. I am more surprised at this than at the other. Read the 20th verse— "You gave, also, Your good Spirit to instruct them." I should have thought He would have said, "Moses, take down the tabernacle, roll up the curtains, put away the Ark. No more morning sacrifices, no more evening lambs. Aaron, go home, take off your breastplate and your ephod, and all your garments which were made for glory and for beauty. This people shall be taught no longer, they are incorrigible. It is in vain that I dwell among them and walk among them."

No, but still He made known His ways among them and maintained the testimony of His servant, Moses, and gave them, still, those matchless types which set forth so fully the way of salvation. My Brothers and Sisters, bless, also, the Lord that though He has often chastised you and given you the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, yet He has not taken away your teachers from you, nor quenched the light of Israel! Still does His good Spirit enlighten and instruct the people. Is He not a God ready to pardon?

Nehemiah also notices that God did not stint them in their daily provisions, notwithstanding their offenses. "Yes," he says, "You withheld not Your manna from their mouths and gave them water for their thirst." I am struck with wonder to think that God should have caused His manna to continue to fall! They provoked Moses and they set up Korah, Dathan and Abiram, but that very morning God's bread was in their mouths! They came up to speak against God and against His servant and their tongues would have been cleaving to the roof of their mouths for thirst if that very morning they had not drunk of the water which God had given them! When dependent persons will persist in disregarding our complaints and violating our rules, we are driven to stop the supplies.

But the Lord did not stop the supplies even in this urgent case. Would not famine and drought have brought them to their senses? If there had been no food for the women and children, and no drink for the strong men, would not that have tamed them? Even lions and savage beasts may thus be subdued. But no, their bread was given them and their water was sure. Was He not a God ready to pardon? One other remark here, and it is this—He did sustain them to the end and ultimately bring them into the land of promise. "Yes, 40 years did You sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing: their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. Their children, also, You multiplied as the stars of Heaven and brought them into the land, concerning which You had promised to their fathers that they should go in to possess it."

Yes, and I know a people who, despite their sins, have already taken possession of many a gracious promise, so that they already dwell in the midst of Covenant blessings. I know a people, too, who, notwithstanding their sins, shall enter into rest. "He shall surely bring them in," for He will

bring His chosen into His Glory and they shall see His face with joy! Is He not a God ready to pardon? My tale is all too long for me to tell it. I must cease from this portion of the history and ask you to meditate upon it. And as you do so, I ask you to admire our pardoning God!

II. Secondly, IT IS EQUALLY TRUE THAT THE LORD AT ALL TIMES IS A GOD READY TO PARDON. It is true of Him by Nature, for mercy is an essential attribute of God. We must never think that our Lord Jesus died to make God merciful—on the contrary, the death of the Lord Jesus is the result of the mercy of God. When man sinned, God was willing, enough, to pardon him, for the death of a sinner is no pleasure to Him. Judgment is His strange work. The way in which He came to Adam, at the first, showed His mercy.

He came, if you remember, in the cool of the day—not at the instant the crime was committed. God is not in a hurry to accuse man or to execute vengeance upon him. He, therefore, waited until the cool of the day. He did not address rebellious man in the language of indignation, but He kindly said, "Adam, where are you?" And when he had questioned the guilty pair and convicted them, and the sentence was passed, it was terrible, certainly, but oh, how mildly tempered! The curse was as much as possible made to fall indirectly—"cursed is the ground for your sake." Though the woman was made to feel great sorrows, yet those were connected with a happy event which causes the travail to be forgotten.

There was tenderness in the dread utterances of an offended God and mainly so because almost as soon as He declared that man must labor and die, He promised that the, "Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." Assuredly, the Lord our God is, by Nature, very pitiful and full of compassion! This Truth is evident when we remember that God was abundantly ready to pardon, for He, Himself, removed the impediment which lay in the way of forgiveness. Being Judge of all the earth, it was essential to Him in that office that sin should never be treated as a light thing, but should be duly punished, lest others rush into it, hoping to escape judgment.

For the good of all His creatures, as well as for the Glory of His own Character, God must not allow sin to go unpunished. A judge may be willing, enough, to pardon the culprit, but He is the Judge, and as such He must condemn the guilty. The readiness of God to pardon was seen in this, that on His own, He provided a way by which His mercy might be consistent with justice. From His own bosom He took His only begotten Son, His own Self, for He is One with Him, and God, in the Person of His Son, suffered that which has honored Justice, vindicated the Law, and enabled God to be just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. Oh, as I see the adorable Father giving up His Well-Beloved, to bleed and die for men, I know beyond all question that He is a God ready to pardon!

And now, the Atonement being made, and Justice being unable, any longer, to offer any protest to boundless Mercy, God stands ready to pardon. By the blood of His dear Son, He is able to blot out offenses. Through the sweet savor of the sacrifice of Jesus He smiles on guilty men. He delights, now, to blot into oblivion the transgressions of all them that seek His face! The Lord's readiness to pardon is very conspicuous to sinners, because He sends His message of love to them while they are yet in their sins. He presents perfect pardon through Jesus Christ to them even while they are sinners, for "Christ died for the ungodly."

I love to think that the Gospel does not address itself to those who might be supposed to have helped themselves a little out of the mire—to those who show signs of lingering goodness—but it comes to men ruined in Adam and doubly lost by their own sin! It comes to them in the abyss where sin has hurled them and lifts them up from the gates of Hell! "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Jesus Christ's salvation is like the good Samaritan—it goes where the wounded man is and pours in its oil and wine into his bleeding wounds. The readiness of God to pardon is to be seen in the fact that He makes no hard conditions with sinners. He does not say, "I will pardon if you suffer this or endure that penance. I will pardon if you perform this act of heroism or that deed of consecration."

No, He, Himself, says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Receive what is freely given—that is the Gospel precept and nothing else! Only confess your transgressions, or, in other words, admit your emptiness and then trust your Savior and you are saved! That He is ready to forgive appears in this yet more glorious fact, that what God demands of man by the Gospel, He also works in him by His Spirit! As for confession of sin, He puts the words into the sinner's mouth. As for repentance, he works in it the sinner's heart—and saving faith, His own Spirit creates in the sinner's soul! Is He not ready to forgive when even what might be called the condition of pardon in one light is under another aspect a gift of free Grace? See you not His readiness to forgive when He accepts even the very lowest grade of the necessary Graces?

Of repentance, so long as it is sincere, He accepts a tear or a sigh. Of faith, though it is but as a grain of mustard seed, He accepts it if it is but true. And notwithstanding all the faults that are in the sinner—though his heart is neither as tender as it ought to be, nor his knowledge so clear, nor his eye of faith so bright, nor his conversion so complete as it should be—yet God looks not at any of these faults except to forgive them! The ignorance and shortcoming, God winks at—He only looks at what He can see of Christ in the sinner. The sinner's plea on his lips is, "for Jesus' sake." The sinner's hope in his heart is, "for Christ's sake"—and it is this that the Father looks at! When He sees that the poor trembling soul has embraced Jesus, His own dear Son, the Father puts the sin away at once without a word and says, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you, go in peace." Oh, He is, indeed, a God ready to pardon!!

Dear child of God, this text has a bearing upon you and you can see it in yourself. Observe how the Lord chastens you. "Why is that?" you ask. Why, because you have been offending Him! You are His child and He is your Father, and He desires to forgive you, but there is a hindrance. Have you never felt a difficulty about expressing forgiveness to your own child when he has done wrong again and again? There is no difficulty in your heart, for you love him well, but still, you do not wish him to think lightly of the fault. And you are afraid that if you at once tell him that you forgive him he may, perhaps, think that he may transgress with impunity. Therefore you chasten him so that after the chastening has been endured it may be safe for you to pardon—I mean safe as far as he is concerned!

He will not be tempted to go into the sin through the readiness with which you forgive him, for he will remember the smarts which your love inflicted. Look upon your chastening as a proof that God is ready to forgive because He executes, in wisdom, that discipline which is necessary for a safe forgiveness. Think, too, how lightly He chastens—

"He will not always chide, And when His strokes are felt, His strokes are fever than our crimes, And lighter than our guilt."

That rod of His, ah, He never loves it. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. But when He does use it, how quickly He puts it up again. Brothers and Sisters, note how ready the Lord is to pardon us, for when we have sadly fallen, He graciously sets us on our feet again. "He restores my soul." If you have wandered, like Noah's dove flying over the waste of waters, the Lord will receive you, even as Noah received the weary bird. He put out his hand at once and plucked her in unto him, into the ark and even thus does the good Spirit pluck us in to himself. He fills our empty spirits again, revives our dying hope, relights the candles of our joy and makes us, once again, what we had been and, perhaps, more.

And then He comes and restores to us His own Presence, oh so soon! He says, "For a small moment have I forsaken you, but in great mercy will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting mercy will I have pity upon you." Very loath is He to hide His face, but very swift is He to come on wings of mercy to restore joy to His mourners! Is He not ready to pardon?

I have almost done when I have answered a question on the behalf of the unconverted and the same on behalf of the children of God. A poor seeker says to me, "You tell us God is ready to pardon, why is it, then, that I have prayed so long for mercy and have not found it?" That was a question I asked once, when my prayers went up to Heaven and seemed to strike upon a dome of brass, and were reverberated in years. Listen! Do you know to what God has promised to give pardon? To prayer? I think if you will read aright, He promised pardon to confession, to repentance and to faith. Have you acknowledged your iniquity? Will you renounce your sins? Have you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ? Come, will you now trust Jesus Christ? If so, you shall have pardon now!

But if your prayers are unbelieving prayers, you are going the wrong way to work. You may as well hope to win Heaven by your works as by your prayers, for, indeed, your prayers are but a kind of work—salvation is by believing—not by praying. If faith is mixed with your prayers, then you will succeed. Believing is essential and if you believe, you shall have mercy, now, at once. "Still," says another, "I have believed in Jesus Christ and I hope I am saved from guilt, but how is it, if God is ready to pardon, that I am still suffering from the result of sin." This, my Friend, you must bear so long as God wills it. God does not make a man healthy if he has brought his body to sickness by sin. Neither does He fill a man's pocket if he has spent his money in profligacy.

This, my Brothers and Sisters, is left to be a thorn in your side—not as a token of anger—but because you are not to be trusted with health or wealth and, therefore, God will not lead you into temptation again. Accept this from the Lord's hand as a gentle chastening. Remember, if He saves your soul, it little matters about the rest, for it will be better for you to enter into life crippled or maimed than to have all your limbs and all the world, and lose your soul! Accept sickness, or whatever else comes, as the result of sin, and do not think it, by any means, proves that God has not pardoned you—on the contrary it may be that He loves you enough to chasten you.

A child of God now says to me, "If God is so ready to pardon, how is it I am still a sufferer, I am still poor and so on?" Ah, my dear Friend, perhaps that is not a rod at all, for remember, "every branch

that bears fruit, He purges it." Not because it did not bear, but to make it bring forth more fruit. You are God's child and you have a cross to carry. Do not look at it as a token of anger. Was God angry with Simon, the Cyrene, who carried Christ's Cross after Him? No, He was conferring an honor upon him—

"Shall Simon bear the Cross alone,

And all the rest go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, And there's a cross for me."

Take it up, for, "through much tribulation" we shall "inherit the kingdom." Look at affliction in this light and you will see that there is nothing of anger in it.

"But," says one child of God, "I am under a cloud. I cannot see the face of God. Why does He hide Himself from me?" Not because He is not ready to pardon, but, perhaps, because you are not ready to forsake the sin which He is aiming at. Perhaps you have not searched your heart. There is still hidden, under the camel's furniture, some idol or other. Make Rachel get up and search even in the secret places. Cry, "Why do You contend with me?" for, if like David and Job you have to say that you are chastened every morning and plagued every evening, there is a reason for it. If you have walked contrary to God, He is walking contrary to you. Take your Achan and stone him and then the Lord will come into the camp again. Tear down the idol and you shall have Jehovah's Presence once more!

But mark my word—whatever your experience may be, this is true—He delights in mercy and He is a God ready to pardon. May the Holy Spirit bless this Truth of God to your souls, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Nehemiah 9:1-38.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—907, 106 (PART II), 101.

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Nehemiah 12:42-43 #1027 - The Joy of the Lord-the

THE JOY OF THE LORD,

THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE

NO. 1027

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 31, 1871,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Nehemiah 8:10.

"And the sinners sang aloud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. Also that day they

offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice

with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the

joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."

Nehemiah 12:42-43.

Last Sunday morning I spoke of the birth of our Savior as being full of

joy to the people of God, and, indeed, to all nations. We then looked at the joy from a distance. We will now in contemplation draw nearer to it, and perhaps as we consider it and remark on the multiple reasons for its existence, some of those reasons may operate upon our own hearts. And we may go out of this House of Prayer ourselves partakers of that exceedingly great joy. We shall count it to have been a successful morning if the people of God are made to rejoice in the Lord, and especially if those who have been bowed down and burdened in soul shall receive the oil of joy for mourning.

It is no mean thing to comfort the Lord's mourners. It is a work especially dear to the Spirit of God, and therefore, not to be lightly esteemed. Holy sorrow is precious before God, and is no bar to godly joy. Let it be carefully noted in connection with our first text that abounding mourning is no reason why there should not speedily be seen an equally abundant joy—for the very people who were bid by Nehemiah and Ezra to rejoice were even then melted with penitential grief—"for all the people wept when they heard the Words of the Law."

The vast congregation before the water gate, under the teaching of Ezra were awakened and cut to the heart. They felt the edge of the Law of God like a sword opening up their hearts—tearing, cutting, and killing—and well might they lament. Then was the time to let them feel the Gospel's

balm and hear the Gospel's music, and, therefore, the former sons of thunder channeled their notes and became sons of consolation, saying to them, "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be you sorry. For the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Now that they were penitent, and sincerely turned to their God, they were bid to rejoice. As certain fabrics need to be dampened before they will take the glowing colors with which they are to be adorned, so our spirits need the bedecking of repentance before they can receive the radiant coloring of delight. The glad news of the Gospel can only be printed on wet paper. Have you ever seen clearer shining than that which follows a shower? Then the sun transforms the raindrops into gems. Then the flowers look up with fresher smiles and faces glittering from their refreshing bath, and the birds from among the dripping branches sing with notes more rapturous because they have paused awhile.

So, when the soul has been saturated with the rain of penitence, the clear shining of forgiving love makes the flowers of gladness blossom all around. The steps by which we ascend to the palace of delight are usually moist with tears. Grief for sin is the porch of the House Beautiful where the guests are full of "The joy of the Lord." I hope, then, that the mourners, to whom this discourse shall come, will discover and enjoy the meaning of that Divine benediction in the sermon on the mount, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

From our text we shall draw several themes of thought, and shall remark—first, there is a joy of Divine origin—"The joy of the Lord." Secondly, that joy is to all who partake of it a source of strength—"The joy of the Lord is your strength." Then we shall go on to show that such strength always reveals itself practically—our second text will help us there—and we shall close by noticing, in the fourth place, that this joy, and, consequently, this strength, are within our reach today.

I. THERE IS A JOY OF DIVINE ORIGIN—"The joy of the Lord." Springing from the Lord as its source, it will necessarily be of a very elevated character. Since man fell in the garden, he has too often sought for his enjoyments where the serpent finds his. It is written, "upon your belly shall you go and so shall you eat dust all the days of your life"—this was the serpent's doom. And man, with infatuated ambition, has tried to find his delight in his sensual appetites and to content his soul with earth's poor dust. But the joys of time cannot satisfy an undying nature, and when a soul is once quickened by the eternal Spirit, it can no more fill itself with worldly mirth, or even with the common enjoyments of life than can a man snuff up wind and feed on it.

But, Beloved, we are not left to search for joy. It is brought to our doors by the love of God our Father—joy refined and satisfying, befitting immortal spirits. God has not left us to wander among those unsatisfactory things which mock the chase which they invite. He has given us appetites which carnal things cannot content, and He has provided suitable satisfaction for those appetites. He has stored up at His right hand pleasures forevermore, which even now He reveals by His Spirit to those chosen ones whom He has taught to long for them. Let us endeavor to analyze that special and peculiar pleasure which is here called "The joy of the Lord."

It springs from God, and has God for its object. The Believer who is in a spiritually healthy state rejoices mainly in God Himself. He is happy because there is a God, and because God is in His Person and Character what He is. All the attributes of God become well-springs of joy to the thoughtful, contemplative Believer. For such a man says within his soul, "All these attributes of my God are mine. His power is my protection. His wisdom is my guidance. His faithfulness, is my foundation. His Grace is my salvation." He is a God who cannot die, faithful and true to His promise. He is all love, and at the same time infinitely just, supremely holy. Why, the contemplation of God to one who knows that this God is His God forever and ever is enough to make the eyes overflow with tears because of the deep, mysterious, unutterable bliss which fills the heart.

There was nothing in the character of Jupiter, or any of the pretended gods of the heathen, to make glad a pure and holy spirit. But there is everything in the Character of Jehovah both to purify the heart and to make it thrill with delight. How sweet is it to think over all the Lord has done— how He has revealed Himself of old, and especially how He has displayed His Glory in the Covenant of Grace—and in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. How charming is the thought that He has revealed Himself to me personally, and made me to see in Him my Father, my Friend, my Helper, my God.

Oh, if there is one word out of Heaven that cannot be excelled, even by the brightness of Heaven itself, it is this word, "My God, my Father," and that sweet promise, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people." There is no richer consolation to be found—even the Spirit of God can bring nothing home to the heart of the Christian more fraught with delight than that blessed consideration. When the child of God, after admiring the Character and wondering at the acts of God, can all the while feel, "He is my God. I have taken Him to be mine. He has taken me to be His. He has grasped me with the hand of His powerful love, having loved me with an everlasting love, with the bands of loving kindness has He drawn me to Himself. My Beloved is mine and I am His"—why, then, his soul would gladly dance like David before the ark of the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord with all its might.

A further source of joy is found by the Christian who is living near to God in a deep sense of reconciliation to God, of acceptance with God, and yet, beyond that, of adoption and close relationship to God. Does it not make a man glad to know that though once his sins had provoked the Lord, they are all blotted out, not one of them remains? Though once he was estranged from God, and far off from Him by wicked works, yet he is made near by the blood of Christ? The Lord is no longer an angry Judge pursuing us with a drawn sword, but a loving Father into whose bosom we pour our sorrows, and find ease for every pang of heart. Oh, to know, Beloved, that God actually loves us! I have often told you I cannot preach upon that theme, for it is a subject to muse upon in silence—a matter to sit by the hour together and meditate upon. The Infinite to love an insignificant creature, an ephemera of an hour, a shadow that declines! Is not this a marvel?

For God to pity me I can understand. For God to condescend to have mercy upon me I can comprehend. But for Him to love me? For the Pure to love a sinner—for the infinitely Great to love a worm—is matchless, a miracle of miracles! Such thoughts must comfort the soul. And then, add to this, that the Divine love has brought us Believers into actual relationship with God, so that we are His sons and daughters—this, again, is a river of sacred pleasure. "Unto which of the angels

said He at any time, You are My son"? No minister of flame, though perfect in obedience, has received the honor of adoption.

To us, even to us frail creatures of the dust, is given a benefit denied to Gabriel, for through Jesus Christ the First-Born, we are members of the family of God. Oh, the abyss of joy which lies in sonship with God, and joint heirship with Christ! Words are vain here. Moreover, the joy springing from the spirit of adoption is another portion of the Believer's bliss. He cannot be an unhappy man who can cry, "Abba, Father." The spirit of adoption is always attended by love, joy, and peace, which are fruits of the Spirit. For we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of liberty and joy in Christ Jesus. "My God, my Father." Oh how sweet the sound!

But all men of God do not enjoy this, you say. Alas, we grant it, but we also add that it is their own fault. It is the right and portion of every Believer to live in the assurance that he is reconciled to God, that God loves him, and that he is God's child. And if he does not so live, he has himself to blame. If there are any starving at God's table, it is because the guest stints himself, for the feast is superabundant. If however, a man comes, and I pray you all may, to live habitually under a sense of pardon through the sprinkling of the precious blood, and in a delightful sense of perfect reconciliation with the great God, he is the possessor of a joy unspeakable and full of glory!

But, Beloved, this is not all. The joy of the Lord in the spirit springs also from an assurance that all the future, whatever it may be, is guaranteed by Divine goodness. Being children of God, the love of God towards us is not of a mutable character, but abides and remains unchangeable. The Believer feels an entire satisfaction in leaving himself in the hands of eternal and immutable love. However happy I may be today, if I am in doubt concerning tomorrow, there is a worm at the root of my peace.

Although the past may now be sweet in retrospect, and the present fair in enjoyment, yet if the future is grim with fear, my joy is but shallow. If my salvation is still a matter of hazard and jeopardy, unmingled joy is not mine, and deep peace is still out of my reach. But when I know that He whom I have rested in has power and Grace enough to complete that which He has begun in me, and for me—when I see the work of Christ to be no half-redemption, but a complete and eternal salvation—when I perceive that the promises are established upon an unchangeable basis, and are yes and amen in Christ Jesus, ratified by oath and sealed by blood— then my soul has perfect contentment.

It is true, that looking forward there may be seen long avenues of tribulation, but the Glory is at the end of them. Battles may be foreseen, and woe unto the man who does not expect them, but the eye of faith perceives the crown of victory. Deep waters are mapped upon our journey, but faith can see Jehovah fording these rivers with us, and she anticipates the day when we shall ascend the banks of the shore and enter into Jehovah's rest. When we have received these priceless Truths of God into our souls we are satisfied with favor and full of the goodness of the Lord.

There is a theology which denies to Believers this consolation. We will not enter into controversy with it, but sorrowfully hint that a heavy chastisement for the errors of that system of doctrine lies in the loss of the comfort which the Truth would have brought into the soul. For my part, I value the Gospel not only for what it has done for me in the past, but for the guarantees which it affords me

of eternal salvation. "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck then out of My hand."

Now, Beloved, I have not yet taken you into the great deeps of joy, though these streams are certainly, by no means, shallow. There is an abyss of delight for every Christian when he comes into actual fellowship with God. I spoke of the truth that God loved us, and the fact that we are related to Him by ties most near and dear. But, oh, when these doctrines become experiences—then are we, indeed, anointed with the oil of gladness! Then we enter into the love of God, and it enters into us. When we walk with God habitually, then our joy is like Jordan at harvest time, when it overflows all its banks.

Do you know what it means—to walk with God—Enoch's joy? To sit at Jesus' feet—Mary's joy? To lean your head upon Jesus' bosom—John's familiar joy? Oh yes, communion with the Lord is no mere talk with some of us. We have known it in the chamber of affliction. We have known it in the solitude of many a night of broken rest We have known it beneath discouragements and under sorrows and defamations, and all sorts of ills. And we reckon that one dram of fellowship with Christ is enough to sweeten an ocean full of tribulation. Only to know that He is near us, and to see the gleaming of His dear eyes—would transform even Hell, itself, into Heaven—if it were possible for us to enjoy His Presence there. Alas, you do not and cannot know this bliss, you who quaff your foaming bowls. Listening to the sound of stringed instruments you do not know what this bliss means—you have not dreamed of it, nor could you compass it though a man should tell it unto you.

As the beast in the meadow knows not the far-reaching thoughts of him who reads the stars and threads the spheres, so neither can the carnal man make so much as a guess of what are the joys which God has prepared for them that love Him, which any day and everyday, when our hearts seek it, He reveals unto us by His Spirit. This is "the joy of the Lord"—fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Beloved, if we reach this point, we must labor to maintain our standing, for our Lord says to us, "abide in Me." The habit of communion is the life of happiness.

Another form of "the joy of the Lord" will visit us practically everyday in the honor of being allowed to serve Him. It is a joy worth worlds to be allowed to do good. To teach a little child his letters for Christ will give a true heart some taste of the joy of the Lord, if it is consciously done for the Lord's sake alone. To bear the portion to those for whom nothing is prepared, to visit the sick, to comfort the mourner, to aid the poor, to instruct the ignorant—any, and all of such Christian works—if done in Jesus' name, will in their measure array us in Jehovah's joy. And happy are we, Brethren, if when we cannot work we are enabled to lie still and suffer, for acquiescence is another silver pipe through which "the joy of the Lord" will come to us. It is sweet to smart beneath God's rod, and feel that if God would have us suffer it is happiness to do so, to fall back with the faintness of nature, but at the same time with the strength of Grace, and say, "Your will be done." It is joy, when between millstones crushed like an olive, to yield nothing but the oil of thankfulness. When bruised beneath the flail of tribulation, still to lose nothing but the chaff. And to yield to God the precious grain of entire submissiveness. Why, this is a little Heaven upon earth!

To glory in tribulations, also, this is a high degree of climbing up towards the likeness of our Lord. Perhaps the usual communions which we have with our Beloved, though exceedingly precious, will never equal those which we enjoy when we have to break through thorns and briars to be at

Him. When we follow Him into the wilderness, then we feel the love of our espousals to be doubly sweet. It is a joyous thing when in the midst of mournful circumstances we yet feel that we cannot mourn because the Bridegroom is with us. Blessed is that man, who, in the most terrible storm, is driven in not from his God, but even rides upon the crest of the lofty billows nearer Heaven. Such happiness is the Christian's lot. I do not say that every Christian possesses it, but I am sure that every Christian ought to do so.

There is a highway to Heaven, and all in it are safe. But in the middle of that road there is a special way, an inner path, and all who walk it are happy as well as safe. Many professors are only just within the hedge. They walk in the ditch by the road side, and because they are safe there they are content to put up with all the inconveniences of their walk. But he who takes the crown of the causeway, and walks in the very center of the road that God has cast up shall find that no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up. For there the Lord Himself shall be his companion, and will manifest Himself to him.

You shallow Christians who do but believe in Christ, and barely that, whose Bibles are unread, whose closets are unfrequented, whose communion with God is a thing of spasms—you have not the joy of the Lord— neither are you strong. I beseech you, rest not as you are, but let your conscious feebleness provoke you to seek the means of strength—and that means of strength is to be found in a pleasant medicine, sweet as it is profitable—the delicious and effectual medicine of "the joy of the Lord."

II. But time would fail me to prolong our remarks upon this very fruitful subject, and we shall turn to our second head, which is this—that THIS JOY IS A SOURCE OF GREAT STRENGTH. Very rapidly let us consider this thought. It is so because this joy arises from considerations which always strengthen the soul. Very much of the depth of our piety will depend upon our thoughtfulness. Many persons, after having received a doctrine, put it away on a shelf. They are orthodox, they have received the Truth of God, and they are content to keep that Truth on hand as dead stock.

Sirs, of what account can this be to you, to store your garners with wheat if you never grind the corn for bread, or sow it in the furrows of your fields? He is the joyful Christian who uses the doctrines of the Gospel for spiritual meat as they were meant to be used. Why, some men might as well have a heterodox creed as an orthodox one for all the difference it makes to them. Having the notion that they know, and imagining that to know suffices them, they do not consider, contemplate, or regard the Truths which they profess to believe, and, consequently, they derive no benefit from them.

Now, to contemplate the great Truths of Divine election, of eternal love, of covenant engagements, of justification by faith through the blood of Christ, and the indwelling and perpetual abiding of the Holy Spirit in His people—to turn over these things is to extract joy from them! And this also is strengthening to the mind. To press the heavenly grapes by meditation, and make the red wine flow forth in torrents is an exercise as strengthening as it is exhilarating. Joy comes from the same Truths which support our strength, and comes by the process of meditation.

Again, "the joy of the Lord" within us is always the sign and symbol of strong spiritual life. Holy vivacity betokens spiritual vigor. I said that he who had spiritual joy gained it by communion with

God, but communion with God is the surest fosterer of strength. You cannot be with a strong God without getting strength yourself, for God is always a transforming God. Regarding and looking upon Him, our likeness changes till we become in our measure like our God. The warmth of the South of France, of which you often hear so much, does not spring from soft balmy winds, but from the sun—at sunset the temperature falls. You shall be on one side of the street in Italy and think it May. Cross the street into the shade and it is cold as January. The sun does it all.

A man who walks in the sunlight of God's countenance, for that very reason is warm and strong. The sunlight of joy usually goes with the warmth of spiritual life. As the light of joy varies, so does the warmth of holy strength. He who dwells in the Light of God is both happy and strong. He who goes into the shade and loses the joy of the Lord becomes weak at the same time. So the joy of the Lord becomes our strength, as, being an indicator of its rise or fall. When a soul is really vigorous and active, it is like the torrent which dashes down the mountain side, which scorns in winter to own the bonds of frost—in a few hours the stagnant pools and slowly moving streams are enchained in ice. But the snow king must bring forth all his strength before he can manacle the rushing torrent. So when a soul dashes on with the sacred force of faith, it is hard to freeze it into misery, its vigor secures its joy.

Furthermore, the man who possesses "the joy of the Lord," finds it his strength in another respect, that it fortifies him against temptation. What is there that he can be tempted with? He has more already than the world can offer him as a reward for treachery. He is already rich—who shall ensnare him with the wages of unrighteousness? He is already satisfied— who is he that can seduce him with pleasing baits? "Shall such a man as I flee?" The rejoicing Christian is equally proof against persecution. They may well afford to be laughed at who win at such a rate as he does. "You may scoff," says he, "but I know what true religion is within my soul, and your scoffing will not make me relinquish the pearl of great price."

Such a man is, moreover, made strong to bear affliction. For all the sufferings put upon him are but a few drops of bitterness cast into his cup of bliss to give a deeper tone to the sweetness which absorbs them. Such a man becomes strong for service, too. What can he not do who is happy in his God? By his God he leaps over a hill, or breaks through a troop. Strong is he, too, for any kind of self-sacrifice. To the God who gives him all, and remains to him as his perpetual portion, such a man gives up all that he has, and thinks it no surrender. It is but laying up his treasure in his own peculiar treasure house, even in the God of his salvation. A joyous man, such I have now in my mind's eye, is to all intents and purposes a strong man. He is strong in a calm, restful manner. Whatever happens he is not ruffled or disturbed. He is not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.

The ruffled man is ever weak. He is in a hurry, and does things ill. The man full of joy within is quiet, he bides his time and crouches in the fullness of his strength. Such a man, though he is humble, is firm and steadfast. He is not carried away with every wind, or bowed by every breeze. He knows what he knows, and holds what he holds—and the golden anchor of his hope enters within the veil, and holds him fast. His strength is not pretentious but real. The happiness arising from communion with God breeds in him no boastfulness. He does not talk of what he can do—he does it. He does not say what he could bear, but he bears all that comes. He does not, himself, always know what he can do—his weakness is the more apparent to himself because of the

strength which the Holy Spirit puts upon him.

But when the time comes, his weakness only illustrates the Divine might, while the man goes calmly on, conquering and to conquer. His inner Light makes him independent of the outward sun. His secret granaries make him independent of the outer harvest. His inward fountains place him beyond dread though the brook Cherith may dry up. He is independent of men and angels, and fearless of devils. All creatures may turn against him if they please, but since God, Himself, is his exceeding joy, he will not miss their love or mourn their hate. He stands where others fall. He sings where others weep. He wins where others flee. He glorifies his God where others bring dishonor on themselves and on the sacred name. God grant us the inward joy which arises from real strength and is so linked with it as to be in part its cause.

III. But now I must hasten on to notice in the third place that THIS STRENGTH LEADS TO PRACTICAL RESULTS. I am sure I shall have your earnest attention to this, because in many of you I have seen the results follow of which I now speak. I would not flatter anyone, but my heart has been full of thanksgiving to the God of all Grace when I have seen many of you rejoicing in the Lord under painful circumstances and producing the fruits of a gracious strength.

Turn then to our second text, and there you shall observe some of the fruits of holy joy and pious strength. First, it leads to great praise. "The singers sang aloud," their minstrelsy was hearty and enthusiastic. Sacred song is not a minor matter. Quaint George Herbert has said—

"Praying's the end of preaching."

Might he not have gone further and have said, praising's the end of praying? After all, preaching and praying are not the chief end of man, but the glorifying of God, of which praising God vocally is one form. Preaching is sowing, prayer is watering, but praise is the harvest. God aims at His own glory—so should we.

And "who so offers praise glorifies Me says the Lord." Be you diligent, then, to sing His praises with understanding. We have put away harps and trumpets and organs—let us mind that we really rise above the need of them. I think we do well to dispense with these helps of the typical dispensation. They are all inferior, even in music, to the human voice. There is assuredly no melody or harmony like those created by living tongues. But let us mind that we do not put away an atom of the joy. Let us be glad, when in the congregation, we unite in psalmody. It is a wretched thing to hear the praises of God rendered professionally, as if the mere music were everything.

It is horrible to have a dozen people in the table pew singing for you, as if they were proxies for the whole assembly. It is shocking to me to be present in places of worship where not a tenth of the people ever venture to sing at all, and these do it through their teeth so very softly, that one had need to have a microscope invented for his ears to enable him to hear the dying strain. Away with such mumbling and murdering of the praises of God! If men's hearts were joyous and strong, they would scorn such miserable worship. In this house we all try to sing, but might we not have more praise services?

We have had a praise meeting every now and then. Ought we not to hold a praise meeting every week? Should not the Prayer Meeting be more than ever cheered by praise? The singing of God's people should be, and if they were more full of Divine strength would be, more constant and

universal. How sinners chant the praise of Bacchus in the streets! You can hardly rest in the middle of the night, but what unseemly sounds of revelry startle you. Shall the votaries of wine sing so lustily, and shall we be silent? We are not often guilty of disturbing the world with our music. The days in which Christian zeal interfered with the wicked seems to have gone by. We have settled down into more orderliness, and I am afraid also into more lukewarmness. Oh for the old Methodist shout!

Brethren, wake up your singing again! May the Lord give us again a singing time, and make us all praise Him with heart, and with voice, till even the adversaries shall say, "The Lord has done great things for them." And we shall reply, "Yes, you speak the truth. He has done great things for us, and we are glad." Perhaps there has not been so large a blessing upon the churches of England because they have not rendered due thanksgiving. In all the time in which we are in trouble we are anxious and prayerful. When a prince is sick, bulletins are issued every hour or so, but ah, when the mercy comes, very few bulletins are put out calling upon us to bless and praise the name of God for His mercies! Let us praise the Lord from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, for great is the Lord, and greatly is He to be praised!

The next result is great sacrifice. "That day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced." What day is that in which the Church of God now makes great sacrifices? I have not seen it in the calendar of late. And, alas, if men make any sacrifice they very often do so in a mode which indicates that they would escape the inflection if they could. Few make great sacrifices and rejoice. You can persuade a man to give a considerable sum. A great many arguments at last overcome him, and he does it because he would have been ashamed not to do it—but in his heart he wishes you had not come that way, and had gone to some other donor. That is the most acceptable gift to God which is given rejoicingly. It is well to feel that whatever good your gift may do to the Church, or the poor, or the sick, it is twice as much benefit to you to give it.

It is well to give because you love to give—as the flower which pours forth its perfume because it never dreamed of doing otherwise. Or like the bird which quivers with song, because it is a bird and finds a pleasure in its notes. Or like the sun which shines, not by constraint, but because, being a sun, it must shine. Or like the waves of the sea which flash back the brilliance of the sun, because it is their nature to reflect and not to hoard the light! Oh, to have such Grace in our hearts that we shall joyfully make sacrifices unto our God!

The Lord grant that we may have much of this. For the bringing of the tithes into the storehouse is the way to the blessing. As says the Scripture—"Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in your house, and prove Me now, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open to you the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Next to that, there are sure to follow other expressions of joy. They "rejoiced, for God had made them to rejoice with great joy." It was not all singing and giving. When the wheels of the machine are well oiled the whole machine goes easily. And when the man has the oil of joy, then in his business, and in his family the wheels of his nature glide along sweetly and harmoniously because he is a glad and a happy man. There are some professors who imagine the sorrow of the Lord to be their strength. They glory in the spirit of bondage and in an unbelieving experience—having great acquaintance with the corruption of their hearts— sometimes of a rather too practical

character. They make the deformities of the saints to be their beauty spots, and their faults to be their evidences. Such men denounce all who rejoice in the Lord and only tolerate the unbelieving. Their strength lies in being able to take you through all the catacombs of Nature's darkness, and to show you the rottenness of their evil hearts.

Well, such strength as that let those have who will, but we are persuaded that our text is nearer to wisdom—"The joy of the Lord is your strength." While we know something of our corruption, and mourn it. While we know something of the world's troubles, and sometimes lament as we bear them, yet there is a joy in the perfect work of Christ, and a joy in our union to Him which uplifts us far above all other considerations. God becomes to us such a strength that we cannot help showing our joy in our ordinary life. But then the text tells us that holy joy leads to family happiness. "The wives also and the children rejoiced."

It is so in this Church. I have lately seen several children from households which God has blessed, and I have rejoiced to see that father and mother know the Lord and that even the last of the family has been brought to Jesus. O happy households where the joy is not confined to one, but where all partake of it! I dislike much that Christianity which makes a man feel, "If I go to Heaven it is all I care for." Why, you are like a German stove which I found in the room of an hotel the other day—a kind of stove which required all the wood they could bring up merely to warm itself, and then all the heat went up the chimney. We sat around it to make it warm, but scarce a particle of heat came forth from it to us.

Too many need all the religion they can get to cheer their own hearts, and their poor families and neighbors sit shivering in the cold of ungodliness. Be like those well constructed stoves of our own houses, which send out all the heat into the room. Send out the heat of piety into your house and let all the neighbors participate in the blessing, for so the text finishes, "The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off." The joy of the Lord should be observed throughout our neighborhood, and many who might otherwise have been careless of true religion will then enquire, "What makes these people glad, and creates such happy households?" Your joy shall thus be God's missionary.

IV. And now I have to close. THIS JOY, THIS STRENGTH, ARE BOTH WITHIN OUR REACH! "For the Lord had made them glad with great joy." God alone can give us this great joy. Then it is within the reach of any— for God can give it to one as well as to another. If it depended upon our good works or our natural abilities, some of us could never reach it. But if God is the Source and Giver of it, He may give it to me as well as to you, my Brother, and to you as well as to another.

What was the way in which God gave this joy? Well first, He gave it to these people by their being attentive hearers. They were not only hearers, but they heard with their ears, their ears were into the Word. It was read to them and they sucked it in, receiving it into their souls. An attentive hearer is on the way to being a joyous receiver. Having heard it, they felt the power of it, and they wept. Did that seem the way to joy? It was. They received the threats of the Law with all their terrors into their souls. They allowed the hammer of the Word to break them in pieces. They submitted themselves to the Word of reproof. Oh, that God would incline you all to do the same, for this, again, is the way in which God gives joy. The Word is heard, the Word is felt. Then after this, when they had felt the power of the Word, we see that they worshipped God devoutly.

They bowed the head. Their postures indicated what they felt within. Worshippers, who with penitent hearts really adore God, will never complain of weary Sundays—adoration helps us into joy. He who can bow low enough before the Throne shall be lifted as high before that Throne as his heart can desire. We read, also, that these hearers and worshippers understood clearly what they heard. Never be content with hearing a sermon unless you can understand it, and if there is a Truth that is above you, strain after it, strive to know it. Bible reader, do not be content with going through the words of the chapter—pray the Holy Spirit to tell you the meaning, and use proper means for finding out that meaning. Ask those who know, and use your own enlightened judgment to discover the sense.

When shall we have done with formalism of worship and come into living adoration? Sometimes, for all the true singing that there is, the song might as well be in Latin or in Greek. Oh, to know what you are singing, to know what you are saying in prayer, to know what you are reading, to get at it, to come right into it, to understand it—this is the way to holy joy. And one other point. These people when they had understood what they had devoutly heard, were eager to obey. They obeyed not only the common points of the Law in which Israel of old had furnished them with examples, but they found out an old institution which had been buried and forgotten.

What was that to them? God had commanded it, and they celebrated it, and in so doing this peculiar joy came upon them. Oh, for the time when all Believers shall search the Word of God! When they shall not be content with saying, "I have joined myself with a certain body of Christians, and they do so, therefore I do so." May no man say to himself any longer, "Such is the rule of my Church." But may each say, "I am God's servant and not the servant of man, not the servant of thirty-nine articles, of the Prayer Book, or the Catechism. I stand to my own Master, and the only Law Book I acknowledge is the Book of His Word, inspired by His Spirit." Oh, blessed day, when every man shall say, "I want to know if I am wrong. I desire to know what I am to do. I am anxious to follow the Lord fully." Well, then, if your joy in God leads you to practical obedience, you may rest assured it has made you strong in the very best manner.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, we had, before I went away for needed rest, a true spirit of prayer among us. I set out for the Continent joyfully, because I left with you the names of some eighty persons proposed for Church membership. My beloved Officers, with great diligence, have visited these and others, and next Lord's Day we hope to receive more than a hundred, perhaps a hundred and twenty fresh members into the Church. Blessed be God for this! I should not have felt easy in going away if you had been in a barren, cold, dead state. But there was a real fire blazing on God's altar, and souls were being saved.

Now I desire that this gracious zeal should continue, and be renewed. It has not gone out in my absence, I believe, but I desire now a fresh blast from God's Spirit to blow the flame very vehemently. Let us meet for prayer tomorrow, and let the prayer be very earnest. And let those wrestlers who have been moved to agonizing supplication renew the ardor and fervency of their desires. And may we be a strong people, and consequently a joyous people in the strength and joy of the Lord! May sinners in great numbers look unto Jesus and be saved. Amen, and Amen.

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

END OF VOLUME 17

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Esth 4,13-14 #1777 - Esther's Exaltation--Or-Wh

ESTHER'S EXALTATION—

OR, WHO KNOWS?

NO. 1777

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 27, 1884,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Then Mordecai told them to answer Esther, "Do not think in your

heart that you will escape in the king's palace, more than all

the Jews. For if you altogether hold your peace at this time,

then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the

Jews from another place, but you and your father's

house shall be destroyed: and who knows

whether you are come to the kingdom

for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:13-14.

THE appeal of Mordecai in his pressing time of distress was to one sin

gle person, namely, to Esther. I believe that I shall do better this morning by making my sermon an address to individuals than by speaking of nations or Churches. I assuredly believe that England has been raised up as a nation and brought to her present unique position that she may be the means of spreading the Gospel throughout all the nations of the earth. I judge that God has blessed the two great nations of the Anglo-Saxon race—England and the United States—and given them pre-eminence in commerce and in liberty on purpose, that in such a time as this they may spread abroad the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Woe to these nations if they fail to fulfill their solemn obligations! If, being raised up for a purpose, they refuse to perform it, they shall melt away. If, being armed and carrying bows, they turn back in the day of battle, both empires will perish as surely as did the power of Macedon and the dominion of Rome. We ought to be very careful as a people to act upon the rule of righteousness and the principles of peace, for any other conduct is inconsistent with our high calling. We are entrusted with great opportunities—if we do not rightly use them, the New Zealander of Macaulay may yet survey the ruins of this empire city.

"You and your father's house shall be destroyed," said Mordecai to Esther, and he says the same to us! Oh, that England may know the day of her visitation! We might properly say of any Christian Church that it has its own appointed place in the purposes of Divine Mercy. If the candle is lit, even though it is set upon a golden candlestick, it is not lit for itself, but that it may give light to all that are in the house. If any Church fails to bless others and so proves unfaithful to her solemn trust, the Lord will take away the candlestick out of its place and leave the unfaithful to mourn in darkness. Remember the Lord's warning voice, "Go you, now,

Volume 30 1unto My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel."

Remember, also, unfaithful Jerusalem, whose house is left unto her desolate because she obeyed not the voice of the Lord. The Church in Rome was once a Church of high commanding influence for good—you know what it has become. Some other churches are on the way, I fear, to the same dreadful end. God grant that none of the Churches with which we are connected as Christian people may ever either apostatize from the faith, or grow lax and worldly, or become indifferent to the Glory of God and the salvation of men! I might thus speak to each Church and say, "Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" My Brothers and Sisters, it is a wonderfully easy thing to denounce the faults of a government or of a nation—to complain of this being done, and of that being left undone—and this amusement may only serve to divert our conscience from its more profitable duties at home.

But consider the matter and remember that in a free state we, each one, are part and parcel of the nation—and of the government—and we are, each one, personally responsible, in our measure and degree, for all the acts of the nation. It is an easy matter to tie up our country to the halberdiers, like a criminal, and then to scourge it without mercy, but it would be a far more profitable business to use the whip of criticism upon ourselves! The same is true with regard to a Church. Men are too apt to condemn, in the mass, what they tolerate in themselves as individuals. But why are we so ready to accuse the Churches? Why are we so censorious as to what the Churches do and what the Churches are? Who make up the Churches? Why, we, each one, by our influence, help to make the Churches good, or bad, or indifferent, as the case may be!

Therefore, I will not waste time in generalities, but I will come to personalities. I will follow Mordecai's tack and speak only to Esther—that is to say, to each one who may happen to be here to whom God has entrusted opportunity, talent and position. I would urge them to remember that there is a something for each Believer to do, a work which he cannot delegate to another. A task which it is his privilege to be permitted to undertake—which it will be to his solemn disgrace and detriment if he does not execute—but which will be to his eternal glory under God if he is found faithful in it. The Gospel assures us that the great Householder has committed talents "to every man according to his several ability." Our hope of success, this morning, in our sermon, shall lie in your individualizing yourselves and hearing the voice of the Spirit of God saying to each one, "Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

I shall lay out my sermon in four parcels, arranging it under four words.

I. The first word is LISTEN! LISTEN to my words, as Mordecai desired Esther to listen to him. Listen while God, the Lord, speaks to your heart and calls you to your high vocation. Listen, first, to

a question. Brother, will you separate your interests from those of your people and your God? I do not think that Mordecai was afraid that Esther would do so, but still, it is sometimes well to prevent an evil before we perceive it, and he did so by saying, "Do not think that you will escape in the king's palace." It was possible, that being a queen, it might enter into her mind that she would be safe even if all the rest of the Jews were put to death. It would be a painful thing that her countrymen should be destroyed, but the stroke might not touch her in the seclusion of the palace where she had, "not yet showed her kindred nor her people."

She would still remain the favored wife of the great king and she might, therefore, selfishly look to herself and leave those who were in peril to look to themselves or to their God, while she coldly hoped that the Lord would somehow or other give them deliverance. Does that temptation come across the path of any one of us? It may. You may say, "I shall be saved though the city should perish in its iniquity. Though the people are steeped in poverty and ignorance, I shall enjoy plenty and live in the Light of God. I know the Lord, myself, and that is my Mal. concern. If the heathen perish, I am not one of them, and I am thankful that it will not interfere with my destiny." Will you argue in this selfish manner? Will you follow the wicked policy of separating your own personal interests from those of your Redeemer and His Church? If so, your ship is wrecked before it leaves the harbor!

You are no child of God if this principle holds the mastery over you! Your salvation lies not in your separation from Christ and His Church, but in your union with them! Over the sea of life, there is no passing in safety but in the vessel which carries your Lord and His disciples. Are you going to sail in a separate boat, or will you try to swim across the sea in your own strength? Then look to yourself—and expect disaster! If your interests and Christ's are to be separated, you must supply yourself with atonement, with righteousness, with spiritual life and with heavenly food! Yes, you must make a Heaven for yourself. You cannot do this and, therefore, it would be your ruin to attempt to stand alone. Do you wish to be joined with Jesus so as to be rescued from Hell? I tell you, Sirs, there is no receiving Christ unless you receive His doctrine and rule! You must receive this Grace, also, namely, that you give yourself to Him to make His interests your interests, His life your life, His Kingdom your kingdom, His Glory your glory!

Your personal welfare will be found in submergence into Christ. Sink or swim with your Lord and His cause! Do you mean to separate yourself from the Church of God and say, "I shall look to my own salvation, but I cannot be supposed to take an interest in saving others"? In such a spirit as that, I do not say you will be lost, but I say you are already lost! It is as necessary that you be saved from selfishness as from any other vice! Some of our worst fetters are those which are forged by selfishness—and this is one of the chief bonds which our Redeemer must burst for us. We must live unto God and love others as God has loved us, or else we are still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. I conceive that nobody who professes to be a Christian would deliberately wish to set up a private estate apart from Christ and His cause. Then if you are partners in name, be partners in fact!

If you have fellowship with Christ—remember that it is of the essence of fellowship that you are in co-partnership with Him—if He is a loser, you are a loser and you are to fret about it. And if He is a gainer, you are a gainer and you are to joy therein! He bids you rejoice with Him that He has found His sheep that was lost! I ask again—Are you determined to set up a separate interest from

Christ? If you are, say so deliberately and count the cost. Mark that man, for though he may, in his selfishness, spread himself abroad and flourish like a green bay tree, yet the day shall come when he shall wither and the place that knows him shall know him no more, forever! O professed servant of God, minister, deacon, or private church member, you shall perish if once you begin to live unto yourself! Remember those Words of God, you careless women, "She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." And listen, you selfish religionists, to this Truth of God—"If you live after the flesh, you shall die."

Listen to a second question. If you could separate your interests from those of the cause of God, would you thereby secure them? You are a Church member. You think, also, that you are a living member of the body of Christ—but you are tempted to look to yourself and to leave others to their shifts. Listen—"Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace, more than all the Jews?" Is it so, that because you are, yourself, a member of a flourishing Church and because you enjoy all sorts of Christian privileges you, therefore, harden your heart concerning dying Churches and desponding saints? Do you imagine that the body can be sick and yet you, as a member of it, will not suffer? I tell you, if the Church of God goes aside, it will be to your injury! If the Truth of God is not preached, you will be a loser! If Christian life is not vigorous, you will be weakened! When a baneful atmosphere is over other Christians, you will breathe it! Sinners cannot be left in their spiritual death without creating a foulness in the air which is to the peril of us all.

If this great city is left to seethe and rot in its infidelity and misery and filthiness, fancy not that you Christian people will escape! You dwell with these outcasts and you are already feeling their influence—and will feel it still more if they do not feel yours. How far and how deep that participation will go, I will not venture to prophesy, for I am no Prophet, neither the son of a Prophet—but there are elements now fermenting which threaten, first, the existence of the commonwealth and next, the liberties of Christian worship! Listen good, my Brothers and Sisters—things cannot long remain as they are. This great flood of wretchedness must be stopped or it will sweep us all away!

I know not what of evil may yet come of the negligence of the Christian Church towards the population with which it is surrounded. Those wretched beings who starve in overcrowded rooms will not die unavenged if nothing more comes of it than the sin which is begotten of need. If you live in a house well-ventilated and well-drained, and you have near you foul hovels—filthy, dilapidated, overcrowded—when the fever breeds there, it will not respect your garden wall—it will come up into your windows, strike down your children, or lay you, yourself, in the grave! As such mischief to health cannot be confined to the locality in which it was born, so is it with spiritual and moral disease—it must and will spread on all sides!

This may be a selfish argument, but as we are battling with selfishness, we may fitly take Goliath's sword with which to cut off his head! You Christian people suffer if the Church suffers! You suffer even if the world suffers. If you are not creating a holy warmth, the chill of sin is freezing you! Unconsciously, the death which is all around will creep over you who are idle in the Church—and it will soon paralyze all your energies unless, in the name of God, you awaken yourselves to give battle to it! You must unite with the Lord and His people in winning the victory over sin, or sin will win the victory over you! Listen to this and let it sink into your mind.

Next, remember, for your humiliation, that God can do without you! Enlargement and deliverance will arise to His people from another place if it comes not by us. If the Lord were tied up to any one man, or any one Church, or any one nation, it were treasonable for that person, Church, or nation to be negligent! But as the Lord waits not for man, neither tarries for the sons of men, it becomes them to mind what they are doing. He can do without us! When He looked and there was no man, His own arm brought salvation! And as it was of old, so will it be again. Remember that! The great Owner of the vineyard will have fruit at the end of the year and if yonder tree does not bear it, He will cut it down—why let it cumber the ground? If the farmers consult their own gain and plot to gain the inheritance for themselves, their Lord will destroy them, "and will let out His vineyard unto other farmers which shall render Him the fruits in their seasons." He will effect His purpose! He will fetch home His banished. He will gather together His scattered sheep. He will cause the earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea—and if we do not gather in the wanderers, or spread the knowledge of His Grace—the work will be done by more faithful men.

The Spirit says unto the Church in Philadelphia, "Hold fast that which you have, that no man take your crown." The crown of this Church has been soul-winning—suffer none to rob you of it! If any one of you has already gained the high honor of bringing sinners to Christ, do not lose it by a future life of sloth or powerlessness! Hold fast your zeal and perseverance, that you may be rewarded at the last day. He can do without you— remember that, O servant of the Lord! We are apt to think ourselves wonderfully important and begin to fret if we are put aside from our work for a little while, but perhaps this affliction is necessary to teach us—and to teach all that know us—to cease from man and to look to God alone! It would be a sad thing to exhibit pride and self-conceit and provoke the Lord to show the world how readily He can dispense with our labors. With this Truth of God in view, my heart cries—

"Dismiss me not from Your service, Lord, But train me for Your will."

Here follows a still more sobering reflection. Remember, that as God can do without us, it may be He will do without us. It might come to pass that God will say, "I will no more bless the world by this England. She has become selfishly mercantile. She cares more for commerce than for righteousness—she is drunken and infidel—I will give her up. Her merchants care nothing for the poor, whose labor is ill-requited. Let her pass away as all oppressors must and let the nations say—'Alas, alas, that great city, that mighty city! For in one hour so great riches is come to nothing.'" He may say to any Church, "Repent! Or else I will come unto you quickly and will fight against you with the sword of My mouth." "Ichabod" has been written before and may be, again, on places where once there shone upon the forefront the inscription—"Holiness unto the Lord." So, also, any man may be set aside, even as the Lord put away Saul and said to him, "You have rejected the Word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." Though, like Samson, a hero may have slain his thousands and the hopes of Israel hang upon the hero—yet shorn and blinded, he may yet grind with slaves at the mill if his lusts enslave him!

The Lord may decline to use us if we are not prepared, in such a time as this, to do our very utmost and to lay ourselves out for the cause of His Truth and Holiness. It may please the Lord to say of a wicked and slothful servant, "Take away his talent from him and give it to him that has ten talents." He may say to any pastor among us, "Let his habitation be desolate and his bishopric let another take." Listen, I pray you, to this warning from the Lord! Hear, O Heaven, and give ear, O

earth, for the Lord will judge His people, and to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.

Listen to yet one thing more. How will you bear the disgrace if ever it comes upon you, of having allowed your golden opportunities to be wasted? What if Israel had been destroyed for lack of Esther's intercession? Her name would have been a byword among other nations as a base and traitorous woman! If the people had been spared by some other means because she had refused her mission—as long as there lived a Jew, they would have kept no feast of Purim—but have cursed her memory! When I think of the neglects of our own ancestors, I am anxious that we take warning by them. There are, at this moment, valleys in the Highlands which are thoroughly Romish. Why? They were not carefully evangelized at the time of the Reformation! If the workers of that period had done their work thoroughly, there would have been no Romish valleys in Presbyterian Scotland!

Ireland still cowers under the shadow of the Pope! There was a hopeful time when better things were promised, but this was allowed to pass by— and what can be done to rescue Ireland now? Times do not tarry and tides do not wait—and if we do not avail ourselves of them while they are with us, our descendants may lament our neglects! I fear that the best among us can remember with regret times which we have suffered to pass over us unimproved. We can never call them back again! You did not train your children—they are men and women, now, and will not listen to you. Oh, parents, why did you not speak to them when they would have listened? But what if a whole life should glide away in living for yourselves, in living for your own comfort and enriching? What if you have done nothing, in all these years, for the cause of the Lord Jesus and the coming of His Kingdom?

What disgrace awaits the unfaithful servant! What dishonor awaits you! If you have been clouds without rain, wells without water, smoking lamps giving no light, fields that yield no harvest, what must be your portion? Let every Esther resolve that she will never bring this ban upon her name! Let every man, woman and even child among us, knowing the Lord, feel that the vows of the Lord are upon us and that by imperative necessity we must serve according to our capacity the cause of God and His Truth! If we should perish through our zeal for the Lord of Hosts, it will be grand, thus, to lose our lives! Thus much for the word, "Listen." May the Spirit of God sanctify your hearts by His Word.

II. I change a little and the call is now, "CONSIDER." Consider to what some of you have been advanced. You have been raised to salvation! You have been lifted from the dunghill and set among princes! I have uttered the word, "salvation," and what an infinity of goodness lies hidden there! In the music of that word, all sweetnesses meet together! What are the obligations of one elected according to the foreknowledge of God, redeemed by the heart's blood of Christ and quickened by the Holy Spirit? What manner of persons ought we to be? You have been raised to that honor, walk worthy of it!

Besides that, some of you have been raised to a considerable degree of Christian knowledge. You are not mere babes in Grace—you are well instructed and you have had a blessed experience both of trouble and of joy which has made you strong in the Lord—and has confirmed you in the faith and has admitted you into the inner circle where the joy of the Lord is best known. If I had said that you had been elevated to be queens, like Esther, it would have been a poor elevation

compared with that which you have actually received! Some of you who are the favorites of Heaven have leaned your head on Christ's bosom and have been permitted to sit where angels would wish to be! You are near and dear to Jesus and espoused to Him in love. In addition to all this, the Lord has raised some of you out of poverty and brought you to comparative wealth, perhaps to positive wealth—and He has given you positions which once you never dreamed of. To this He adds domestic comfort, health and prosperity in all its forms. The Lord has also given you talent. I fear we have, all of us, more ability than we use—but some have more talent than they, themselves, are aware of—and this, perhaps, they display in business, but never in the cause of God!

Thus you are brought to the Kingdom of God, but why is it so? I want you to consider why the Lord has brought you where you are. Do you think that He has done it for your own sake? Does He intend all this merely that you may practice self-indulgence? Can this be the design of God? Do not think so! Has He done all this merely to give you pleasure? Not so! God's work is like a net of many meshes and these are all connected with each other. We are links of the same chain and cannot move without moving others. We are members of one body and God acts towards us with that fact in view. He does not bless the hand for the hand's sake, but for the sake of the whole body! Well then, dear Friend, you are saved that you may save! You are taught that you may teach! You are confirmed in the faith that you may confirm others! Talents are allotted to you that you may turn them over and bring in heavenly usury for your Lord! Whatever you have is not yours to hoard for yourself, or to spend upon yourself, but that you may use it as a good steward of God! Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom which God has given you for such a time as this, when there is need of you and all that you have?

Consider, next, at what a time it is that you have been thus advanced. You have been instructed in the faith in a time when unbelief is rampant. Why? You have been confirmed in full assurance at a time when many are weak and trembling. Why? You have been entrusted with talent in a time when multitudes are perishing for lack of knowledge. Why? You are found in the Church when valued Brothers and Sisters are dying or moving off. Why is this? You have wealth when many are starving. Why is this? You hold a high position when many master spirits are leading men into infidelity, or ritualism, or communism. Why are you placed where you are? Brother, your inevitable answer must be that God has put you where you are for some good purpose—which purpose must be connected with His own Glory—and with the extension of His Kingdom in the world. If, however, you think it enough to have secured a fortune, let me ask you—Do you think you are the proprietor of what you have amassed, or do you admit that you are a steward? If you are a steward, use not the goods entrusted to you for your own ends, but for your Master's, for if you do not, you are a thief! Whenever a steward considers that the estate is his own property and not his master's, he is a thief and, before long, his master will deal with him and say, "Give an account of your stewardship; for you may be no longer steward."

Consider also, I pray you, under what very special circumstances you have come where you are. To you as an individual I distinctly speak, and to no one else. It was a very strange thing that Esther, who was the foster child of Mordecai, a humble Jew, should rise from lowly rank to be the queen of Persia! Out of all the women gathered from every province, how amazing that she should be chosen to be queen! Special Providence selected the Jewish maiden for the throne! The same is true of each one of us now occupying a post of usefulness. David was taken from the

sheepfolds—from following the ewes great with young—that he might be the shepherd of God's people, Israel. I am marveling to find myself where I now am—are not you? How came you into your present pastorate, my dear Brother in the ministry? How did you gain that comfortable position which you now occupy in society? How came you, even, to be in the Church of God? Oh, if anybody had told yonder Brother, a few years ago, that he would be here, he would have sworn at them! But here he is, sitting at the feet of Jesus, charmed to be His disciple!

Now, consider what a wonder of Grace you are, what a singular favor it is that you are where you are! Should not these remarkable dealings of the Lord towards you bind you to the Divine service? Many a man of business here, today, obtaining a satisfactory livelihood, has, a dozen times, been within an inch of bankruptcy and yet he has obtained help and passed the rock in safety. Some of you have been well-near ruined several times—and yet you still have bread to eat and clothes to put on. It is a miracle in your eyes that you have not come to beggary! Let your special deliverances and memorable mercies be as the tongue of persuasion, calling you to grateful service. Consider how great things the Lord has done for you and let us not have to say, "Many times did He deliver them, but they soon forget His works. They understood not His wonders in Egypt. They remembered not the multitude of His mercies."

Then I beg you to consider, once more, with what singular personal adaptations you are endowed for the work to which God has called you. I believe you are endowed with special capacity for a certain work, so that no one is so fit for it as yourself—you are a key to a lock which no other key will fit so well. God has prepared you for the work for which you are appointed. Is it not written—"Also unto you, O Lord, belongs mercy: for You to render every man according to his work"? Each laborer for the Lord has his proper tools found for him. God does not, like Pharaoh, require us to make bricks without straw, nor to fight without weapons, nor to build without a trowel! The Lord provides lamps, oil and wedding garments for all who are called to the Bridegroom's midnight banquet. You, my Brother, are equipped for such work as the Lord has appointed you—will you not at once get to your post?

You say, "If I could preach, I would do it gladly." You would not preach worthily unless you are, even now, prepared to do other service for which you are fitted. You would be a disgrace to the pulpit if you are useless in the home circle. If God entrusts you with a single talent and you do not use it, neither would you use 10 talents, for he that is unfaithful in that which is least, would be unfaithful in that which is greatest. "But," says one, "I can hardly get out to public worship! I am a mother shut in at home with five or six little children." To you there is a little kingdom in your own household. No one can bring up those little ones for the Lord as well as you can. Your influence over them is as strong as it is tender. Now, do not say, "Because I am not allowed to be a preaching woman, therefore I will not attend to the lowly care of my children." It is far better to train a little family for Jesus than to be attempting a work to which you are not called. Let each one of you feel that he has come to his own little kingdom for such a time as this. You and your work fit each other—God has joined you together—let no man put you asunder.

Ask for more power from the Holy Spirit and if there happens to be a tool which the Lord intends for you which hangs a little higher than your present reach, get the ladder of earnest endeavor and you will soon attain to it! Consider how you can improve yourself. Give yourself to reading; study Scripture more and use all helps towards increased knowledge and efficiency. If a further

qualification is within your reach, be eager for it, and even the reaching after it may be as great a blessing to you as the talent itself!

III. Thirdly, ASPIRE. "Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Rise to the utmost possible height. Fulfill your calling to its loftiest degree. Not only do all that you are sure you can do, but aim at something which, as yet, is high up among the questions. Say to yourself, "Who knows?" That is what the ambitious man says when he aspires to be great. When Louis Napoleon was shut up in the fortress of Ham and everybody ridiculed his foolish attempts upon France, yet he said to himself, "Who knows? I am the nephew of my uncle, and may yet sit upon the imperial throne." And he did before many years had passed. I have no desire to make any man ambitious after the poor thrones, honors and riches of this world, but I would gladly make you all ardently ambitious to honor God and bless men! Who knows? Does anybody know what God may do by you? Does anybody know what capacities slumber within your bosom? I suggest the enquiry and I will help you to an answer. "Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Nobody knows to the contrary. I cannot tell but what God may bless you to this entire nation. Nobody will dare to say that He cannot! I cannot tell but what God may bless you, my Friend, to that part of London in which you live, even though you may be deeply conscious of its great needs and of your own insufficiency. Who can tell what the Lord can or will do? Dear mother, who knows but what the Lord Jesus may bless you to all the members of your family, so that by your means all the little ones shall come to Him? Nobody has any right to speak to the contrary! Who knows but what God may bless you, dear teacher, to all your Sunday school class, so that you may meet them all in Heaven? Nobody can declare that it shall not be so, therefore strive after it. The watchword is, "ASPIRE."

Further, nobody knows the limit of the possibilities that surround any man—should God please to use him. "Alas," cries one, "I am soon at the end of my powers." My dear Brother, if you begin calculating how much there is in you by nature and how much you can do of yourself, you may as well end the enquiry by hearing our Lord's Words—"Without Me you can do nothing." Though you are no better than a mere cipher, yet the Lord can make something of you. Set one before a cipher and it is 10, directly. Let two or three nothings combine to serve the Lord and, if the Lord Jesus heads them, these nothings become tens of thousands! Who knows what you can do? Shall the Church ever say, "Here is a problem we cannot solve?" Bite your lip through rather than have it thought that you doubt the power of the Almighty! All things are possible to Him that believes! You are able to take the land into possession, the Lord being your Helper. Go up against even these entrenched Canaanites, the walls of whose cities reach to Heaven, for you can drive them out!

You seem, in your own sight, to be as grasshoppers when compared with the sons of Anak. But the Lord on high is mighty and out of the weakest things He has ordained strength to His honor and glory! Young man, I trust you have given your heart to the Lord—what are you going to do? You have come into some property unexpectedly, or you are promoted in a house of business—what is the meaning of it? "Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" My talented Brother, should you not take your share in battling with present evils? I believe that in dark times God is making lamps with which to remove the gloom. Martin Luther is sitting by his father's hearth in the forest when the Pope is selling his wicked indulgences—Martin will soon come out and stop the crowing of the cock of the Romish Christ-denying Peter!

John Calvin is quietly studying when false doctrine is most rife and he will be heard of at Geneva! A young man is here this morning—I do not know whereabouts he is, but I pray the Lord to make this to be an ordination sermon to him—starting him on his life-work. I feel as if I were Samuel at Bethlehem, seeking for David, to anoint him with a horn of oil in the name of the Lord! Some beloved Brothers are here who have done a good deal and the Lord has blessed them, but their work is heavy and their hearts are weary. By the anointing which has given you the kingdom, I trust that you will not be weary in well-doing! Pluck up courage, for a grand future is before you! "Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Be content to be a living sacrifice. Say with Esther, "If I perish, I perish. I am content to give myself up for such a cause. Come life, come death, I am all His! If I die in my Lord's work, I die content."

Further, "Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" You do not, yourself, know. I speak experimentally, using myself as an instance in the work which God has enabled me to do. If it had been revealed to me that I should have enjoyed the opportunities which have fallen to my lot, I would never have believed it. If the Lord can use me, He can also use you! Only stand in a waiting posture, saying, "Here am I, send me!" and you shall see things which you dare not expect! If the curtain could be drawn and you could behold the future, you would exclaim, "Is Your servant born of angels that he should attempt such things as these?" I do not suppose Peter, James and John had any inkling of what the Lord was going to do by them when they left their boats and nets at His call. John dreamed that one day he might sit on an earthly throne and, his brother, James, on another. Though this was not to be, yet they have obtained a nobler heritage!

To each of us there is a share in the purposes of Heaven and this is a large enough kingdom! Who knows, Brother or Sister, whether you are put in your family to save your family? Who knows whether you are made to live in a back street to bless that street? Who knows whether you are set down in a forlorn district to raise up that district? Who knows whether you are put into that nation to save that nation? Yes, put into the world, in Christ's name, to save the world? Aspire to great things for God!

IV. Our fourth word is—CONFIDENCE. "Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" If you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this, be confident that you are safe. If God has brought Esther to the throne that she may go in unto the king and save her people—go in, good Esther! Fear not the risk. Fast and pray your three days before you go, but be not dismayed! If the womanhood in you trembles in the prospect of a possible death, let confidence in God override your fears! Ahasuerus cannot kill you! You cannot die! He can refuse his golden scepter to all the princes of the empire, but not to you—for God has placed you where you are and ordained you for His purpose! Rest assured if He had meant to destroy you, He would not have shown you such things as these. Fall back on His past mercy and be confident!

What is more, if God has a purpose to serve by a man, that man will live out his day and accomplish the Divine design. The more resistance he experiences, the more surely will his life-work be achieved. If all the devils in Hell rose up at once against a true, devoted servant of God who has a work to do—in the name of the Lord he would drive them away as smoke before the wind! David said, "They compass me about like bees, yes, they compass me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them." It is a bad day for anybody when he opposes himself to the

manifest destiny of one of the Lord's commissioned ones! I fall back often on the grand Truth of God of Predestination—it is no sleepy doctrine to me! If God's decree so runs, there is no altering, it! And if He has purposed it, there is no defeating it! Heaven and earth shall sooner fail than the eternal purpose!

Each chosen servant of God is like the Word which called him—as the Word of the Lord does not return unto Him void, but prospers in the thing of which He has sent it, even so shall it be with every servant of the Most High! A holy confidence in the Divine purpose, instead of making men grow stolid and idle, may prove to be one of the mightiest impulses to the heroic life. Cromwell's Ironsides, to a man, believed in the everlasting purpose, therefore they were invincible, for no fear ever breathed upon them! Though the hosts of the tyrant may be innumerable, yet with the war cry, "The Lord of Hosts is with us," we will ride forth conquering and to conquer! Settle it in your mind that the Lord has called you to the work and then advance without question or fear. Put your hand to the plow and pause not. Do the work with all your might.

Do not stand asking how—do it as if you can! Do not stand asking when—do it now! Do not say, "But I am weak"—the Lord is strong! Do not say, "But I must devise methods." Do not concoct schemes or tarry to perfect your methods—fling yourself upon the work with all your might! Load your cannon with rough bits of rock or stones from the road if nothing better comes to hand. Ram them in with plenty of powder and apply the fire. When you have nothing else to hurl at the foe, place yourself in the gun! Believe me, no shot will be more effectual than the hurling of your whole being into the conflict.

There was a man who strove, in the House of Commons, for what he thought would be a great blessing to seamen, but he could not prevail. At last he broke through all the rules of the House and acted like a fanatic— and when everybody saw that the man was so in earnest that he was ready to faint and die, they said, "We must do something"—and it was done! An enthusiasm which overpowers yourself is likely to overpower others. Do not fail from lack of fervor! Never mind if men think you are crazy. When you are overwhelmed, yourself, the flood of zeal will bear all opposition before it. When you become so fanatically insane as to be absorbed by a passion for the Glory of God, the salvation of men, the spread of the Truth and the reclaiming of the fallen masses—there shall be about you the truest sanity and the mightiest force!

May you feel such a passion concerning missions! May you feel that the Gospel must be preached to all nations! May you feel that impulse, at this moment, while we worship God by giving our contributions to His cause.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

Esther 4:1-17; Psalms 116:12-19.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—972, 663, 116 (PART II).

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Esth 9,1 #1201 - Providence--As Seen in the Book

PROVIDENCE—AS SEEN IN THE

BOOK OF ESTHER

NO. 1201

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 1, 1874,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews

had rule over them that hated them."

Esther 9:1.

YOU are probably aware that some persons have denied the

Inspiration of the Book of Esther because the name of God does not occur in it. They might, with equal justice, deny the Inspiration of a great number of chapters in the Bible, and of a far greater number of verses. Although the name of God does not occur in the Book of Esther, the Lord Himself is there most conspicuously in every incident which it relates. I have seen portraits bearing the names of persons for whom they were intended, and they certainly needed them, but we have all seen others which required no name because they were such striking likenesses that the moment you looked upon them you knew them.

In the Book of Esther, as much as in any other part of the Word of God, and I had almost committed myself by saying—more than anywhere else—the hand of Providence is manifestly to be seen. To condense the whole of the story of the Book of Esther into one sermon would be impossible and, therefore, I must rely upon your previous acquaintance with it. I must also ask your patience if there should be more of history in the sermon than is usual with me. All Scripture is given by Inspiration and is profitable, whether it is history or doctrine. God never meant the Book of Esther to lie dumb—whatever it seemed good to Him to teach us by it, it ought to be our earnest endeavor to learn.

The Lord intended, by the narrative of Esther's history, to set before us a wonderful instance of His Providence, so that when we had viewed it with interest and pleasure, we might praise His name and then go on to acquire the habit of observing His hand in other histories, and especially in our own lives. Well does Flavel say that he who observes Providence will never be long without a Providence to observe. The man who can walk through the world and see no God is said upon Inspired authority to be a fool—but the wise man's eyes are in his head—he sees with an inner sight and discovers God everywhere! It is his joy to perceive that the Lord is working according to

His will in Heaven, earth and in all deep places.

It has pleased God at different times in history to startle the heathen world into a conviction of His Presence. He had a chosen people to whom He committed the true light—and to these He revealed Himself continually. The rest of the world was left in darkness, but every now and then the Divine Glory flamed through the gloom as the lightening pierces the blackness of storms. Some, by that sudden light, were led to seek after God and found Him. Others were rendered uneasy and without excuse, though they continued in their blind idolatry. The wonderful destruction of Pharaoh and his armies at the Red Sea was a burst of light which startled the midnight of the world by giving proof to mankind that the Lord lived and could accomplish His purposes by suspending the laws of Nature and working miracles.

The marvelous drama enacted at Shushan, the capital of Persia, was intended to be another manifestation of the Being and Glory of God, working not as formerly, by a miracle, but in the usual methods of His Providence and yet accomplishing all His designs. It has been well said that the Book of Esther is a record of wonders without a miracle and, therefore, though equally revealing the Glory of the Lord, it sets it forth in another fashion from that which is displayed in the overthrow of Pharaoh by miraculous power.

Let us come now to the story. There were two races, one of which God had blessed and promised to preserve, and another of which He had said that He would utterly put out the remembrance of it from under Heaven. Israel was to be blessed and made a blessing, but of Amalek the Lord had sworn that, "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." These two peoples were, therefore, in deadly hostility—like the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent—between whom the Lord, Himself, has put at enmity. Many years had rolled away. The chosen people were in great distress and at this time there still existed upon the face of the earth some relics of the race of Amalek.

Among them was one descended of the royal line of Agag, whose name was Haman. He was in supreme power at the court of Ahasuerus, the Persian monarch. Now it was God's intent that a last conflict should take place between Israel and Amalek—the conflict which began with Joshua in the desert was to be finished by Mordecai in the king's palace. This last struggle began with great disadvantage to God's people. Haman was prime minister of the far-extending empire of Persia, the favorite of a despotic monarch who was pliant to his will. Mordecai, a Jew in the employment of the king, sat in the king's gate. When he saw proud Haman go to and fro, he refused to pay him the homage which others rendered insincerely.

He would not bow his head or bend his knee to him, and this exceedingly galled Haman. It came into his mind that this Mordecai was of the seed of the Jews—and with the remembrance came the high ambition to avenge the quarrel of his race. He thought it scorn to touch only one man and resolved that in himself he would incarnate all the hate of generations—and at one blow sweep the accursed Jews, as he thought them—from off the face of the earth! He went to the king, with whom his word was power, and told him that there was a singular people scattered up and down the Persian empire, different from all others, who opposed the king's laws and that it was not for the king's profit to let them live.

He asked that they might all be destroyed—and he would pay into the king's treasury an enormous sum of money to compensate for any loss of revenue by their destruction. He intended that the spoil which would be taken from the Jews should tempt their neighbors to kill them and that the part allotted to himself should repay the amount which he advanced, thus he would make the Jews pay for their own murder! He had no sooner asked for this horrible grant than the monarch conceded it. Taking his signet ring from off his finger, he bade Haman do with the Jews as seemed good to him. Thus the chosen seed were in the hands of the Agagite who thirsted to annihilate them.

Only one thing stands in the way. The Lord has said, "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that rises against you in judgment you shall condemn." We shall see what happens, and learn from it.

I. First, we shall learn from the narrative that GOD PLACES HIS AGENTS IN FIT PLACES FOR DOING HIS WORK. The Lord was not taken by surprise by this plot of Haman. He had foreseen it and forestalled it. It was necessary, in order to match this cunning, malicious design of Haman, that someone of the Jewish race should possess great influence with the king. How was this to be effected?

Should a Jewess become Queen of Persia, the power she would possess would be useful in counteracting the enemy's design. This had been all arranged years before Haman had concocted in his wicked heart the scheme of murdering the Jews. Esther, whose sweet name signifies myrtle, had been elevated to the position of Queen of Persia by a singular course of events. It happened that Ahasuerus, at a certain drinking bout, was so far gone with wine as to forget all the proprieties of eastern life. He sent for his queen, Vashti, to exhibit herself to the people and the princes. No one dreamed, in those days, of disobeying the tyrant's word and, therefore, all stood aghast when Vashti, evidently a woman of right royal spirit, refused to degrade herself by being made a spectacle before that ribald rout of drinking princes. She refused to come.

For her courage Vashti was divorced and a new queen was sought. We cannot commend Mordecai for putting his adopted daughter in competition for the monarch's choice—it was contrary to the Law of God and dangerous to her soul in the highest degree. It would have been better for Esther to have been the wife of the poorest man of the house of Israel than to have gone into the den of the Persian despot. The Scripture does not excuse, much less commend, the wrong doing of Esther and Mordecai in thus acting, but simply tells us how Divine Wisdom brought good out of evil, even as the chemist distils healing drugs from poisonous plants.

The high position of Esther, though gained contrary to the wisest of laws, was overruled for the best interests of her people. Esther, in the king's house, was the means of defeating the malicious adversary. But Esther alone would not suffice. She is shut up in the harem, surrounded by her chamberlains and her maids of honor, but quite secluded from the outside world. A watchman was needed outside the palace to guard the people of the Lord and to urge Esther to action when help is needed. Mordecai, her cousin and foster father, obtained an office which placed him at the palace gate. Where could he be better posted? He is where much of the royal business will come under his eye and he is both quick, courageous and unflinching.

Never had Israel a better sentinel than Mordecai, the son of Kish, a Benjamite—a very different man from that other son of Kish who had suffered Amalek to escape in former times! His relationship to the queen allowed him to communicate with her through Hatach, her chamberlain. When Haman's evil decree was published, it was not long before intelligence of it reached her ear and she felt the danger to which Mordecai and all her people were exposed. By singular Providences did the Lord place those two most efficient instruments in their places. Mordecai would have been of little use without Esther—and Esther could have rendered no aid had it not been for Mordecai. Meanwhile, there is a conspiracy hatched against the king which Mordecai discovers and communicates to the highest authority—and so puts the king under obligation to him—which was a necessary part of the Lord's plan.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, whatever mischief may be brewing against the cause of God and Truth, and I dare say there is very much going on at this moment, for neither the devil, nor the Jesuits, nor the atheists are long quiet—this we are sure of—the Lord knows all about it and He has His Esther and His Mordecai ready at their posts to frustrate their designs! The Lord has His men well placed and His ambushes hidden in their coverts to surprise His foes. We need never be afraid but what the Lord has forestalled His enemies and provided against their mischief. Every child of God is where God has placed Him for some purpose. The practical use of this first point is to lead you to inquire for what practical purpose has God placed each one of you where you now are.

You have been wishing for another position where you could do something for Jesus—do not wish anything of the kind, but serve Him where you are! If you are sitting at the King's gate, there is something for you to do there. And if you were on the queen's throne, there would be something for you to do there. Do not ask either to be gatekeeper or queen, but whichever you are, serve God in that position! Brother, are you rich? God has made you a steward—take care that you are a good steward. Brother, are you poor? God has thrown you into a position where you will be the better able to give a word of sympathy to poor saints. Are you doing your allotted work? Do you live in a godly family? God has a motive for placing you in so happy a position. Are you in an ungodly house? You are a lamp hung up in a dark place—mind you, shine there!

Esther did well because she acted as an Esther should. And Mordecai did well because he acted as a Mordecai should. I like to think, as I look over you all, that God has put each one of you in the right place, even as a good captain well arranges the different parts of his army. And though we do not know His plan of battle, it will be seen during the conflict that He has placed each soldier where he should be. Our wisdom is not to desire another place, nor to judge those who are in another position, but each one, being redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus, should consecrate himself fully to the Lord, and say, "Lord, what would You have me to do, for here I am, and by Your Grace I am ready to do it." Forget not, then, the fact that God, in His Providence, places His servants in positions where He can make use of them!

II. Secondly, the Lord not only arranges His servants, but HE RESTRAINS HIS ENEMIES. I would call your attention, particularly, to the fact that Haman, having gained a decree for the destruction of all the Jews upon a certain day, was very anxious to have his cruel work done thoroughly and, therefore, being very superstitious and believing in astrology, he bade his magicians cast lots that he might find a lucky day for his great undertaking. The lots were cast for the various months, but

not a single fortunate day could be found till hard by the close of the year—and then the chosen day was the 13th of the 12th month.

On that day the magicians told their dupe that the heavens would be propitious and the star of Haman would be in the ascendant! Truly the lot was cast into the lap, but the disposal of it was of the Lord! See you not that there were 11 whole months left before the Jews would be put to death—and that would give Mordecai and Esther time to turn round— and if anything could be done to reverse the cruel decree they had space to do it! Suppose that the lot had fallen on the second or third month— the swift dromedaries and camels and messengers would scarcely have been able to reach the extremity of the Persian dominions—certainly a second set of messengers to counteract the decree could not have done so and, humanly speaking, the Jews could have been destroyed!

But oh, in that secret council chamber where sit the sorcerers and the man who asks counsel at the hands of the infernal powers, the Lord Himself is present, frustrating the tokens of the liars and making diviners mad! Vain were their enchantments and the multitude of their sorceries! The astrologers, the star-gazers and the monthly prognosticators were all fools, together, and led the superstitious Haman to destruction. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel." Trust in the Lord, you righteous, and in patience possess your souls. Leave your adversaries in the hands of God, for He can make them fall into the snare which they have privately laid for you!

Notice attentively that Haman selected a mode of destroying the Jews which was wonderfully overruled for their preservation. They were to be slain by any of the people among whom they lived who chose to do so— and their plunder was to reward their slayers. Now, this was a very cunning device, for greed would naturally incite the baser sort of men to murder the thrifty Jews and, no doubt, there were debtors who would also be glad to see their creditors disposed of! But see the loophole for escape which this afforded! If the decree had enacted that the Jews should be slain by the soldiers of the Persian empire, it would have been done, and it is not easy to see how the Jews could have escaped. But, the matter being left in private hands, the subsequent decree that they might defend themselves, was a sufficient counteraction of the first edict. Thus the Lord arranged that the wisdom of Haman should turn out to be folly, after all!

In another point, also, we mark the restraining hand of God—namely, that Mordecai, though he had provoked Haman to the utmost, was not put to death at once. Haman "refrained himself." Why did he do so? Proud men are usually in a mighty tiff if they consider themselves insulted, and are ready, at once, to take revenge. But Haman "refrained himself" until that day in which his anger burned furiously. Then he set up the gallows. But until then he smothered his passion. I marvel at this! It shows how God makes the wrath of man to praise Him and the remainder He does restrain. Mordecai must not die a violent death by Haman's hands.

The enemies of the Church of God and of His people can never do more than the Lord permits—they cannot go a hair's breadth beyond the Divine license! And when they are permitted to do their worst, there is always some weak point about all that they do—some extreme folly which renders their fury vain. The wicked carry about them the weapons of their own destruction—and when they rage most against the Most High, the Lord of All brings out of it good for His people and Glory to Himself! Judge not Providence in little pieces—it is a grand

mosaic—and must be seen as a whole! Say not of any one hour, "This is dark"—it may be so, but that darkness will minister to the light, even as the ebony gloom of midnight makes the stars appear the more bright!

Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength. His wisdom will undermine the mines of cunning. His skill will overtop the climbings of craft! "He takes the wise in their own craftiness and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong."

III. Next we will notice that God, IN HIS PROVIDENCE, TRIES HIS PEOPLE. You must not suppose that those who are God's servants will be screened from trial—that is no part of the design of Providence. "If you are without chastisement," says the Apostle, "then you are bastards and not sons." God's intent is to educate His people by affliction. We must not, therefore, dream that an event is not Providential because it is grievous! No, you may count it to be all the more so, for, "the Lord tries the righteous."

Observe that God tried Mordecai. He was a quiet old man, I have no doubt, and it must have been a daily trial to him to stand erect, or to sit in his place when that proud peer of the realm went strutting by. His fellow servants told him that the King had commanded all men to pay homage to Haman, but he held his own, not, however, without knowing what it might cost him to be so sternly independent. Haman was an Amalekite—and the Jew would not bow before him. But what a trouble it must have been to the heart of Mordecai, when he saw the proclamation that all the Jews must die! The good man must have bitterly lamented his unhappy fate in being the innocent cause of the destruction of his nation!

"Perhaps," he thought within himself, "I have been too obstinate. Woe is me! My whole house and my whole people are to be slain because of what I have done!" He put on sackcloth and cast ashes on his head. And he was full of sorrow—a sorrow which we can hardly realize—for even if you know you have done right, yet if you bring down trouble, and especially destruction, upon the heads of others, it cuts you to the quick. You could bear martyrdom for yourself, but it is sad to see others suffer through your firmness.

Esther, also, had to be tried. Amid the glitter of the Persian court she might have grown forgetful of her God. But the sad news comes to her, "Your cousin and your nation are to be destroyed." Sorrow and dread filled her heart. There was no hope for her people unless she would go in unto the king—that despot from whom one angry look would be death. She must risk all and go unbidden into his presence and plead for her nation. Do you wonder that she trembled? Do you marvel that she asked the prayers of the faithful? Are you surprised to see both herself and her maids of honor fasting and lamenting before God?

Do not think, my prosperous Friend, that the Lord has given you a high place that you may escape the trials which belong to all His people—yours is no position of ease, but one of the hottest parts of the battle! Neither the lowest and most quiet position, nor the most public and exposed condition will enable you to escape the "much tribulation" through which the Church Militant must fight its way to Glory. Why should we wish it? Should not the gold be tested in the crucible? Should not the strong pillar sustain great weights? When the Menai bridge was first flung across the straits, the engineer did not stipulate that his tube should never be tried with great weights! On the contrary, I can imagine his saying, "Bring up your heaviest trains and load the bridge as much as ever you

will, for it will bear every strain."

The Lord tries the righteous because He has made them of metal which will endure the test—and He knows that by the sustaining power of His Holy Spirit they will be held up and made more than conquerors! Therefore is it a part of the operation of Providence to try the saints. Let that comfort those of you who are in trouble at this time.

IV. But we must pass on to note, fourthly, that THE LORD'S WISDOM IS SEEN IN ARRANGING THE SMALLEST EVENTS SO AS TO PRODUCE GREAT RESULTS. We frequently hear persons say of a pleasant or a great event, "What a Providence!" while they are silent as to anything which appears less important, or has an unpleasant savor. But, my Brothers and Sisters, the place of the shrub upon the heath is as fixed as the station of a king! And the dust which is raised by a chariot wheel is as surely steered by Providence as the planet in its orbit! There is as much Providence in the creeping of an aphid upon a rose leaf as in the marching of an army to ravage a continent. Everything—the most minute as well as the most magnificent—is ordered by the Lord who has prepared His Throne in the heavens, whose kingdom rules over all!

The history before us furnishes proof of this. We have reached the point where Esther is to go in unto the king and plead for her people. Strengthened by prayer, but doubtless, still trembling, Esther entered the inner court and the king's affection led him, instantly, to stretch out the golden scepter. Being told to ask what she pleases, she invites the king to come to a banquet and bring Haman with him. He comes, and for the second time invites her to ask what she wills to the half of his kingdom. Why, when the king was in so kind a spirit, did not Esther speak? He was charmed with her beauty and his royal word was given to deny her nothing! Why not speak out?

But no, she merely asks that he and Haman will come to another banquet of wine tomorrow. O, daughter of Abraham, what an opportunity have you lost! Why did you not plead for your people? Their very existence hangs upon your entreaty and the king has said, "What will you?" and yet you are slow to ask! Was it timidity? It is possible. Did she think that Haman stood too high in the king's favor for her to prevail? It would be hard to say. Some of us are very unaccountable, but on that woman's unaccountable silence far more was hanging than appears at first sight! Doubtless she longed to bring out her secret, but the words came not.

God was in it! It was not the right time to speak and, therefore, she was led to put off her disclosure. I dare say she regretted it and wondered when she should be able to come to the point, but the Lord knew best. After that banquet Haman went out joyfully at the palace gate, but being mortified beyond measure by Mordecai's unbending posture, he called for his wife and his friends and told them that his riches and honors availed him nothing so long as Mordecai, the Jew, sat in the king's gate. They might have told him, "You will destroy Mordecai and all his people in a few months, and the man is already fretting himself over the decree. Let him live and be content to watch his miseries and gloat over his despair!"

But no, they counsel speedy revenge! Let Mordecai be hanged on a gallows on the top of the house—and let the gallows be set up at once— and let Haman, early in the morning, ask for the Jew's life and let his insolence be punished. Go, call the workmen, and let the gallows be set up at a great height that very night! It seemed a small matter that Haman should be so enraged at just that hour, but it was a very important item in the whole transaction, for had he not been so hasty

he would not have gone so early in the morning to the palace. And he would not have been at hand when the king said, "Who is in the court?"

But what has happened? Why, that very night, when Haman was devising to hang Mordecai, the king could not sleep! What caused the monarch's restlessness? Why did it happen on that night of all others? Ahasuerus is master of 127 provinces, but not master of 10 minutes' sleep! What shall he do? Shall he call for soothing instruments of music, or beguile the hours with a tale that is told, or with a merry ballad of the minstrel? No, he calls for a book. Who would have thought that this luxurious prince must listen to a reader in the dead of night? "Bring a book!" What book? "A volume perfumed with roses, musical with songs, sweet as the notes of the nightingale?" "No, bring the chronicles of the empire." Dull reading, that!

But there are 127 provinces—which volume shall the page bring from the recorder's shelves? He chose the record of Shushan the royal city. That is the center of the empire and its record is lengthy. In which section shall the reader make a beginning? He may begin where he pleases, but he chooses the section which contains the story of the discovery of a conspiracy by Mordecai! The reader settles upon that one of all others! The Jews tell us that he began at another place, but that the book closed and fell open at the chapter upon Mordecai. Be that as it may, this is certain—the Lord knew where the record was and guided the reader to the right page! Speaking after the manner of men, there were a million chances against one that the king of Persia should, in the dead of the night, be reading the chronicle of his own kingdom—and that he should light upon this particular part of it!

But that was not all. The king is interested. He had desired to go to sleep, but that wish is gone and he is in haste to act. He says, "This man, Mordecai, has done me good service. Has he been rewarded?" "No." Then cries the impulsive monarch, "He shall be rewarded at once! Who is in the court?" It was the most unlikely thing in the world for the luxurious Ahasuerus to be in haste to do justice, for he had done injustice thousands of times without remorse—and chiefly on that day when he wantonly signed the death warrant of that very Mordecai and his people! For once the king is intent on being just—and at the door stands Haman—but you know the rest of the story. How he had to lead Mordecai in state through the streets.

It seems a very small matter whether you or I shall sleep tonight or toss restlessly on our beds, but God will be in our rest or in our wakefulness. We know not what His purpose may be, but His hand will be in it! Neither does any man sleep or wake but according to the decree of the Lord. Observe well how this matter prepared the way for the queen at the next banquet. When she unfolded her sorrow and told of the threatened destruction of the Jews—and pointed to that wicked Haman—the king must have been the more interested and ready to grant her request. Especially since the man who had saved his life was a Jew and that he had already awarded the highest honors to Mordecai, fitted, in every way, to supersede his worthless favorite!

All was well. The plotter was unmasked, the gallows ready and he who ordered it was made to try his own arrangements!

V. Our next remark is THE LORD, IN HIS PROVIDENCE, CALLS HIS OWN SERVANTS TO BE ACTIVE. This business was done, and well done, by Divine Providence. But those concerned had to pray about it. Mordecai and all the Jews outside and in Shushan fasted and cried unto the Lord.

Unbelievers inquire, "What difference could prayer make?" My Brethren, prayer is an essential part of the Providence of God. It so essential that you will always find that when God delivers His people, His people have been praying for that deliverance!

They tell us that prayer does not affect the Most High and cannot alter His purposes. We never thought it did, but prayer is a part of the purpose and plan, and a most effective wheel in the machinery of Providence. The Lord sets His people praying and then He blesses them. Moreover, Mordecai was quite sure the Lord would deliver His people, and he expressed that confidence, but he did not, therefore, sit still—he stirred up Esther. And when she seemed a little slack, he put it very strongly—"If you altogether hold your peace at this time, then enlargement and deliverance will arise from another place, but you and your father's house shall be destroyed." Nerved by this message, Esther braced herself to the effort. She did not sit still and say, "The Lord will arrange this business, there is nothing for me to do." No, she both pleaded with God and ventured her life and all for her people's sake. And then acted very wisely and discreetly in her interviews with the king.

So, my Brothers and Sisters, we rest confidently in Providence, but we are not idle! We believe that God has an elect people and therefore we preach in the hope that we may be the means, in the hands of His Spirit, of bringing this elect people to Christ. We believe that God has appointed for His people both holiness here and Heaven hereafter. Therefore we strive against sin and press forward to the rest which remains for the people of God. Faith in God's Providence, instead of repressing our energies, excites us to diligence! We labor as if all depended upon us and then fall back upon the Lord with the calm faith which knows that all depends upon Him.

VI. Now we must close our historical review with the remark that in the end THE LORD ACHIEVES THE TOTAL DEFEAT OF HIS FOES AND THE SAFETY OF HIS PEOPLE. Never was a man so utterly defeated as Haman! Never was a project so altogether turned aside. He was taken in his own trap and he and his sons were hanged up on the gallows set up for Mordecai! As for the Jews, they were in this special danger, that they were to be destroyed on a certain day, and though Esther pleaded with the king for their lives, he was not able to alter his decree! Though willing to do so, it was a rule of the constitution that the law of the Medes and Persians could not be altered.

The king might determine what he pleased, but when he had once decreed it, he could not change it—the people feeling it better to submit to the worst established law than to be left utterly to every capricious whim of their master. Now, what was to be done? The decree was given that the Jews might be slain—and it could not be reversed. Here was the door of escape—another decree was issued giving the Jews permission to defend themselves and take the property of any who dared to attack them! Thus one decree effectually neutralized the other.

With great haste this mandate was sent all over the kingdom and on the appointed day the Jews stood up for themselves and slew their foes. According to their tradition nobody attempted to attack them except the Amalekites—and consequently, only Amalekites were slain—and the race of Amalek was, on that day, swept from off the face of the earth! God thus gave to the Jews a high position in the empire and we are told that many became Jews, or were proselytes to the God of Abraham because they saw what God had done.

As I commenced by saying that God sometimes darted flashes of light through the thick darkness, you will now see what a flash this must have been. All the people were perplexed when they found that the Hebrews might be put to death, but they must have been far more astonished when the decree came that they might defend themselves! All the world enquired, "Why is this?" And the answer was, "The living God whom the Jews worship has displayed His wisdom and rescued His people." All nations were compelled to feel that there was a God in Israel and thus the Divine purpose was fully accomplished—His people were secured and His name was glorified to the world's end! From the whole we learn the following lessons. First, it is clear that the Divine will is accomplished, and yet men are perfectly free agents. Haman acted according to his own will. Ahasuerus did whatever he pleased. Mordecai behaved as his heart moved him. And so did Esther. We see no interference with them, no force or coercion. Therefore the entire sin and responsibility rest with each guilty one, yet, acting with perfect freedom, none of them acts otherwise than Divine Providence had foreseen. "I cannot understand it," says one. My dear Friend, I am compelled to say the same—I do not understand it, either! I have known many who think they comprehend all things, but I fancy they had a higher opinion of themselves than truth would endorse.

Certain of my brethren deny free agency and so get out of the difficulty. Others assert that there is no predestination, and so cut the knot. As I do not wish to get out of the difficulty and have no wish to shut my eyes to any part of the Truth of God, I believe both free agency and predestination to be facts. How they can be made to agree, I do not know, or care to know! I am satisfied to know anything which God chooses to reveal to me—and equally content not to know what He does not reveal. There it is. Man is a free agent in what he does, responsible for his actions, and verily guilty when he does wrong. And he will be justly punished, too! And if he is lost, the blame will rest with only himself. But yet there is One who rules over all, who, without complicity in their sin, makes even the actions of wicked men to subserve His holy and righteous purposes. Believe these two Truths of God and you will see them in practical agreement in daily life, though you will not be able to devise a theory for harmonizing them on paper.

Next, we learn what wonders can be worked without miracles. When God does a wonderful thing by suspending the laws of Nature, men are greatly astonished, and say, "This is the finger of God." But nowadays they say to us, "Where is your God? He never suspends His laws, now!" I see God in the history of Pharaoh, but I must confess I see Him quite as clearly in the history of Haman. And I think I see Him in even a grander light, for, (I say it with reverence to His holy name), it is a somewhat rough method of accomplishing a purpose to stop the wheels of Nature and reverse wise and admirable laws. Certainly it reveals His power, but it does not so clearly display His Immutability.

When, however, the Lord allows everything to go on in the usual way, and gives mind and thought, ambition and passion their full liberty—and yet achieves His purpose—it is doubly wonderful! In the miracles of Pharaoh we see the finger of God, but in the wonders of Providence, without miracles, we see the hand of God. Today, whatever the event may be, whether it is the war between the Germans and the French, or the march into Coomassie, or the change of our own government, the attentive eye will as clearly see the Lord as if by miraculous power the hills had leaped from their places, or the floods had stood upright in a heap! I am sure that God is in the world, yes, and is at my own fireside and in my chamber. And I am sure He manages my affairs

and orders all things for me, and for each one of His children. We need no miracles to convince us of His working. The wonders of His Providence are as great marvels as miracles themselves.

Next we learn how safe the Church of God is. At one time the people of God seemed to be altogether in Haman's power. Nero once said that he wished his enemies had but one neck that he might destroy them all at a blow. Haman seemed to have realized just such power. Yet the chosen nation was delivered, the Jewish people lived on until the Messiah came, and does exist, and will exist till they shall enjoy the bright future which is decreed for them. So is it with the Church of God today. The foes of the Truth of God can never put out the candle which God has lit. They can never crush the living seed which the Lord Jesus has sown in His own blood-bought people. Brethren, be not afraid, but establish your hearts in God!

Again, we see that the wicked will surely come to an ill end. They may be very powerful, but God will bring them down. They may be very crafty and may plot and plan, and may think that even God, Himself, is their accomplice because everything goes as they desire. But they may be sure their sin will find them out. They may dig deep as Hell, but God will undermine them. They may climb as high as the stars, but God will be above them to hurl them down. Wicked man, I charge you, if you are wise, to turn from your career of opposition to the Most High! You cannot stand against Him—neither can you outwit Him. Cease, I beseech you, from this idle opposition, and hear the voice of His Gospel which says, "Confess your sin and forsake it. Believe in Jesus, the Son of God, the great atoning Sacrifice, and even you shall yet be saved." If you do not so, upon your own head shall your iniquities fall!

Last of all, let each child of God rejoice that we have a guardian so near the Throne. Every Jew in Shushan must have felt hope when he remembered that the queen was a Jewess. Today let us be glad that Jesus is exalted—

"He is at the Father's side, The Man of Love, the Crucified."

How safe are all His people, for, "if any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." There is one that lies in the bosom of God who will plead for all those who put their trust in Him! Therefore be you not dismayed, but let your souls rest in God and wait patiently for Him—for sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away than those who trust the Lord perish! "They shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end." Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Esther 5:9-14; Esther 6:1-14; Esther 7:1-10.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 1,20-22 #2457 - Job's Resignation

JOB'S RESIGNATION

NO. 2457

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 22, 1896.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 11, 1886.

"Then Job arose, tore his clothes, and shaved his head, and fell

to the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked I came from

my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there:

the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;

blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

Job 1:20-22.

JOB was very much troubled and he did not try to hide the outward

signs of his sorrow. A man of God is not expected to be a stoic. The Grace of God takes away the heart of stone out of his flesh, but it does not turn his heart into a stone. The Lord's children are the subjects of tender feelings—when they have to endure the rod, they feel the smart of its strokes—and Job felt the blows that fell upon him. Do not blame yourself if you are conscious of pain and grief, and do not ask to be made hard and callous. That is not the method by which Grace works—it makes us strong to bear trials, but we have to bear them! It gives us patience and submission, not stoicism. We feel and we benefit by the feeling—and there is no sin in the feeling—for in our text we are expressly told of the Patriarch's mourning, "In all this Job sinned not." Though he was the great mourner—I think I might truly call him the chief mourner of Scripture—yet there was no sin in his mourning. There are some who say that when we are heavy of heart, we are necessarily in a wrong spirit, but it is not so. The Apostle Peter says, "If need be you are in heaviness through manifold trials," but he does not imply that the heaviness is wrong. There are some who will not cry when God chastises them and some who will not yield when God strikes them. We do not wish to be like they—we are quite content to have the suffering heart that Job had—and to feel the bitterness of spirit, the anguish of soul which racked that blessed Patriarch.

Furthermore, Job made use of very manifest signs of mourning. He not only felt sorrow within his heart, but he indicated it by tearing his clothes, by shaving his head and by casting himself prone

upon the ground, as if he sought to return to the womb of mother earth as he said that he would. And I do not think we are to judge those of our Brothers and Sisters who feel it right to wear the common tokens of mourning. If they give them any kind of solace in their sorrow, let them have them. I believe that, at times, some go to excess in this respect, but I dare not pass sentence upon them because I read here, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." If the black band should be worn for a

Volume 42 1very long while and if the sorrow should be nursed unduly, as others judge, yet we cannot set up a standard of what is right for others—each one must answer for his conduct to his own Lord. I remember the gentleness of Jesus towards mourners rather than His severity in dealing with them—He has much pity for our weakness—and I wish that some of His servants had more of the same spirit. If you who are sorrowing could be strong. If the weeds of mourning could be laid aside, it might indicate a greater acquiescence in the Divine will, but if you do not feel that it should be so with you, God forbid that we should rebuke you while we have such a text as this before us, "Job arose, tore his clothes, and shaved his head, and fell to the ground." And, "in all this Job sinned not."

I want you, however, to notice that mourning should always be sanctified with devotion. It is very pleasant to observe that when Job had torn his clothes after the Oriental custom and shaved his head, (in a manner which, in his day, was not forbidden, but which under the Mosaic law was prohibited, for they might not cut their hair by way of mourning as the heathen did), and, after the Patriarch had fallen to the ground, he "worshipped." Not, he grumbled. Not, he lamented—much less that he began to imprecate and use language unjustifiable and improper—but he, "fell to the ground and worshipped." O dear Friend, when your grief presses you to the very dust, worship there! If that spot has come to be your Gethsemane, then present, there, your "strong crying and tears" to your God! Remember David's words, "You people, pour out your hearts"—but do not stop there, finish the quotation—"You people, pour out your hearts before Him." Turn the vessel upside down! It is a good thing to empty it, for this grief may ferment into something more sour. Turn the vessel upside down and let every drop run out—but let it be before the Lord. "You people, pour out your hearts before Him: God is a refuge for us." When you are bowed down beneath a heavy burden of sorrow, then take to worshipping the Lord and, especially, to that kind of worshipping which lies in adoring God—and in making a full surrender of yourself to the Divine will—so that you can say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." That kind of worshipping which lies in the subduing of the will, the awakening of the affections, the bestirring of the whole mind and heart and the presentation of oneself to God over, again, in solemn consecration, must tend to sweeten sorrow and to take the sting out of it.

It will also greatly alleviate our sorrow if we then fall into serious contemplations and begin to argue a little and to bring facts to bear upon our mind. Evidently Job did so, for the verses of my text are full of proofs of his thoughtfulness. The Patriarch brings to his own mind at least four subjects for earnest consideration, out of which he drew great comfort. In like manner, you will do well, not merely to sit still and say, "I shall be comforted," but you must look about you for themes upon which to think and meditate to profit. Your poor mind is apt to be driven to and fro by stress of your sorrow, but if you can get an anchor hold on some great clearly ascertained Truths of God, about which you can have no possible doubt, you may begin to derive consolation from them. "While I was musing," said David, "the fire burned," and it comforted and warmed him. Remember

how he talked to himself as to another self, "Why are you cast down, O my Soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope you in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." There are two Davids, you see, talking to one another, and cheering one another! A man ought always to be good company for himself—and he ought to also be able to catechize himself! He who is not fit to be his own schoolmaster is not fit to be schoolmaster to other people. If you cannot catechize your own heart and drill a Truth of God into your own soul, you do not know how to teach other people. I believe that the best preaching in the world is that which is done at home. When a sorrowing spirit shall have comforted itself, it will have learned the art of consoling other people. Job is an instance of this kind of personal instruction. He has three or four subjects which he brings before his own mind and these tend to comfort him.

I. The first is, to my mind, THE EXTREME BREVITY OF LIFE. Observe what Job says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and

naked shall I return there." He came forth and he expected to go back to mother earth and there to lie. That is Job's idea of life and a very true one it is, "I come forth, and I go back again." One asked a man of God, one day, "Will you tell me what life is?" The man of God stopped just a moment and then deliberately walked away. When his friend met him the following day, he said to him, "Yesterday, I asked you a question and you did not answer it." "But I did answer it," said the godly man. "No," rejoined the other, "you were there and you were gone." "Well, you asked me what life was, and that was my answer. Could I have answered your question better?" He answered and acted wisely, for that is a complete summary of our life here below—we come, and we go! We appear for a brief moment and then we vanish. I often, in my own mind, compare life to a procession. I see you, dear Friends, going by me, one by one, and vanishing—and others come on behind. But the point that I am apt to forget—and you do the same—is that I am in the procession and you are in it, too. We all count all men mortal but ourselves—yet all are marching towards that country from whose stream no traveler returns.

Well now, because life is so short, do you not see where the comfort comes? Job says to himself, "I came, and I shall return; then why should I worry myself about what I have lost? I am going to be here only a little while, then what need have I of all those camels and sheep?" So, Brothers and Sisters, what God has given us is so much spending money on our journey, to pay our fares and to help our fellow travelers. But we do not, any of us, need as much substance as Job had. He had seven thousand sheep. Dear me! What a task it must have been to drive and to feed such a large flock! "And three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen!" That is, a thousand oxen. "And five hundred she asses, and a very great household." Our proverb says, "The more servants, the more plagues," and I am sure it is true that the more camels, the more horses, the more cows, the more of such things that a man has, the more there is to look after and to cause him trouble! So Job seems to say to himself, "I am here for such a little time, why should I be carried away, as with a flood, even when these things are taken from me? I come and I go—let me be satisfied if other things come and go. If my earthly stores vanish, well, I shall vanish, too. They are like myself—they take to themselves wings and fly away—and, by-andby, I, too, shall take to myself wings, and I shall be gone." I have heard of one who called life, "the long disease of life." And it was so to him, for, though he did a great work for his Master, he was always sickly. Well, who wants a long disease? "There's the respect that makes calamity of so long life." We need, rather, to feel that it is not long, that it is short, and to set small store by all things here below and to

regard them as things which, like ourselves, appear but for a time, and soon shall be gone.

Further, Job seems especially to dwell with comfort upon the thought, "I shall return to the earth, from which all the particles of my body originally came. I shall return there." "Ah," said one, when he had seen the spacious and beautiful gardens of a wealthy man, "these are the things that make it hard to die." You remember how the tribe of Gad and the tribe of Reuben went to Moses and said, "If we have found grace in your sight, let this land be given unto your servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan." Of course, they did not need to cross the Jordan if they could get all their possessions on the other side. But Job had not anything this side Jordan, he was cleaned right out, so he was willing to go. And, really, the losses that a man has, which make him "desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better," are real gains! What is the use of all that clogs us here?

A man of large possessions reminds me of my experience when I have gone to see a friend in the country and he has taken me across a plowed field and I have had two heavy burdens of earth, one on each foot, as I have plodded on! The earth has clung to me and made it hard walking. It is just so with this world—its good things hamper us, clog us, cling to us like thick clay—but when we get these hampering things removed, we take comfort in the thought, "We shall soon return to the earth from where we came." We know that it is not mere returning to earth, for we possess a life that is immortal! We are looking forward to spending it in the true land that flows with milk and honey, where, like Daniel, we shall stand in our lot at the end of the days. Therefore we feel not only resigned to return to the womb of mother earth, but sometimes we even long for the time of our return to come!

A dear servant of God whom you would all recognize if I mentioned his name, was talking with me concerning our dear departed brother, Hugh Stowell Brown, and he said, "All the Brethren of my age and yours seem to be going Home. They are passing away. The fathers and the leaders are going and I could almost wish," he added, "that our Heavenly Father would put my name down as the next to go." I said that I hoped the Lord would not do so, but that our Brother might be spared to labor a while longer but that, if I might put in another name, I would plead for my own to go in there instead of his! Happily, we have nothing to do with the date of our going Home—it is out of our hands—yet we are glad to feel that when the time of our departure shall arrive, it will be no calamity, but a distinct advancement, for the Master to bid us to return to the dust from where we came! "Return, you children of men," He will say, and we will joyfully answer, "Yes, Father, here we are, glad to stretch our wings and fly straight to yonder world of joy, expecting that even our poor bodies, by-and-by, at the trump of the archangel, shall come back to You, and we shall be like Your only-begotten Son, when we shall see Him as He is."

II. Secondly, Job seems to comfort himself by noticing THE TENURE OF HIS EARTHLY POSSESSIONS. "Naked," he says, "came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there."

He feels himself to be very poor, everything is gone, he is stripped. Yet he seems to say, "I am not poorer, now, than I was when I was born." I had nothing then, not even a garment for my back but what the love of my mother provided for me. I was helpless then—I could not do anything for myself whatever." One said to me, the other day, "All is gone, Sir, all is gone, except health and strength." Yes, but we had not as much as that when we were born. We had no strength, we were

too weak to perform the least, though most necessary offices, for our poor tender frame. David often very sweetly dwells upon his childhood and still more upon his infancy—and we shall do well to imitate him. Old men sometimes arrive at a second childhood. Do not be afraid, Brother, if that is your case! You have gone through one period, already, that was more infantile than your second one can be—you will not be weaker, then, than you were at first!

Suppose that you and I should be brought to extreme weakness and poverty—we shall neither be weaker nor poorer than we were when we were born! "But I had a mother," says one. Well, there are some children who lose their mother in their very birth, but if you had a mother to care for you then, you have a Father to care for you now and, as a child of God, you surely feel that your mother was but the secondary agent to watch over you in your weakness! And God who gave that love to her and moved her to care for you will be sure to find that same love which flowed out of Him into her still stored up in His own bosom—and He will see you through. Do not be afraid, my Brother, my Sister, the Lord will see you through! It is amazing that after God has been gracious to us for 50 years, we cannot trust Him for the rest of our lives! And, as for you who are 60, 70, or 80 years of age—has He brought you this far to put you to shame? Did He bear you through that very weakest part of your life and do you think He will now forsake you? David said, "I was cast upon You from the womb," as if then he had none but God to help him! And will not He who took care of us, then, take care of us even to the end? Yes, that He will! Therefore let us be of good courage and let the poverty and weakness of our infancy, as we think of it, cheer us if we are weak and poor now.

Then Job adds, "However poor I may be, I am not as poor as I shall be, for naked shall I return to mother earth. If I have but little, now, I shall soon have still less." We have heard of a rustic who, when dying, put a crownpiece into his mouth because he said that he would not be without money in another world—but he was a clown and everyone knew how foolish was his attempt thus to provide for the future! There have been stories told of persons who have had their gold sewn up in their shrouds, but they took not a penny with them for all their pains. Nothing can be taken with us—we must go back to the earth, the richest as poor as the poorest, and the poorest no poorer, really, than the richest! The dust of great Caesar may help to stop a hole through which the blast blows and the dust of his slave cannot be put to more ignoble uses. No, poor and weak as we may be, we are not as poor and weak as we shall be, by-andby, so let us just solace ourselves with this reflection. The two ends of our life are nakedness—if the middle of it should not always be scarlet and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day, let us not wonder. And if it should seem to be all of a piece, let us not be impatient or complaining.

I want you to notice, also, what I really think was in Job's mind, that, notwithstanding that he was but dust at the beginning and would be dust at the end, yet, still, there was a Job who existed all the while. "I was naked, but I was. Naked I shall return there, but I shall be there." Some men never find themselves till they have lost their goods. They, themselves, are hidden away like Saul, among the stuff—their true manhood is not to be seen because they are dressed so finely that, though people seem to respect them—it is their clothes that are respected! They appear to be somebodies, but they are nobodies, notwithstanding all that they possess. The Lord brought His servant Job to feel, "Yes, when I had those camels, when I had those she asses, when I had those sheep, when I had those men servants, they were not myself. And now that they are gone, I am the same Job that I ever was. The sheep were not a part of myself, the camels were not a part of

myself. I, Job, am still here, lying in my wholeness and integrity before God as much a servant of Jehovah in my nakedness, as I was when I wrapped myself in ermine."

O Sirs, it is a grand thing when God helps us to live above what we have and above what we have not! Then it is that He brings us to know ourselves as we are, in our God, not dependent upon externals, but maintained and strengthened by food of which the world knows nothing, which comes not from milk of cattle! Then are we robed in a garment that comes not from fleece of sheep and we possess a life that depends not on the swift camel—a true existence that is neither in flocks, nor herds, nor pastures, nor fields—but delights itself in God and keeps itself on the Most High. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there," says Job, but, "still it is I, the blessed of God, His same devoted servant who will trust Him to the end." That was good talk for Job's heart, was it not? Though it may not all have been said in words, I doubt not that something like it, or something much better passed through the Patriarch's mind and thus he solaced himself in the hour of his sorrows and losses.

III. But now, thirdly, and perhaps the most blessed thing, is what Job said concerning THE HAND OF GOD IN ALL THINGS—"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

I am so pleased to think that Job recognized the hand of God everywhere giving. He said, "The Lord gave." He did not say, "I earned it all." He did not say, "There are all my hard-earned savings gone." "Ah, me," he might have said, "all the care for those sheep, the dreadful expense of those camels and the trouble that I have been at with those oxen—and now they are all gone, it does seem hard." He does not put it so, but he says, "The Lord gave them to me. They were a gift and though they are gone, they were a gift from Him who had a right to take them back, for all He gives is only loaned. 'A loan should go laughing home,' and if God loans me these things, and now has called them back, I will bless His name for having let me have them so long."

What a sweet thing it is, dear Brothers and Sisters, if you can feel that all you have in this world is God's gift to you! You cannot feel that, you know, if you came by it dishonestly. No, it is not God's gift, then, and it brings no blessing with it. But that which is honestly the result and fruit of your cheerful industry, you may consider has come from God and if, in addition, you have really sanctified your substance and have given your fair proportion to help the poor and the needy, as Job did—if you can say that you have caused the widow's heart to sing for joy when you relieved her needs, then all that you have is God's gift! God's Providence is man's inheritance and your inheritance has come to you from God's Providence. Look at it all as God's gift—it will even sweeten that little loaf of bread and that tiny pat of butter which is all you may have to eat today or tomorrow—if you regard it as God's gift! It will soften that hard bed upon which you lie, wishing that you were somewhat better covered from the cold, if you think of it as God's gift. A slender income will give us much contentment if we can see that it is God's gift.

Let us not only regard our money and our goods as God's gifts, but also our wife, our children, our friends. What precious gifts they often are! A man is truly rich who has a good helpmeet! He is really rich who has godly children about him. Even though they may cost him much care, he is abundantly repaid by their affection. And if they grow up in the fear of the Lord, what a choice gift they are! Let us look at them all as God's gifts—let us not see them or anything else about the house without feeling, "My Father gave me this." Surely it will tend to draw the teeth of every sharp

affliction if, while you have enjoyed the possession of your good things, you have seen God's hand in giving them to you.

Alas, some of you do not know anything about God! What you have is not counted by you as God's gift. You miss the very sweetness and joy of life by missing this recognition of the Divine hand in giving us all good things richly to enjoy.

But then, Job equally saw God's hand in taking them away. If he had not been a believer in Jehovah, he would have said, "Oh, those detestable Sabeans! Somebody ought to go and cut to pieces those Chaldeans." That is often our style, is it not—finding fault with the secondary agents? Job has nothing to say about the Sabeans or the Chaldeans, or the wind, or the lightning. "The Lord," he said, "the Lord has taken away." I believe that Satan intended to make Job feel that it was God who was at work when his messenger said, "The fire of God is fallen from Heaven and has burned up the sheep." "Ah," said Satan, "he will see that God is against him!" The devil did not succeed as he thought he had done, for Job could see that it was God's hand and that took away the sting of the stroke. "The Lord has taken away." Aaron held his peace when he knew that the Lord had done it. And the Psalmist said, "I was dumb with silence, I opened not my mouth, because You did it." And Job felt just that. "It is the Lord, let Him do what seems good to Him." Never mind the secondary agents! Do not spend your strength in kicking against this bad man or that—he is responsible to God for all the evil he has done. But at the back of these free agents there is a Divine Predestination, there is an over-ruling hand and even that which in men is evil may, nevertheless, in another light, be traced up distinctly to the hand of the Most High! "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away."

Will you remember that with regard to your children? If Job had lost only his eldest son, he might have needed much Grace to say, "The Lord gave him, and the Lord has taken him away." Job had lost his eldest son, but he had lost six more sons, and he had lost his three daughters as well. I have known a mother say, "My two dear boys sickened and died within a week—I am the most tried woman who ever lived." Not quite, not quite, dear Friend—there have been others who have excelled you in this respect. Job lost his 10 children at a stroke. O Death, what an insatiable archer you were that day, when 10 must fall at once! Yet Job says, "The Lord has taken away." That is all he has to say about it—"The Lord has taken away."

I need not repeat to you the story of the gardener who missed a choice rose, but who could not complain because the master had plucked it. Do you feel that it is just so with all that you have, if he takes it? Oh, yes! Why should he not take it? If I were to go about my house and take down an ornament or anything from the walls, would anybody say a word to me? Suppose my dear wife should say to the servant, "Where has that picture gone?" and the maid replied, "Oh, the master took it!" Would she find fault? Oh, no! If it had been a servant who took it down, or a stranger who removed it, she might have said something, but not when I took it, for it is mine. And surely we will let God be Master in His own house—where we are only the children—He shall take whatever He pleases of all He has loaned us for a while. It is easy to stand here and say this, but, Brothers and Sisters, let us try to say it if it should ever come to us as a matter of fact that the Lord who gave should also take away.

I think Job did well to call attention to this blessed Truth of God, that the hand of God is everywhere at work, whether in giving or in taking away. I do not know anything that tends more to

reconcile us to our present sorrows, losses and crosses than to feel, "God has done it all. Wicked men were the agents, but still, God, Himself, has done it. There is a great mystery about it which I cannot clear up, and I do not need to clear it up. God has done it and that is enough for me. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away.'"

IV. Job's last comfort lay in this Truth, that GOD IS WORTHY TO BE BLESSED IN THINGS—"Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Dear Friends, let us never rob God of His praise, however dark the day is. It is a funeral day, perhaps, but should not God be praised when there is a funeral, as well as when there is a wedding? "Oh, but I have lost everything!" And is this one of the days when there is no praise due to God? Most of you know that the Queen's taxes must be paid—and our great King's revenue has the first claim upon us. Let us not rob our King of the revenue of His praise. "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised." "Oh, but I have lost a child!" Yes, but God is to be praised. "But I have lost my mother." Yes, but God is to be praised. "I have a bad headache." Yes, but God is to be praised. One said to me, one evening, "We should have family prayer, my dear Sir, but it is rather late. Do you feel too tired to conduct it?" "No," I said, "I was never too tired, yet, to pray with my Brothers and Sisters, and I hope I never shall be." If it is the middle of the night, let us not go to bed without prayer and praise, for we must not rob God of His Glory! "There is a mob in the street," but we must not rob God of His Glory. "Our goods are getting cheaper and cheaper—we shall be ruined in the market." Yes, but let us not rob God of His Glory! "There is going to be, I do not know what, happening, by-and-by." Yes, but we must not rob God of His Glory.

"Blessed be the name of the Lord." Job means that the Lord is to be blessed both for giving and taking. "The Lord gave," blessed be His name. "The Lord has taken away," blessed be His name! Surely it has not come to this among God's people, that He must do as we like or else we will not praise Him! If He does not please us every day and give way to our whims, and gratify our tastes, then we will not praise Him? "Oh, but I do not understand His dealings," says one. And are you really such a stranger to God and is God such a stranger to you, that unless He enters into explanations, you are afraid that He is not dealing fairly with you? O Sir, have you known the Lord for 20 years and cannot praise Him for everything? Brothers and Sisters, some of us have known him 40 years, now. Perhaps some of you have known the Lord for 50 years—are you always needing to have chapter, verse and explanations from Him before you will praise Him? No, no, I hope we have gone far beyond that stage!

God is, however, especially to be praised by us whenever we are moved by the devil to curse. Satan had said to the Lord concerning Job, "Put forth Your hand, now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse You to Your face." And it seemed as if God had hinted to His servant that this was what the devil was aiming at. "Then," said Job, "I will bless Him." His wife suggested afterwards that he should curse God, but he would do no such thing, he would bless Him! It is usually a wise thing to do the very opposite to what the Evil One suggests to you. If he says, "Curse," you bless! Remember the story of a man who was going to give a pound to some charitable institution? The devil said, "No, you cannot afford it." "Then," said the man, "I will give two pounds. I will not be dictated to in this way." Satan exclaimed, "You are a fanatic!" The man replied, "I will give four pounds." "Ah," said Satan, "what will your wife say when you go home and

tell her that you have given away four pounds?" "Well," said the man, "I will give eight pounds, now, and if you do not leave me alone, you will tempt me to give sixteen." So the devil was obliged to stop because the more he tempted him, the more he went the other way. So let it be with us! If the devil would drive us to curse God, let us bless Him all the more, and Satan will be wise enough to leave off tempting when he finds that the more he attempts to drive us, the more we go in the opposite direction!

This is all meant to be sweet, cheery talk to suffering saints. How I wish that everybody here had an interest in it! What will some of you do—what are some of you doing, now that you have lost all? Wife dead, children dead and you are growing old, yet you are without God? O you poor rich people who have no interest in God! Your money must burn your souls! But you poor, poor, poor people who have not anything, here, and have no hope hereafter, how sad is your case! May God in His rich mercy give you even a little commonsense, for surely, commonsense would drive you to Him!

Sometimes in distributing temporal relief, we meet with persons who have been out of work and full of trouble. They may not have any bread to eat and we say to them, "Did you ever cry to God for help?" "No, Sir, we never prayed in all our life." What is the matter with you? Here is your child crawling about the house, shivering for lack of bread and clothes. "Did you never ask your Father for anything?" "No, never." Come, Friend, did God make you, or did you grow without Him? Did God create you? If He made you, He will have respect unto the work of His hands. Go and try Him, even on that low ground. Go and seek His face, even as His creature, and see whether He does not help you! O unbelief, to what madness do you go, that even when men are driven to starvation, they will not turn to God! O Spirit of God bless the sons of men! Even through their fears, sorrows and losses, bless them, and bring them in penitence to the Savior's feet, for His dear name's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Job 1:6-22.

Verse 6. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. Angels and all kinds of intelligent spirits had, as it were, a special, solemn, general assembly—a great field-day, or levee. Perhaps, in stars far remote, in various parts of the universe, there was celebrated, that day, a high festival of honor unto Jehovah, but since sin has come into the world, since even among the 12 Apostles there was a Judas, so in every assembly, even though it is an assembly of the sons of God, there is sure to be a devil—"Satan came also among them." If he is not anywhere else, he is sure to be where the sons of God are gathered together. Yet what impudence this is on his part, that he dares to come even into the assemblies of the saints! And what hardness of heart he must have, for he comes in as a devil and he goes out as a devil! The sons of God offer their spiritual prayers inspired by the Holy Spirit, but the devil offers diabolical petitions suggested by his own malice.

7. And the LORD said unto Satan, From where do you come? He is obliged to give an account of himself. He cannot go a yard from his door without Divine permission. 7. Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. Satan is always busy, never quiet—he cannot be still.

8. And the LORD said unto Satan, Have you considered My servant Job—You see, Job is a man whom God calls His servant even in speaking to the devil, "Have you considered My servant Job?"

8. That there is none like he in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and shuns evil? God Himself gives Job that high character! He is a non-such, he stands alone among mankind—"There is none like he in the earth." "Have you reckoned him up? Have you taken his measure, O you accuser of the Brethren?"

9. Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Does Job fear God for nothing? Even the devil could not bring a charge against Job's conduct, so he insinuated that his motives were not pure.

10. Have not You made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? "He finds that it pays, it answers his purpose to be devout."

10-11. You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse You to Your face. See, the devil measures Job's corn in his own bushel, but, happily, it was the measurement of a liar, so he measured amiss! There are still some who say, "Yes, it is a fine thing to be good when you are rich. It is a very easy thing to behave yourself aright when all goes smoothly with you. Would the man who is such a devout servant of God, now, be like that if he were in poverty, or if he were cruelly slandered, or if he were tested with contempt? Would the Grace of God carry him over those rough bridges? His religion is a fine thing, no doubt, but if he were tried and tested, we would see what he would do." Now, the Lord delights in proving the Graces of His people, for it brings great Glory to His name when experiments are made upon them to test them and try them—and to let even their greatest adversary know how true they are and what a Divine work it is which God has worked upon them!

12. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself put not forth your hand. Satan could go so far, but no farther. There is an, "only," in the permission granted to him— "Only upon himself put not forth your hand."

12, 13. So Satan went forth from the Presence of the LORD. Now there was a day when Job's sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house. That was a bad day for trouble to come. Satan selected that day because it was a joyful day and, therefore, it would make the trials of Job the more startling. Moreover, if Job could have had his choice, he would have preferred that his trouble should come when his sons and his daughters were praying, not when they were feasting.

14, 15. And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yes, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and only I am escaped alone to tell you. The bad news comes to him all of a sudden, just when he is thinking of something very different. There is only one servant left to tell the tale—he was spared that Job might know that the news was true. If that one other servant had been killed, the tidings could only have reached Job as a rumor that might or might not be true, but now, one of his own servants tells him the sad story, so there is no mistake about it. Ah, the devil knows how and where to strike when he strikes! Yet this was only the first blow for poor Job, and there were heavier ones to follow.

16. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from Heaven, and has burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and only I escaped alone to tell you. Now, if that lightning had fallen on the Sabeans while they were robbing and plundering, one might not have wondered! But to fall on the flocks of a man of God who had clothed the naked with the fleece of his sheep and had presented many of the fat of the flock unto God in sacrifice—that did seem strange. This trial, too, comes right upon the back of the other—and this one appeared to be more severe than the former one because it seemed to come distinctly from God. "The fire of God"—the lightning, "is fallen from Heaven, and has burned up the sheep."

17. While he was yet speaking there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yes, and slain the servants with the edge of the word; and I only am escaped alone to tell you. Three such heavy blows will surely be enough to test the Patriarch, but a fourth messenger came with the direst news of all!

18-19. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: and, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell you. Did any other man ever have to endure such a complication of trouble, such agonies piled, one upon another, with no respite? Job must have felt wellnear stunned and choked by these consecutive griefs!

20-22. Then Job arose, tore his clothes, and shaved his head, and fell to the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there: the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. Oh, the triumphs of Almighty Grace! May God grant us such patience, if He sends us such trials, and unto Him shall be the glory evermore!

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 18

Job 1,21 #3025 - Fifteen Years After

FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER!

NO. 3025

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY FIRST, 1907.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 11, 1869.

[This title has been selected in order to call special attention to the fact that the Sermon is published exactly 15 years after the beloved preacher was "called Home" on January 31st, 1892. The subject is as singularly appropriate to the anniversary of that never-to-be-forgotten period as the Sermons which were issued at the time of Mr. Spurgeon's death and funeral—Sermons No. 2242, (All Volume 38)—GOD'S WILL ABOUT THE FUTURE; No. 2243, HIS OWN FUNERAL SERMON; No. 2244, MEMBERS OF CHRIST and No. 2245, "LIVING, LOVING, LASTING UNION"—

Read/download the entire sermons, free of charge, athttp://www.spurgeongems.org.]

"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;

blessed be the name of the LORD."

Job 1:21.

OR, as some read it, "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord." So that the text is not only concerning the past, but it may rightly be considered as relating also to the present. Some of the rarest pearls have been found in the deepest waters and some of the choicest utterances of Believers have come from them when God's waves and billows have been made to roll over them. The fire consumes nothing but the dross and leaves the gold all the purer. In Job's case, I may truly say with regard to his position before God, he had lost nothing by all his losses, for what could be purer and brighter gold than this which gleams before us from our text, revealing his triumphant patience, his complete resignation and his cheerful acquiescence in the Divine will? "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

There are two points to which I ask your earnest attention while we meditate upon this subject. The first is the exhortation drawn from the text—learn to see the Lord's hand in everything—in giving and in taking. And, secondly—and this is a harder lesson—learn to bless the Lord's name in everything—in giving and in taking.

I. First, LET US LEARN TO SEE THE LORD'S HAND IN EVERYTHING. Our whole history seems to be divided, as our text divides itself, into a

beholding of God's hand in giving and then a beholding of it in taking. We are then, first of all, to behold God's hand as a giving hand. If we are Believers, all the comforts and mercies that we have are to be viewed by us as coming from the hands of our gracious Heavenly Father. Job confessed that the Lord had given him the camels, the sheep, the oxen and that the Lord had given him his seven sons and three daughters. Everything which he had ever possessed he looked upon as having been the gift of God. Job did not say, "I worked hard to obtain all that stock that I have now lost." He did not complain, "I spent many weary days and many anxious nights in accumulating all those flocks and herds that have been stolen from me." He did not ascribe any of his wealth either to his own wit, or to his own industry, but he said of it all—"The Lord gave it to me." In his mind's eye, he took an inventory of all that he once had and of all that he had lost—and he said of the whole, "It was all the Lord's gift to me."

Now, Beloved, whatever may be the possessions which you have at the present time. Whatever may be the number of those who are the comfort of your life—husband or wife, parents or children, kinsfolk of any sort— say of all of them, "The Lord gave them to me." And, as a Christian, learn the wisdom of never ascribing any earthly comfort to any earthly source. The worldling may not always be able to say what Job said concerning his possessions. Some of what he has may not have been obtained honestly—the Lord did not give any of that to him. Some of what he has may turn out to be a curse rather than a blessing, but the Believer in Christ may say with the utmost truthfulness, with regard to all that he has, "It is all the gift of my loving and tender Heavenly Father."

And, Brothers and Sisters, there is associated with this fact that all our possessions are God's gifts, the remembrance that they are all undeserved gifts. They are gifts in the fullest sense of the word—the gifts of God's Grace. They are not given to us because we have merited them, for we have never deserved even the least of all the mercies which the Lord has so bountifully bestowed upon us. We may say of the whole river of His favor which continually flows side by side with us as we journey along the pathway of our pilgrimage, that there is not a drop of it which comes to us of debt or by law, but all comes through the free gift of God's Grace! All that we have, over and above what would have been our portion in the pit of Hell, is the gift of God's mercy towards us. It is of the Lord's mercy and because His compassions fail not, that we are not consumed. Every Believer can truly say with Job, "'The Lord gave,' yes, the Lord gave even to me, an unworthy one who sat as a beggar at His gate and received from His own hand countless tokens of His Infinite loving kindness."

And I may add, with regard to those gifts, that they have been given to us with wondrous kindness and thoughtfulness on God's part. Some here, I think, will have to say that they have found themselves provided for by God's forestalling their needs. He has gone before them in the way of His Providence and mysteriously cleared a path for them. Before they have felt the pinch of poverty, the pinch has been averted. There are others of God's servants here who have sometimes been brought very low, yet they can bear witness that up to now their bread has always been given to them and their waters have been sure. And while God's mercy comes to us very sweetly when forestalling our needs, there is equal sweetness if it comes when the need has been

felt. No food is so palatable as that which has hunger for its sauce! To know what it is to be poor will make us more grateful if God ever gives us abundance. But time would fail me to tell you the love and care of God towards each one of us, every day of our lives, and to recount how He not only continues but even multiplies His favors. It is impossible for us to count them, for they are more in number than the hairs of our head, or the sand on the seashore, or the stars in the midnight sky! [See Sermon No. 3022, Volume 53—GOD'S INNUMERABLE MERCIES—

Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, athttp://www.spurgeongems.org.]

Now, as everything we have is freely and graciously given to us by God, this should make us feel, in the first place, that this Truth sweetens all that we have. I daresay there is many a little thing in your house that is of no great value in itself, but it was given to you by someone who was very dear to you. How much a child values that Bible that was given to her by her mother who wrote her name in it! Many a man has, in his house, things which an auctioneer would appraise at a very small amount, but which the owner prizes very highly because they were given to him by someone whom he intimately esteemed and who gave them to him as a token of his love. In like manner, look at the bread on the table of a Believer as a love token from God. The Lord gave it to him—and if there were upon his table nothing but that bread, it would be a token of God's gracious condescension in providing for his needs! Let us learn to look thus at everything that we receive in this life, for such a view of it will sweeten it all. We shall not then begin to calculate whether we have as much as others have, or as much as our own whims or wishes might crave, but we shall recognize that all we have comes from the hand and heart of our Heavenly Father—and that it all comes to us as a token of our Father's love and with our Father's blessing resting upon it!

This fact should also prevent any Believer from acting dishonestly in his daily avocations, or even from wishing to obtain anything that is not his own by right. All of you who belong to God have what God has given you—so mind that you do not mix with it anything that the devil has given you! Do not go into any worldly enterprise and seek to gain something concerning which you could not say, "The Lord my God gave it to me." Men of the world will engage in such transactions and they will say that you are not as sharp as you might be because you will not do the same. But you have a good reason for refusing to gain even a shilling

Volume 53 3upon which you cannot ask God's blessing. A sovereign, dishonestly procured, though it might gladden your eyes for a little while and help to fill your purse, would certainly bring a curse with it—and you do not want that. You would not like to have to confess to yourself, concerning anything you possessed, "I dare not tell my Heavenly Father how I got it, though He knows. And I dare not ask His blessing upon it, nor do I think He would ever give it to me. He will probably turn it into a rod and sharply scourge me for having dared to use such unholy means to get what I ought not to have even wished to possess." Some of God's people might have been very happy if they had not been greedy and grasping. He that hurries to be rich will soon find that he will fall into many snares and abundant temptations. It is an evil thing when people cannot be content although they have enough for all their necessities, for even the world's proverb says that, "enough is as good as a feast." Yet many stretch out their arms, like wide-encircling seas, and try to grasp in them all the shore! Such people, sooner or later, begin to rob others right and left, and very many of them come down to poverty and the Bankruptcy Court, disgraced and dishonored. Let it not be so with you, Beloved, but be content with such things as you have, whether God gives

you little or much and, above all things, pray that you may have nothing but what He gives you, nothing in your house or shop but what comes in at the front door in the light of day, nothing but what may be seen coming in if any eyes should be watching. That man is truly happy who can say of all his substances, be it little or be it much, "The Lord gave it to me."

Further, as it is the Lord who gives us all the wealth that we possess, how very foolish are those people who are proud of possessing a little more of this world's wealth than others have! There are some who seem to be thoroughly intoxicated by the possession of a larger income than their neighbors enjoy. They even seem to fancy that they were made of better material than was used in the creation of ordinary mortals. Did not a broad grin appear on the faces of many aristocrats when someone said, in Parliament, that we were all made of the same flesh and blood? Of course all those who were in their right senses knew that it was true— but insanity in high places seemed to be moved to utter contempt at the bare mention of such a thing! When a man is poor, unless he has brought his poverty upon himself by extravagance, or idleness, or his own wrongdoing, the man is a man for all that, and none the worse man for being poor! Indeed, some of the best of men have been as poor as their Lord was. I have known many who have been very poor, yes, who have been the excellent of the earth, in whom a true saint of God might well take delight! There always will be various ranks and conditions among man and there is a certain respect which is due from one to another which should never be withheld where it is rightly due, but, at the same time, whenever a man begins to say that because God has given him more than He has given to another, therefore he will despise his poorer brother and look down upon him, it must be dishonoring and displeasing to God and it is extremely likely that He will turn round and make the proud man bite the dust! How often those who have held their heads so very high have been rolled in the mud—and how easily that might be made to come to pass with others!

A further inference arising out of this Truth that God gives us all that we have, is that it ought never to be difficult for us to give back to God as much as we can. As He has given us all that we have, it is but right that we should use it to His Glory and if, under the rule of His Grace, and under the Gospel, He does not so much claim a return from us as a matter of right, but leaves our liberality to be awakened by the love which constrains us, rather than by the Law which compels us, yet let us not give God less because He gives us more! Under the Mosaic dispensation, the Jew gave his tenth by compulsion, but let us willingly give to God more than that and not need to be forced to do it except by the sweet constraint of love. Do I owe every penny that I have in this world to the bounty of God's hand? Then, when God's cause and God's poor are in need, let no one have to beg of me to give to them! I always feel ashamed when I hear people say that we are "begging for God's cause." God's cause has no need to be a beggar from those who would be beggars if it were not for God's Grace! Oh, no, no! It must never be so! We ought to be like the children of Israel in the wilderness who gave so generously towards the building and furnishing of the Tabernacle that Moses had to restrain their liberality, for they had already given "much more than enough for the service of the work which the Lord commanded to make." Let us try to imitate the liberality which God has manifested toward us in the gift of His well-beloved Son and in all the Covenant blessings which come to us through Him. All those who have received so much from God should count it their privilege and delight to give back to Him all that they can!

These reflections might suffice for this part of the subject, but I shall add one more. "The Lord gave"—then we must worship the Giver and not His gifts. How can we so degrade ourselves as to

worship that which God has given to us? Yet you know that many make idols of their gold, their lands, their husbands, their wives, their children, or their friends! It is no unusual thing for a little child to be the god of the family—and wherever that is the case, there is a rod laid up in store in that house. You cannot make idols of your children without finding out, sooner or later, that God makes them into rods with which He will punish you for your idolatry! "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," was the injunction of the loving Apostle John. And he wrote thus in love because he knew that if God sees us making idols of anything, He will either break our idols or break us. If we really are His people, He will, in some way or other, wean

Volume 53 5us from our idols, for He wants our love to be given wholly to Himself. So it is best for us to keep the creature in its right place and never to let the joys or comforts of this life usurp God's rightful position in our hearts! God has been pleased so to fashion the world that it should always be under our feet and, as Christians, we should always keep it there. The dearest thing we have on earth should always be estimated by us at its proper value as a gift from God but as nothing more than that—and never be allowed to occupy our heart's throne which should always be reserved for the Lord alone.

But now we are to think, for a while, of the Lord's hand taking away from us as well as giving to us. Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away." Some of you have come to this service very sad and heavy of heart because that dear child of yours is dead. Well, I do not blame you for sorrowing over your loss, but I pray you also to remember that it is the Lord who has taken your child away from you. You say that it was the fever that took away your dear one—and perhaps that was the immediate cause of your child's death—but if you can realize that the fever was only the instrument in God's hands to remove the dear little one from your care to His own, surely you will dry your tears. And as for that substance of yours, which has almost melted away under the fiery trial to which it has been subjected, so that poverty seems, now, to stare you in the face, you will be able to bear even that when you remember that it is the Lord's hand that has taken away what His hand had first given!

As long as we look at the secondary causes of our trouble, we see reasons for sorrow. But when our faith can pierce the veil and see the Great First Cause, then our comfort begins! If you strike a dog with a stick, he will try to bite the stick because he is a dog. But if he knew better, he would try to bite you—not the stick! Yet that is the way that we often act with the troubles that come to us—we fly at the second causes and so are angry and petulant with them! But if we would always remember that it is God who takes away, as well as God who gives—that He is at the back of all our trials and troubles—that His hand weighs out our shame of grief and measures our portion of pain—then we would not dare to rebel and bewail, but, like David, we would say, "I was dumb. I opened not my mouth because You did it." Even if we could not get up higher, and say with Job, "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Further, when once we know that God has done anything, that fact forbids any question concerning it. It must be right because He did it. I may not be able to tell why, but God knows why He did it. He may not tell me the reason, but He has a reason, for the Lord never acted unreasonably. There never was any action of His, however sovereign or autocratic it might appear to be, but was done "after the counsel of His own will." Infinite Wisdom dictates what absolute Sovereignty decrees. God is never arbitrary, or tyrannical. He does as He wills, but He always wills

to do that which is not only most for His own glory, but also most for our real good. How dare we question anything that God does!

My dear Sister, rest assured that it is better that you should be a widow and seek to glorify God in your widowhood. My dear young Friend, believe that it is better that you should be an orphan—otherwise God would not have taken away your parents. It is better that you, dear Friends, should lose your eyes. It is better that you should be poor, or diseased, or else the Lord would not let you be so, for, "no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." If health and wealth were good things for you, God would let you have them. If it were a good thing for saints to never die, they would never die. If it were a good thing for them to go to Heaven at once, they would go there at once. If you are walking uprightly, you may know that you have all things, which, all things considered, would be good for you. Some things which might be good in themselves, or good for others, might not be good for you and, therefore, the Lord, in love, withholds them from you. But, whatever He gives, or takes away, or withholds, raise no questions concerning it, but let it be sufficient for you that the Lord has done it!

Besides, when we know that the Lord takes away our possessions, the knowledge that they are His effectually prevents us from complaining. Suppose you are a steward to a certain nobleman and that his lordship has been pleased to entrust you with ten thousand pounds of his money? By-and-by he withdraws it from your charge and invests it somewhere else. Well, it never was your money—you might have complained if it had been. But you are only a steward and if your lord pleases to withdraw his own money, are you going to be out of temper with your master because he does what he wills with his own? Suppose you have a banker—and we are, as it were, the Lord's bankers—and suppose that a week or two ago you paid into the bank a thousand pounds, or more, and the clerks or those in authority were pleased to take charge of your money. But suppose that you went to the bank, today, and drew it all out? They did not get angry with you, did they? You would not like to trust a banker who was only civil to you when you were paying in money! And if we are God's bankers, He sometimes puts His treasure into our keeping and sometimes takes it out—but it is not our treasure any more than our money is the banker's when we entrust it to his care! It is on deposit with us and we ought to be paying God good interest upon it! Whatever God has given to us, He never gave it as our own freehold. It was always on a lease—a lease, too, that had to be renewed every moment, for if God chose to cancel it, He could do so whenever He pleased. How dare we, then, complain?

Volume 53 7To use another figure, our position is like that of a nurse into whose care a mother placed her baby and the nurse dandled the child, and was glad to have charge of it. But when she had to return it to its mother, she cried over the loss of the little darling! Yet it was not the nurse's child, given to her to keep—it was only hers to nurse. So it was with your children whom God has taken Home to Himself—they were not yours to keep. The Lord put each one of them, for a while, into your charge and said to you, "Christian mother, take this child and nurse it for Me, and I will pay you your wages." So, when He called the child back to Himself, why should you complain as though He had wronged you? Or, to use another illustration, which has been frequently employed in this connection—a gardener had been especially careful in tending one particular rose which was very fair to look upon. But, when he went, one morning, to his favorite rosebush, he found that the flower of which he had taken such care, was gone! He was very vexed, for he thought that some bad boy had stolen into the garden and taken away his best flower. He was complaining

very bitterly of his loss when someone said, "The master has been down in the garden this morning, and he has been admiring this rosebush, and he has taken away that fine bud of which you were so proud." Then the gardener was delighted that he had been able to grow a flower that had attracted his master's notice and, instead of mourning any longer, he began to rejoice! So should it be with anything upon which we have set our hearts! Let each one of us say to our Master, "My Lord, if it pleases You to take it, it pleases me to lose it! Why should I complain because You have taken from me what is really Your own?—

'If You should call me to resign What most I prize—it never was mine! I only yield You what was Yours— Your will be done!'"

II. The second part of my discourse must be briefer than the first part, yet it is equally important. It is this, LEARN TO BLESS THE LORD'S NAME IN EVERYTHING. Learn to ring the bells of His praise all day long and, for that matter, all night long, too!

First, bless the name of the Lord when He reveals His hand in giving. "Ah," you say, "that is an easy thing to do." So it ought to be, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, and it is a neglect of our duty when we do not do it. We come down to our breakfast in the morning rejoicing in health and strength, and we go out to our day's engagements but, I hope not without thankfulness that we are in health and that we have food to eat, and raiment to put on! We are out all day and things prosper with us, but I trust that we do not accept all this as a matter of course—but that we praise the Lord for it all day long—and then when we go home again at night, and God is still with us, I hope we do not fall asleep before we again praise Him. John Bunyan used to say that the very chickens shame us if we are ungrateful, for they do not take a drink of water without lifting up their heads, as if in thankfulness, for the refreshing draught. If we, who are the Lord's children, do not bless Him for the mercies which so constantly come to us from Him, we are, of all people, the most ungrateful! Oh, for a grateful frame of mind, for I am sure that is a happy frame of mind. Those who are determined to murmur and to complain of God's dealings with them, are sure to find plenty of things to complain of—while those who are of a thankful spirit will see reasons and occasions for gratitude in everything that happens!

Do you remember a touching story, told some years ago, of a poor mother with her two little fatherless children? On a cold winter's night they discovered an empty house into which they went for shelter. There was an old door standing by itself, and the mother took it, placed it across a corner of the room, and told the children to creep behind it so as to get a little protection from the cold wind. One of the children said, "Oh Mother, what will those poor children do that haven't got any door to set up to keep out the wind?" That child was grateful even for such a poor shelter as that! Yet there are some who have thousands of greater blessings than that, and yet do not see God's hand in them—and do not praise Him for them. If that has been the case with any of us, let us turn over a new leaf and ask God to rule it with music lines and then let us put on them notes of thanksgiving, and say to the Lord, with David, "Every day will I bless You; and I will praise Your name forever and ever." Or say with one of our old poets—

"My God, I'll praise You while I live, And praise You when I die, And praise You when I rise again, And to eternity."

Praising God is one of the best ways of keeping away murmuring! Praising God is like paying a peppercorn rent for our occupation of our earthly tenement. [See Sermon No. 3021, Volume 53—LANDLORD AND TENANT— Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, athttp://www.spurgeongems.org.] When the rent is not paid, the owners generally turn the tenants out—and God might well do so with us if He were like earthly landlords. If we are not grateful to Him for all the bounties which we constantly receive from Him, He may make the stream stop—and then what would we do? Ungrateful mind, beware of this great danger! Thankfulness is one of the easiest virtues for anyone to practice and certainly it is one of the cheapest! So let all Christians especially comply with the Apostolic injunction, "Be you thankful." It is a soul-enriching thing to be thankful. I am sure that a Christian, with gratitude for a small income, is really richer than the man who lives a graceless life and is plentifully endowed with worldly wealth. David spoke truly when he said, "A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked." So, let others do as they will, we say, "Give us, Lord, whatever You will, whether

Volume 53 9it is little or much, so long as You give with it the light of Your Countenance, our souls shall be abundantly content!"

Thus are we to bless the name of the Lord for all that He gives us. But, it is a much more difficult thing to bless the name of the Lord for

what He takes away from us. Yet, difficult as it is, I venture to say that many Believers who have forgotten to praise God while He was giving to them, have not forgotten to praise Him when He was taking away from them! I do not know how thankful Job had been before this trying period in his history, but I do know that his trials brought out this expression of his thankfulness. It is his first recorded praise to God. Some of us need to lie a little while upon a sickbed in order to make us thankful for having had good health for so long. And we need to be brought low and to have our spirits depressed in order to make us grateful that we have had such cheerful spirits and been blessed with so many comforts. It is not natural or easy for flesh and blood to praise God for what He takes away, yet this painful experience often wakes up the gratitude of the Christian and he who forgot to praise the Lord, before, makes up for it now!

Brothers and Sisters, praise is God's due when He takes as well as when He gives, for there is as much love in His taking as in His giving! The kindness of God is quite as great when He smites us with His rod as when He kisses us with the kisses of His mouth. If we could see everything as He sees it, we would often perceive that the kindest possible thing He can do to us is that which appears to us to be unkind. A child came home from the common with her lap full of brightly shining berries. She seemed very pleased with what she had found, but her father looked frightened when he saw what she had and anxiously asked her, "Have you eaten any of those berries?" "No, Father," replied the child, to his great relief. And then he said to her, "Come with me into the garden." And there he dug a hole, put the berries in, stamped on them and crushed them, and then covered them with earth. All this while, the little one thought, "How unkind Father is to take away these things which pleased me so much!" But she understood the reason for it when he told her that the berries were so poisonous that if she had eaten even one of them, she would in all probability have died in consequence! In like manner, sometimes, our comforts turn to poison—especially when we begin to make idols of them—and it is kind on the part of God to stamp on them and put them right away from us so that no mischief may come to our souls. Surely

that child said, "Thank you, Father, for what you have done. It was love that made you do it." And you, also, Believer, can say, "Thank God for my sickness, for my poverty, for that dead child of mine, for my widowhood, for my orphanhood—thank God for it all! It would have been ruinous to me to have left me unchastened. Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept His Word. Blessed be His name for all that He has done, both in giving and in taking away."

It is a grand thing when we do not judge God's dealings with us simply by the rules of reason. From the first moment when the love of God is revealed to us, right on to the hour when we shall be in the Presence of the Father in Glory, we may depend upon it that there is Infinite Love in every act of God in taking from us, just as much as in giving to us! Jesus said to His disciples, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you." The Father always loved Jesus with Infinite Love—He loved Him as much when He was on the Cross as He did when He was on His Throne. And, in like manner, Jesus always loves us with an unchanging love—a love which can never fail us. He loves us as much in the furnace of affliction as He will love us when we shall be with Him in Glory, so let us bless His name whether He gives or takes away! I invite every mourning soul here to bless God's name at this moment.

"Ah," says one, "I wish I could get a little more happiness to sustain me under my many trials." Well, let me just remind you of the poor widow woman who went out to gather a few sticks to make a fire, that she might bake some cakes for herself and her son. When the Prophet Elijah met her, what did he say to her? He told her to make him a little cake, first, and afterwards he added, "make for you and for your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah." Notice that he said to the woman, "Make me a little cake first." And God seems to say to you, "Praise Me first, and then I will bless you." Say, as Job did a little later in his history, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him." I believe it marks the turn of the tide, with a saint, when he or she can say to the Lord, with good old John Ryland—

"You, at all times, will I bless! Having You, I all possess!"

The sky soon begins to clear when the Christian begins to say, "The Lord's will be done." "Not as I will, but as You will." This is a sign that the chastisement has had its due effect—the rod will now probably be put away. You mourning souls, take down your harps from the willows and sound forth at least a note or two to the praise of the Lord your God! Praise Him with such notes as these—"Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart...I will not fret myself because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked devices to pass...O my God, I believe that all things are working together for my good and that You are my gracious Heavenly Father, full of compassion

Volume 53 11 and overflowing with love." If you talk like this, Christian, and mean what you say, it will be a blessing to you, a comfort to others and an honor to your God!

As I speak thus, I am reminded that these comforting Truths of God belong only to true Believers. And as I send you away, I dare not put the words of my text into all your mouths, for, alas, some of you cannot see our Father's hand in anything that happens to you! You are without a parent,

except that wicked one of whom Christ said to the Jews, "You are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do." Yet, remember, you who cannot claim God as your Father, that the door of His Grace is not yet shut. He is still willing to receive you! If you will come to Him, confessing your sins and seeking mercy through the precious blood of Jesus, He is both able and willing to give you a new heart and a right spirit—to save you here and now—and to adopt you at once into His family! Then will you also be able to see His hand both in giving and in taking away—and you will also learn to bless His name at all times!

If God the Lord shall deal thus graciously with you, His shall be the praise forever and ever. Amen.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 1,22 #2172 - Patient Job and the Baffled Enemy

PATIENT JOB AND THE BAFFLED ENEMY

NO. 2172

A SERMON DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, AUGUST 28, 1890,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

Job 1:22.

THAT is to say, in all this trial and under all this temptation, Job kept right with God. During all the losses of his estate and the deaths of his children he did not speak in an unworthy manner. The text speaks admiringly of "all this." And a great "all" it was! Some of you have many troubles—but what are they compared with those of Job? Your afflictions are mole-hills contrasted with the Alps of the Patriarch's grief. "All this"! He was suddenly reduced from a peer to a pauper—from a man of great wealth to a person in absolute poverty—from a happy father to a childless mourner! Who can measure or fathom "all this"? Yet, "In all this Job sinned not." Here was the triumph of a gracious spirit. Ah, dear Friends, if God could uphold Job in all this, you may be sure that He can support you! Look to Him for this Divine support.

"All this" also alludes to all that Job did and thought, and said. He was full to bursting with swelling grief. He shaved his head and tore his garments. And he lifted up his voice unto the Lord his God—but, "In all this Job sinned not." He rose up, for he was a man of action, a man of a sensitive and powerful mind, a man of poetic energy who could not fail to express his emotions in striking symbols—but "In all this Job sinned not." This is a great deal to say of a man when you see him in the extreme of trial. If in patience he can possess his soul when all the arrows of affliction are wounding him, he is a man, indeed.

May we ourselves so live that it may be said of us in the end, "In all this he sinned not. He swam through a sea of trouble. The roll of his life story is written within and without with lamentations—but in all this he did not dishonor the name of his Lord. He did and said many things—but in them all he was patient, resigned, obedient and never uttered a rebellious word." Let us think of the wonderful case of Job in a practical way, desiring the Holy Spirit to make us like he was!

I. Our first head shall be, IN ALL OUR AFFAIRS THE MAIN THING IS NOT TO SIN. It is not said, "In all this Job was never spoken against," for he was spoken against by Satan in the presence of himself and very soon he was falsely accused by men who should have comforted him. You must not expect, dear Friend, that you will pass through this world and have it said of you in the end, "In all this no one ever spoke against him." I heard say of one man, "He was a man who never had an

enemy." I ventured to add, "nor a friend." He has no friend who never had a foe.

Those who secure zealous lovers are pretty sure to call forth intense adversaries. A man who is such a chip in the porridge that he never offends, is pretty sure to be equally flavorless in the other direction. The trimmer may dodge through the world without much censure, but it will seldom be so with an out-and-out man of God. Because he is not of the world, the world will hate him! The blessed and holy Lord Jesus was slandered to the utmost. God, the Ever-Blessed, was Himself libeled in Paradise, itself, by an old servant who had turned into an old serpent! Therefore you must not wonder if you are also abused!

To go through life without calumny is not a thing to be expected—but it is anxiously to be desired that we may go through every phase of joy or of sorrow without falling into sin. Neither is it a chief point for us to seek to go through life without suffering, since the Lord's servants, the best of them, are ripened and mellowed by suffering. Amos, the herdsman, was a bruiser of sycamore figs—a kind of fig that never ripened in Palestine unless it was struck with a rod and thus was bruised. I fear there are very few of the godly who will fully ripen without affliction. The vine bears but little fruit unless it makes the acquaintance of the knife and is sternly pruned. I fear that much fruit will seldom be forthcoming without much tribulation.

A high character might be produced, I suppose, by continued prosperity, but it has very seldom been the case. Adversity, however it may appear to be our foe, is our true friend and, after a little acquaintance with it, we receive it as a precious thing, the prophecy of a coming joy. It should be no ambition of ours to traverse a smooth path without thorn or stone. Rather let us ask—

"Shall Simon bear the cross alone, And all the rest go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, And there's a cross for me."

Dear Friends, I think, also that it should not be our ambition to go through the world without sadness of heart. It is true that heaviness of heart is worse than bodily suffering—"A wounded spirit who can bear?" Some persons, however, seem to endure terrible trouble without much feeling. They are case-hardened, stout-hearted, thick-skinned persons— and truly I have half envied them at times and almost prayed to lose that sensitiveness which causes fear—but it would be a very doubtful blessing. We need to be tender that we may feel the slightest touch of God's hand. "Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you."

The Apostle says, "Though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations." Many read it as if there were a necessity for the trial and so, indeed, there is. But the necessity in the passage has reference to being in heaviness. If you can bear trial without ever being heavy, it is scarcely a trial to you. "The blueness of a wound cleanses away evil." It is the ache of the ache—it is the sting of the wasp which works effectively on the heart. If we do not smart under the rod, what is the use of it to us? Therefore I would not have you ask that you may be kept from sadness of soul—but I would have you pray seven times a day from the very heart of your being, "Lord, keep me from sin." May it be said at the last, of every one of us, that in all this we sinned not!

Remember, if the Grace of God prevents our affliction from driving us into sin, then Satan is defeated. Satan did not care what Job suffered, so long as he could but hope to make him sin. And

he was foiled when he did not sin. He must have regretted that he tried him, when he found that he could not make him sin. I think I hear the Fiend muttering, "Give him back his camels. Give him back his sheep, if by the loss of these his patience and resignation are made manifest." If he could not extract a rebellious speech from Job, the Tempter had lost all his cruel efforts—his malice had spent itself without result. If he could not make the good man sin, nor charge God foolishly, he was defeated and God was glorified!

If in enduring your particular trouble, my dear Friend, you do not fall into sin, you are more than a conqueror over him that hates you. The arch-enemy will fly away confounded from you if you are able to resist him while darkness covers your soul. If you conquer him in your hour of grief, you conquer, indeed! May your conflict with Apollyon be like that of Christian in "Pilgrim's Progress," and to you, also, may a monument be erected, bearing this inscription—

"The man so bravely played the man, He made the Fend to fly; Whereof a monument I stand The same to testify."

If you do not sin while under the stress of heavy trouble, God will be honored. He is not so much glorified by preserving you from trouble as by upholding you in trouble. He allows you to be tried that His Grace in you may be tested and glorified.

When one Winstanley, years ago, built a lighthouse on the Eddystone Rock, he said that he was sure that it would stand any storm that ever blew and he should himself like to be in it in the fiercest tempest that ever drove adown the Channel. It came to pass that he was in his own lighthouse one night and there came a tremendous blast which swept him and his lighthouse clean away so that he was never heard of again. He courted trial because he believed in his work—God permits trial because He knows that His wisdom and Divine Grace have made us able to bear it. The lighthouse which was afterwards built on the Eddystone has had all manner of storms beating upon it but it has outlived them all, and therefore its builder's name is held in honor.

Even thus our God is glorified in every trial of His saints when their grace enables them to endure with patience. "There," says He, "see what Grace can do, what suffering it can endure, what labors it can perform!" Grace is like an athlete performing before the great King and His heavenly court. A cloud of witnesses look down upon the feats of Faith and note with joy how it achieves everything which the Lord appoints it to perform. It even enters into contest with Satan, the fiend of Hell, and gives him a signal overthrow—and He that made the athlete and trained him for the contest is honored thereby. If you do not sin in your trouble, your endurance of trial will bring glory to God!

Remember, furthermore, that if you do not sin, you yourself will be no loser by all your tribulations. Sin alone can injure you. But if you remain steadfast, though you are stripped, you will be clothed with glory! Though you are deprived of comfort, you will lose no real blessing. True, it may not seem a pleasant thing to be stripped and yet if one is soon going to bed it is of no great consequence. It is no easy thing to part with wealth— but if thereby you are unburdened—the loss is a gain. A child of God may have the knife sharply cutting him, but if it only removes the superfluous wood, it may be of the utmost benefit to the fruitage of the tree—and that is the main thing.

If the metal in the pot loses none of its gold, all that it does lose is well lost and is, indeed, really gained. Though you are reduced in circumstances, what does it matter if you are enlarged in

spirit? Though you are sick in body, what does it matter if your soul's health is furthered? To sin would be terrible—to abide in holiness is triumph! In all our affliction may there be no defection. The Lord may send us a ton of trouble, but this will be better than an ounce of sin! Do not let all your prayer run after deliverance from sorrow, but first of all pray, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." Seek first the kingdom of God and obedience to Him, and then deliverance shall be added unto you.

We are permitted to say, "Lord, keep us from trouble," but we are commanded to pray, "Deliver us from the Evil One." Should trials come to us, even like those which happened to Job, it shall be well with our souls if our hearts are not drawn or driven into sin.

II. And, now, a second thought arises out of the text. IN ALL TIME OF TRIAL THERE IS SPECIAL FEAR OF OUR SINNING. It is well for the child of God to remember that the hour of darkness is an hour of danger. Suffering is fruitful soil for certain forms of sin. Hence it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to give a testimony to Job that, "In all this he sinned not." It looked as if he must sin but yet he did not sin—and this is recorded by Inspiration as a memorable fact. He still held fast his integrity and bowed before the will of the Lord.

Dear Friends, if you are approaching a season of trouble, watch and pray that in entering upon trial you may not also enter upon sinning. Many have sorely grieved their God by what they have said and done in the hour of sorrow. For instance, we are apt to grow impatient. We murmur against the Lord. We think our trial is too long, or that prayer is not answered when it ought to be. If God is faithful, why does He not hasten to deliver His child? In the olden time He rode upon a cherub and did fly, yes, He did fly upon the wings of the wind—why are His chariots now so long in coming? The feet of His mercy seem shod with lead.

Petulance and complaining are sins which easily beset those who are severely tried. Men are apt to have bitter thoughts of God when He puts His hand into the bitter box and brings out the quinine of sorrow. Of the two sexes, women usually carry the prize for patience, especially in bodily sickness. As for us, who are made of rougher stuff, it is to our shame that we are, as a rule, very impatient of pain. We do not so much lose our patience as show that we have none! Job, under his first set of trials was not swift to complain, for you have heard of the patience of Job which the Holy Spirit takes care to mention in the New Testament.

We are even tempted to rebellion against God. I have met with cases in which rebellious words have been uttered and even spoken again and again. One said in my hearing, "God has taken away my mother and I shall never forgive Him. I can never think of Him as a God of love as once I did." Such words will cause a child of God more pain than the loss, itself, would have occasioned. I heard one say of his dying child, whom I was called in to visit, that he could not believe that God would be so unjust as to take his daughter from him. Indeed, he spoke so rebelliously that I, with all gentleness, but with deep solemnity of soul, admonished him that I feared the Lord would visit him for such proud speeches.

It was clear that his child would soon die and I feared that he would die himself, when the shock came, because he so stoutly quarreled with the Lord. I said to myself, "A child of God cannot speak in this way about his Father without coming under further chastisement." It came to pass as I expected and he, himself, was laid low. Grieved as I was, I was by no means surprised. How can

we rebel against God and hope to prosper in that rebellion? With the stubborn He will show Himself stubborn and we shall find out what a world of misery that will bring us! Oh, for Divine Grace not only to yield because we must, but because we trust! May we say, "It is the Lord—let Him do what seems good to Him"! Before that temptation Job did not fall, for in this respect he sinned not.

We may also sin by despair. An afflicted one said, "I shall never look up again. I shall go mourning all my days." Dear Friend, why not be cheerful again? Are God's mercies clean gone forever? You are bid to believe always. "Who is among you that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." In the dark is the place for trust, not for despair! A child that is sullen will probably make for himself 10 times more misery than the rod, itself, would cause him. Who dares despair while God bids him trust? Come, if you are as poor as Job, be as patient as Job and you will find hope ever shining like a star which never sets.

Many sin by unbelieving speeches. I have repeated one or two naughty things that God's children have said, but Job said nothing of the kind. He bravely said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Men have been driven into a kind of atheism by successive troubles. They have wickedly argued—"There cannot be a God, or He would not let me suffer so." Beloved, you must not speak as the foolish do—and such speech is sheer folly. Your mouth would be greatly defiled if you were thus to vex the Holy Spirit. Has the Lord saved you and will you speak against Him?

I have no time to say more where so much might be added. The Lord preserve us in trying times from sinning either with heart, or hands, or lips.

III. Notice, thirdly, that IN ACTS OF MOURNING WE NEED NOT SIN. Listen—you are allowed to weep. You are allowed to show that you suffer by your losses. See what Job did. "Job arose and tore his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped." And "in all this Job sinned not." The mother wept much over her child and yet she may not have sinned—a mother's grief and a mother's love are sacred things. When a dear child is mourned over, those may have been not only perfectly natural tears, but even holy tears.

The husband lamented sorely when his beloved was taken from him. He was right. I should have thought far less of him if he had not done so. "Jesus wept." But there is a measure in the expression of grief. Job was not wrong in tearing his garment—he might have been wrong if he had torn it into shreds. He was not wrong in shaving his head—he would have erred had he torn out his hair, as some have done whom despair has turned into maniacs. He deliberately took the razor and shaved his head— and in this he sinned not. You may wear mourning—saints did so in other times. You may weep, for it may, perhaps, be a relaxing of your strained emotions. Do not restrain the boiling floods. A flood of tears without may assuage the deluge of grief within.

Job's acts of mourning were moderate and seemly—toned down by his faith. I wish that Christians did not so often follow the way of the world at their funerals, but would try to make it clear that they sorrow not even as others that are without hope. You may wear black as long as it does not become the ensign of rebellion against the will of the Lord. Job's words, also, though very strong, were very true—"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return." If we say no more than the truth, we may say it if the tone is not that of murmuring, although, perhaps

sometimes it might be better to be altogether silent, like Aaron, who held his peace.

David said, "I opened not my mouth; because You did it." If we cannot maintain a golden silence, yet let our speech be silver—we must use nothing less than precious metal. Job mourned and yet did not sin, for he mourned and worshipped as he mourned. This is what I commend to you who are mourning at this time. If you must fall on the ground, worship there before the Lord! If your heart is bowed down, emulate the holy ones who fall on their faces and worship God! I believe that some of the truest, purest, sweetest and strongest devotion has come to God from hearts that were breaking with grief. Remember, then, that in acts of mourning there is not, of necessity, any sin.

IV. But, fourthly, IN CHARGING GOD FOOLISHLY WE SIN GREATLY. "Job sinned not" and the phrase which explains it is, "nor charged God foolishly." Here let me say that to call God to our judgment seat at all is a high crime and felony! "No, but, O man, who are you that replies against God?" Woe unto him that contends with his Maker! The Lord is absolutely Sovereign and He gives no account of His matters. We are usurping fools when we pretend to sit in judgment upon the Judge of all the earth!

In the next place, we sin in requiring that we should understand God. What? Is God under bonds to explain Himself to us? Do we threaten to revolt unless He will put Himself right with us? Blessed be His name, He is inscrutable and I am glad to have Him so! Do you want your God to explain His dispensations? Are you not content to believe Him? The demand for explanation is unbelief! This is, indeed, making yourselves to be wiser than God! Let us bow before Him without a question. He is Jehovah and that ends the matter! He would have His children feel that what He wills is always best. Bow before God and prostrate your desires and thoughts and judgment before His Throne. What He does is wise and true and kind— and of this we are sure. We can very easily charge God foolishly, but we had better not charge Him at all, for who are we that we should call the Eternal to account?

We charge God foolishly when we imagine that He is unjust. "Ah!" said one, "When I was a worldling I prospered. But ever since I have been a Christian I have endured no end of losses and troubles." Do you mean to insinuate that the Lord does not treat you justly? Think a minute and stand corrected. If the Lord were to deal with you according to strict justice, where would you be? If He were now to call you to account for your sins and lay bare the naked sword of Justice, what would become of you? You would be at once in despair and very soon in Hell! Never charge upon the Lord a failure of justice, for this is to sin with a vengeance.

Some, however, will bring foolish charges against His love. "How can He be a God of love if He permits me to suffer so?" You forget that word—"As many as I tenderly love," (for that is the Greek word), "I rebuke and chasten." The more the Lord loves you, the more surely He will rebuke any and every evil that He sees in you! You are so precious to Him that He desires to make you perfect in every good work to do His will. God prizes you much, my Sister, or you would not have to be so often ground upon the wheel to take away all your warts and make the jewel of your soul to shine.

"Oh," said a worldling to me when I was in great pain and weakness of body, "is this the way God treats His children? Then I am glad I am not one." How my heart burned within me and my eyes flashed as I said that I would take an eternity of such pain as I endured sooner than stand in the

place of the man who preferred ease to God. I felt it would be Hell to me to have a doubt of my adoption and whatever pain I might suffer was a trifle so long as I knew that the Lord was my God. Every child of God under such a taunt would feel exceedingly jealous for the honor of his Lord.

Beloved, we are willing to take the Divine love with every possible drawback that can be concerned—for the love of our Father is a weight of Glory—and all the sorrows of time are but "light afflictions" and they last but for a moment. How sweet to hear the Lord say—

"In love I correct you your gold to refine; To make you, at length, in My likeness to shine"!

Alas, at times, unbelief charges God foolishly with reference to His power! We think that He cannot help us in some peculiar trial. Throw to the winds such fears—they are unworthy of us and dishonoring to our Lord! Is anything too hard for the Lord? Through flood and fire He will bring us in safely. We may be so foolish as to doubt His wisdom. If He is All-Wise, how can He suffer us to be in such straits and to sink so low as we do? What folly is this? Who are you, that you would measure the wisdom of God? Shall an owl begin to compute the light of the sun? Or an ant estimate the eternal hills? Shall some tiny animalcules, sporting with myriads of others in a drop of water, begin to trace the bounds of the sea? What are you? Who are you, that you should set your judgment against that of the Lord God Almighty? Less than nothing, will you censure the Infinite? A worm of the dust, will you arraign the mighty God? Be this far from you! Job did not so, for he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

V. Lastly—as I must close in haste—TO COME THROUGH GREAT TRIAL WITHOUT SIN IS THE HONOR OF THE SAINTS. If we are tried and come forth from it naked as when we were born, we need not be ashamed. And if we come out of it without sinning, then the greatness of the affliction increases the honor of our victory. "In all this Job sinned not"—the, "all this," is a part of the glory with which Grace covered him.

Suppose that your life was all ease. Suppose that you were brought up tenderly from a child. Suppose that you were well educated, left with a sufficient fortune to gratify every wish and happily married. Suppose that you were free from sickness, lifted above care, grinding labor and heavy sorrow—what then? Assuredly you could never be noted for patience! Who would ever have heard of Job if he had not been tried? None would have said of him, "In all this Job sinned not." Only by his patience could he be perfected and immortalized!

Suppose that your record should be—from birth a sufferer, throughout life a struggler. At home a wrestler and abroad a soldier and a crossbearer—and, notwithstanding all this, full of joy and peace, through strong believing—tried to the uttermost, yet found faithful. In such a chronicle there is something worth remembering! There is no glory in being a feather-bed soldier, a man bedecked with gorgeous regimentals, but never beautified by a scar, or ennobled by a wound. All that you ever hear of such a soldier is that his spurs jingle on the pavement as he walks. There is no history for this carpet-knight. He is just a dandy. He never smelled gunpowder in his life, or if he did, he fetched out his scent-bottle to kill the offensive odor.

Well, that will not make much show in the story of the nations. If we could have our choice and we were as wise as the Lord Himself, we should choose the troubles which He has appointed us and we should not spare ourselves a single pang. Who wants to paddle about a duck pond all his life? No, Lord, if You will bid me go upon the waters, let me launch out into the deep! Those who are

uplifted to the heavens by the billows and then go down again to the deeps as ocean yawns—these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep! Discomforts and dangers make men of us and then we deal no more with childish things, but with eternal matters!

If we had no troubles, we should in the end be dumb for lack of themes to speak upon—but now we are storing up incidents worth the telling to our Brothers and Sisters when we join the family circle before the Throne! Tried souls can tell of the infinite mercy and love of God, who helped them, and delivered them! Give me an interesting life, after all, and if it is to be an interesting life, then it must be one that has its full share of trouble as Job's had! Then shall it be Heaven to hear the verdict of the great Judge—"In all this My servant sinned not." The honor of a Christian, or, let me say, the honor of God's Divine Grace in a Christian, is when we have so acted that we have obeyed in detail, not forgetting any point of duty. "In all this Job sinned not," neither in what he thought, or said, or did—nor even in what he did not say, and did not do—"In all this Job sinned not."

We are apt to purpose that we will shut ourselves up in our own room and never go out into the world again, or attempt to speak or act any more. Surely, that would be a great blank and a blot upon our lives. No! No! No! We must not say, "I will speak no more in the name of the Lord." Go on speaking! Go on acting! Go on suffering! Breast the wave, Christian! Swim to the other shore and may God's infinite mercy be seen in bringing you there! Crowd your life with action and adorn it with patience, so that it shall be said, "In all this he sinned not." God grant us a detailed obedience, a following of the Lord fully, a perfect working out of the minute points of service!

I feel that I must add just this. As I read the verse through, it looked too dry for me and so I wet it with a tear. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly," and yet I, who have suffered so little, have often sinned and, I fear, in times of anguish, have charged God foolishly. Dear Friends, is not this true of some of you? If so, let your tears follow mine. But yet the tear will not wash out the sin! Fly to the Fountain filled with blood and wash there from sins of impatience, sins of petulance, sins of rebellion, sins of unbelief! These are real sins and they must be washed away in the blood of the Lamb. Oh, how dear that Fountain is to us! How dear to you who have often to lie in bed and suffer—for you still sin! How dear to us who have health and strength to serve God, for we see sin in our holy things and we need to be purged from its defilement! You that go into business every day and mix up with all sorts of persons, how much you have need of daily washing! Come, Beloved, let us go together and say, "Lord, forgive us." I should like to say a little to some of you who are not God's people. Suppose I were to sum up your lives and wrote it out in this fashion: "Was fond of gaiety. Spent many days in frivolous amusement. Was sometimes drunk. Occasionally would use profane language," and so on? How falsely should I speak if I were to say, "In all this he sinned not"! Why, in all this you have done nothing else but sin! God has loaded your tables, clothed your backs, kept you in health and prolonged your lives—and in all this you have done nothing else but sin and act foolishly towards God! I want you to come, then, to that same Fountain of which I spoke, and cry tonight, "Wash me, Savior, or I die." You have been the very opposite of Job. You have sinned in all your comforts and your mercies, and have never shown due gratitude to the blessed God! You have only done evil against Him! The Lord bring us all to His feet and then may He help us in all future troubles to stand firm and not to sin.

I know that some of you are entering upon fierce trials. You have the prospect of it on your minds, tonight, and sitting here you feel depressed about it. Do not begin to despond, but be doubly diligent in prayer! Be more concerned to be kept from sinning than from suffering and pray daily, "Lord, if You will lead me by this rough road, yet keep my feet that I stumble not, and preserve me even to the end with garments unspotted from the world! I will ask no more of You but this one thing. Holy Father, keep me as a dear child, obeying and serving You with all my heart, soul and strength, till I go up higher to dwell with You forever!"

May the Lord hear you all in the day of trouble and preserve you to life's last hour, without spot and blameless! Then shall He be glorified in you and you shall have joy. Amen, and Amen.

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

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Job 1,4-5 #352 - A Merry Christmas

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

NO. 352

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, DECEMBER 23, 1860,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

"And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent

and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it

was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that

Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning

and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them

all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned

and cursed God in their hearts.

Thus did Job continually.

Job 1:4-5.

JOB was an exceedingly happy man before his great trial. He was as much blessed in the fruit of his body as in his basket and in his store. Our text gives us a very pleasing picture of Job's family. He was a happy man to have had so many children all comfortably settled in life. For you will perceive that they all had houses. They had left his roof. They had all established themselves and had so prospered in the world that there was not one of them who had not enough of the world's goods to entertain all the rest. So it seemed as if Job's prosperity in his business had attended his children in the different places where they had settled

To add to his comfort they were an undivided family—not like Abraham's household, where there was an Ishmael who mocked Isaac. Nor like Isaac's household, where there was an Esau and a Jacob who sought to supplant him. Nor like Jacob's household, where there was a Joseph and all the rest of his brethren were envious and jealous of him. Nor like David's household, where there was perpetual strife and bickering between the one and the other. Job's descendants were a large tribe. But they were all united and knit together in bonds of perfect happiness.

And moreover they seem to have had a great desire to preserve their unity as a family. Perhaps Job and his family were the only ones who feared God in the neighborhood. They wished therefore to keep themselves together as a little flock of sheep in the midst of wolves, as a cluster of stars in

the midst of the thick darkness. And what a brilliant constellation they were—all of them shining forth and proclaiming the Truth of God! I say it was their desire not only to enjoy pleasantness and peace, but to maintain it. For I think that these annual meetings at the different houses were intended to knit them together so that if any little strife had arisen, as soon as they met at the next brother's house all might be settled. And the whole host might go on again shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot— as one phalanx of soldiers for God.

I think Job must have been a right happy man. I do not know that he always went to their feasts. Perhaps the soberness of age might have a little disqualified him for joining in their youthful enjoyments, but I am sure he commended their feasting. I am quite certain he did not condemn it. If he had condemned it he would never have offered sacrifice to God, lest they should have sinned, but he would have told them at once it was a sinful thing and that he could give no countenance to it. I think I see the happy group, so happy and holy that surely if David had been there, he would have said, "Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Job was a godly man and so godly that unlike Eli he brought up his household in the fear of God. He was not only quick to observe any known sin but was exceedingly jealous over his children lest secretly and inadvertently in their hearts—while they were at their loaded tables, they might have said or thought anything which might be termed blaspheming God. He therefore as soon as the feasting was over, called them all together and then as a preacher, told them of the danger to which they were exposed. And as a priest, (for every Patriarch before the Law was a priest), he offered burnt sacrifices lest any sin should by any possibility remain upon his sons and daughters.

So says the text. I pray that now we may have grace to listen to it. And may what we shall now hear abide with us during the coming week, when some of you shall meet together in your own houses! May God grant that our parents, or we, if we are parents, may be as Jobs and when the feasting is over, may there come the sacrifice and the prayer, lest we should have sinned and blasphemed God in our hearts!

I shall divide my sermon thus. First, the text and that is festive: so we will ring in a merry bell. Secondly, that which is in the text and that is instructive: so we will ring the sermon bell. And, thirdly, that which follows the text and that is afflictive: so we will ring the funeral bell.

I. First, then, the text itself and that is festive. Let us therefore RING THE MERRY BELL. I think I hear distinctly three notes in its merry peal. First, the text gives a license. Secondly, it suggests a caution. And thirdly, it provides a remedy.

First, the text gives a license. Now, you souls who would deny to your fellow men all sorts of mirth, come and listen to the merry bell of this text while it gives a license to the righteous especially—a license that they meet together in their houses and eat and drink and praise their God. In Cromwell's days the Puritans thought it an ungodly thing for men to keep Christmas. They, therefore, tried to put it down and the common crier went through the street announcing that Christmas was henceforth no more to be kept, it being a Popish, if not a heathen ceremony. Now, you do not suppose that after the crier had made the proclamation any living Englishman took any notice of it! At least I can scarcely imagine that any did, except to laugh at it. For it is idle thus to strain at gnats and stagger under a feather! Albeit that we do not keep the feast as Papists—nor

even as a commemorative festival—yet there is a something in old associations that makes us like the day in which a man may shake off the cares of business and disport himself with his little ones.

God forbid I should be such a Puritan as to proclaim the annihilation of any day of rest which falls to the lot of the laboring man. I wish there were a half-a-dozen holidays in the year. I wish there were more opportunities for the poor to rest. Though I would not have as many saint's days as there are in Roman Catholic countries—yet if we had but one or two more days in which the poor man's household and the rich man's family might meet together—it might perhaps be better for us. However, I am quite certain that all the preaching in the world will not put Christmas down. You will meet next Tuesday and you will feast and you will rejoice and each of you, as God has given you substance, will endeavor to make your household glad.

Now, instead of telling you that this is all wrong, I think the merry bell of my text gives you a license to do so. Let us think a minute. Feasting is not a wrong thing, or otherwise Job would have forbidden it to his children. He would have talked to them seriously and admonished them that this was an ungodly and wicked custom to meet together in their houses. But, instead of this, Job only feared lest a wrong thing should be made out of a right thing and offered sacrifices to remove their iniquity. But he did by no means condemn it. Would any of you ask a blessing upon your children's attendance at the theater? Could you say, when they had been in such a place, "It may be they have sinned?" No, you would only talk thus of a right thing.

I think I can prove to you that this was a good thing. First you will notice they met in good houses. They did not go to an ale-house to feast. They had no need to enter the tavern. But they met in their own houses— houses where prayer and praise were made. How much better for the working man to spend his money on his family than upon liquor sellers! And then it was in good company. They did not scrape together all the ruffians of the place to feast with them. But they kept to their own kith and kin. And feasting is good when good men feast—especially when they spare for the poor—as no doubt Job's children did or else they were quite unworthy of their generous ancestor.

They feasted in good houses and in good company. And they observed during their feasting good behavior. Job never heard of a wrong expression they had used. No one ever told him that they had become riotous, or that they had uttered one wrong word, or else Job could not have said, "It may be," but he would have said, "It is so." He must be a good son of whom a father could say, "It may be he has erred." All that he had was a fear lest secretly they might have done wrong. But it appears that openly their feasting had been such that even the busy tongue of scandal could not find fault with them. And besides, their feasting was a good thing, because it had a good intent. It was for amity, for cheerfulness and family union. It was that they might be bound together as a bundle of rods— strong and unbroken—that they might be as a strongly intertwined cord, interwoven by these their family greetings and meetings.

Now, I say that if in their case the thing was not wrong—and I think I have proved in four respects that it was right—it was in good houses, in good company, with good behavior and for a good purpose—the text gives a license for us to do the like and to meet in our houses, in the company of our kith and kin, provided we feast after a good sort and do it with the good intent of knitting our hearts the one towards the other.

But again—good men of old have feasted. Need I remind you of Abraham's making a great feast in his house when his child Isaac was weaned? Shall I tell you of Sampson and his feasts, or of David, or of Hezekiah, or of Josiah and of the kings who gave to every man a loaf of bread and a good piece of flesh and a flagon of wine and they cheered their hearts and made merry before God?

But let me remind you that feasting, so far from being evil, was even an essential part of Divine Worship under the old Law. Do you not read of the Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of the New Moons and how many other feasts besides? Come they not over again and again? Now if the thing were wrong in itself God would certainly never employ it as an emblem and token of the Divine, the pure and the heavenly doctrines of His grace. It is impossible that God should have taken a wrong thing to be the type of a right thing. He might take a common good and make it the type of a special favor—but not an evil thing. It is far from us to suppose such a thing of our God.

Besides, did not the Savior Himself countenance a feast and help to provide the guests with the wherewithal that they might have good cheer? Do you think the Savior out of place when He went to the wedding feast? And do you suppose that He went there and did not eat and drink? Was it not said of Him, "Behold a drunken man and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners"? Not that He was either drunken or a wine bibber, but that He "came eating and drinking," to dash to pieces the Phariseeism which says that that which goes into a man defiles a man—whereas Christ teaches "not that which goes into a man, but that which comes out of a man, that defiles a man."

Jesus Christ, I say, was at the feast. And suppose you that He bore a sad countenance? Did He sour with the vinegar of a morose behavior the wine with which He had filled the watering pots? I think not. I believe at that marriage feast He joined with the guests. And if He were indeed "a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief," as He certainly was, yet did He not keep His griefs to Himself, for if He came to suffer Himself, He came to make others glad and I doubt not that at the feast He seemed the most glad of the guests. Most glad because He was really the Master of the feast and because He saw in the wedding the type of His own marriage— His own Divine espousal with the Church—which is "the bride, the Lamb's wife."

And let me add once more—God has certainly made in this world provision for man's feasting. He had not given just dry bread enough for a man to eat and keep body and soul together. The harvests teem with plenty and often are the barns filled to bursting. O Lord, You did not give simply dry bread and water for mankind but You have filled the earth with plenty and milk and honey have You given to us. And You have besides this laden the trees with fruit and given to men dainties. You are not illiberal, You do not dole out with miserable hand the lean and scanty charity which some men would give to the poor, but You give liberally and You upbraid not!

And for what purpose is this given? To rot, to mold, to be trod on, to be spoiled? No, but that men may have more than enough. That they may have all they want and may rejoice before their God and may feed the hungry, for this indeed is one essential and necessary part of all true Christian feasting. My text, I say, rings a merry bell and gives us license for sacred feasting.

2. But now the same merry bell suggests a caution. Job said—"It may be." They were good sons. Good, godly young men, I am sure, or else Job would not have said, "It may be." But "it may be,"

said he, "it may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Or, as some translate it, "have blessed God too little in their hearts." They may not have been grateful enough for their prosperity and for the enjoyments which God had given them. "It may be." Well, hearken, Brothers and Sisters, "it may be," too, that you and I may sin and blaspheme God in our hearts and be as Job's sons may have been—too little thankful. If, though they were true men and true women, though they all had a Job for their father and though their feasting was in their own houses and after a right sort and a commendable sort, yet there was a "may be" that there might be sin.

Am I too careful when I say, Brethren, "it may be"? It may be that in our happiest gathering of our family together, it may be that we shall sin? I think we could not prefer ourselves before the sons and daughters of Job—that were self-righteousness indeed—we are surely not proud enough to think ourselves better than the sons of that "perfect and upright" man "who feared God and eschewed evil." I think I am not too severe and too strict, when I say, "It may be. "It" may be. Look to it—take heed to yourselves—be careful, be on your watch tower. Let me give you some reasons and arguments why this caution is not unnecessary.

And first, remember there is no place free from sin. You may set bounds about this mount, but the beast will touch the mountain. You may endeavor as much as you will to keep out Satan. But wherever there were two met together, Satan was ever the third. There was never a company met, but the Evil One somewhere intruded. Does he not come into your business? Do you not find him entering into your very closet? Yes, and the very Table of the Lord—has not Satan sat there and tempted Judas? Yes, and tempted you, too? How, then, can you hope that when your family are met together Satan shall not be there?

Is it not written, "The sons of God came together and Satan came also among them"? I am sure they never invited him. But he does not stay for that. And you will find it so. Never invite him by anything ungodly or unChristian-like. But since there are temptations everywhere, however pure and upright your intentions may be, however excellent your company, think you hear my little bell ringing—"It may be, it may be, it may be." And it may be a blessed check to you.

Beside this, remember that there is many a special temptation where there is a loaded table. Old Quarles said, "Snares attend my board." And certainly they do. More men have perished by fullness of bread than ever died by hunger. Hunger may break through stone walls but I have known feasting leap over golden walls—the golden walls of grace. Some men cut their throats with their teeth and many a man has swam to Hell down his own throat. More have been drowned in the bowl, 'tis said, than ever were drowned in the sea. I trust I need not say anything of that to you. I hope not.

If there is a man here who falls into drunkenness—in God's name let him tremble—for there is no admittance for the drunkard into the kingdom of Heaven. I am speaking now to Christian men—not to men who fall into these vices—and I say to them where you use the most proper moderation in receiving the things which God gives you, where you even totally abstain from that which might be a temptation, yet even there your table may be a snare unto you. Therefore, take heed to yourself, Believer, lest Satan lie in ambush beneath the family table.

Remember, also, that they who sit at the table are but men and the best of men are but men at the best. Men have so little grace that if they are not on the watchtower, they may soon be overtaken and they may say or do that which they will have to repent of afterwards. I have heard say that there are men who swallow mouthfuls of earth which they will have to digest in Hell and I do not doubt it. There have been times when a happy company have gathered together and the conversation has become trifling, then full of levity. Perhaps it has gone so far that afterwards, when they retired to their homes, they would have recalled their words, if it had been possible. Let this caution, then, sound in all our ears, "It may be—it may be—it may be!"—and let us so act that if Christ were at the feast we should not be ashamed to see Him.

Let us so speak that if Christ sat at our table we should not count it a hindrance to our joy—but rather that we should be the more free, joyous and glad—because of such thrice-blessed Company. Oh, tell me not that Christianity curbs our joy! My Brethren, it shuts up one of its channels— that black and filthy kennel into which the sinner's joy must run. But it opens another channel, wider, broader, deeper, purer and fills it to the very banks with joy, more lustrous and more full of glory.

Think not that we who follow Christ and seek to walk strictly in our integrity are miserable. We tell you that our eyes sparkle as much as yours and that we have not the redness of the eyes in the morning. We can say to the worldling that our heart, despite its sometimes heaviness, does rejoice in the Lord and we have peace which is like a river and a righteousness which is like the waves of the sea. O Christian Brothers and Sisters! Let not the world think of you that you are shut out here from anything like happiness. But so act and so live at all times, that you may teach men that it is possible to be happy without sin and to be holy without being morose. This, then, is the caution which our merry bell rings out to us.

But, then, in the third place, having given a license and suggested a caution, the merry bell provides a remedy. "It may be"—it may be we have done wrong. What then? Here is a remedy to be used by parents and heads of families and by ourselves.

Job sent for his sons as a father. He sanctified them as a preacher. He sacrificed for them as a priest. By all which I understand, he first bade them come together and then he sanctified them—that is, he first spoke to them—commended them for the excellent and admirable manner in which they had met together, told them how pleased he was to see their love, their union. But then he said, "It may be, my sons, you are like your father—there is some sin in you and it may be you have sinned. Come, let us repent together."

And so, being, as I believe, all godly persons they sat down and thought over their ways. Then no doubt the good old man bade them kneel down while he prayed with them. And then he expressed his faith in the great coming Mediator and so, though one man's faith cannot prevail for another, yet the faith of the father helped to quicken the faith of the sons. The prayer of the father was the means of drawing forth the prayer of the sons and so the family was sanctified. Then after that he would say, "There is no putting away of sin, except by the shedding of blood. So they fetched the bullocks, a bullock for every son and for every daughter. The old Patriarch slew the victims and laid them on the altar. And as the smoke ascended—they all thought if they had sinned against God—by His grace the blood shed and the victim offered could, as the type of Christ, take away their sin.

I think I see the good old man after the sacrifice was all complete— "Now, my children," he says, "return to your homes. If you have sinned, your sin is put away. If you have transgressed, the atonement made has cancelled your transgression. You may go to your habitations and take a father's blessing with you."

Call to your recollection that Job is said to have seen to his sacred work "early in the morning." It is ill lying in bed when we have sin on our conscience. He that has a sin unforgiven should never travel slowly to the Cross but run to it. So Job would sleep in the morning not an hour till he had seen his sons and his daughters sanctified and the sacrifice made. Mark well, that "he offered according to the number of his sons." He did not leave out one. If he prayed for the eldest, he prayed for the youngest too—and if he made supplication for the sons, he did not forget the daughters. Ah, parents, never forget any of your children—carry them all before God—let them all be consecrated to Him and let your earnest prayer go up for them all—from your Reuben down to your Benjamin. Leave not one of them out, but pray God to grant that they may all be bound up together in the bundle of life.

And notice once again, "So did Job continually." As often as they visited, so often was there the sacrifice. I suppose they had ten feasts in the year. And it is supposed by the old commentators that they assembled on their birthdays. They were not always feasting—that were sinful. In fact, that was the sin of the old world, for which God drowned it. "They ate and they drank, they married and they were given in marriage," all which things are right enough in themselves. But if we are wholly immersed in them, always eating, always drinking, always feasting, then they become sins and indeed at all times they become sin, unless, like Job's feasts they are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. If our meetings are thus sanctified, we can in everything give thanks. Then "he that eats, eats to the Lord and gives God thanks." And being accepted in our thankfulness, the eating is to God's glory. I say, then, my dear Friends, that Job did this continually which teaches to the parent his duty of continually pleading for his sons and daughters.

The aim of my remarks is just this—you will most of you meet together next Tuesday and keep the household feast. I beg you to imitate Job on Wednesday morning and make it your special and peculiar business to call your children together and sanctify them by prayer and by pleading the precious sacrifice of Christ Jesus. So "it may be" there has been sin. But there will be no "may be" as to the putting away of the sin. For pleading with prayer and laying hold on the sacrifice by faith you shall stand accepted still—both you and your households. Now, some may think that what I have said upon this point is cessary and that we ought not to speak about such common things as these. Do you suppose that the Christian pulpit was set up by God that we might always talk to you about the millennium, or the antediluvians, or the things that are to happen in Ethiopia or Palestine? I believe that the Christian ministry has to do with you in your daily life—and the more the preacher delivers that which is practically suggestive of profit to our souls—the more closely does he keep to the Master. I am sure if my Lord Jesus Christ were here He would say somewhat in these words to you, "Go your way and eat your bread with a joyous heart, for God has accepted you through My blood. But watch and be you as men that look for their Lord. Still keep your lamps trimmed and your lights burning and your loins girt about. Be steadfast and watch unto prayer, that should I come in the morning, or at cock-crowing, I may find you ready for My appearing."

As for you young men and women who will be separated on that day from your own parents—having no family circle in which to join—perform this pleasant privilege yourselves. Set apart a season Wednesday morning in which by prayer and supplication you shall make confession of sin. And whenever the feast-time comes round—whenever you are invited to a social meeting, or the like—look upon it as a necessary successor of the social gathering—that there is private supplication, private confession of sin and a personal laying hold anew upon the great sacrifice. If this is done, your meetings, instead of being unprofitable, shall be the beginning of better days to you and you shall even grow in grace through that prayer, that repentance and that faith which have been suggested by your gatherings together.

I think all this is most fairly in my text. And if I ought not to preach from such a passage, then the text ought not to be in the Bible.

II. And now let us turn to the second head, or what is in the text and that is instructive. We must, therefore, ring the SERMON BELL.

Well, it will be a short sermon. My sermon shall not be like the bell and preacher of St. Anthony's church which were said to be both alike, the bell was pulled a long while and was exceeding dreary in its tone and the preacher was precisely the same. The sermon which is fairly in my text is this—if Job found it right with a holy jealousy to suspect lest his sons might have sinned, how much more do you think he suspected himself? Depend on it—he who was so anxious to keep his children clean was himself more anxious that he might always fear his God and eschew evil.

God said Job was a perfect and an upright man. And yet he was jealous! How much more, then, shall you and I be jealous of ourselves? Say not in your heart, Christian, "I may go here and there and may not sin." You are never out of danger of sinning. This is a world of mire. It will be hard to pick your path so as not to soil your garments. This is a world of pitch. You will need to watch often if in handling it you are to keep your hands clean. There is a robber in every turn of the road to rob you of your jewels. There is a thief behind every bush. There is a temptation in every mercy. There is a snare in every joy. There is not a stone on which you tread under which there is not a viper's nest.

And if you shall ever reach Heaven it will be a miracle of Divine Grace. If you shall ever come safely home to your Father's house it will be because your Father's power brought you there. If Job's sons were in danger at their own tables, how much more are some of you in danger, Christians, when you have to go among the ungodly? It may be that some of you are called to do business where you hear oaths and blasphemy. Your way of life is such that you cannot help being exposed to many temptations. Be on your guard. It was said of a certain great man that he was so afraid of losing his life that he always wore armor under his clothes. Take care you always wear armor. When a man carries a bomb in his hand he should mind that he does not go near a candle.

And you, too must take care that you do not go near temptation. But if you are called to go through the temptation, how watchful, how anxious, how careful, how guarded should you be! Brothers and Sisters, I do not think that we are any of us watchful enough. I have heard of a good woman who would never do anything till she had sought the Lord in prayer about it. Is that our custom? If we do even a common thing without seeking the Lord's direction we may have to repent it as long as we

live. Even our common actions are edged tools. We must mind how we handle them.

There is nothing in this world that can foster a Christian's piety, but everything that can destroy it. How anxious should we be, then, to look up—to look up to God—that He may keep us! Let your prayer be, "Hold me up and I shall be safe." Let your daily cry be, you young Christians especially, yes and you old Christians too, , "Lord, keep me! Keep my heart, I pray You, for out of it are the issues of my life." Do not expose yourselves unnecessarily but if called to exposure, if you have to go where the darts are flying, never go abroad without your shield. For if once the devil catches you abroad and your shield at home, then he will say, "Now is my time." And he will send an arrow which may rattle between the joints of your harness and you may fall down wounded, even though you cannot be slain.

The Lord grant, then, that this sermon bell of my text may ring in your ears during the next week and as long as ever you live may you hear it saying to you, "Be careful. Be watchful, be vigilant. danger may be in an hour when all seems secure to you." Inspect the vessel, see to her keel, look to the sails. Look to the rudder bands. Watch every part of the ship for the storm may be coming though the calm rule at present and the rocks may be ahead though the breakers roll not and the quicksand may underlie your keel, though you think all is well. God help you then, Christian, to watch unto prayer! What we say unto you, we say unto all— WATCH!

III. But now what follows the text—and that is afflictive: and here let us ring the FUNERAL BELL.

What follows the text? Why hear this, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house. And behold there came a great wind from the wilderness and smote the four corners of the house and it fell upon the young men and they are dead and I only am escaped alone to tell you."

Between the table and the coffin there is but a step, between the feast and the funeral there may be but a day and the very bell that rings the marriage peal tolls the funeral knell. Here is a death's head for you to put on your table. The old Egyptians set a corpse among the guests—that all might know that they must die. I set the bodies of Job's sons and daughters at your table—to make you think that you will die. Our very eating is the grave of God's mercies and should remind us of our own graves. What do we do when we eat but patch the old tenement, put fresh plaster on the dilapidated and naked rafters? So, then, we should remember that the time will come when we can no more do this, but when the tenement itself shall be shaken and be blown down.

Sinner! Let no joy cross your face till death and you are friends. Saint! Let no joy be in your heart either, till you can say, "Welcome, Death. I gladly go with you." Do nothing that you would not willingly die doing. Be found in no position in which you would be unwilling to stand forever. Be you today what you would wish to be in eternity. And so live and so act and so sit at the table that if the wind should come and smite the four corners of the house and you should die, yet you fall asleep at one feast, to wake up at another feast where there would be no "may be," about sin, but where you should eat bread in the kingdom of God and drink the new wine of which Jesus Christ spoke when He rose from the supper and left His disciples.

Ah, my spirit rises on wings of delight at the solemn tones of that funeral knell—for it has more music in it, after all—than my merry bell. There is a pleasing joy in sorrow and mirth is akin to sadness. Hearken, friends, the bell is speaking, "GONE, GONE, GONE, GONE. "Who is that for?

Who is dead in this parish? "That is poor So-and-so." My God, when it shall be my turn, may my soul behold Your face with joy. O may my spirit, when it receives the last summons cry with delight, "Blessed be God for that sound! It was the merriest sound my soul could have desired, for now I sit with Jesus and eat at His table and feast with angels and am satisfied and have the privilege of John—to lean my head upon my Savior's breast."

Christian! I say never let the thought of dying plague you. Let it be a comfort to you and stand you so ready that when the Master shall say, "Arise!" you will have nothing to do but to rise at His bidding and march to Heaven—leading your captivity captive.

But you, sinner, when you are sitting at your table, remember my funeral bell tolling in your ears. And if you should step aside and the rest should say, "What ails you?"—if you should be compelled to rise while they are laughing and go upstairs to pray, I shall not mind. Though some may say I have made you melancholy and have marred your feast—Sinner it is no time for you to be feasting while God's sword is furbished and sharp and ready to divide soul from body. There is a time to laugh, but it is not till sin is pardoned that there is time to dance. It is not till the heart stands with joy before the ark that there is time to make merry—it is not till sin is forgiven.

Your time is a time to weep and a time to rend your garments and a time to sorrow and a time to repent. May God's Holy Spirit give you the grace! The time is now. And the grace being given, may you fall before the Cross and find pardon and mercy there and then we may say, in the words of Solomon—"Go your way, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart. For God now accepts your works."

. Adapted from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 1,8 #623 - Satan Considering the Saints

SATAN CONSIDERING THE SAINTS

NO. 623

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 9, 1865

BY C. H. SPURGEON

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Have you considered My servant Job."

Job 1:8.

HOW very uncertain are all terrestrial things! How foolish would that Believer be who should lay up his treasure anywhere except in Heaven! Job's prosperity promised as much stability as anything can beneath the moon. The man had round about him a large household of devoted and attached servants. He had accumulated wealth of a kind which does not suddenly depreciate in value. He had oxen and asses and cattle. He had not to go to markets and fairs and trade with his goods to procure food and clothing, for he carried on the processes of agriculture on a very large scale round about his own homestead and probably grew within his own territory everything that his establishment required.

His children were numerous enough to promise a long line of descendants. His prosperity wanted nothing for its consolidation. It had come to its flood tide—where was the cause which could make it ebb? Up there, beyond the clouds, where no human eye could see, there was a scene enacted which foretold no good to Job's prosperity. The spirit of evil stood face to face with the infinite Spirit of all good. An extraordinary conversation took place between these two beings. When called to account for his doings, the Evil One boasted that he had gone to and fro throughout the earth—insinuating that he had met with no hindrance to his will and found no one to oppose his freely moving and acting at his own pleasure.

He had marched everywhere like a king in his own dominions unhindered and unchallenged. Then the great God reminded him that there was at least one place among men where he had no foothold and where his power was unrecognized, namely, in the heart of Job. He reminded him that there was one man who stood like an impregnable castle, garrisoned by integrity and held with perfect loyalty as the possession of the King of Heaven. The Evil One defied Jehovah to try the faithfulness of Job. He told Him that the Patriarch's integrity was due to his prosperity—that he served God and eschewed evil from sinister motives—because he found his conduct profitable to himself.

The God of Heaven took up the challenge of the Evil One and gave him permission to take away all the mercies which he affirmed to be the props of Job's integrity and to pull down all the outworks and buttresses and see whether the tower would not stand in its own inherent strength

without them. In consequence of this, all Job's wealth went in one black day and not even a child was left to whisper comfort.

A second interview between the Lord and His fallen angel took place. Job was again the subject of conversation. And the Great One, defied by Satan, permitted him to touch him in his bone and in his flesh till the prince became worse than a pauper. And he who was rich and happy was poor and wretched, filled with disease from head to foot and forced to scrape himself with a miserable potsherd to gain a little relief from his pain.

Let us see in this the mutability of all terrestrial things. "He has founded it upon the floods," is David's description of this world. And, if it He founded on the floods, can you wonder that it changes often? Put not your trust in anything beneath the stars—remember that "CHANGE" is written on the forefront of Nature. Say not, therefore, "My mountain stands firm—it shall never be moved." The glance of Jehovah's eyes can shake your mountain into dust. The touch of His foot can make it like Sinai, to melt like wax and to be altogether on a smoke. "Set your affection on things above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God," and let your heart and your treasure be, "where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal."

The words of Bernard may here instruct us—"That is the true and chief joy which is not conceived from the creature, but received from the Creator, which (being once possessed) none can take from you: compared with which all other pleasure is torment, all joy is grief, sweet things are bitter, all glory is baseness and all delectable things are despicable."

This is not, however, our subject this morning. Accept thus much as merely an introduction to our Mal. discourse. The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job?" Let us deliberate, first, in what sense the evil spirit may be said to consider the people of God. Secondly, let us notice what it is that he considers about them. And then, thirdly, let us comfort ourselves by the reflection that One who is far above Satan considers us in a higher sense.

I. First, then, IN WHAT SENSE MAY SATAN BE SAID TO CONSIDER THE PEOPLE OF GOD? Certainly not in the usual Biblical meaning of the term, "consider." "O Lord consider my trouble." "Consider my meditation." "Blessed is he that considers the poor." Such consideration implies goodwill and a careful inspection of the object of benevolence with regard to a wise distribution of favor. In that sense Satan never considers any. If he has any benevolence, it must be towards himself. All his considerations of other creatures are of the most malevolent kind. No meteoric flash of good flits across the black midnight of his soul.

Nor does he consider us as we are told to consider the works of God, that is, in order to derive instruction as to God's wisdom, love and kindness. He does not honor God by what he sees in His works, or in His people. It is not with him, "Go to the ant, consider her ways and be wise." He goes to the Christian and considers his ways and becomes more foolishly God's enemy than he was before. The consideration which Satan pays to God's saints is upon this wise—he regards them with wonder when he considers the difference between them and himself. A traitor, when he knows the thorough villainy and the blackness of his own heart, cannot help being astounded when he is forced to believe another man to be faithful. The first resort of a treacherous heart is to believe that all men would be just as treacherous and are really so at bottom. The traitor thinks that all men are traitors like himself, or would be, if it paid them better than fidelity. When Satan

looks at the Christian and finds him faithful to God and to His Truth, he considers him as we should consider a phenomenon—perhaps despising him for his folly—but yet marveling at him and wondering how he can act thus.

"I," he seems to say, "a prince, a peer of God's parliament, would not submit my will to Jehovah! I thought it better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven! I kept not my first estate, but fell from my throne—how is it that these stand? What grace is it which keeps these? I was a vessel of gold and yet I was broken! These are earthen vessels—and yet I cannot break them! I could not stand in my glory—what can be the matchless grace which upholds them in their poverty, in their obscurity, in their persecution—still faithful to the God who does not bless and exalt them as He did me?"

It may be that he also wonders at their happiness. He feels within himself a seething sea of misery. There is an unfathomable gulf of anguish within his soul and when he looks at Believers he sees them quiet in their souls, full of peace and happiness and often without any outward means by which they should be comforted—yet rejoicing and full of glory. He goes up and down through the world and possesses great power and there are many faithful followers to serve him, yet he has not the happiness of spirit possessed by yonder humble cottager, obscure, unknown, having no servants to wait upon her, but stretched upon a bed of weakness. He admires and hates the peace which reigns in the Believer's soul.

His consideration may go farther than this. Do you not think that he considers them to detect, if possible, any flaw and fault in them by way of solace to himself? "They are not pure," he says—"these blood-bought ones—these elect from before the foundations of the world—they still sin! These adopted children of God, for whom the glorious Son bowed His head and gave up the ghost—even they offend!" How must he chuckle with such delight as he is capable of over the secret sins of God's people! And if he can see anything in them inconsistent with their profession, anything which appears to be deceitful and therein like himself, he rejoices.

Each sin born in the Believer's heart cries to him, "My Father! My Father!" and he feels something like the joy of fatherhood as he sees his foul offspring. He looks at the "old man" in the Christian and admires the tenacity with which it maintains its hold—the force and vehemence with which it struggles for the mastery—the craft and cunning with which every now and then, at set intervals, at convenient opportunities, it puts forth all its force. He considers our sinful flesh and makes it one of the books in which he diligently reads.

One of the fairest prospects, I doubt not, which the devil's eyes ever rest upon is the inconsistency and the impurity which he can discover in the true child of God. In this respect he had very little to consider in God's true servant, Job. Nor is this all, but rather just the starting point of his consideration. We doubt not that he views the Lord's people and especially the more eminent and excellent among them as the great barriers to the progress of his kingdom and just as the engineer endeavoring to make a railway keeps his eyes very much fixed upon the hills and rivers and especially upon the great mountain through which it will take years laboriously to bore a tunnel, so Satan, in looking upon his various plans to carry on his dominion in the world, considers most such men as Job.

Satan must have thought much of Martin Luther. "I could ride the world over," says he, "if it were not for that monk! He stands in my way. That strong-headed man hates and mauls my first-born

son, the Pope. If I could get rid of him I would not mind though fifty thousand smaller saints stood in my way." He is sure to consider God's servant if there are "none like he"—if he stands out distinct and separate from his fellows. Those of us who are called to the work of the ministry must expect from our position to be the special objects of his consideration. When the glass is at the eye of that dreadful warrior, he is sure to look out for those who, by their regimentals, are discovered to be the officers and he bids his sharpshooters be very careful to aim at these, "For," says he, "if the standard-bearer falls, then shall the victory be more readily gained to our side and our opponents shall be readily put to rout."

If you are more generous than other saints—if you live nearer to God than others as the birds peck most at the ripest fruit—so may you expect Satan to be most busy against you. Who cares to contend for a province covered with stones and barren rocks and ice-bound by frozen seas? But in all times there is sure to be a contention after the fat valleys where the wheat sheaves are plenteous and where the farmer's toil is well requited. And thus, for you who honor God most, Satan will struggle very sternly. He wants to pluck God's jewels from His crown if he can, and take the Redeemer's precious stones even from the breastplate itself.

He considers, then, God's people. Viewing them as hindrances to his reign he contrives methods by which he may remove them out of his way or turn them to his own account. Darkness would cover the earth if he could blow out the lights. There would be no fruit to shake like Lebanon if he could destroy that handful of corn upon the top of the mountains. From now his perpetual consideration is to make the faithful fail from among men. It needs not much wisdom to discern that the great object of Satan in considering God's people is to do them injury.

I scarcely think he hopes to destroy the really chosen and blood-bought heirs of Life. My notion is that he is too wise for that. He has been foiled so often when he has attacked God's people that he can hardly think he shall he able to destroy the elect. And remember the soothsayers who are very nearly related to him spoke to Haman in this way—"If Mordicai is of the seed of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you shall not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him."

He knows right well that there is a seed royal in the land against whom he fights in vain. And it strikes me if he could be absolutely certain that any one soul were chosen of God, he would scarcely waste his time in attempting to destroy it, although he might seek to worry and to dishonor it. It is however, most likely, that Satan no more knows who God's elect are than we do! He can only judge, as we do, by outward actions—though he can form a more accurate judgment than we through longer experience— and being able to see persons in private where we cannot intrude. Yet into God's book of secret decrees his black eyes can never peer. By their fruits he knows them and we know them in the same manner.

Since, however, we are often mistaken in our judgment, he, too, may be. And it seems to me that he therefore makes it his policy to endeavor to destroy them all—not knowing in which case he may succeed. He goes about seeking whom he may devour and, as he knows not whom he may be permitted to swallow up, he attacks all the people of God with vehemence. Someone may say, "How can one devil do this?" He does not do it by himself. I do not know that many of us have ever been tempted directly by Satan—we may not be notable enough among men to be worth his trouble—but he has a whole host of inferior spirits under his command and control.

And as the centurion said of himself, so he might have said of Satan— "he says to this spirit, 'Do this,' and he does it. And to his servant, 'Go,' and he goes." Thus all the servants of God will more or less come under the direct or indirect assaults of the great enemy of souls and that with a view of destroying them—for he would, if it were possible—deceive the very elect. Where he cannot destroy there is no doubt that Satan's object is to worry. He does not like to see God's people happy. I believe the devil greatly delights in some ministers whose tendency in their preaching is to multiply and foster doubts and fears and grief and despondency as the evidences of God's people.

"Ah," says the devil, "preach on! You are doing my work well, for I like to see God's people mournful. If I can make them hang their harps on the willows and go about with miserable faces, I reckon I have done my work very completely." My dear Friends, let us watch against those specious temptations which pretend to make us humble, but which really aim at making us unbelieving. Our God takes no delight in our suspicions and mistrusts. See how He proves His love in the gift of His dear Son, Jesus. Banish, then, all your ill surmising and rejoice in unmoved confidence. God delights to be worshipped with joy.

"O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His Presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto Him with Psalms." "Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and shout for joy all you that are upright in heart." "Rejoice in the Lord always and again, I say, rejoice." Satan does not like this. Martin Luther used to say, "Let us sing Psalms and spite the devil," and I have no doubt Martin Luther was pretty nearly right—for that lover of discord hates harmonious, joyous praise. Beloved Brothers and Sisters, the archenemy wants to make you wretched here, if he cannot have you hereafter.

And in this, no doubt, he is aiming a blow at the honor of God. He is well aware that mournful Christians often dishonor the faithfulness of God by mistrusting it and he thinks if he can worry us until we no more believe in the constancy and goodness of the Lord, he shall have robbed God of His praise. "He that offers praise, glorifies Me," says God. And so Satan lays the axe at the root of our praise that God may cease to be glorified. Moreover, if Satan cannot destroy a Christian, how often has he spoilt his usefulness? Many a Believer has fallen, not to break his neck— that is impossible—but he has broken some important bone and he has gone limping to his grave!

We can recall with grief some men once eminent in the ranks of the Church who did run well, but suddenly, through stress of temptation, they fell into sin and their names were never mentioned in the Church again except with bated breath. Everybody thought and hoped they were saved so as by fire, but certainly their former usefulness never could return. It is very easy to go back in the heavenly pilgrimage, but it is very hard to retrieve your steps. You may soon turn aside and put out your candle, but you cannot light it quite so speedily. Friend, Beloved in the Lord, watch against the attacks of Satan and stand fast, because you, as a pillar in the House of God, are very dear to us and we cannot spare you.

As a father, or as a matron in our midst, we do you honor and oh, we would not be made to mourn and lament—we do not wish to be grieved by hearing the shouts of our adversaries while they cry, "Aha! Aha! So would we have it," for alas, there have been many things done in our Zion which we would not have told in Gath, nor published in the streets of Askelon lest the daughters of the uncircumcised should rejoice and the sons of the Philistines should triumph!

Oh may God grant us Divine Grace, as a Church, to stand against the wiles of Satan and his attacks, that having done his worst he may gain no advantage over us and after having considered and considered again and counted well our towers and bulwarks, he may be compelled to retire because his battering rams cannot jar so much as a stone from our ramparts and his slings cannot slay one single soldier on the walls!

Before I leave this point I should like to say that perhaps it may be suggested, "How is it that God permits this constant and malevolent consideration of His people by the Evil One?" One answer, doubtless, is that God knows what is for His own Glory and that He gives no account of His matters—that having permitted free agency, and having allowed, for some mysterious reason, the existence of evil—it does not seem agreeable with His having done so to destroy Satan. But He gives him power that it may be a fair hand-to-hand fight between sin and holiness, between Divine Grace and craftiness.

Besides, be it remembered that incidentally the temptations of Satan are of service to the people of God. Fenelon says they are the file which rubs off much of the rust of self-confidence. And I may add they are the horrible sound in the sentinel's ear which is sure to keep him awake. An experimental Divine remarks that there is no temptation in the world which is so bad as not being tempted at all—for to be tempted will tend to keep us awake. Whereas, being without temptation, flesh and blood are weak—and though the spirit may be willing, yet we may be found falling into slumber. Children do not run away from their father's side when big dogs bark at them. The howling of the devil may tend to drive us nearer to Christ, may teach us our own weakness, may keep us upon our own watchtower and be made the means of preservation from other ills.

Let us "be sober, be vigilant, because our adversary the devil, like a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour." And let us who are in a prominent position be permitted affectionately to press upon you one earnest request, namely, " Brethren, pray for us," that, exposed as we are peculiarly to the consideration of Satan, we may be guarded by Divine power. Let us be made rich by your faithful prayers that we may be kept even to the end.

II. Secondly, WHAT IS IT THAT SATAN CONSIDERS WITH A VIEW TO THE INJURY OF GOD'S PEOPLE? It cannot be said of him as of God, that he knows us altogether. But since he has been now nearly six thousand years dealing with poor fallen humanity, he must have acquired a very vast experience in that time. And having been all over the earth and having tempted the highest and the lowest, he must know exceedingly well what the springs of human action are and how to play upon them.

Satan watches and considers, first of all, our peculiar infirmities. He looks us up and down, just as I have seen a horse dealer do with a horse—and he soon finds out where we are faulty. I, a common observer, might think the horse an exceedingly good one, as I see it running up and down the road. But the dealer sees what I cannot see and he knows how to handle the creature just in such quarters and at such points that he soon discovers any hidden mischief. Satan knows how to look at us and reckon us up from head to toe, so that he will say of this man, "His infirmity is lust," or of that other, "He has a quick temper," or of this other, "He is proud," or of that other, "He is slothful."

The eye of malice is very quick to perceive a weakness, and the hand of enmity soon takes advantage of it. When the arch-spy finds a weak place in the wall of our castle, he takes care to plant his battering ram and begin his siege. You may conceal, even from your dearest friend, your infirmity—but you will not conceal it from your worst enemy. He has lynx eyes and detects in a moment the joint in your harness. He goes about with a match and though you may think you have covered all the gunpowder of your heart, yet he knows how to find a crack to put his match through and much mischief will he do, unless eternal mercy shall prevent.

He takes care, also, to consider our frames and states of mind. If the devil would attack us when our mind is in certain moods, we should be more than a match for him—he knows this and shuns the encounter. Some men are more ready for temptation when they are distressed and desponding—the fiend will then assail them. Others will be more liable to take fire when they are jubilant and full of joy. Then will he strike his spark into the tinder. Certain persons, when they are much vexed and tossed to and fro can be made to say almost anything. And others, when their souls are like perfectly placid waters, are just then in a condition to be navigated by the devil's vessel.

The worker in metals knows that one metal is to be worked at such a temperature and another at a different temperature. Those who have to deal with chemicals know that at a certain heat one fluid will boil while another reaches the boiling point much earlier. So Satan knows exactly the temperature at which to work us to his purpose. Small pots boil as soon as they are put on the fire and so little men of quick temper are soon in a passion. Larger vessels require more time and coal before they will boil—but when they do boil it is a boil, indeed—not soon forgotten or abated. The enemy, like a fisherman, watches his fish and adapts his bait to his prey. And he knows in what seasons and times the fish are most likely to bite.

This hunter of souls comes upon us unawares and often we are overtaken in a fault, or caught in a trap through an unwatchful frame of mind. That rare collector of choice sayings, Thomas Spencer, has the following, which is much to the point: The chameleon, when he lies on the grass to catch flies and grasshoppers, takes upon him the color of the grass, as the polypus does the color of the rock under which he lurks that the fish may boldly come near him without any suspicion of danger." In like manner Satan turns himself into that shape which we least fear and sets before us such objects of temptation as are most agreeable to our natures so that he may the sooner draw us into his net. He sails with every wind and blows us that way which we incline ourselves through the weakness of nature.

Is our knowledge in matters of faith deficient? He tempts us to error. Is our conscience tender? He tempts us to scrupulosity and too much preciseness. Has our conscience, like the ecliptic line, some latitude? He tempts us to carnal liberty. Are we bold-spirited? He tempts us to presumption. Are we timorous and distrustful? He tempts us to desperation. Are we of a flexible disposition? He tempts us to inconstancy. Are we stiff? He labors to make obstinate heretics, schismatics, or rebels of us. Are we of an austere temper? He tempts us to cruelty. Are we soft and mild? He tempts us to indulgence and foolish pity. Are we hot in matters of religion? He tempts us to blind zeal and superstition. Are we cold? He tempts us to Laodicean lukewarmness. Thus does he lay his traps that one way or the other he may ensnare.

He also takes care to consider our position among men. There are a few persons who are most easily tempted when they are alone. They are the subjects, then, of great heaviness of mind and they may be driven to most awful crimes. Perhaps the most of us are more liable to sin when we are in company. In some company I never could be led into sin—into another society I could scarcely venture. Many are so full of levity that those of us who are inclined the same way can scarcely look them in the face without feeling our besetting sin starting forth. And others are so somber that if they meet a brother of like mold, they are pretty sure, between them, to invent an evil report of the goodly hand.

Satan knows where to overtake you in a place where you lie open to his attacks. He will pounce upon you—swooping like a bird of prey from the sky who has been watching for the time to make his descent with a prospect of success. How, too, will he consider our condition in the world! He looks at one man and says, "That man has property—it is of no use my trying such-and-such arts with him. But here is another man who is very poor, I will catch him in that net." Then, again, he looks at the poor man and says, "Now, I cannot tempt him to this folly, but I will lead the rich man into it."

As the sportsman has a gun for wild fowl and another for deer and game, so has Satan a different temptation for various orders of men. I do not suppose that the Queen's temptation ever will annoy Mary the kitchen maid. I do not suppose, on the other hand, that Mary's temptation will ever be very serious to me. Probably you could escape from mine—I do not think you could. And I sometimes fancy I could bear yours—though I question if I could. Satan knows, however, just where to smite us—and our position, our capabilities, our education, our standing in society, our calling may all be doors through which he may attack us. You who have no calling at all are in peculiar peril—I wonder the devil does not swallow you outright!

The most likely man to go to Hell is the man who has nothing to do on earth. I say that seriously. I believe that there cannot be a much worse evil to a person than to be placed where he has no work. And if I should ever be in such a state, I would get employment at once for fear I should be carried off, body and soul, by the Evil One. Idle people tempt the devil to tempt them. Let us have something to do! Let us keep our minds occupied, for, if not, we make room for the devil! Industry will not make us gracious, but the want of industry may make us vicious. Have always something on the anvil or in the fire—

"In books, or work, or healthful play, I would be busy, too, For Satan finds some mischief still For idle hands to do."

So Watts taught us in our childhood and so let us believe in our manhood. Books, or works, or such recreations as are necessary for health should occupy our time. If I throw myself down in indolence, like an old piece of iron, I must not wonder that I grow rusty with sin.

Nor have I done yet. Satan, when he makes his investigations, notices all the objects of our affection. I doubt not when he went round Job's house he observed it as carefully as thieves do a jeweler's premises when they mean to break into them. They very cunningly take account of every door, window and fastening—they fail not to look at the next-door house— for they may have to reach the treasure through the building which adjoins it. So, when the devil went round, jotting down in his mind all Job's position, he thought to himself, "There are the camels and the oxen, the

asses and the servants—yes, I can use all these very admirably."

"Then," he thought, "there are the three daughters! There are the seven sons and they go feasting—I shall know where to catch them and if I can just blow the house down when they are feasting—that will afflict the father's mind the more severely, for he will say, 'O that they had died when they had been praying, rather than when they had been feasting and drinking wine.' I will put down, too, in the inventory," says the devil, "his wife—I dare say I shall need her," and accordingly it came to that. Nobody could have done what Job's wife did—none of the servants could have said that sad sentence so stingingly—or, if she meant it very kindly—none could have said it with such a fascinating air as Job's own wife.

"Bless God and die," as it may be read, or, "Curse God and die." Ah, Satan, you have plowed with Job's heifer, but you have not succeeded! Job's strength lies in his God, not in his hair, or else you might have shorn him as Samson was shorn! Perhaps the Evil One had even inspected Job's personal sensibilities and so selected that form of bodily affliction which he knew to be most dreaded by his victim. He brought upon him a disease which Job may have seen and shuddered at in poor men outside the city gates. Brethren, Satan knows quite as much in regard to you. You have a child and Satan knows that you idolize it. "Ah," he says, "there is a place for my wounding him." Even the partner of your bosom may be made a quiver in which Hell's arrows shall be stored till the time may come—and then she may prove the bow from which Satan will shoot them.

Watch even your neighbor and her that lies in your bosom, for you know not how Satan may get an advantage over you. Our habits, our joys, our sorrows, our retirements, our public positions—all may be made weapons of attack by this desperate foe of the Lord's people! We have snares everywhere—in our bed and at our table—in our house and in the street. There are dangers and traps in company. There are pits when we are alone. We may find temptations in the House of God as well as in the world!

There are traps in our high estate and deadly poisons in our abasement. We must not expect to be rid of temptations till we have crossed the Jordan and then, thank God, we are beyond gunshot of the enemy! The last howling of the dog of Hell will be heard as we descend into the chill waters of the black stream—but when we hear the hallelujah of the glorified, we shall have done with the Black Prince forever and forever!

III. Satan considered but THERE WAS A HIGHER CONSIDERATION WHICH OVERRODE HIS CONSIDERATION. In times of war the sappers and miners of one party will make a mine and it is a very common counteractive for the sappers and miners of the other party to counter-mine by undermining the first mine. This is just what God does with Satan. Satan is mining, and he thinks to light the fuse and blow up God's building, but all the while God is undermining him and He blows up Satan's mine before he can do any mischief.

The devil is the greatest of all fools. He has more knowledge but less wisdom than any other creature. He is more subtle than all the beasts of the field but it is well called subtlety, not wisdom. It is not true wisdom—it is only another shape of folly. All the while that Satan was tempting Job, he little knew that he was answering God's purpose—for God was looking on and considering the whole of it and holding the enemy as a man holds a horse by its bridle. The Lord had considered exactly how far He would let Satan go.

He did not, at first, permit him to touch his flesh—perhaps that was more than Job at that time could have borne. Have you ever noticed that if you are in good strong bodily health you can bear losses and crosses and even bereavements with something like equanimity? Now that was the case with Job. Perhaps if the disease had come first and the rest had followed, it might have been a temptation too heavy for him. But God, who knows just how far to let the enemy go, will say to him, "Thus far and no farther."

By degrees he became accustomed to his poverty—in fact, the trail had lost all its sting the moment Job said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away." That enemy was slain—no, it was buried and this was the funeral oration—"Blessed be the name of the Lord." When the second trial came, the first trial had qualified Job to bear the second. It may be a more severe trial for a man in the possession of great worldly wealth to suddenly be deprived of the bodily power of enjoying it, than to lose all first and then lose the health necessary to its enjoyment.

Having already lost all, he might almost say, "I thank God that now I have nothing to enjoy, and therefore the loss of the power to enjoy it is not so wearisome. I have not to say, "How I wish I could go out in my fields and see to my servants," for they are all dead. I do not wish to see my children—they are all dead and gone—I am thankful that they are—better that than that they should see their poor father sit on a dunghill like this. He might have been almost glad if his wife had gone, too, for certainly she was not a very particular mercy when she was spared. And possibly, if he had had all his children about him, it might have been a harder trial than it was.

The Lord who weighs mountains in scales, had meted out His servant's woe. Did not the Lord also consider how He should sustain His servant under the trial? Beloved, you do not know how blessedly our God poured the secret oil upon Job's fire of Divine Grace while the devil was throwing buckets of water on it. He says to Himself, "If Satan shall do much, I will do more. If he takes away much, I will give more. If he tempts the man to curse, I will fill him so full of love to Me that he shall bless Me. I will help him. I will strengthen him—yes, I will uphold him with the right hand of My righteousness."

Christian, take those two thoughts and put them under your tongue as a wafer made with honey—you will never be tempted without express license from the Throne where Jesus pleads and, on the other hand, when He permits it, He will, with the temptation, make a way of escape, or give you Grace to stand under it. In the next place, the Lord considered how to sanctify Job by this trial. Job was a much better man at the end of the story than he was at the beginning. He was "a perfect and an upright man" at first, but there was a little pride about him. We are poor creatures to criticize such a man as Job—but still there was in him just a sprinkling of self-righteousness, I think—and his friends brought it out.

Eliphaz and Zophar said such irritating things that poor Job could not help replying in strong terms about himself that were rather too strong, one thinks. There was a little too much self-justification. He was not proud as some of us are, of a very little—he had much to be proud of, as the world would allow—but yet there was the tendency to be exalted with it. And though the devil did not know it, perhaps if he had left Job alone, that pride might have run to seed and Job might have sinned. But Satan was in such a hurry that he would not let the ill seed ripen, but hastened to cut it up and so was the Lord's tool to bring Job into a more humble, and consequently a more safe and blessed state of mind.

Moreover, observe how Satan was a lackey to the Almighty! Job all this while was being enabled to earn a greater reward. All his prosperity is not enough—God loves Job so much that He intends to give him twice as much property—He intends to give him his children again! He means to make him a more famous man than ever—a man whose name shall ring down the ages—a man who shall be talked of through all generations. He is not to be the man of Uz, but of the whole world! He is not to be heard of by a handful in one neighborhood, but all men are to hear of Job's patience in the hour of trial. Who is to do this? Who is to fashion the trump of fame through which Job's name is to be blown? The devil goes to the forge and works away with all his might to make Job illustrious! Foolish devil! He is piling up a pedestal on which God will set His servant Job, that he may be looked upon with wonder by all ages.

To conclude. Job's afflictions and Job's patience have been a lasting blessing to the Church of God and they have inflicted incredible disgrace upon Satan. If you want to make the devil angry throw the story of Job in his teeth! If you desire to have your own confidence sustained, may God the Holy Spirit head you into the patience of Job. Oh, how many saints have been comforted in their distress by this history of patience! How many have been saved out of the jaw of the lion and from the paw of the bear by the dark experiences of the Patriarch of Uz!

O Arch-Fiend, how are you taken in your own net! You have thrown a stone which has fallen on your own head! You made a pit for Job and have fallen into it yourself! You are taken in your own craftiness. Jehovah has made fools of the wise and driven the diviners mad. Brethren, let us commit ourselves in faith to the care and keeping of God—come poverty, come sickness, come death—we will in all things through Jesus Christ's blood be conquerors, and by the power of His Spirit we shall overcome at last. I would God we were all trusting in Jesus. May those who have not trusted Him be led to begin this very morning and God shall have all the praise in us all, forevermore. Amen.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 3,23 #2666 - The Sorrowful Man's Question

THE SORROWFUL MAN'S QUESTION

NO. 2666

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 18, 1900.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 8, 1882.

"Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,

and whom God has hedged in?"

Job 3:23.

I AM very thankful that so many of you are glad and happy. There is

none too much joy in the world and the more that any of us can create, the better. It should be a part of our happiness and a main part of it, to try to make other people glad. "Comfort you, comfort you My people," is a commission which many of us ought to feel is entrusted to us. If your own cup of joy is full, let it run over to others who have a more trying experience. If you, yourself, are privileged to have flashing eyes and elastic steps, and a bounding heart, be mindful to speak words of good cheer to such as are in bonds! Feel as if you were bound with them and try to revive their drooping spirits. That is what I am going to aim at, tonight, so you will excuse me if I bid, "good-bye," for a while to you joyous ones! I want to seek after those who have no such delight as you now possess— those who are, on the contrary, suffering from extreme depression of spirit. Sometimes, we must single out the wounded ones of the flock. That is what I am about to do, yet I feel sure that while some few will be distinctly sought after, there will be something that may be of use to the many who are in a less sorrowful condition. The 99 shall get their full portion although the shepherd goes especially after the lost one.

The question of our text was put by Job when he first opened his mouth in the extreme bitterness of his anguish. "Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?" His case was so sad and so trying that life itself became irksome to him. I suppose that by, "light," here, he means the power to see the Light of God, the life which lives in the light. "Why," he asked in his agony, "is that continued to a man when God has filled him with sorrow upon sorrow?" The verses preceding our text are to the same effect—"Therefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul which long for death, but it comes not; and dig for it more than for hidden treasures; which rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they can find the grave."

The Patriarch was weary of living and, perhaps, we shall not wonder so much at his pitiful lamentation if we remember the extreme distress into which he had been brought. He had lost all his property. Stroke by stroke all his wealth had been taken away from him. He might have

Volume 46 1borne that if it had been his only loss, but close upon the heels of it had come sore bereavement. His happy children, for whom he daily cared and whom he had tenderly loved, were all destroyed in a moment—while they were feasting in the house of one of their brothers. The calamity seemed all the greater because it came in the very midst of their joys. Then, as if that was not trial enough, Job was, himself, smitten from head to foot with boils. If you have ever seen a person in that condition, I am sure that you must pity him. There is a dear friend of ours, now with God, whom I visited when he was in much the same state as that. Perhaps he had not to endure quite all that Job suffered, but something exceedingly like it had befallen him. The irritation, the pain and the depression of spirit that come with that particular form of disease all tend to make us treat very gently the petulant expressions of Job.

We may not excuse them, but only he among us that is without fault may take up the first stone to cast at him. I will warrant that if we had suffered as he did, been brought to poverty, left childless, and then been tortured as he was, from head to foot—and even his wife rendering him no comfort, but, on the contrary, adding to his grief and woe—we might have said even worse things than Job did! For remember, dear Friends, that he said nothing against God in the time of his deepest sorrow. He cursed most vehemently the day of his birth and wished that he had never existed, or that he might speedily pass away to sleep with the generations that are dead. He used unwise and foolish expressions—but any of us might have used far worse words if we had been in his case, so we will not condemn him, but we will see what lessons we can learn from his experience.

I think that Job's experience teaches us the very small value of temporal things. To have spiritual blessings and to enjoy them, is one thing, but to have earthly things, and to enjoy them, is quite another. You may have an abundance of them and yet they may be utterly tasteless to you, or they may even be bitter as gall to you—and you may curse the day that gave them to you. I am sure that it is so, because Job speaks thus concerning life, which is the chief of all earthly things. It is true, although Satan said it, "All that a man has will he give for his life," yet we may be brought into such a condition that we may wish that we had never been born! Life itself may become so wearisome to us that we may even wish to escape from it, that we may be at rest, as we hope.

Job had once enjoyed every comfort that heart could desire and he still had this blessing of life left to him. But even that had become curdled and soured—the last thing to which a man usually clings had become distasteful and disgusting to him—so that he set no store by it, but longed to get rid of it. O Beloved, seek eternal treasures, for there is no moth that can eat them, no rust can mar them, no fermentation or corruption can injure them. But, as for the things of time and sense, if you do possess them, use them as though you had them not and never make them your gods, for they are but as a shadow that passes away in a moment. They come, and they are gone. And if you make idols of them, the Lord may permit you to retain them, but take away from you all power to enjoy them. You may have abundance and yet not be able to relish even the bread you eat, or the drink that refreshes you! You may have a loss of health, or a loss of all power to be happy, though everything that men think to be the cause of happiness may be laid abundantly at your feet.

With this as a preface, I now come to my text and ask you to notice, first, the case which raises the question. Secondly, the question itself. And, thirdly, answers which may be given to the question—"Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?"

I. First, notice THE CASE WHICH RAISES THE QUESTION. "Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?"

That is to say, "Why does God permit men to live when their souls are under deep depression and gloom? Why does He not let them die at once? When their days are spent in weariness and their nights yield them neither rest nor refreshment—when they look upward and see nothing to give them hope, or onward, and behold nothing but that which is even more dreadful than the present—why is it that God continues life to those who are in such sad circumstances?" Well, dear Friends, if life were not continued to any but those who are bright of eye, fleet of foot and joyous of heart, how few would live! And if the first time that darkness fell upon a man's pathway, he were to be permitted to die, well, then, the whole population of the globe would soon be swept away! If our murmuring and petulance demanded that we should die rather than suffer, then we should soon pass away and be gone. And that is the case which is supposed in Job's question—If a man finds himself entirely in the dark, if God's Presence is completely hidden from him and he can find no joy in anything whatever, and his spirit is tossed to and fro with worries and perplexities, the question is—"Why does he continue to live"

Yet, further, the man here described is in such trouble that he can see no reason for the trouble. His "way is hidden." Job could not perceive, in his case, any cause for the distress into which he had been plunged. As far as he knew, he had walked uprightly. He had not sinned so as to be now suffering the result of his sin. He had not committed a crime, otherwise he would have understood the punishment when it came upon him. He looked back upon all that he had done and he could not, at first glance, see in himself any cause for his affliction. Nor, indeed, dear Brothers and Sisters, was there any cause why all these things should have happened to Job by way of punishment, for the Inspired record concerning him is that he was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil."

Even the devil, himself, who kept a sharp lookout with his malicious eyes, could not find any fault whatever with which he could charge Job. He deserved the character which God had given to him, though Satan did insinuate that he had acted from interested motives. He asked, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" That question has always seemed to me to be a very crafty one, yet very foolish, for if it could have been proved that Job had feared or served God for nothing, then the devil would have said at once that God was a bad Master and that there was no reward for those who served Him. But now that he finds God putting a hedge of roses round about Job, and sheltering him on every side, he declares that Job was only pious because he found it profitable! He could find no other fault with him—and even that accusation was not true.

Job, on his part, remembered how he had fed the widows and succored the fatherless—how he had acted justly towards his fellow creatures in the midst of an unjust generation and how, amidst a mass of idolaters, he had worshipped God and God alone. He had never kissed his hand in adoration to the moon, as she walked along her shining way in all her queenly brightness, nor had he ever bowed himself down to the host of heaven, as nearly all around him had done. He stood alone, or almost alone, in that age, as a true and faithful servant of Jehovah—yet his sorrows and

trials were multiplied. And so, his way was hidden, he was hedged in by God, and he could not make it out. You know, dear Friends, that it is often a great aggravation of our troubles when we do not know why they come. A man, when he is ill, usually wants to know what is the nature of his disease and how he came to be attacked by it. When we see a person suffering, we generally ask "Where did you catch that cold?" or, "What was it that brought on that congestion?" We always like to know the cause of the complaint—and Job, too, wanted to ascertain the reason for his trouble, but he could not find out—and this rendered it all the more mysteriously grievous to him. And therefore he enquired, "Why do I continue to live, when I have come into such darkness as this?"

It was equally trying to Job that he did not now what to do. There seemed to be nothing that he could do. He was stripped of all his earthly possessions. Those ashes where he sat formed his uncomfortable couch. And the only property that remained to him was a potsherd, with which, in his desperation, he began to scrape himself because of his boils. What could he do in such a case as that? There was no physician there to cure him of his sad complaint.

True, there were his three friends, but all that they could do, or, at least, the best thing they did, was to sit still and say nothing. When they opened their mouths, it was only to pour vinegar into his wounds and to increase his agony tenfold! What could poor Job do under such circumstances? His very helplessness tended to increase his wretchedness.

Am I addressing anyone who is in that kind of perplexity? I think I hear someone moaning, "I don't know which way to turn. I have done everything I can think of and I cannot tell what is to come next. I sit in darkness and can see no light. Why I am brought to this pass, I cannot tell. Or what is the reason for it, I cannot make out. If I could light upon some great and grievous fault which had brought me where I am, I could understand it. But as it is, I am in thick Egyptian night about it all and I know not what to do. Why does a man continue to live when his way is thus hidden, or hedged up." If that is the way you talk, you are in very much the same sort of plight that the Patriarch was in when he uttered the mournful question which forms our text. What was still worse to Job was that he could not see any way out of his trouble. He said that God had hedged him in, not with a hedge of roses, but with a barrier of briars. Whatever he tried to do, he found himself obstructed in doing it. And there are now men in this world whose sorrows are the more grievous because everything they do to alleviate their distress seems only to increase it. Their efforts are all fruitless. They are like men who have become entangled in a bog—the more they struggle to get out, the deeper they descend. They strive to their very utmost, but it is all in vain. They rise up early, they sit up late, and they eat the bread of carefulness mingled with their tears, but there is a blight on all that they do. Nothing prospers with them. They are at their wits end. Then they begin to cry, "Oh, that we had never been born, rather than that we should have been born to such trouble as this! 'Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?'"

I have thus stated the case which gave rise to Job's question and I should not wonder if I have, at the same time, stated the case of some who are here. Do not think it has been a waste of time for any of you to hear this sorrowful description of a very sad condition of heart and mind. If I should only have been describing one such individual, let us all feel sympathy for him or for her—and let us unite in breathing the silent petition, "Lord, bring Your servant out of prison."

II. Now, secondly, we are to consider THE QUESTION ITSELF. "Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?" In other words, Why is the light of life given

to him who is in the darkness of misery?

Well, first, let me say that it is a very unsafe question for anyone to ask. Brothers and Sisters, we are sure to get into mischief as soon as we begin catechizing God and asking, "why?" Such questioning comes not well from our lips. He is the Potter and we are the clay in His hands. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?" God's eternal purposes are a great deep and when we try to fathom them, we utterly fail. Divine Sovereignty is an ocean without a bottom and without a shore—and all we can do is to set our sail and steer by the chart which He has given us and all the while believe that, as we sang just now—

"Even the hour that darkest seems, Will His changeless goodness prove; From the mist His brightness streams, God is Wisdom, God is Love."

Voyaging in that fashion, we shall be safe, indeed!

But to try to cross such a sea without rudder, or chart, or compass— this is a venture—some piece of sailing which we had better not undertake! I tremble whenever I have to think of the wondrous ways of God. I mean when I have to think of them after the manner of the reasoner and not after the style of the Believer! Well did Milton describe the fallen spirits sitting in little groups, discussing predestination and the counsels of the Eternal. You know how Paul answers the man who calls in question the dealings of God either in Providence or in Grace—"No but, O man, who are you that replies against God?" Job received his answer when the Lord spoke to him out of the whirlwind and said, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" What God said to him was not so much a vindication of the ways of Providence, but a revelation of His matchless power as the Creator and the Ruler of the universe. And, though men may not like to hear it, yet there is, in the thunder of God's power, an answer which, though it may not always answer the skeptic, but ultimately overpower and silence him! As for God's child, he sits down in the shadow of that black cloud which is the canopy of Deity, and he is well content to be still in the Presence of the Lord of the whole earth! Imitate him, my Brothers and Sisters, and do not keep asking God the why and the wherefore of what He does. It is an unsafe thing to ask such questions!

Next, it reflects upon God. In this question of Job, there is really a reflection upon the wisdom of the Almighty. He has given the Light of Life to a man whose way is hidden and whom He has hedged in, yet Job asks, "Why did He do it?" I think that far too often we indulge our questionings of Divine Providence. Is God to stand and answer to you and me for what He does? Is He bound to tell us the reason why He does it? Job's friend, Elihu, said, "God is greater than man. Why do you strive against Him? For He gives not account of any of His matters." If there is His equal anywhere, let him meet Him in the field and they shall speak together. But to us worms of the dust, answers shall not be given if we haughtily put questions to Him of, "what?" and "why?" To accept the Lord's will with absolute submission is after the manner of the Son of God, Himself, for He prayed, in the hour of His greatest agony, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as You will." But to quibble and to question is after the manner of the prince of darkness who is always seeking to dispute the Sovereignty of God. Therefore, Beloved, let no question of ours reflect upon the Lord's love, or the dispensations of His Providence.

Further, we may rest quite certain that there must be an answer to this question, a good answer, and an answer in harmony with the Character of God. If there are men and women to be found still sitting in the darkness of grief and sorrow and we ask why they are allowed to continue to live, there is a reply to that enquiry, and a reply consistent with boundless Grace and infinite compassion, but, mark you, that reply may never be given, or, if it is given, we may be incapable of understanding it! There is much that God does that cannot be understood, even by those great men of modern times who would gladly sit on the Throne of the Eternal and judge Him—

"Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod, Rejudge His judgments, be the god of God."

I say that there are some answers which God might give if He pleased, but which even they could not comprehend with all their wit and wisdom! And you and I must often come to a point where we have to stop and say, "We cannot understand this." And we shall be still wiser if we add, "Nor do we wish to do so." Brothers and Sisters, I, for one, have had enough of searching into reasons! I am perfectly satisfied to accept facts. I am ready to bow my reason before the Lord and to accept whatever He says. If I do not, how little shall I ever know! What is there that I really understand? I confess that I see profound mysteries about the most common phenomena around me. I cannot fully comprehend anything when I get right to the bottom of it. There is, on every hand, a deep which I cannot fathom. How, then, shall I understand the ways of God and measure Him with my finite mind, comparing so many inches with the Infinite, weighing so many ounces against the Omnipotent and reckoning so many seconds in contrast with the Eternal? No, Brothers and Sisters, for such calculations you have nothing to measure with! You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep, yes, bottomless! So, the less of such questions as Job's, any of us ask, the better, for, even if we had the answer to them, we might not be able to understand it.

Let me remind you, also, that however important this question may seem to be, it is not the most profitable question. I have heard of a farmer, whose boy said to him, "Father, the cows are in the corn; however did they get there? Boy," he replied, "never mind how they got there—our work is to get them out as soon as we can." That is our main business, also—to get the cows out of the corn! How they got there is a matter that can be thought of, by-and-by, when we have nothing else to do. The origin of evil is a point that puzzles a great many people, but I hope you will not worry your brain over that question. If you do, you will be very foolish. But if you are wise, you will not trouble yourself so much about the origin of evil, as about how to conquer it, in yourself, and in others! Get the cows out of the corn, and then find out how they got in, if you can, and, by so doing, prevent their getting in again.

There will be space enough and time enough, and better Light to discuss these questions when we get up yonder before the Throne of the Eternal. If their solution is of any real consequence to us, we shall get them solved, but, meanwhile, we are colorblind, or, if we are not, it is so dark and so misty here—and we have so many other more pressing matters to attend to—that we had better leave these whys and wherefores, and rely on the Infallible wisdom and the Infinite love of God. If He has done anything, it is quite certain that it is right and just! Yes, if it has come from His dear hands, it is also gracious and kind. There is more sublimity in being like a little child in the Presence of the Eternal than there is in trying to imitate the Deity, for that is but a mockery—a thing to be despised! No, more, it is the greatest insult we can offer to God and it is a pity and a shame that any of us should so live and act. Put aside everything of the kind, I implore you, and in

very truth submit yourselves unto God.

III. But now, in the last place, speaking to the sorrowful person, I want to mention SOME ANSWERS WHICH MAY BE GIVEN TO HIS QUESTIONS. "Why do I continue to live," he asks, "in such sorrow as this? Why does not God take from me the light of life when He does not permit me to enjoy the light of comfort?" Supposing that you are a child of God, I will give you one answer which ought to satisfy you, though, perhaps, it will not if your spirit is rebellious. God wills it. If you are one of His true children, that is all the answer that you will require—and you will say, with those early Christians, "The will of the Lord be done." And with your Lord, Himself, "Not My will, but Yours be done." It was enough for Christ that His suffering was in accordance with the Father's will, so He bowed before Him in unquestioning submission. And shall not you, the disciple, be content to fare as your Master did? Will you not be perfectly satisfied with that which satisfied your Lord? It is the will of the Lord—then what need is there of any further question if you are His child?

But supposing that you are an unconverted person, and you say, "I cannot bear to live in such sorrow as this, why is my life prolonged?" The answer is, "Because of God's mercy to you." Where would you go to be better off than you are here? You who have no hope in Christ and yet who say, "I wish I were dead," you know not what you are wishing! You wish you were dead? But what would be your portion after death? What? Do you really wish to hear that dread sentence which must be passed upon you if you die unregenerate—"Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"? Do you really desire to feel the full weight of Divine Justice! Ah, I hope that you are not so foolish! You have spoken in petulance and do not mean what you have said. It may be hard for you to live, but it would be harder far for you to die—and then to live forever in a death that never dies! God grant that you may never know that awful doom!

Moreover, the answer to your question is that the Lord spares you because He would gladly save you. You are kept alive that you may hear again that voice of mercy which says, "Repent and be converted." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." God comes to you in this time of suffering, that He may stop you in your sin and make you think! Even to the most careless and giddy among you, during the poignancy of your grief, He says, "Now, My prodigal child, you have wasted your substance in riotous living, your belly is hungry and you have nothing with which to fill it. Arise and go unto your Father, for He will receive you." Come then, sorrowful one, it may be that your sorrows will end when your sins end. Certainly, when you come to Christ to be forgiven, you shall find Divine consolation, even if all your griefs do not at once disappear. Anyhow, it would be better to be whipped all the way to Heaven than to be carried down to Hell "on flowery beds of ease." Pray this prayer, "O Lord, let me enter into life with one eye and one hand, halt or maimed, rather than, having two eyes and two hands, to be cast into Hell!"

This is one answer to your question—The Lord lets you live, even though it is in pain and grief, because He has purposes of love and mercy towards you. Therefore, be not anxious to die, but be thankful that you are still permitted to tarry upon Gospel ground! No, do not be content to tarry there, but fly at once to the God of Grace! Look this very instant to Jesus, for—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One; There is life at this moment for thee! Then look, Sinner—look unto Him and be saved! Unto Him who was nailed to the tree."

One believing glance of the eyes to Him who is the sinner's Substitute and all transgression is forgiven! Therefore, yield yourself unto Him. Trust to His finished work and eternal life is yours! And when you have that unspeakable blessing, why need you sorrow more?

As for the child of God, to whom I now again speak, if you ask, in a timid, childlike way, "Why do I continue to live in such sorrow as I have to endure?" I would, as your Brother, try to answer you. First, it may be that all this trouble has come upon you to let you know what is in you. None of us know what there is in us until we are put to the test. We are wonderfully sweet-tempered until somebody touches one of our sore places—and then, ah, me—there is not much sweetness of temper left after that! We are remarkably patient until we get a sharp neuralgic pain, perhaps—and then where is all our boasted patience? We are very generous until we, ourselves, are somewhat pinched—and then we become as tight-fisted as others whom we have condemned. We do not know what is really in us while all goes smoothly and well. But sickness, sorrow, bereavement, poverty and hunger will soon let us see what we are! They make a mental or moral photograph of us and when we look at the picture we say, "Oh, no! That cannot be our likeness." But we look again and again, and then we say, "Alas, it is even so. But we did not know we were like that. Now we see our faults and our follies. O Lord, You have searched us, and tried us, and shown us the wicked ways that are in us. Now purge us from them and make us clean and pure in Your sight!" That is one reason, and a very good reason, for sharp affliction—to let us see ourselves as we really are.

The next is that, often, our trials bring us very near to our God. Your children run down the meadow to play and they get a good way off from home in the sunny day, as they ramble along, gathering their buttercups and daisies. But by-and-by, the sun sets, and night comes on—and now they cry to be at home. Just so. And you, in all your pretty ways of pleasure in your happy home, though you are a child of God, sometimes forget Him. Sorrowfully must you remember that sad fact. But now the night comes on and there is danger all around you. So you begin to cry for your Father and you would gladly be back in fellowship with Him— and that is a blessed trouble which brings us near to our God. Christ's sheep ought to be thankful for the ugly black dog that keeps them from going astray, or fetches them back when they have wandered from the Shepherd! Perhaps Christ will call that black dog off when he has answered the Master's purpose and brought you near His side.

Dear child of God, anything that promotes your sanctification, or increases your spirituality, is a good thing for you. I have had my share of physical pain and, perhaps, more of it than most who are here—and I bless God for it. If it comes again, I ask Him for Grace to bless Him for it then—and now that it has gone for a while, I freely bless Him for it, for I cannot tell you all the good that it has worked in me! Oh, how often a proud spirit has been cut back by affliction and trial, like a vine that is made to bleed, that the clusters that followed the pruning might be all the better and richer! The mown grass is very sweet and fine and so, often, are Believers who have been deeply tried. This tribulation, as Paul says, "works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." Therefore, bow humbly before the Lord, my tried and afflicted Friend, and see at least some of the reasons why He thus puts you in he dark chamber of tribulation.

Perhaps, dear Brother, you are being very greatly tried, more than most people, to fit you to be an example to others. The Lord means to make a veteran of you, so you must be the first in the breach, or you must lead the forlorn hope. He puts you on the hardest service because He wants others of His children to be able to learn from you. I do not know that we should ever have heard anything of Job if it had not been for his troubles—he was a most respectable Eastern farmer with a considerable estate—very much like a great many country gentlemen we have in England who may be heard of at the Quarter Sessions, or the corn and cattle market. But nothing more will be known of them unless you go to the parish church and see some memorial of them stuck up there. Job would have been much the same sort of man as that—an Oriental magnate who would have lived, died and been forgotten—but now his fame will last as long as the world endures! "You have heard of the patience of Job." You have all heard of it, and Job is one of the undying names. So it may be with you, Beloved. You are, perhaps, to sail through seas of trouble to reach your crown. God means to use you in His service and make you a blessing to others, and a teacher of others, by passing you, again and again, through the fire. One of the ancient warriors said, "I cannot use in battle a sword that has not been often times hardened. But give me a Damascus blade that has been so prepared, and I will cut through a coat of mail, or split a man from head to foot at a single stroke. It gets its temper and keenness of edge from having slept with the flames again and again." So must it be with Believers! Full often they are unfit for God to use till they have been sorely tried.

Perhaps, dear Friend, the Lord is putting you through all this trouble—(only I hardly like to say it aloud, I must whisper it in your ears somehow) because He loves you more than anybody else. Dear Samuel Rutherford, when he wrote to a lady who had lost, I think, seven children, congratulated her and said, "I am sure that the Well-Beloved has a strong affection for Your Ladyship, for He will have all your heart. He has taken away all these children that there may not be a nook or a corner for anybody else but for Him." So the Lord loves you much and He is testing you to see whether you can bear His will—whether you love Him so much that you will take up your cross and deny yourself, just as, sometimes, architects will ask for their work to be put to the severest possible tests. "Yes," they say, "see what it will really bear."

No doubt Stephenson felt great joy when the heaviest train went safely across his tubular bridge. And other engineers have said, "Yes, put on as much pressure as you like; it will stand it." Fathers often take delight in the athletic feats of their sons, and princes revel in the brave deeds of their warriors. And so does the Lord delight to see what His people can do and He often puts upon them more and more, to prove whether they love Him so much that they can bear it all for His sake. Did not the Lord do this to let Satan see that Job did love his God, and would still say, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?...The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." We cannot tell what blessing might come from such a state of heart as that!

It is very possible, dear Friend, also, that God is putting you through all this trouble that He may enable you to bear great prosperity. Job was to have twice as much as he had ever had before, and that was a very great deal, for he said that he washed his steps with butter, and the rock poured him out rivers of oil. But how much richer he was when everything was doubled! Job was hardly fit to manage such a large estate as that until he had been made to see the vanity of it all, and to get nearer to his God. So, dear Friends, you are going to be pressed, and squeezed, and tried in order that you may be fitted to come right out into the front rank and to be magnified and

made much of by the Lord your God! I have noticed this kind of thing happen more than once. I have seen a man suddenly taken from the very dregs of the people and put up to preach—and he has been popular all at once. Nobody has abused him, nobody has said a word against him. But, before long, he has passed completely out of sight. He could not bear the weight that was put upon him, and gave way.

You have seen others who have been called of God to preach the Word, and they have been abused year after year. They could not say anything that was not perverted. They were called mountebanks, impostors, and I know not what. And then, when happier days came, and almost all men spoke well of them, they could bear it, for they had learned to despise alike the flatteries and the abuse of men! Now, something like that must happen to all God's servants who are to be greatly honored. If they are to bear prosperity, they must first go through the fire. Perhaps that is what the Lord is doing with you, my dear Friend. If so, be content with your lot.

And, once again, do you not think that the Lord means thus to make you more like His dear Son than other people are? Some other Christians have not as much trouble to endure as you have. No, why is it? You know how an artist can, if he likes, dash off a picture. There! A little red, a little blue and so on, and it is done. And away it goes! Yes, but when he wants to paint something that will be observed and admired, then he takes more pains. Look how he works at every part of it. Note what care and what trouble he takes with it. It is the same with the lapidary or the sculptor when he has choice work in hand. And you are, I hope, the kind of material that will pay for cutting and carving—and the Lord is using His chisel upon you more than He does upon most folk. He wants to make you just like His dear Son—so now He is chipping out a crown of thorns and you must wear it round your head. He is fashioning the image of His Son out of the block of your renewed nature and you must patiently bear the blows from His hammer and chisel till the work is done.

Finally, if I cannot tell you why all this trouble falls to your lot, I know it is right, for the Lord has done it, and blessed be His name! Aaron held his peace when his two sons died. He got as far as that in submission to the will of the Lord. But it will be better still if, instead of simply holding your peace, you can bless and praise and magnify the Lord even in your sharpest trouble! Oh, may you be Divinely helped to do so! Let every troubled soul march out of this place feeling, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Rise, dear Friend, out of all despondency and despair! Shake yourself from the dust and put on your beautiful garments of praise and joy, remembering that—

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone, Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

You can see the tracks of the martyrs along the road you are journeying! Better still, you can see the footprints of the Son of God, your Lord and Savior! Therefore, you may rest assured that you are on the right road, so press bravely forward on it and, in due time, you will come to that place of which Job said, "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest." And you shall be forever without fault before the Throne of God!

May He grant this happy portion to you all, for His dear Son's sake! Amen.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 5,26 #43 - The Death of the Christian

THE DEATH OF THE CHRISTIAN

NO. 43

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, SEPTEMBER 9, 1855,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.

"You shall come to your grave in a full age, like as a

shock of corn comes in, in his season."

Job 5:26

WE do not believe all that Job's friends said. They spoke very often as uninspired men, for we find them saying many things that are not true. And if we read the book of Job through, we might say with regard to them, "miserable comforters are you all," for they did not speak concerning God's servant, Job, the thing that was right. But nevertheless, they gave utterance to many holy and pious sentences which are well worthy of regard as having come from the lips of three men distinguished in their age for their learning, talent and ability. Three gray-headed sires, who, from experience, were able to speak what they knew. Their mistakes are not to be wondered at because they had not then that clear, bright, shining Light of God which we enjoy in these modern times. They had few opportunities to meet together. There were but few Prophets in those days who taught them the things of the Kingdom of God. We only marvel that without the Light of the Gospel Revelation they were able to discover so much of the Truth of God as they did. However, I must make a remark concerning this Chapter, that I cannot but regard it as being, in the main, not so much the utterance of the man—who here speaks—Eliphaz the Temanite—but the very Word of God. Not so much the simple saying of the unwise comforter who upbraided Job as the speech of the Great Comforter who consoles His people and who only utters the thing that is right! The opinion is justified by the fact that this chapter is quoted by the Apostle Paul. Eliphaz says in the 13th verse, "He takes the wise in their own craftiness." And we find the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:19 saying, "As it is written, He takes the wise in their own craftiness"—thus giving sanction to this passage as having been Inspired of God—at all events as being most certainly truthful. Most certainly the experience of such a man as Eliphaz is worthy of much regard. And when he, speaking of the general condition of God's people—that they are hid from the scourge of the tongue, "that they are not afraid of destruction when it comes"—that they laugh at destruction and famine and so on, we may accept his words as being proven by experience and authenticated by Inspiration!

"You shall come to your grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn comes in in his season." Here is a very beautiful comparison, the comparison of the aged Christian—for that I take it lies on the

surface of the text—to a shock of corn. Go into the harvest field and you shall see how much the wheat reminds you of the aged Believer. How much anxiety has been expended on that field! When the seed first sprung up, the farmer dreads lest the worm should bite the tender shoots and the blade should be devoured. Or lest some sharp frost should consume the infant plant and cause it to wither and die. And, then, month after month, as the seasons came, how did he anxiously look towards Heaven and long that the rains might come, or that the genial sunshine might pour out its vivifying floods of light upon the field? When it has come to somewhat of maturity, how greatly has he feared lest the mildew and blast should shrivel up the precious ears? It now stands in the fields and, in some respects, he is freed from his anxiety. The months of his travail are over. He has waited patiently for the precious fruits of the soil and now they are there.

And so with the gray-headed man. How many years of anxiety have been expended upon him? In his youth how likely did it seem that he might be smitten down by death and yet he has passed safely through youth, manhood and age. What varied accidents have been warded from him? How has the shield of the Providential Keeper been over his head to keep him from the shafts of the pestilence, or from the heavy hand of accident that might have taken his life!? How many anxieties has he had, himself? How many troubles has he passed through? Look upon the hoary-headed veteran! Mark the scars that troubles have inflicted upon his forehead! And see, written deep in his breast, the dark mementos of the sharp struggles and trials he has endured! And now his anxieties are somewhat over—he is come very nearly to the haven of rest. A few short years of trial and trouble shall land him on fair Canaan's coast! We look upon him with the same pleasure that the farmer regards the wheat because the anxiety is over and the time of rest is now approaching. Mark how weak the stem has become! How every wind shakes it to and for—it is withered and dried! See how the head hangs down to earth, as if it were about to kiss the dust and show from where it had its origin! So, mark the aged man—tottering are his steps—the eyes that look out of the windows are darkened, the grinders cease because they are few—and the grasshopper has become a burden. Yet even in that weakness there is glory! It is not the weakness of the tender blade—it is the weakness of the full ripe corn! It is a weakness that shows its maturity. It is a weakness that gilds it with glory. Even as the color of the wheat is golden, so that it looks more beauteous than when the greenness of its verdure is on it, so the gray-headed man has a crown of glory on his head! He is glorious in his weakness—more than the young man in his strength, or the maiden in her beauty! Is not a shock of corn a beautiful picture of the state of man, moreover, because very soon it must be taken home? The reaper is coming! Even now I hear the sickle sharpening. The reaper has well edged it and he shall soon cut the corn down. Look! He is coming across the field to reap his harvest. And then, by-and-by, it shall be carried into the barn and safely housed, no more subject to blight, or mildew, or insect, or disease. There it shall be secured where no snow can fall upon it, no winds can molest it. It shall be safe and secure. And joyful shall be the time when harvest home shall be proclaimed and the shock of corn, fully ripe, shall be carried into the farmer's garner! Such is the aged man. He, too, shall soon be taken Home. Death is even now sharpening his sickle and the angels are getting ready their chariot of gold to bear him up to the skies! The barn is built. The house is provided. Soon the great Master shall say, "Bind up the tares in bundles to burn and gather the wheat into My barn."

This morning, we shall consider the death of Christians in general. Not merely of the aged Christian, for we shall show you that while this text does seem to bear upon the aged Christian, in

reality it speaks with a loud voice to every man who is a Believer. "You shall come to your grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn comes in in his season."

There are four things we shall mark in the text. First, we shall consider that death is inevitable, because it says, "you shall come." Secondly, that death is acceptable, because it does not read, "I will make you go to your grave," but, "you shall come there." Thirdly that death is always timely—"you shall come to your grave in full age." Fourthly, that death to the Christian is always honorable, for the promise declares to him, "You shall go to your grave in full age, like as a shock of corn comes in in his season."

1. The first remark, namely, that death, even to the Christian, is INEVITABLE, is very trite, simple and common. We scarcely need have made it. But we found it necessary, in order to introduce one or two remarks upon it. How familiar is the thought that all men must die and, therefore, what can we say upon it? And yet we blush not to repeat it, for while it is a Truth so well known—there is none so much forgotten! While we all believe it in theory and receive it in the brain, how seldom is it impressed on the heart? The sight of death makes us remember it. The tolling of the solemn bell speaks to us of it. We hear the deep-tongued voice of time as the bell tolls the hours and preaches our mortality. But very usually we forget it. Death is inevitable to all. But I wish to make an observation concerning death and that is, that while it is written, "It is appointed unto all men, once to die," yet a time shall come when some Christians shall not die at all! We know that had Adam never sinned, he would not have died, for death is the punishment of sin. And we know that Enoch and Elijah were translated to Heaven without dying. Therefore it does seem to follow that death is not absolutely necessary for a Christian. And, moreover, we are told in Scripture that there are some who shall be "alive and remain," when Jesus Christ shall come. And the Apostle says, "I tell you a mystery—we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." There shall be some who shall be found living, of whom the Apostle says, "Then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we always be with the Lord." We know that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, but it is possible that they may be refined by some spiritual process which shall preclude the necessity of dissolution. Oh, I have thought of that idea very much and I have wondered whether it would not be possible that some of us might be in that happy number who shall not see death! Even if we are not, there is something very cheering in the thought—Christ did so conquer death that He not only delivers the lawful captive out of the prison, but He saves a band from the jaws of the monster and leads them by his den unharmed!

He not only resuscitates the dead and puts new life into those that are slain by the fell scythe, but some He actually takes to Heaven by a byroad. He says to death—"Avaunt, you monster! On these you shall never put your hand! These are chosen men and women. And your cold fingers shall never freeze the current of their soul. I am taking them straight to Heaven without death. I will transport them in their bodies up to Heaven without passing through your gloomy portals, or having been captives in your dreary land of shades." How glorious is the thought that Christ has vanquished death—that some men shall not die! But you will say to me, "How can that be? For the body has mortality mingled with its very essence!" We are told, it is true, by eminent men that there is a necessity in nature that there should be death, since one animal must prey upon another. And even could all animals be taught to give up their prey, they must feed upon plants and so devour certain minute insects which had hidden thereon. Death, therefore, seems to be the law of Nature.

Be it remembered that men have already lived far beyond the present allotted term and it does seem most easy to conceive that the creature which can subsist a thousand years could exceed that period. But this objection is not valid, since the saints will not live forever in this world, but will be removed to a habitation where Laws of Glory shall supersede laws of Nature.

II. And now comes a sweet thought—that death to the Christian is always ACCEPTABLE—"you shall come to your grave." Old Caryl makes this remark on this verse—"A willingness and a cheerfulness to die. You shall come, you shall not be dragged or hurried to your grave, as it is said of the foolish rich man in Luke 12:1-59, 'This night shall your soul be taken from you.' But you shall come to your grave quietly and smilingly, as it were. You shall go to your grave, as it were, upon your own feet and rather walk than be carried to your sepulcher." The wicked man, when he dies, is driven to his grave, but the Christian comes to his grave! Let me tell you a parable. Behold, two men sat together in the same house when Death came to each of them. He said to one, "You shall die." The man looked at him—tears suffused his eyes and tremblingly he said, "O Death, I cannot! I will not die." He sought out a physician and said to him, "I am sick, for Death has looked upon me. His eyes have paled my cheeks and I fear I must depart. Physician, here is my wealth, give me health and let me live." The physician took his wealth but gave him not his health with all his skill. The man changed his physician and tried another and thought that perhaps he might spin out the thread of life a little longer. But, alas, Death came and said, "I have given you time to try your varied excuses. Come with me. You shall die." And he bound him hand and foot and made him go to that dark land of Hades. As the man went, he clutched at every side post by the way, but Death, with iron hands, still pulled him on! There was not a tree that grew along the way but he tried to grasp it, but Death said, "Come on! You are my captive and you shall die." And unwillingly as the laggard schoolboy who goes slowly to school, so did he trace the road with Death. He did not come to his grave, but Death fetched him to it—the grave came to him.

But Death said to the other man, "I am come for you." He smilingly replied, "Ah, Death! I know you, I have seen you many a time. I have held communion with you. You are my Master's servant. You have come to fetch me Home. Go, tell my Master I am ready, whenever He pleases. Death, I am ready to go with you." And together they went along the road and held sweet company. Death said to him, "I have worn these skeleton bones to frighten wicked men. But I am not frightful. I will let you see myself. The hand that wrote upon Belshazzar's wall was terrible because no man saw anything but the hand. But," said Death. "I will show you my whole body. Men have only seen my bony hand and have been terrified." And as they went along, Death ungirded himself to let the Christian see his body and he smiled, for it was the body of an angel. He had wings of cherubs and a body as glorious as Gabriel. The Christian said to him, "you are not what I thought you were—I will cheerfully go with you." At last Death touched the Believer with his hand—it was even as when the mother does in sport smite her child a moment. The child loves that loving pinch upon the arm, for it is a proof of affection. So did Death put his finger on the man's pulse and stopped it for a moment and the Christian found himself, by Death's kind finger, changed into a spirit. Yes, found himself brother to the Angels! His body had been etherealized, his soul purified and he himself was in Heaven! You tell me this is only a parable. But let me give you some facts that shall back it up. I will tell you some of the deathbed savings of dying saints and show you that, to them, Death has been an agreeable visitant of whom they were not afraid. You will not disbelieve dying men! It were ill to act the hypocrite's part at such a time. When the play is over, men will take off

the mask—and so with these men when they came to die—they stood out in solemn unclothed reality. First, let me tell you what Dr. Owen said—that celebrated prince of Calvinists. While his works are to be found, I am not afraid that men shall lack arguments to defend the Gospel of Free Grace. A friend called to tell Dr. Owen that he had put to press his, "Meditations on the Glory of Christ." There was a momentary gleam in his languid eye as he answered, "I am glad to hear it. Oh," he said, "the long wished-for time has come at last, in which I shall see that glory in another manner than I have ever done, or was capable of doing in this world."

"But," you may say, "this man was a mere theologian, let us hear a poet speak."

George Herbert, after some severe struggles and having requested his wife and nieces, who were weeping in extreme anguish, to leave the room, committed his will to Mr. Woodnott's care. Crying out, he said, "I am ready to die—Lord, forsake me not now, my strength fails. But grant me mercy for the merits of my Lord Jesus. And now, Lord receive my soul." Then he laid himself back and breathed out his life to God. Thus the poet dies. That glorious fancy of his that might have pictured gloomy things if it had pleased, was only shed with rapturous sight of angels. As he used to say himself, "I think I hear the church bells of Heaven ringing." And I think he did hear them when he came near the river Jordan!

"But," you will say, "one was a theologian and the other a poet—it might have been all fancy." Now learn what an active man, a missionary, said—Brainard.

He said, "I am almost in eternity. I long to be there. My work is done. I have done with all my friends. All the world is now nothing to me. Oh, to be in Heaven to praise and glorify God with His holy angels." That is what Brainard said. He who counted all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and went among wild untutored Indians to preach the Gospel!

But it is possible you may say, "These were men of ages gone by." Now, you shall have men of modern times!

And first, hear what the great and eminent Scotch preacher, Haldane, said. He raised himself a little and distinctly repeated these words, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then we shall appear with Him in Glory." He was then asked if he thought he was going Home. He answered, "Perhaps not quite yet." Mrs. Haldane affectionately said, "Then you will not leave us very soon." He replied with a smile, "To depart and to be with Christ is far better." On being asked if he felt much peace and happiness, he twice repeated, "Exceedingly great and precious promises." He then said, "But I must rise." Mrs. Haldane said, "you are not able to get up." He smiled and answered, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with His likeness." She said, "Is that what rising up you meant?" He replied, "Yes, that is the rising I meant. I must rise!"

And now, what said Howard—the great philanthropist, the man who, while possessing true religion and being the most eminent and distinguished of Christians, would, from his plain commonsense mode of acting, never be suspected of being a fanatic and an enthusiast? A few days before his death, when the symptoms of his disease began to assume a most alarming appearance, he said to Admiral Priestman, "You endeavor to divert my mind from dwelling on death. But I entertain very different sentiments. Death has no terror for me. I always look forward to it with cheerfulness, if not with pleasure."

But perhaps you may say, "We never knew any of these people. We would like to hear of somebody whom we did know." Well, you shall hear of one whom you have heard me affectionately mention. He was not of our denomination, but he was a very prince in Israel—I refer to Joseph Irons. Many of you heard the sweet and blessed things that proceeded out of his lips and will, perhaps, be able to verify what is said of him. At intervals he repeated short portions of Scripture and select sentences, such as, "How long, Lord?" "Come, Lord Jesus!" "I long to go Home to be at rest." Seeing his dear wife shedding tears, he said, "Do not weep for me. I am waiting for that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." After a pause, to recover his breath, he added, "He that has preserved me thus far, will never leave, or forsake me. Fear not—all is well! Christ is precious. I am going Home, for I am a shock of corn fully ripe." Now that is a man you did know, many of you. And it proves the fact that I have asserted—that to a Christian, death is acceptable, come when it may! I am sure I can say, with many of my Brothers and Sisters, here, that could I now have the greatest favor conferred on me that mortals could desire, I would ask that I might die! I never wish to have the choice given to me. But to die is the happiest thing man can have because it is to lose anxiety, it is to slay care, it is to have the peculiar sleep of the Beloved. To the Christian, then, death must be acceptable!

A Christian has nothing to lose by death. You say he has to lose his friends. I am not so sure of that. Many of you have many more friends in Heaven than on earth. Some Christians have more dearly beloved ones above than below. You often count your family circle, but do you do as that little girl of whom Wordsworth speaks, when she said, "Master, we are seven." Some of them were dead and gone to Heaven, but she would have it that they were still all brothers and sisters. Oh, how many brothers and sisters we have upstairs in the upper room in our Father's house! How many dear ones linked with us in the ties of relationship, for they are as much our relations, now, as they were then! Though in the Resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, yet in that great world, who has said that the ties of affection shall be severed, so that we shall not even, there, claim kindred with one another, as well as kindred with Jesus Christ? What have we to lose by death? Come when he may, should we not open the door for him? I would love to feel like that woman who said, when she was dying, "I feel like a door on the latch, ready to be opened to let my Lord in." Is not that a sweet state, to have the house ready, so that it will require no setting in order? When death comes to a wicked man, he finds him moored fast, he snaps his cable and drives his ship to sea. But when he comes to the Christian, he finds him winding up the anchor and he says, "When you have done your work and shipped the anchor, I will take you Home." With sweet breath he blows on him and the ship is wafted gently to Heaven, with no regrets for life, but with angels at the prow, spirits guiding the rudder, sweet songs coming through the cordage and canvas silvered over with light!

III. Then thirdly, the Christian's death is always TIMELY—"You shall come to your grave in a full age." "Ah," says one, "that is not true! Good people do not live longer than others. The most pious man may die in the prime of his youth." But look at my text. It does not say you shall come to your grave in old age—but in a "full age." Well, who knows what a "full age" is? A "full age" is whenever God likes to take His children Home! There are some fruits you know that are late in coming to perfection and we do not think their flavor is good till Christmas. Or till they have gone through the frost—while some are fit for table right now. All fruits do not get ripe and mellow at the same season. So with Christians. They are at a "full age" when God chooses to take them Home. They

are at "full age" if they die at twenty-one. They are not more if they live to be ninety. Some wines can be drunk very soon after the vintage. Others need to be kept. But what does this matter, if when the liquor is broached it is found to have its full flavor? God never broaches His cask till the wine has perfected itself. There are two mercies to a Christian. The first is that he will never die too soon. And the second, that he will never die too late!

First, he will never die too soon. Spencer, who blazed out so brilliantly some years ago, preached so wonderfully that many expected that a great light would shine steadily and that many would be guided to Heaven. But then suddenly the light was quenched in darkness and he drowned while yet in his youth. Men wept and said, "Ah, Spencer died too soon." So it has been sung of Kirk White, the poet, who worked so laboriously at his studies. Like the eagle who finds that the arrow that smote him was winged by a feather from his own body, so was his own study the means of his death. And the poets said he died too soon. It was untrue. He did not die too soon—no Christian ever does! "But," some say, "How useful might they have been had they lived." Ah, but how damaging they might have been! And were it not better to die than to do something, afterwards, that would disgrace themselves and bring disgrace to the Christian character? Were it not better for them to sleep while their work was going on than to break it down afterwards? We have seen some sad instances of Christians who have been very useful in God's cause, but have afterwards had sad falls and have dishonored Christ. Though they were saved and brought back, at last, we could almost wish that they had died rather than lived. You don't know what might have been the career of these men who were taken away so soon! Are you quite sure they would have done so much good? Might they not have done much evil? Could we have a dream of the future and see what they might have been, we would say, "Ah Lord! Let it stop while it is well." Let him sleep while the music plays, there may be hideous sounds afterwards. We long not to keep awake to hear the dreary notes. The Christian dies well—he does not die too soon.

Again, the Christian never dies too late. That old lady, there, is 80 years old. She sits in a miserable room, shivering before a small fire. She is kept by charity. She is poor and miserable. "What's the good of her?" everybody says —"She has lived too long. A few years ago she might have been of some use. But now look at her! She can scarcely eat unless her food is put into her mouth. She cannot move. And what good can she be?" How dare you find fault with your Master's work! He is too good a husbandman to leave His wheat in the field too long and let it shale out. Go and see her and you will be reproved. Let her speak—she can tell you things you never knew in all your life. Or, if she does not speak at all, her silent unmurmuring serenity—her constant submission—teaches you how to bear suffering. So that there is something you can yet learn from her—say not the old leaf hangs too long on the tree! An insect may yet twist itself therein and fashion it into its habitation. O say not the old sear leaf ought to have been blown off long ago! The time is coming when it shall fall gently on the soil. But it remains to preach to unthinking men the frailty of their lives. Hear what God says to each of us—"You shall come to your grave in full age." Cholera! You may fly across the land and taint the air—I shall die in a "full age." I may preach today and as many days as I please in the week, but I shall die at a full age. However ardently I may labor, I shall die at a full age! Affliction may come to drain my very life's blood and dry up the very sap and marrow of my being. Ah, but Affliction, you shall not come too soon—I shall die at a full age! And you waiting man! And you tarrying woman! You are saying, "O Lord, how long? How long? Let me go Home." You shall not be kept from your Beloved Jesus one hour more than is

necessary! You shall have Heaven as soon as you are ready for it. Heaven is ready enough for you and your Lord will say, "Come up higher!" when you have arrived at a full age—but never before nor after!

IV. Now the last thing is that a Christian will die with HONOR. "You shall come to your grave like a shock of corn comes in, in his season." You hear men speak against funeral honors and I certainly do enter my protest against the awful extravagance with which many funerals are conducted and the absurdly stupid fashions that are often introduced. It would be a happy thing if some persons could break through them and if widows were not obliged to spend the money which they need so much, themselves, upon a needless ceremony which makes death not honorable, but rather despicable! But I think that while death should not be flaunted out with gaudy plumes, there is such a thing as an honorable funeral which everyone of us may desire to have. We do not wish to just be carried away as a bundle of tares—we would prefer that devout men would carry us to the grave and make much lamentation over us. Some of us have seen funerals that were very like a "harvest home." I can remember the funeral of a sainted minister under whom I once sat. The pulpit was hung in black and crowds of people came together. And when an aged veteran in the army of Christ rose up to deliver the funeral oration over his remains, there stood a weeping people lamenting that a prince had fallen that day in Israel! Then, verily, I felt what Mr. Jay must have experienced when he preached the funeral sermon for Rowland Hill, "Howl fir tree, the cedar is fallen!" There was such a melancholy grandeur there. And yet my soul seemed lit up with joy to think it possible that some of us might share in the same affection and that the same tears might be wept over us when we come to die! Ah, my Brothers here, my Brothers in office, my Brothers and Sisters in this Church—it may somewhat cheer your hearts to know that when you depart, your death will be to us a source of the deepest grief and most piercing sorrow. Your burial shall not be that prophesied for Jehoiakim—the burial of an ass, with none to weep over him. But devout men will assemble and say, "Here lies the deacon who for years served his Master so faithfully." "Here lies the Sunday school teacher," will the child say, "who early taught me the Savior's name." And if the minister should fall, I think a crowd of people following him to the tomb would well give him such a funeral as a shock of corn has when "it comes in in his season." I believe we ought to pay great respect to the departed saints' bodies. "The memory of the just is blessed." And even you little saints in the Church, don't think you will be forgotten when you die. You may have no gravestone. But the angels will know where you are as well without a gravestone, as with it! There will be some who will weep over you. You will not be hurried away, but will be carried with tears to your grave.

But I think there are two funerals for every Christian—one, the funeral of the body. And the other, the soul. Funeral, did I say, of the soul? No, I meant not so! I meant not so! It is a marriage of the soul. For as soon as it leaves the body, the angel reapers stand ready to carry it away! They may not bring a fiery chariot as they had for Elijah, but they have their broad spreading wings. I rejoice to believe that angels will come as convoys to the soul across the ethereal plains. Lo! Angels at the head support the ascending saint and lovingly they look upon his face as they bear him upwards. And angels at the feet assist in wafting him up yonder through the skies. And as the husbandmen come out from their houses and cry, "A joyous harvest home," so will the angels come forth from the gates of Heaven and say, "Harvest home! Harvest home! Here is another shock of corn fully ripe gathered into the garner!" I think the most honorable and glorious thing we

shall ever behold, next to Christ's entrance into Heaven and His Glory, there, is the entrance of one of God's people into Heaven. I can suppose it is made a holiday whenever a saint enters and that is continually—so that they keep perpetual holiday! Oh, I think there is a shout that comes from Heaven, whenever a Christian enters it, louder than the noise of many waters! The thundering acclamations of a universe are drowned as if they were but a whisper in that great shout which all the ransomed raise when they cry, "Another and yet another comes!" And the song is still swelled by increasing voices, as they chant, "Blessed Husbandman, blessed Husbandman, Your wheat is coming home. Shocks of corn fully ripe are gathering into Your garner!"

Well, wait a little, Beloved. In a few more years you and I shall be carried through the ether on the wings of angels. I think I die and the angels approach. I am on the wings of cherubs. Oh, how they bear me up—how swiftly and yet how deftly. I have left mortality with all its pains. Oh, how rapid is my flight! Just now I passed the morning star. Far behind me, now, the planets shine! Oh, how swiftly do I fly and how sweetly! Cherubs! What sweet flight is yours and what kind arms are these I lean upon! And on my way you kiss me with the kisses of love and affection. You call me Brother. Cherubs—am I your Brother? I, who just now was captive in a tenement of clay—am I your Brother? "Yes!" they say. Oh, hark! I hear music strangely harmonious! What sweet sounds come to my ears! I am nearing Paradise. 'Tis even so. Do not spirits approach with songs of joy? "Yes!" they say. And before they can answer, behold they come—a glorious convoy! I catch a sight of them as they are holding a great review at the gates of Paradise. And ah, there is the golden gate. I enter in. And I see my blessed Lord! I can tell you no more. All else were things unlawful for flesh to utter. My Lord! I am with You—plunged into You—lost in You just as a drop is swallowed in the ocean—as one single tint is lost in the glorious rainbow! Am I lost in You, glorious Jesus? And is my bliss consummated? Is the wedding day come at last? Have I really put on the marriage garments? And am I Yours? Yes! I am! There is nothing else now for me. In vain your harps, you angels! In vain all else. Leave me for a little while. I will know your Heaven, by-and-by. Give me some years, yes give me some ages to lean here on this sweet bosom of my Lord! Give me half an eternity and let me bask myself in the sunshine of that one smile. Yes—give me this! Did You speak, Jesus? "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love and now you are Mine! You are with Me." Is not this Heaven? I want nothing else! I tell you once again, you blessed spirits, I will see you, by-and-by. But with my Lord I will now take my feast of loves. Oh, Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! YOU are Heaven! I need nothing else! I am lost in YOU!

Beloved, is not this to go to "the grave in full age, like as a shock of corn," fully ripe? The sooner the day shall come, the more we shall rejoice. Oh, tardy wheels of time! Speed on your flight. Oh, angels, from where do you come with haggard wings? Oh, fly through the ether and outstrip the lightning's flash! Why may I not die? Why do I tarry here? Impatient heart, be quiet a little while. You are not yet fit for Heaven, otherwise you would not be here. You have not done your work, otherwise you would have your rest. Toil on a little longer. There is rest enough in the grave, you shall have it there. On! On!

"With my scrip on my back and my staff in my hand, I'll march on in haste thro' an enemy's land. Though the way may be rough, it cannot be long. So I'll smooth it with hope and I'll cheer it with song."

My dear Friends, you who are not converted, I have no time to say anything to you this morning. I wish I had. But I pray that all I have said may be yours. Poor Hearts, I am sorry I cannot tell you this is yours right now. I would if I could, preach to everyone of you and say that you all shall be in Heaven. But God knows there are some of you that are on the road to Hell—and do not suppose you will enter Heaven if you go Hell's road! Nobody would expect, if he proceeded to the north, to arrive at the south! No, God must change your heart. By simple trust in Jesus, if you give yourself up to His mercy, even though the vilest of the vile, you shall sing before His face! And I think, poor Sinner, you will say to me as a poor woman did last Wednesday, after I had been preaching—when I believe everybody had been crying—from the least to the greatest and even the preacher in the pulpit. As I went down, I said to one, "Are you chaff or wheat?" And she said, "Ah, I trembled tonight, Sir." I said to another, "Well, Sister, I hope we shall be in Paradise soon." And she replied, "You may, Sir." And I came to another and said, "Well, do you think you will be gathered with the wheat?" And she answered, "One thing I can say—if God ever lets me get into Heaven I will praise Him with all my might. I will sing myself away and shall never think I can sing loud enough." It reminded me of what an old disciple once said—"If the Lord Jesus does but save me, He shall never hear the last of it." Let us praise God, then, eternally—

While life, or thought, or being, lasts, Or immortality endures!"

Now may the Three-in-One God dismiss you with His blessing.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 5,27 #2175 - So It Is

"SO IT IS"

NO. 2175

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 30,

1890.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCT. 12, 1890.

"Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know you it for your good."

Job 5:27.

THUS closed a forcible speech by Eliphaz the Temanite—it may be called his "summing up." He virtually says, "What I have testified in the name of my friends is no dream of theirs. Upon this matter we are specialists and bear witness to truth which we have made the subject of research and experience. Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know you it for your good." By this declaration he sets forth his teaching with authority and presses it home. He persuades Job to consider what he had said, for it was no hasty opinion, but the ripe fruit of experience. When we speak what we know we expect to be heard.

I shall not follow Eliphaz—I am only going to borrow his closing words and use them in reference to Gospel testimony which is to us a thing known and searched out. I shall use it in the following way. First, our text sets forth the qualification of the teacher. He must be a man who can say, "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is." Secondly, we have the argument with the hearers—"We have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know you it for your good." And lastly, we have here the exhortation for every enquirer who wants to know the truth concerning spiritual and eternal things: "Hear it, and know you it for your good."

I. To begin with, I judge that these words may well describe THE QUALIFICATION OF THE TEACHER. He will be poorly furnished if he cannot run in the line which Eliphaz draws in the words of our text. He should have, first, an intimate knowledge of his subject. How can he teach what he does not know? When we come to talk about God and the soul, and sin and the precious blood of Jesus, and the new birth, and holiness and eternal life, the speaker who knows nothing about these things personally must be a poor driveller. Let him be quiet till he knows what he is to speak upon! Let him sweep chimneys, or cobble shoes, or break stones, or follow any other honorable calling—it will not be honest for him to profess to be a preacher of the Gospel unless he is acquainted with these sacred subjects.

I know well the place of the ministry of one who was ordained to be a preacher and drew the hire of which every true laborer is worthy. He delivered a discourse which greatly troubled the mind of a friend named Jonathan whom I knew and esteemed. The awakened young man went to him on the Monday and said, "Oh, Sir, your sermon last Lord's Day has robbed me of my sleep and made me very anxious." The preacher answered, "I am very sorry for it, Jonathan. I will never preach that sermon any more. If it troubles people, I will have no more of it, for I have something better to do than to make people miserable." "But, Sir," said the young man, "you preached about the new birth and you said we must be born again. In fact your text said so. What does it mean?" He answered, "Jonathan, I do not know anything about it and you are such a good fellow that I am quite sure you need not be afraid. If there is anything in being born again you had it when you were christened. In your Baptism you were made a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven. That is all I know about it."

It is necessary that we say to some preachers, first of all—You must be born again, for, if not, you cannot interpret the new birth to the people. Without personal experience you will speak riddles of which you do not know the answers! The blind will lead the blind and both will fall into the ditch. There is a German story of a minister who had delivered himself very earnestly upon a vital theme and after the service he was waited upon by one in great distress of heart who was peculiar in his use of language. He generally said, "we," when he should have said, "I." And so he said to the minister, "Sir, if what you have been saying is true, what shall we do?" He did not mean to bring the minister into it, but the use of the word, "we," implicated the pastor so much that he began to search—and searching he found that he had no part nor lot in the matter—and that he had been preaching what he himself had never felt!

Have I anybody here who is doing this every Sabbath? A blind man who is teaching others about color and vision? A preacher of an unknown God? A dead man sent with messages of life? You are in a strange position, dear Friend. The Lord save you! I wish that it might happen to you as it did to my dear friend, Mr. Haslam, whom God has blessed to the conversion of so many. He was preaching a sermon which he did not understand and while he preached it he converted himself! By God's Grace he began to feel the power of the Holy Spirit and the force of Divine Truth. He so spoke that a Methodist in the congregation presently cried out, "The parson is converted!" And so the parson was. He admitted it and praised God for it—and all the people sang—

"Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow."

His own utterances concerning Christ Crucified had been to him the power of God unto salvation! O Beloved, no man has any right to teach in the Sunday school, or preach, or pretend in any other way to be sent of God unless he has been so taught of the Holy Spirit that he has an intimate acquaintance with the Gospel! I must add that he should have a personal experience of it, so that he can say, "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is." It is unseemly that an ignorant man should keep a school. It is not meet that a dumb man should teach singing. Shall an impenitent man preach repentance? Shall an unbelieving man preach faith? Shall an unholy man preach obedience to the Divine will? Shall one that is living in sin preach of freedom from sin? Surely any person will be an unsuitable herald of the glad tidings of Divine Grace who speaks what he has never tried and verified. Before you preach again, Brother, pray God to enable you to know in your own soul the Truth of that which you declare. Oh, that we may be born again and so preach regeneration! Oh,

that we may exercise faith and then preach it! Surely it must be so! He who would learn to plow must not be apprenticed to one who never turned a furrow. We must know the Lord or we cannot teach His way.

It strikes me, next, that what is needed in a successful teacher is a firm conviction of the truth of these things growing out of his having tested them for himself. He must say, with emphasis, "So it is." When I had found Christ and joined the Church, I began to teach in the Sunday school, but my little class of boys taught me more than I taught them! I was speaking to them, one day, about "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved," and one of the boys said to me, "Teacher, have you believed?" I answered, "Yes." "And have you been baptized?" "Yes." "Then," said he, "Teacher, you are saved." I said, "I hope so." Years ago it was a kind of fashion to say, "I hope so," and I followed my seniors in this modest talk. The boy looked me straight in the face and said, "And don't you know, Teacher?"

Well, I felt that I did know and that I ought not to have said, "I hope so." So I replied, "Yes, I do know it." "Of course," said the boy, "the text says so. If it ain't true, well, of course, it ain't true. But if it is true, well, it is true and nobody need hope about it." So it was. The boy used good logic. The Scripture says, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Therefore, he that believes and is baptized is saved. That is clear enough and let not the Believer say that "he hopes so," but let him boldly assert that, "it is so!"

You promise a man to pay him five pounds some day this week. Suppose you asked him, "Do you expect that I shall pay you that five pounds?" If he should answer, "I hope so," you would know what he thought of you. And it is very much the same when we thus speak of the Lord—we dishonor Him when we say, "I hope so," after He has said "it is so." The Lord's Word is true. Why do you "hope" about it? Believe it and enjoy it! But people will go hoping and hoping, and hopping and limping— as if to be lame were the proper thing. They had better put both feet to the ground and cry, "God has said it! I believe it! Glory be to His name, He shall have all the praise!" "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart." When we teach others, we ought to have a firm conviction that what we teach is true beyond all question. You cannot use a lever if you have no fixed fulcrum. You must have a point to work upon or you cannot lift an ounce. So, in trying to teach another man, you must know that something or other is true.

Infallibility used to be claimed for the pope, but Luther upset that nonsense. The Protestants then asserted that infallibility lay in the Bible and this became their fulcrum. It seems to me that now it is commonly thought that infallibility lies nowhere—or, if there is any such thing, it is to be found among young green horns, fresh from college, who do not know A from B in theology and yet criticize the Bible and cut it about as they choose. They are infallibles and we must all bow down before their idol of advanced thought! I prefer my Infallible Bible and I shall stick to it—God helping me—knowing that it has never led me astray and believing that it never will! O dear Teachers, know for a certainty what you teach and, if you do not know it to be true, hold your tongues about it! If you are not sure that your doctrine is true, be quiet till you are sure! A ministry of hesitation must be ruinous to souls. When Divine Truth is held fast, then let it be held forth and not till then.

Once more—a necessary qualification for a teacher of the Lord is earnestness and good will to the hearer. We must implore each one of our hearers to give earnest heed. We must cry to him with our whole heart, "Hear it, and know you it for your good." Without love there can be no real

eloquence. We must have a burning love for the souls of men if we would win them for Jesus. Unless our hearts desire their good, we may preach our tongues out, but we shall never bring our hearers to salvation by Christ. The best birdlime for these wild fowl is a longing desire for their present and eternal good! The great Savior's heart is love and those who are to be saviors for Him must be of a loving spirit. True love will do the work when everything else has failed. A pastor has held the hearer by his heart long after his head has struggled away.

A preacher had managed, somehow, to offend one of his hearers and the angry man kept away from the place of worship for many a day. The preacher was not in the least aware that he had given offense, but when the matter came out, he went at once to set it right. The offended person had become settled in unbelief. The preacher went to him and said that he had been sorry to miss him and that he had been made ill by learning that he had become an unbeliever. Tears were in his eyes and his voice was half choked as he said, "Do you know, friend David, I cannot sleep at nights for thinking about you? I am so concerned about your soul that I cannot rest unless you are converted."

The man had grown into the habit of blasphemy and if he had been addressed in any other way he would have cursed the minister and told him to go about his business—but that touch of real affection did it. "You, concerned about my soul? Then it is time that I became concerned about it, too"—that was the reasoning which passed through David's mind. Oh, do let us love our hearers! Let us love them to Jesus! These are the bands that draw men to Jesus—the bands of love! And these are the cords that hold them to the Savior—the cords of a man! We must wish our people to hear the Truth of God, not because we have prepared discourses which we cannot afford to waste upon an empty chapel, but because we feel sure that if they will hear the Gospel it will do them good and save their souls! We must sigh and cry for the souls of our hearers! We must preach with an intent—and that intent must not fall short of their eternal salvation! We must go as with a sword in our bones till we see our hearers yield their hearts to Jesus! Knowledge of our subject avails not without love to our hearers!

There are three ways of knowing, but only one sort is truly worth having. Many labor to know merely that they may know. These are like misers who gather gold that they may count it and hide it away in holes and corners. This is the avarice of knowledge—in some respects less mean than greed of gold and yet of the same order of vices. Selfishness makes men anxious to know. Mental selfishness urges them to toils most wearisome. Yet there may be much of this hoarded knowledge where there is no wisdom. Poor is the ambition to know—to know more than others, to know more today than we knew yesterday—to know what no one else knows. What of all this? To know, to know—this is the one thing with those who, like the horseleech live only to suck and to be swollen. To what purpose is knowledge buried in the brain like a crock of gold buried in a ditch? Such knowledge turns stagnant, like water shut up in a close pond—above mantled with rank weeds and below putrid, or full of loathsome life.

A second class aspire to know that others may know that they know. To be reputed wise is the Heaven of most mortals. To win a degree and wear half-a-dozen letters of the alphabet at the end of your name is the glory and immortality of many. To me the fashion seems cumbersome and vexatious—but the grand use of these appended letters is to let the world know that this is a man who knows more than the average of his fellows. After all, it is no very great thing to make your

neighbors aware that you are somebody in scientific circles. It is more magnanimous to do without the certificates and let folks find out for themselves that you possess unusual information. One does not eat merely that others may know that you have had your dinner and one should not know merely to have it known that you know. Why not wear letters after your name to signify that you own half a million of money, or farm a thousand acres of land, or fatten a hundred hogs? This is the grand end of wearisome days and nights—that the knowing ones may know that you know!

The third kind of knowledge is the one worth having. Learn to know that you may make other people know. This is not the avarice but the commerce of knowledge. Acquire knowledge that you may distribute it! Light the candle, but put it not under a bushel. Some are much buried under that bushel. My friend was half inclined to say a word or two for his Lord but he did not, for he remembered the big bushel marked, "TIMIDITY & Co.," and so he kept his light out of the way. Destroy that bushel, since it destroys your usefulness! If God has given you a candle, let it burn and shine, for light is given that eyes may see it. If God has lighted you from on high, do not deny your light to any far or near. Know that others may know! Be taught that you may teach! This trading is gainful to all who engage in it.

Thus much upon the first point—the qualification of a teacher is intimate knowledge, personal experience, confidence, earnestness and good will.

II. Secondly, THE ARGUMENT FOR THE HEARER—"Lo this, we have searched it, so it is." The argument directed to the hearer is the experience of many, confirming the statement of one—"We have searched it, so it is." Bacon has taught us from a mass of agreeing testimonies to infer a general truth. We are not, now, so foolish as to set up a theory and then hunt for facts to support it. No, but we gather the facts, first, and then deduce the theory from them. So here the three friends have made ample research and have arrived at certain conclusions—and they urge this reasoning upon Job.

Unrenewed men cannot know much about Christ and His salvation unless it is through the testimonies of their friends who have felt the power of Divine Grace. It is ours, therefore, to be witnesses for Christ to them, that they also may believe the Truth of God which can save their souls. Without further preface I should like to bear my own personal witness to a few things about which I am fully persuaded. I am not afraid of dogmatism, but I shall speak very positively, since I can say, "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is." And my first witness is that sin is an evil and a bitter thing. I think, my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I may speak for you and say, "We have searched this out, and we know that it is so." We have seen sin prove injurious to our fellow men.

"Who has woe, who has redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine. Men of strength to mingle strong drink." From where comes much of beggary but from dissipation? From where comes much of deadly disease but from uncleanness of life? Is not half the misery in the world the direct and distinct result of vice? I will not harrow up your feelings by telling you of young men and young women who set out for better things, but who turned aside to vice and thus brought evil diseases into their bones. We could wish to forget their cries and moans with which they appalled us when they found that wild oats had to be reaped and that each ear of those sheaves was as a flake of fire. By-and-by the guilty soul has to meet its God—and what will be its terror!

We know of ourselves and in ourselves, that sin is a serpent whose tooth infuses poison into the wound it makes. Sin brought some of us very low and nothing but Almighty Grace restored us. It made some of us sit between the jaws of despair and question whether it would not be better to put an end to our lives than continue to exist in such horrible gloom. Sin is that inquisition which deals in racks and fires and all manner of infernal tortures. No misery can for a moment be compared with the torment which follows upon sin! We get neither pleasure nor profit by sin, though it may dupe us with the name of both. Sin is "evil, only evil and that continually." This we have searched, and so it is.

We wish that others who are beginning life would accept our testimony and withhold their feet from the paths of the Destroyer. It cannot be necessary that everybody should taste the poison cup—may not our mournful experience of sin's evil effects suffice for you? Sirs, you may search the neighborhood of sin from end to end, but you will never find a living joy therein. Therefore, flee from it, by God's Grace. I wish, next, to testify to the fact that repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ bring a wonderful rest to the heart and work a marvelous change in the whole life and character. There is such a thing as the new birth, for we have been born again—and this not a mere fancy or sentiment—but is a plain matter of fact. We know what it is to have passed from death unto life as surely as we know the difference between night and morning. Young man, have you any doubt about this? Will my testimony be of any use to you? Do you think I would stand here, knowingly, and tell you what is false? I hope you do me justice and admit that I aim at speaking the truth! There is such a thing as having the tastes all altered, the desires all changed, the fears removed, the hopes elevated, the passions subdued, the will conquered, the affections purified and the mind sanctified.

There is such a thing as having perfect rest about all the past because sin is forgiven—perfect rest about the future, because we have committed our all to the hands of Christ who is able to keep us—and peace as to the present, because we belong to Jesus. I speak for thousands in this place tonight when I say that repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ bestow on men a wonderful delight and transform their characters by the Holy Spirit! That is worth knowing, is it not? Believe for yourselves and realize personally the power of faith. "We have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know you it for your good."

Next, we beg to bear our witness to the fact that prayer is heard of God. If it were possible for me to tell you the many instances in which God has heard my prayers, you would, in your kindness, follow me a considerable way. But I should have to draw so largely upon your faith that before I came to the end, you would feel compelled to doubt. Nor should I blame you. Truth is stranger than fiction and if you are not familiar with prayer, you will think me a mad fanatic! In matters in reference to the Stockwell Orphanage I have seen the Lord's hand very conspicuously in times of need. When money has run short and there have been hundreds of children to be fed, faith and prayer have filled our coffers! Well, Sirs, men of the world may say it is all fancy and laugh at it as a spiritual dream—but fancies do not load tables and feed children and supply thousands of pounds!

Will one of you make the attempt? Will you provide for our five hundred orphans for a month by dreams and fancies? We have known times of close pinching and have waited upon God—and in a short time He has sent us abundant relief and there are Brethren on this platform who would

willingly bear witness. If there is no prayer-hearing God, we have played the fool! And yet no other sort of foolery has ever produced such surprising results! We know that God hears prayer! We are personally sure of it because we have tried it for ourselves. I wish that anybody here who is in doubt about it would try the power of prayer. Go to God in prayer—yes, even you that are unconverted—and see whether the Lord will not hear you! Somebody says, "Surely that is unsound advice! How can the unconverted pray?" Let me tell you a story. I was preaching, years ago, to the Sunday school children of a certain country town where the people were Calvinistic and a point or two more. They received 16 ounces to the pound of the Gospel and they liked an ounce or two above full weight. I made the observation to the children that before I had been renewed by Divine Grace, I, as a child, was in trouble and I went to God in supplication and He helped me. I need not repeat the circumstances but it seemed to me that the Lord heard my childish pleading and helped me. This experience led me to feel that there was a reality in prayer, for God had heard me.

When I came out from the Chapel where I had mentioned this circumstance, a number of grave persons who were both sound and sour in the faith, beset me round about like bees. They began asking, "How can a natural man pray a spiritual prayer? How can God accept a prayer which is merely natural, since He is a Spirit? If prayer is not worked by the Holy Spirit it is an idle form," and so on, and so on. It is difficult to conceive how many quibbles can be made upon one point. I was about 20 years of age but I did my best to defend myself, for I had stated a fact and a fact is a stubborn thing. At any rate, I held my own, but I do not know that I should have won the victory if I had been left alone. A grand old woman in a red cloak pressed forward into the middle of the ring and addressed the doubly-sound Brethren whom she knew better than I did.

With an almost prophetic air she looked on them and said, "O fools and slow of heart to come here and quibble with this young servant of the Lord! Listen to me and be convinced, and go home in silence. Does not the Lord hear the young ravens when they cry? Do they pray spiritual prayers? Does the Holy Spirit work prayer in them? If God hears the natural prayers of crying ravens, will He not hear the cries of children?" This was fine. The adversaries vanished out of my sight. There was no overcoming a statement so Scriptural. God does hear prayer! We bear our witness to that fact with all our strength and therefore we say about it—"Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know you it for your good."

Another testimony we would like to bear, namely, that obedience to the Lord, though it may involve present loss, is sure to be the most profitable course for the believing man to take. If you will serve the Lord Jesus Christ, you will not find your road all smooth, but you will find it more pleasant than serving the devil. Satan said of Job, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have not You made an hedge about him and about all that he has?" It was most true, but the Lord God might have answered the devil, "Would you have My servants unrewarded? It is from you that service meets no reward but death. Do you think I would have you able to say, 'God's servants serve Him for nothing. Even Job gets no return for his faithful obedience'?"

Beloved, we may not expect immediate success in business because we walk in the path of integrity. We may, for a time, be losers by being honest and may miss many a chance by abhorring deception. But we do not measure things by the inch and by the ounce when we come to deal with eternal matters. Brothers and Sisters, here we leave the clock and its ticking and

speak of the Glory and Immortality which belong to the infinite and the eternal! Coming into those larger regions, we declare that nothing can be obtained worth getting by a lie, or by a trick, or by falling into sin. The most profitable course in life that any man can take is to do the right in every case. If it should involve loss, do right and suffer the consequences—for there are other compensating consequences which will make a man a gainer by uprightness—even if he should lose the clothes from his back. To have done right is to have a well-spring of joy within the heart.

Some of us have tried this and are sure about it. There are aged persons here who can tell you that they owe everything in life to having been enabled, by the Grace of God, to act uprightly in their youth. I know one who is at this moment in a fine position, whose rise in life dates from the moment when his employer bade him say that he was not at home and he answered, "Sir, I could not say that. I cannot tell a lie." From that day his promotion in the office was constant and rapid.

Another felt himself unable to cast up the firm's accounts on Sunday but before long was so prized that nobody would have suggested such a thing to him. A straightforward course is the nearest way to success. We bear our testimony that righteousness is the best course. We cannot say, "Honesty is the best policy—we have tried both that and thieving—and honesty pays best." But, for all that, if you consider the Law of the Lord you will be considering your own interests. Take notice of this testimony— righteousness is wisdom. A straight line is the shortest way between any two places. "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know you it for your good."

I have many things to say, but our hours fly like the cherubim—each one has six wings. We beg to say that the old-fashioned Gospel is able to save men and to awaken enthusiasm in their souls. Here—here is the best proof! Look around upon this vast assembly! Have we any music, any candles, any millinery? Have we anything here to attract people but simply the preaching of the old, old Gospel? Our service is so severely simple as to be called bare. Have I varied from the old way and the old faith—yes, by even an eighth part of a hair's breadth? Have I not kept to the Gospel and set it forth in simple language? Lo, here I come to the end of 37 years and before me are the same multitudes of people as at the first!

Young preacher, you will not need anything but Christ Jesus should you be spared to preach as long as I have done. When everybody seems to say that orthodoxy is spun out, God will send us a revival and the despised Doctrines of Grace will be to the front again and Christ shall make them His chariot in which He will ride forth conquering and to conquer! Behold, even at this day a company of the poorest of the people proclaim the Gospel in its roughest form and preach it in our streets and lanes— and the crowd is stirred as it never is by any other theme! Notwithstanding all the infidelity of the times, faith is still lifting the standard! Hold to the faith and to the Cross! Preach sin down—preach Christ up! Preach the atoning Sacrifice! Preach in the power of the Holy Spirit! Such preaching is sufficient for the purposes of salvation! "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know you it for your good."

III. I close, now, with our third point—we have HERE THE EXHORTATION TO THE ENQUIRER. What do we say to him? This—"We have searched it, so it is; hear it." I need hardly address that exhortation to most of the present assembly. Hear it you do—with a delight which is remarkable. But you know how matters tend in London in these sad days. The masses of the people will not come to hear of Jesus and His love. They often pass by a street preacher and have no curiosity to know what it is which has brought him out into the open air.

But oh, if you wish to be saved, hear the Gospel! Let nothing keep you away from God's sanctuary where the real Gospel is proclaimed. Hear it! If it is not preached exactly in the style which you would prefer, nevertheless, hear it! "Faith comes by hearing." Come out on Sunday morning, you working men that are sitting at home in your shirt-sleeves. Come out and hear! I cannot make out what some of you do—you work hard all the week round—and when the day of rest arrives, you have no hope of Heaven and no hunger after salvation! Life is a poor thing if it ends here. Do you believe that all you can possess is to be had on this side the grave? It is a poor situation.

Do you fancy that your life can be nothing better than an endless turning of the grindstone? Were you born merely to toil for daily bread? Is there nothing higher and better? If you say that you will die like dogs, I dare not think so meanly of you as you think of yourselves. You have only begun to exist! You have to live forever! You will exist in eternity as surely as God shall live, world without end! Shall it be an immortality of happiness, or an eternal existence of woe? Do, I pray you, think about this— and if there is a Gospel, (and you know there is), then hear it, hear it, hear it, till by the hearing of it God sends you faith and faith grasps salvation!

The next thing that we say is, "know it." Hear it and know it—go on hearing it until you know it! If you cannot quite attain to knowing it by hearing it, read your Bibles and seek the Lord till you are made to know the sublime secret. Ask Christian men and women to explain difficulties to you so you may know it. By getting a clear view of the plan of salvation, know what you must do to be saved. If you do not know anything else, know this essential matter! Christ Crucified is the most precious piece of knowledge which you can ever come at. To know Christ is life eternal! Look to Him till you see in Him your life, your love, your God, your Heaven, your all. Blessed is the man that finds this wisdom, for he has found an endless blessedness.

Our text means—know it in a particular way. "Know you it for your good." The devil knows a great deal. He knows more than the most intelligent of us—but he knows nothing for his good. All that he knows sours into evil within his rebellious nature. There is a way of knowing a great deal and yet of getting no good out of it. Like Samson's lion which had a mass of honey within it and yet had never tasted the sweetness of it, for it was a dead lion. You may have all the knowledge of Solomon and yet you may know nothing for your good, but end your days with the terrible wailing, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!"

How is a man to know anything for his good? This knowledge must first be a practical knowledge. Does the Word say, "Repent"? If you want to know what repentance means, repent at once. You need not go to the Catechism or to the Creed for a definition—repent, and you know what repentance means! Be changed in mind, confess your sin and forsake it. Be sorry for sin. See the wrong of it. Quit it. You will know what repentance is when you have repented. If you want to know what faith is, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and when you have believed, you will know what believing is. The best way to know a virtue is to practice it! Somebody said, "What is the best way to tell a sinner the way of salvation?" The answer given was, "The best way to tell him is to tell him." So it is.

The very best way to eat your dinner is to eat it. We get confounding and confusing ourselves with trivial distinctions, whereas we had better throw distinctions to the dogs and get to soul-winning! You will never catch hares with drums, nor souls with controversies. Come to Jesus, Sinner! Come to Jesus! Believe in Jesus, Sinner! Believe in Jesus at once! "He that does His will shall know of

His doctrine." You will know the Truth of God when, from the heart, you have obeyed it. God help you to exercise this practical faith at once. "Know you it for your good." To know a thing for our good is to know it for ourselves. "Know you it for your good."

I find that one rendering is, "Know it for yourself." Another man's God is no God to me—He must be, "My Lord and my God." Another man's Christ is no Christ for you—He must reveal Himself to you personally. Another man's faith is no faith for you. God must be your God. Christ must be your Christ and the faith that saves you must be your own faith. God grant that it may be so—then you will know the Lord personally for your good. I must add that we only know things for our good when we know them believingly. To a sinner a promise is as dark as a threat if he does not believe it. Christ, to an unbelieving sinner, is simply a judge. Christ's very death becomes "a savor of death unto death" to the unbeliever and it cannot be "a savor of life unto life" to him unless it is mixed with faith.

When you believe in Jesus, there is a vein of Divine Grace for you in every doctrine of the Bible. You know the promise of the Lord and you know it for your good when you humbly believe that it is so, and humbly take it to yourself because you are resting in Christ. I would to God that many here would know these things for their good! If they did, I should be happy, indeed, and so would they!

Now I have done, but I should like to say this—If there is nothing in religion, why do you come here? If there is salvation in believing in Christ, why are you not saved? You say there is a Hell. Why are you going there? You know that there is a Heaven. Why are you not preparing for it? You know that there is a Christ whose wounds bleed salvation—why are you not looking to Him? Is it all to be play, this religion of yours—going to meetings, sitting in your seats and listening to the preacher? I would rather be silent than be fiddling to your dancing, or go through the service merely to spend a Sabbath in a decorous manner.

Sirs, if you are not saved what shall I do? What shall I do? If you are saved, we will meet in Heaven and we will praise God forever, each one of us—and our Lord shall have all the glory. But if you are lost! If you are lost—I cannot come to you, nor can you come to me—no matter what I do for you before the great gulf divides us. What? What shall I say when I render in my account? Shall I tell the Lord that you were not saved because I was afraid to tell you that there was a Hell and I kept back every threatening doctrine and tried to make things pleasant for you, whether you were saved or not? I could not make that profession even if it could save your souls, for it would not, in any measure, be true!

"I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God" as far as I know it. God is my witness and so are your consciences that I have longed for your conversion! You that have heard me these years, if you are lost, it will not be for lack of pleading with, nor for lack of instruction, nor from lack of entreaties! O Souls, why will you die? Why will you keep on procrastinating and crying, "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow"? Why should it always be tomorrow? There will be no tomorrow of hope for you when once you are lost!

Flee, now, to Christ! I pray you, by the living God and by the Heaven which He gives to those who believe in Christ, hasten to Jesus! Trust yourselves to Jesus now! By that dreadful doom which will surely fall on every man who dies rejecting Christ, I beseech you, flee from the wrath to come! Lord, grant that it may be so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job 5:1-27.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—245, 23 (VERS. III), 757.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON: [The following note from Mr. Spurgeon was read at the Tabernacle last Lord's-Day. The publishers feel sure that sermon readers everywhere will pray for the speedy recovery of the suffering preacher.]

DEAR FRIENDS—I have been in great pain day and night all this week. I earnestly entreat your prayers, for I am brought very low. Yours ever heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, November 20, 1890.

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Job 6,10 #1471 - Concealing the Words of God

CONCEALING THE WORDS OF GOD

NO. 1471

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 27, 1879,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

(On behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society).

"I have not concealed the Words of the Holy One."

Job 6:10.

JOB'S dire distress was aggravated by the remarks of his friends. Eliphaz the Temanite opened fire against him in such words as these— "Behold, you have instructed many and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him that was falling and you have strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon you and you faint; it touches you, and you are troubled." As much as to say, you can preach but you cannot practice. Where are your sermons and advice to others now? It was a shameful thing to throw in the good man's teeth his testimonies in former days, but Job, who under all his sorrow always retained his clearness of intellect and singular shrewdness, took the words of Eliphaz and used them for his own comfort.

They were bread and meat to him, though brought in a raven's mouth. "Yes," he said, "I have comforted many and my words have instructed the ignorant and strengthened the feeble, and this is so much my comfort in the hour of my affliction that I dare even ask God to let loose His hand upon me and end my life. Let Him not spare me, for I have the testimony of my conscience that I have not been disloyal to my God. The taunt of my accuser proves that I have not concealed the Words of the Holy One."

It is always well to be able to turn the enemy's guns upon him and to extract comfort from that which was meant to grieve us. Job made no idle boast when he said that he had not concealed the Words of the Holy One, for we know from his history that he had been a bold confessor of the Truth of God. We are informed that he was carefully watchful as to his own family that the Words of the Holy One should be there esteemed and known, especially that grandest of all holy Words concerning sacrifice and atonement, for we read that when his children had kept birthdays at each other's houses and had fulfilled their days of feasting, "Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, it may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually."

He was earnest for the purity of his family and the keeping up of the sacrifices which were typical of the cleansing of sin—and thus he made known to his descendants the central Word of all the

Words of the Holy One. Even in the time of his affliction the Patriarch had not spoken other than according to the mind of God. What said he when he had lost all his possessions and was left without a child? "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there: the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; and blessed be the name of the Lord." And when his wife, seeing him covered with a loathsome disease, bade him curse God and die, he did not withhold his testimony from her, but said, "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

These were words given him of the Lord in the moment of his need and he shunned not to utter them with all his heart! The Inspired Testimony about this holy man is that, "in all this did not Job sin with his lips." It is clear that in his prosperity Job was a most faithful witness for God. We will not speculate about the time or the place in which he lived, but wherever he lived, he was a man of great influence and was held in high esteem. He says, "When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street, the young men saw me and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking and laid their hand on their mouth."

This influence was always exerted for the cause of truth and righteousness, which is always the cause of God. In the 29th chapter he says of himself, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem." He was thus, by his conduct, a perpetual protest against sin; a continued proclamation of justice, righteousness, mercy and love in the age in which he lived. And he could, therefore, say without any word of egotism, "I have not concealed the Words of the Holy One."

This was now a comfort to him when all other comforts failed—he knew that his affliction was not the fruit of a treacherous departure from God, or a cowardly concealment of his faith. He felt that he could face death and even long for it because he had been loyal to his God and faithful to the light which had been given him from on high. It was not selfrighteousness which led Job to speak thus, but only such a use of the sure evidences of Grace as would be natural and proper in any godly man in the hour of his extremity. It is the nature of obedience to yield peace to the heart and no one can be blamed for enjoying that peace. It cannot be wrong for our consciences to bear testimony to the sincerity and purity of our lives, nor wrong that when our hearts condemn us not, we have confidence towards God.

He who is most undivided in his faith in Jesus may, nevertheless, derive comfort from having been enabled to be loyal to his God. Did not Paul bless God for much the same faithfulness as Job claimed when he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"? Happy shall he be who has a clear testimony within his soul that he has declared the Truth of God in all honesty and earnestness, even to the end. Job had not refrained from an open confession of his own faith in God—he had been known in the gates of the city as a worshipper of the Lord, a perfect and an upright man—one that feared God and eschewed evil. He had never hidden his faith, but had acknowledged one God whom he here calls the Holy One. While many gods and lords divided the fealty of nations, Job was true to the one only God and believed His Words as they were revealed to him. Nor was he content with an open confession of his own faith.

Job had made a continued communication of what he knew to others. He had taught his family—there all teaching should begin. He had taught his fellow citizens by his example—the most powerful of all teaching. Never had he wandered into idolatry, or worshipped the sun when it shined, or kissed his hand to the queen of heaven, but, on the contrary, he had avowed the one and only Lord without fear. He asks, "Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me that I kept silence?" So faithful had he been that he cries, "Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know my integrity." This was high ground to take, but it evidently strengthened the good man's heart to bear his troubles and it will do the same for us if we can win the same witness from our consciences.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, this is a comfort we ought to seek. It should be our care that when we come to die, we may not have to cry, "I was ashamed of Jesus and now I shall find Him ashamed of me! I hid His Truth in unrighteousness, wrapping my talent in a napkin! What shall I do, or where shall I turn? A servant unfaithful to His trust, I have to give an account of my stewardship and I cannot do it! Woe is me!" God grant that we may be able to say with Job, "I have not concealed the Words of the Holy One."

Many professors will greatly need to alter their ways, or they will be covered with confusion in the Day of the Lord. Blessed and holy is he who can declare with David, or rather with David's son, "I have not hid Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation: I have not concealed Your loving kindness and Your Truth from the great congregation" (Psalms 40:10). We have more of the Words of the Holy One than Job had and should, therefore, be the more anxious to make them known. I suppose he had no Inspired Book to read—he could not have had any more than the Books of Moses and probably he had not those—but the Lord spoke to him as He often spoke to the Prophets in the olden time and he had also learned those Truths of God which had been handed down from the earliest days from father to son.

Now we have a vast mass of sacred literature and we have, besides that, the Word Himself, who is the hope of our souls and the Lord of our hearts! O Brethren, if we wickedly hide what God has revealed to us, we shall be veiling a great light and we shall heap up guilt like the hills! When we come to die, we shall feel a misery proportionate to the enormity of our crime—we shall be tortured with agonizing thoughts for having, as far as we were able, quenched the Spirit and blotted out the testimony of the Most High! God forbid that we should be guilty of such an enormity!

Job, according to the language of our text, evidently had a great reverence for every Word of the Lord. He would not have used that term, "the Holy One," if he had not felt the holiness of the Words, themselves, and if he had not stood in solemn awe of Him who spoke them. He felt that they must not be concealed, because the Words of the Holy One should have free course and be published abroad. Should not the word of a king be circulated through the length and breadth of his dominions? Have you and I such a reverence for every revealed Truth of God? Do we stand in awe of every Word of God? If we do, it will be well for us if we practically express our homage after the fashion of David, who said, "With my lips have I declared all the judgments of Your mouth."

The words which God speaks are uttered that we may speak them! It is the best homage to a word to hear it and to repeat it. Let us proclaim God's Words abroad—they are light and are not meant to be hidden! Such candles ought never to be put under a bushel. To hide the Divine Words would be a great sin against the Most High—and to warn you against it will be the aim of this morning's

discourse. I shall speak with the earnest prayer that both to myself and to each one of you there may be a personal voice from God stirring every conscience as to this matter and making each one of us enquire whether or not we, also, can say, "I have not concealed the Words of the Holy One."

We shall divide our subject thus. First, we shall have a little to say about the sin to be avoided. Then we will give some strong arguments for avoiding it. And, thirdly, suggest some methods by which we may be enabled to avoid it.

I. Here is A SIN TO BE AVOIDED, concealing the Words of the Holy One. Now, we can conceal those words from ourselves as well as from others. "How can we conceal them from ourselves?" you ask. I think that very great stress must be laid upon this form of the evil which lies at the root of the second shape of it. We can conceal the Word of God from ourselves in many ways. The Law of God speaks with a searching and threatening voice—it tells us of our sin, it forewarns us of the punishment—and it sets our danger, both present and future, before our mind's eyes.

But there are thousands of persons who never give the Law an opportunity of being heard in their hearts—they turn a deaf ear to anything which is unpleasant to them—they do not like to face the honest Truth of God. You know why this is. Why doesn't a man who is bankrupt in business take any pleasure in his books? Why is it that he postpones all settlements and endeavors to forget his affairs? Is it not because his ruin is near at hand? If there is any Truth of God, my Friend, that you are afraid of, you have cause to be afraid of it! But let me forewarn you that there is no escaping from a fact by endeavoring to forget it!

Every honest man, every brave man, every man who is truly a man, would like to face his true condition and see what and where he is. One of the prayers which I commend to your frequent use is this, "Lord, let me know the very worst of my case that I may not be living upon vain pretensions and may not be pluming myself with being in a happy condition while all the while I am in awful danger." Let it never be said of any one of you that you concealed the Words of the Holy One about yourselves by refusing to feel their force lest they should end the flattering visions of your fond conceit! Love the Truth of God even though it cuts you to the quick. Ask God to search you and try you and to make you sensible of sin and of judgment to come—this is the part of honesty and common sense. You will be foolish, indeed, if you conceal the Words of the Holy One from your conscience and so flatter your soul into destruction. Others conceal the Gospel Word, that Word which speaks of the free gift of pardoning mercy, which is of many offenses unto justification. They go about to find out some way of their own for self-salvation and do not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God. Beloved, pray the Lord to help you to know the Gospel thoroughly and to understand its glorious simplicity, its sweet freeness and boundless fullness! Do not put out the light which, alone, can lead you to eternal life! Do not shut your eyes to the Divine Lamp—do not conceal from yourselves those humbling but yet soul-saving doctrines which make for your souls eternal peace! Shut not against yourselves the one gate of Paradise. Hide the Gospel in your heart, by all means, but hide it not from your heart, lest you sin against your own soul.

I ought, also, to warn every Christian here of concealing any of the Words of God from himself, by accepting half the Truth of God and rejecting the rest. Receive the whole of Revelation. Some professors have favorite texts and choice portions of Scripture—and they regard other parts of the Word with aversion—avoiding them as much as possible because they do not agree with their

system of divinity and need much squaring before they will fit in with their foregone conclusions! They do not read such passages, or they read them carelessly, or a commentator is sought out who, by the exercise of much ingenuity, will impute another meaning than the true one to the Words of God.

Brothers and Sisters, open your souls to Divine Light! Give the Word of God free admittance into your spirits! Lay no embargo upon any form of the Truth of God! Demand no toll for the commodities of Heaven. Let your mind be an open port, carrying on a free trade in the treasures of the Gospel. Believe whatever God says, because God says it, though you may not always see its why and wherefore or perceive its internal consistency. Be prepared and even anxious to know the whole Truth of God as far as you can know it and let it pervade your entire being with its holy influence. It will be a terrible thing if one of these days you shall have to say, "I rejected a great Truth of God. I had a suspicion that it was so, but I did not wish to believe it and so I shut my ears to its evidence. I had a leaning towards the opposite view and I felt committed to it and so refused to change." Open both your eyes, my Brothers and Sisters. If you cannot see everything, yet see all you can see and pray the Lord to take each scale away that you may know all the Truth and so the Truth may make you wholly free.

There is, again, a concealing of the Truth from ourselves in one other respect, namely, when we try to avoid the Word of command. There are some professed Christians of peculiar doctrinal opinions to whom the word, "duty," is something dreadful and if the preacher dwells upon Gospel precepts they call him, "legal." I am not much in awe of that word, myself, for being interpreted it means, lawful, and none of us would like to be unlawful preachers. These folks insinuate that the preaching of the practical precepts of the Gospel is in conflict with the Grace of God and is little better than preaching up human merit! Whereas the doctrine of God our Savior is always a doctrine according to holiness and good works are the sure results of true faith. True Gospel preaching does not decry holy living! No, it sets up the highest possible standard and declares the way to reach it! Beware of picking and choosing in reference to the commands of Christ! Some professors object to much of the teaching of Him whom they call Master and Lord. The forgiving of injuries as we hope to be forgiven; the nonresistance principle of turning the other cheek when one is struck—these are very objectionable to ordinary religionists. Such precepts are denounced as impracticable and it is asserted that they cannot be carried out. Doing unto others as you would that they should do to you is regarded as a golden precept for other people to practice towards our dear selves, but not at all a practical maxim from us to the general public!

When persons speak of our Lord's precepts as good but impracticable, they make Him out to be an amiable simpleton! Is this their reverence for the Incarnate Wisdom? I need not stop to quote examples, but there are many such things in the Word of God as precepts which good men decline to see, which, indeed, they declare that they cannot see! If you put a gold piece over the boldest printed verse in the Bible you will not be able to see the passage—and there are some whose profits in business, whose position in life, above all, whose "respectability" will not allow them to see certain precepts and so they do not see them and they pass through life without obeying the most plain commands of the Lord! I pray you do not do so, for willful ignorance is no excuse for disobedience.

It is written, "He that knew his master's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." And, mark you, he that did not know his master's will, but might have known it and deliberately declined to know it, shall take his place with those who bear the heavier punishment! The plea of ignorance will be of no use to such persons except it is to make them also take their place with the man who receives the few stripes and so they shall partake in both the greater and the lesser scourging, inasmuch as they are worthy to range with both kinds of offenders! Try to know what God would have you do and pray that by His Holy Spirit, when you know it, you may put it into speedy and cheerful practice and this shall be a comfort to you.

Still, the point I want to bring out is that the holy man in our text had not concealed God's Truth from others. We can do this in many ways. We can conceal the Words of the Holy One by not confessing the Truth of God at all. A Christian, but he never said so! He hid himself along with Joseph of Arimathea, although he never offered his new tomb to his Lord. He justified himself by the example of Nicodemus, though he never brought spices for his Lord's burial! There was a time when there might be secret disciples of Christ, but that was before the Cross was lifted up! It is written, concerning our Lord's death, that the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed by it and now Christ's followers follow Him openly. I should not like to be among those who expect to slink into Heaven by a back door some dark night and intend never to disclose themselves till they throw off the mask and stand before the wondering eyes of angels!

Christians who passed through the world disguised as unregenerate men? No, no! Our Lord has said, "He that confesses Me before men, him will I confess. But he that denies Me, him will I deny." Do not run risks upon that score! If you love the Lord, say so! If you expect Him to acknowledge you, acknowledge Him. We may conceal the Words of the Holy One, although we have made an open confession, by a sinful silence about the Gospel towards others. I am afraid I would not be too censorious if I said that there are many professors of religion who never talk of Christ to others and never seek the salvation of anybody.

Are there any such people here in this gallery, or down below in this area? You have found a medicine which has healed your soul, but you never mention it to the thousands who are sick around you? You have not even named it to your own children? Can such cruelty be possible? Where do you sit? Are you there? No, good people, do not move away from him! I hope he still has something human about him, though certainly not much that is humane. You were hungry and you have found bread and you have eaten it—and yet though thousands are around you perishing with hunger, you have no pity on them? Many loaves are in your stores at home, but you spare none for these starving ones! You eat your morsel alone and all the while thousands are dying outside your window, yes, they are perishing by the millions. Do you care nothing for their woes? Are you a man or a demon? The Lord have mercy upon you! I will say no more than this, for I think I need not prove that it must be an atrocious sin for a man to know the Words of the Holy One and not to make them known to others. This sin is easily committed by a silence which pleads modesty, but which ought to confess to cowardice—therefore be aware of the cheat!

Some who speak often, nevertheless conceal the Words of the Lord by their own words. The Roman Catholic Church stands convicted of concealing the Words of the Holy One by the use of the Latin tongue in the daily service. Whatever there is of good in the "mass," ought to be spoken in such language that everybody can understand and receive it. But instead, the people stand and

look on and know not what is being done! And if there is anything that might edify and instruct, they are not cognizant of it because it is hidden from them by words unknown to them.

Protestant! You condemn this practice, but are not many of you as guilty yourselves? Did you listen to that splendid sermon? What rhetoric! What oratory! But those poor people in the aisles did not understand a word, or if they did, they only comprehended disconnected sentences and lost the soul of the discourse. Is this right? Is this according to the Scriptural idea of preaching? "Oh, but," you say, "the great man does not preach to that class of people." But His Master did and He bade men take note that in the Gospel dispensation the poor have the Gospel preached unto them! He would have His ministers preach so that they can be understood of all men! It is a pity when you hang the Cross with your artificial flowers until you hide the wounds of Christ. Down, down, down with all your tawdry rhetoric! Your so-called eloquence deserves a curse since it robs the simple of a blessing! Few things have so much damaged the Church of God as "the wisdom of words." A sweet and solemn simplicity which a child can comprehend is after the fashion of our Master, therefore let us aim at it. When you talk about Jesus Christ, make your speech very plain, lest under the ornaments of your language you should conceal the Words of the Holy One. The thing can be done, again, by clouding the Truth of God with error. There is such a thing as laying a substratum of the Truth of God and then overlaying it with human opinions, after the manner of the boastful school of modern thought whose novelties are set before us as the matured fruit of the culture of the 19th Century—this also is concealing the Words of the Holy One! You may, perhaps, have seen ancient parchments containing words of holy Writ which have been covered over and then re-written with popish legends—these palimpsests (that is their technical name) are the types and symbols of the discourses of the philosophical divines of the school of culture. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is hidden by their so-called "thought"—their own thoughts are set before the thoughts of God! What shall we say to such thinking but that it is a presumptuous setting up of human intellect above the Revelation of the Lord? What shall we say of such culture but that it cultivates a pride which had better have been cut up by the roots? It conceals the Words of the Holy One that fallible man may sit upon the throne of wisdom and make his own religion and be his own god!

We may yet further conceal the Words of God by an inconsistent life. You have often heard it said that the worldling does not read his Bible, but he reads professing Christians—he never troubles to read a chapter, but he reads his godly relatives. Many a man has found Christ through reading some dear and venerated mother whose living and dying experience has been God's testimony to his soul. See, then, if our lives are crooked, perverse, unkind, ungenerous, unholy, selfish, un-Christly—we conceal the Words of God—for men will not read a true Gospel in us, nor have a true idea of our religion. They will not care to hear a Gospel which produces such characters as ourselves, if those characters are unlovely.

Men lay all our faults at the door of our Master and thus we crucify Him afresh. They say, "That is your religion," though they must know better. They will always say so, for after this manner the enemies of God have always gloried over Israel. He who lives not after a godly and holy sort is guilty of concealing the Words of the Holy One in the most injurious manner. Let us all try to avoid this sin because it is contrary to the practical genius of Christianity which commands godly men to shine as lights in the world. Sinful silence, as to the blessed Word of Grace, is rebellion against our Lord's last command—"Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Therefore, be not chargeable with so grave a crime.

II. In the second place we will give a mere outline of the ARGUMENTS FOR AVOIDING THIS SIN. The subject is weighty and deserves a longer consideration, but time compels me to condense. And first, the man who conceals the Word of God is out of order with God. God speaks that He may be heard and that His mind may be known. The evident design of words is to make known the speaker's mind. To run parallel with God's wish, therefore, is to give His Words free course to the ends of the earth.

O you who profess to be a child of God, will you run counter to the design of the Most High? And when He speaks, will you, by concealing His Words, make Him to be as though He spoke not? Such a silence is out of gear with the whole course of Nature. "The heavens are telling the Glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork: day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge." The whole Creation, after its own inarticulate manner, proclaims its Maker and Preserver! Rocks find a voice and waters have a tongue. Stars sing by shining and darkness preaches by its solemnity. Should man, alone, be dumb? God forbid that he should be Creation's silent chord when every other string is vibrating with praise! No, let us pray the Holy Spirit to put us into order with God and with His universe—and let us no more conceal His Words!

If you wish to see the sin of concealing the Gospel, think of the consequences which would have followed if others had done so. If the Apostles had never risked their lives to preach, what had the nations been? If martyrs had never yielded their blood in testimony, would not thick darkness have brooded over the nations? Imagine the consequences, if you can, if Luther had taken the advice of his godly but timid friend, when he said, "Get to your cell and pray: meddle not with things too high for you." Imagine what history would have been if Wycliffe, Tyndal, Calvin, Zwingli and all those lights of the world had hidden themselves through cowardice! They would have been guilty, but we would have been miserable!

Now, what would have been criminal in them must be evil in us, also, in proportion to our degree. We owe it to coming generations that we pass on the torch of the Truth of God as it has been handed down to us. Let us not be unfaithful to our trust. If we conceal the Words of the Holy One, we shall evidently err because the motive for so doing can hardly be supposed to be other than sinful. If we conceal God's Truth, it will probably be out of cowardice—and to be a coward under the command of such a Captain as ours is treason! Probably self-love will be the ruling motive, but we are told expressly that he who loves his life shall lose it and that Christ is to be better loved than life itself.

Those who do not love the Word of God are often moved by pride which cannot stoop to be despised. Or fear which dreads ridicule, or love of the world which seeks the applause of men. Is it not atrocious ingratitude to Him who was derided and spit upon for our sakes if we hide His glory to escape from shame? I feel it difficult to conceive an argument for concealing God's Word which would hold water for a single moment! Certainly I can invent none which will bear the test of the great trial to which we all must come. If, then, the motive of such concealment is evil, it must, itself, be evil.

I have already hinted that common humanity requires that if we have received the precious Truth of God, we should not conceal it. I feel as if your natures responded to the remark and that I needed not again enforce it, having done so already. If you love men; if you would make them happy here; if you would save them from perishing hereafter, I beseech you make known to them

with holy earnestness the way of salvation contained in the Words of the Holy One! For if not, let it be known that all the results of concealment will be chargeable against you! If the next generation should become more wicked than the present and still more ignorant of the Gospel, the fact will be chargeable upon those who conceal the Words of God today! If the masses, through not knowing the Gospel, reject it and continue in their sin, the calamity and crime will be charged upon those dumb lips which never speak of Jesus! If sinners sink to Hell, passing out of this world unsaved and they have come into contact with Christian men who gave them no warning, on whose hands will their blood be found? Yes, more—remember that even if sinners are saved by some other agency it does not exonerate those who neglected to warn them—for since the silence naturally tended to destruction, those who were guilty of it shall be judged as if the uninstructed were destroyed even though, by God's interposition, it is not so! If the natural result of any line of conduct is prevented by Divine interference, its criminality is by no means lessened. The conduct itself may be judged by what it would naturally result in if it were left to itself.

Many a man has been guilty of murder who, nevertheless, did not actually spill his fellow's blood because he did that which he knew would kill. And it is no praise of his that death did not come of it. So, if a corrupt, unholy silence would slay a soul, even though that soul is saved, the wickedly silent one is guilty of soul murder all the same. You are shifting uneasily in your seats, some of you—this is a good sign—for many might do so without being too sensitive. How again, dear Friends, can any man prove his loyalty to his God or his likeness to the Savior if he continues to conceal the Words of the Holy One? What can you do for God but obey Him? And when He speaks to you, you must gladly make known to others the Truth which has sounded in your ears!

How can you be like Jesus, your professed Master, if you have no witness to bear for the good of men? He went about doing good. His life was transparent. He wore the Gospel on His sleeve, spoke it with His eyes and revealed it in His daily life! How can you be like He if you smuggle away the Gospel as if it were contraband to be hidden away from all eyes? How can you bury the priceless Truth of God like a miser who hoards up his cankered gold? Tell all the heavenly message! Tell it all around! Tell it so long as you have a voice! If you are a true servant of God, you can not stifle the voice of Jesus, who, out of Heaven cries to the sons of men!

Now, think once more and we shall see the sinfulness of the conduct we denounce. What will it be to meditate upon your dying bed of having known the Truth of God, but having never, in any way, assisted to spread it? What will it be to die with eternity just before you and to reflect, "I have been a member of a Church many years, but I have never brought in a single convert. I sat in my pew and I knew the Divine Secret, but I never even told a child of it. Neither by pen nor tongue did I make Jesus known. I left that to the minister. I knew there were good people about who cared for men's souls, but I had no such feeling—I kept myself to myself and felt no anxiety about my neighbors. I had very little care as to whether souls were saved or not. I was glad when I heard of an increase in the Church, but not very particularly so. I was rather sorry when things were down—not so sorry that I lost my appetite, or lay awake 10 minutes. I did not trouble myself more than I could help, for I was foolish enough to dream that the best thing I could do was to consult my own interests and I fancied that my chief end was to enjoy myself forever." Now, I can imagine such a person sorely beset with horrors when he comes to die and struggling hard to get anything like a glimpse of hope. His whole life has been that of selfishness—how can he be a Christian? Conscience will ask him, "Is this Christ-like, this keeping back of the Divine Bread from the

perishing millions; this concealing of the Light of God? Surely you are no follower of the Crucified!" How will such conduct look at the Last Great Day? The Lord Jesus will say to some, "I was hungry and you gave Me no meat: I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink." Now mark, these sentences refer to temporal bread and water, but they must be more emphatic, still, when they relate to spiritual things! If the Lord Jesus shall say, "There were hungering souls and you professed to know the Gospel, but you gave them no meat. There were thirsty souls and you professed to have drunk of the Water of Life and you gave them no drink," can there be any answer? Will not such persons stand speechless—dumbly confessing the justice of the sentence, "Depart, you cursed"?

III. I shall close by mentioning one or two METHODS BY WHICH WE MAY AVOID THIS SIN. I am speaking, now, to you who have believed in Jesus and are truly His own disciples. First, take care that you make an open profession of your faith. Come out from the world and unite with the people of God. If you do not make a profession, I do not see how you can be found innocent of the charge of concealing the Lord's Words. When you have done that, keep yourself clear of sinful silence by very often speaking to others of the things of God.

I was greatly pleased this week when a Brother minister said to me, "A man has just joined our Church; a rough man who mixed in company that was not likely much to improve him and yet he has been really made a new man. He was accustomed to go round to houses with small casks of beer for a large brewery and among the rest he called at a certain house where the servant is a member at the Tabernacle. She had not seen him more than once or twice before she began to ask him whether he knew the Savior and to question him about his soul. And when he called each month she spoke to him, again, till at last he who had never thought of religion, nor entered a place of worship at all, was brought to the feet of Jesus and has become an honor to the Church of which he is a member."

This minister said, "I hope all your members do as that servant does." I told him I knew a great many of you did, but no doubt some of you did not. You who do not, may well fidget upon your seats as you take home the hint! From now on, at every opportunity speak of Jesus to those around you, lest you be found guilty of concealing the Words of the Holy One! Some of you cannot speak very much because you are naturally diffident and slow of speech. Try and overcome the infirmity, but if you cannot do so, do not conceal the Words of the Most High on that account, but write letters of personal entreaty. You can do this, can't you? Some of you can write very well, indeed, and you write so much that it is much easier for you to write than for friends to read! As you can write so well, write for Jesus Christ—write earnestly and lovingly for Jesus!

You can also circulate what has been written by other people, though I do not think it so good a thing to do as writing, yourself. You may send tracts and sermons, but let them be such as you may hope that people will read. Sometimes you may write out part of a tract and it will attract them all the more for being your own handwriting. Another thing may be done. If you feel that when you have spoken and written you have still not done much, help other people who have greater gifts. A great deal may be done by imitating Aquila and Priscilla who helped Apollos. It is not given to everybody to preach to large numbers, or to preach at all—but you can often pick out a young man and say, "I will help him in his education and encourage him in his first efforts." You can always help young men by filling the offering box, which supports the College. [Seminary.]

I married a gentleman on this platform, some time ago, who said to me, "I wish I could preach, but I will tell you what I will do. I will support a man to preach—I will find the money and you will find the man." I told him I must have him speak, too, as best he could. He said he would, but he wished to have somebody to speak better. Men of wealth should copy this example. Help the tract distributors, help the city missionaries, help all those who publish the Word of the Lord! [If the Holy Spirit is thus burdening you, a great print/audio ministry is Mt. Zion Publications, a ministry of Mt. Zion Bible Church, in Pensacola, Florida. Write them at 2603 W. Wright St., Pensacola, FL 32505, USA.]

And lastly, and this morning most to the point, there are the heathen perishing for lack of knowledge. Millions of voices call out of the darkness to you, "Come over and help us! You have the Light of God, bring it to us! You have the Living Bread, come and feed us! We perish, we perish, we perish." Brothers and Sisters, the heathen are perishing! Will you let them perish? I wish that some young men here would go for missionaries. One of the leaders of a missionary society cheered my heart last week when he took out of his pocket an old sermon of mine, marked and crossed and scored. He said, "You will like to see that, Mr. Spurgeon." "What about it?" I asked. "That was given to me by a young man who has joined our mission. He read that sermon and marked the passages which touched his heart and now he is at work in China.

I looked upon that sermon with great delight! I think I felt more pleased with that old sermon than if I had received a wreath of gold. I felt gratified that I had brought a young and fervent heart to devote itself to the Lord Jesus Christ. Give me the same joy, each of you! And if you cannot go among the heathen, personally, help others to do so! Give, this morning, a liberal collection and may God accept it at your hands for Christ's sake. Amen.

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Chapter 26

Job 6,6 #1730 - A Cure for Unsavory Meats--Or-Sal

A CURE FOR UNSAVORY MEATS—

OR, SALT FOR THE WHITE OF AN EGG

NO. 1730

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 5, 1883,

BY C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Or is

there any taste in the white of an egg?"

Job 6:6.

THIS is a question which Job asked of his friends who turned out to be

so unfriendly. Thus he battles with those "miserable comforters" who inflamed his wounds by pouring in salt and vinegar instead of oil and wine. The first of them had just opened fire upon him and Job, by this question, was firing a return shot. He wanted the three stern watchers to understand that he did not complain without cause. If he had spoken bitterly, it was because he suffered grievously. He was in great bodily pain; he was enduring great mental depression and, at the same time, he had been smitten with poverty and bereavement. He had, therefore, reason for his sorrow. He had no comforts left and every arrow of grief was sticking in his flesh. If he groaned, he had reason to groan.

His were not sorrows which he had imagined. They were real and true and, therefore, he asks this question first, "Does the wild ass bray when he has grass? Or bellows the ox over his fodder?" If these creatures lift up their notes of complaint, it is when they are starving. When the wild ass cannot find a mouthful of grass, anywhere, then his complaint is heard far and near. When the ox at the stall has no fodder—when he is fastened there and no farmer brings him provision—then he lows and there is good reason for his bellowing. Job seems to say, "I do not complain without cause. If I still enjoyed my former comforts, or even a tithe of them, you should hear no voice of murmuring from me. But I am tried to the utmost. I am grievously afflicted and there is overflowing cause for my moaning."

He had lost all care to breathe. The zest of life was gone. No joy remained to make existence worth the having. He was like one who finds no flavor in his food and loathes the morsel which he swallows. That which was left to him was tasteless as the white of an egg—it yielded him no kind of comfort. In fact, it was disgusting to him. He was fed, he says, upon meat which yielded him no solace. "The things that my soul refused to touch are as my sorrowful meat." Therefore, he virtually asks his friends, "How can you expect me to eat such meat as this without sighs and tears? Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Is there any taste in the white of an egg?"

He means that everything about him had lost its flavor and life had become dull and dreary to him and, therefore, they must not wonder that he uttered words of complaint. The speech, also, to which Job had listened from Eliphaz the Temanite, did not put much sweetness into his mouth, for it was devoid of sympathy and consolation. If you read it at home you will see that it was worthy to be the first of a singular selection of galling utterances. Job, we must admit, was sufficiently acid, himself, and abundantly sarcastic, but his friends produced the irritation and took care to always repay him double for all his wormwood. For every hard speech of his, they returned compound interest. They grieved and vexed his upright soul till he said no more than the truth when he cried, "Miserable comforters are you all."

Here he tells them that Eliphaz had administered unto him unsavory meat without salt—mere whites of eggs without taste. Not a word of love, pity, or fellow feeling had the Temanite uttered. He had spoken as harshly and severely as if he were a judge addressing a criminal who was suffering no more than he deserved. Looking at the speech—and looking at all his surroundings—poor Job feels that he has very unsavory meat to eat and he asks them whether they expect him to eat it without salt. They have given him something that is no more gratifying to him than the white of an egg and he enquires if they really think that he can accept this at their hands and thank them for their treatment.

We may now forget the much-tortured Patriarch, Job, and apply this text to ourselves. "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" Three thoughts arise out of it.

I. The first point will be this—A LACK OF SAVOR IS A VERY GREAT NEED in anything that is meant for food. I am not going to deliver a cookery lecture and so I shall not enlarge upon the passage so far as it refers to the bread upon our table, or the food which we eat and drink. Everybody knows that all kinds of animal life delight in food that has a flavor in it—and even "dumb driven cattle" will turn away from dry, flavorless food and will go a long way to find something that has a juice and a taste in it which suits the palate which God has created in them.

It is exactly the same with regard to the food of our souls. It is a very great fault with a sermon when there is no savor in it. It is a killing fault to the people of God when a book contains a good deal of what may be true, but yet lacks holy savor—or what, in other words, we call, "unction." Somebody says, "Tell us what unction is." I can much more easily tell you what it is not! You know a discourse when there is savor in it—and you also know when a sermon is dry, sapless, marrowless. And yet you could not state the difference in words. Some sermons could not even be suspected of anything like unction—their authors would sneer at you if you accused them of it!

But salt is still to be had. The fat things, full of marrow, are not quite out of the market yet. But what kind of savor is that which we expect in a sermon? I answer, first, it is a savor of the Lord Jesus Christ. Years ago, before ministers grew so wise as to question the Divine Inspiration of Scripture and renounce the Doctrine of Atonement, there used to be men in the country whose ministry was full of savor to the people of God. There were numbers of Christians in London who would go to the north, or go to the south, or go to the east, or go to the west to hear such preachers—and count it a great feast to listen to them! What was there about them? Were they great critics? I do not suppose that the good men ever read a work on criticism.

Were they profoundly learned? Assuredly they were not! Profoundly learned brothers were preaching in churches and chapels where there were more spiders than people! Those who displayed their learning and rhetoric had empty places—but these men were followed by multitudes! Wherever they spoke, the places were too small for them. Those who did not know the reason said, one to another, "What is there about these men? We do not see any peculiar talent." And there was not much. "We do not see any profound learning." And there was none to see. "We do not hear anything of advanced thought and liberal ideas." No, these good men were innocent of these modern diseases!

Yet there are people of God tonight, now gray-headed, who remember the happy hours they spent, and the joyful seasons they knew while hearing these men, and how they journeyed home, perhaps, seven or eight or 10 miles from such a sermon and only wished they could go again the next night, when their labor was done, to be fed again! What was it that made this preaching so attractive, so edifying? What drew the Lord's people so far? What evoked such enthusiasm? Why, it was that the preacher spoke of his Lord and never wandered from the Cross! When we were children we learned Dr. Watts' Catechism of the Bible and I remember one question—"Who was Isaiah?" and the answer was, "He was that Prophet who spoke more of Jesus Christ than all the rest."

Who were these men, then, that were followed by God's people so earnestly? They were men that spoke more of Jesus Christ than all the rest! You have read Dr. Hawker's Morning and Evening Portions, perhaps? I do not suppose that you have learned much of fresh exposition from them, or that you have been struck with any great originality of idea in them. But if you have read them profitably you have said to yourself, "Well, there is this one point in Hawker, his subject is Christ on the first of January, Christ on the last of December and Christ all the other days of the year." He speaks of nothing else but Christ! He seems to bring forth the Lord Jesus in his portions every day as a matter of course, just as your maid always puts the bread on the table, whatever else she does not place there.

So it was with Hawker and men like he—Christ Crucified was their All in All. Their dear Lord and Master was never long absent from their discourses. If they preached doctrine, it was "the Truth of God as it is in Jesus." If they preached experience, it was "to know Him and the fellowship of His suffering." And if they went into practice, as they did, their idea of holiness was to be made like Jesus and to follow Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. Now, I do not believe a sermon can have savor in it unless it has Christ in it, for He has the savor of all good ointments and there is no sweetness without Him!

What shall we say of Him? "Your name is as ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love You." His name is so fragrant that it perfumes Heaven itself! Jehovah smells a savor of rest in the name, Person and work of His well-beloved Son. Therefore an essential to savory meat is that it shall have Christ in it! He has said, "My flesh is meat, indeed, and My blood is drink, indeed." And there is no meat and no drink that has such savor in it as this! Oh, that we might hear more of a crucified Christ in all our places of assembly!

The next necessity to secure savor is a devout spirit in the preacher—a savor of devotion. I am trying to explain savor by not attempting a definition, but by noticing its accompaniments. Why, those men who have now gone to Heaven, whom you used to hear, seemed to be praying while

they preached! Their sermons were devotions as well as discourses! Their rhetoric was rapture, their oratory was emotion. Their preaching came from the heart, but it came also from "the deep that lies under," that secret reservoir of the everlasting Truth of God which is opened up by the Spirit to those who know the Lord, and to none else! They could say, "All my fresh springs are in You." They drew up the Truth of God, which they preached out of this deep—out of the very heart of God!

They preached the Gospel of Grace as men that knew it, loved it, lived on it! It was no irksome task to them to speak of Christ and Grace, and pardon and Covenant faithfulness. You could not always see traces of elaboration or even of preparation about their utterances—you could see something better—the sparkling salt of Divine Grace! If the midnight oil had not smeared their sermons, the unction of the Spirit had anointed them! Their heart was inditing a good matter, for they spoke the things which they had learned touching the King! They spoke with such cheerfulness and reverence that it was good to hear them! They spoke with profound belief that what they said was Infallibly true, for had they not received it fresh from the Spirit of God?

Coming from their heart, it went to your heart—and by their realizing faith you were helped to believe it joyfully! It is an evil sign when a teacher of the Truth of God does not, himself, believe it, for thus he becomes a virtual spreader of error. David said, "I believed: therefore have I spoken." Do you not believe, Brother? Then go home and be quiet till you do! At least, do not come into the pulpit until you know what your Lord would have you say. Woe to the man who lets the smoke of undried wood come from off his hearth and blow into poor seekers' eyes! We need live coals from off the altar—and the less doubt-smoke the better!

Where a man has evidently been with God to learn His Truth and has been baptized into the everlasting spirit of that truth and, therefore, speaks what he knows and testifies what he has seen in the fear of the living God, there is a savor about his witness and the saints discern it gladly. This holy savor cannot be imitated or borrowed! It must come of personal assurance. It is a holy thing and the composition thereof is known only to the great Giver of all spiritual gifts, the Lord, Himself. It is a holy anointing oil which comes not of man's flesh and is far removed from all carnality. It never comes on any man except as it descends from Him who is "the Head," and so drops even to the skirts of His garments. From Christ, alone, the true anointing comes, and blessed is he who is made partaker with Him.

Very well, then, as food without savor is an evil and undesirable sort of food, so is all Christian teaching unacceptable if it lack the savor of Christ and of devotion. Another matter goes to make up sweet savor in a discourse, and that is a savor of experience. You used to delight in those men because they had tasted and tested the doctrines which they preached. The younger Brothers were somewhat at a discount because, you said, "That good Brother speaks fluently, but he cannot have experienced so much as the man of God under whom I have now sat for many years." You prefer to have the Truth of God spoken to you by one who has felt for himself the renewing, upholding and comforting power of Divine Grace.

And I cannot blame you for your liking. If the preacher has done business on great waters, in deep soul trouble, or personal affliction, so much the better for you. If he is one who loves much because much has been forgiven him, so much the better for you. If he is a man conscious of his own infirmity and weakness, who speaks humbly of himself as out of the very dust, though he

speaks confidently the word from Heaven, so much the better for you! Such experience puts a kind of spice into the food which he presents to you. It is so in all our communications one to another. We do not speak with certainty of edification unless we speak of what we have, ourselves, enjoyed.

I have been greatly benefited by hearing an aged blind man stand up and tell of the faithfulness of God to himself. I have been much encouraged, at times, by hearing a poor but gracious woman near to the gates of death telling with tears in her eyes of the goodness of the Lord to her. Testimonies from such people have weight in them. These people do not play at religion! Poor and tried people; people with aches and pains; people who have none of this world's comforts; people on the borders of the grave tell us of the great Father's love—and when they do so, there is great force of conviction in their testimony. We attach weight to every word they say because their experience is taken into consideration.

I never heard a man who spoke more to my soul than dear Mr. George Mueller. The sermon that I heard from him was like an address to a Sunday school, it was so simple and unadorned. But then there was the man behind it—that simple-hearted child of God who has believed the promises and has gone on doing wonders such as astonish all beholders! That man has no more doubt about God's answering his prayers than he has about two times two making four—why should he have? He acts out the Truth of God which he has received—why shouldn't he? Entertaining no modern questions and no ancient questions, either, he triumphs by knowing the Truth of God and living the Truth of God, and rejoicing in the Truth of God! Such a man is a pattern and example to us all. And there is a precious savor in what he utters because he speaks experimentally of Truths which he has carried out in his own life.

Thus three things help to make up savor in sermons—Christ as the doctrine, devotion as the spirit and experience as adding weight to testimony. But these three things are not the whole of it. There is a sacred something—it is not nameless, for I will name it, by-and-by—it is a heavenly influence which comes into man, but which has no name among the things that belong to men. This sacred influence pervades the speaker, flavoring his matter and governing his spirit—while, at the same time, it rests upon the hearer so that he finds his mind awake, his faculties attentive, his heart stirred. Under this mysterious influence the hearer's spirit is in a receptive condition and, as he hears the Truth of God, it sinks into his soul as snowflakes drop into the sea. He finds himself warmed, cheered, comforted and stirred up as fainting men are apt to be when refreshed after a long fast.

Now, what is this? From where comes this savor? In a word, it comes of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit bears witness with the Word of God upon the quickened heart and conscience of the people of God—and that Word of God becomes life, light and power to them. All this we greatly need! And if we have it not, what shall we do? I have often trembled as I have come to preach here lest I should have to speak among you without the help of the Divine Spirit. It would be much better to be silent. I could almost wish that we had the liberty of our Quaker friends just to sit still until we feel that we are moved to speak, for sometimes we might do better to wait without a spoken word for the hour and a half rather than for one of us to talk without the guidance of the Spirit of God!

Pray much, Beloved, that there may be a great deal of dew about—that heavenly showers may fall on us and on all the Churches of God! Let our belief in the Holy Spirit never become a mere

compliment which we feel bound to pay Him, but in deep and reverent sincerity may we acknowledge that He is the great Worker in the Church—the real actor and doer of the wondrous works of quickening, saving and comforting! Let us wait upon Him with lowly spirits, feeling that we can do nothing without Him, but that if He is with us then all is well. Take away from any preaching or any teaching Christ as the subject, devotion as the spirit, experience as the strength of testimony—and the Holy Spirit as being All in All—and you have removed all the savor!

And what is left? What can we do with a savorless Gospel? "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Is there any taste in the white of an egg?" They said of a Brother, the other day, that he liked savory doctrine. "He had a sweet tooth," they said. It was said in scorn, but if there is anything to be scoffed at in that matter, I desire to be a partaker in the reproach, for I have a sweet tooth, myself! I like such books as have savor in them and I declare to you that whatever scorn it brings upon me, I think that the majority of modern books seem to me to be fit for nothing but to be burned! The old theology has the sweetness and the savor in it which the people of God delight in and I, for one, mean to stick to it, for I cannot eat the white of your eggs—I cannot endure your unsavory meat!

I must hear of the electing love and Covenant purpose of the Father— this is savory meat such as my soul loves! I must have teaching that is full of Christ, the Doctrines of Grace and the Holy Spirit, or my soul will die of famine! This is my first head.

II. Our second remark is this. I find a rendering given to the text, which, if it is not absolutely accurate, nevertheless states an important truth, namely, that THAT WHICH IS UNSAVORY FROM NEED OF SALT MUST NOT BE EATEN. I shall only mention this second head as a note of caution. A word to the wise suffices. There is a great deal in this world which is unsavory for lack of salt. I mean in common conversation. Alas, it is easy to meet with people—even people wearing the Christian name— whose conversation has not a particle of salt in it. Nothing that tends to edification is spoken by them. Their talk has an abundance of gaiety, but no Grace in it. They exhibit any amount of frivolity, but no godliness.

In other conversation there is weighty information and solid upon common matters, but there is a lack of that spirit which God's people desire to live in, for the Lord Jesus is forgotten. Someone said to me, the other day, "When we were young people, we knew many good old folk who used to meet together and talk about the Lord Jesus Christ by the hour together. And we used to sit and wonder whether we should ever join in such talk as that. But where do you hear it now?" So I said to him, "I hope that we can hear it in a great many places." He said, "I do not meet with it. I find that the ordinary talk among professors has not much in it for the helping of souls onward towards Heaven." I do not profess to form a judgment on this matter, but I will say this—it is a great pity if holy conversation is a scarce commodity—and it is well for you and for me to get away from that conversation which does not benefit us. If there is no salt in conversation, it will be unsavory to a true Christian spirit, and the less he has of it, the better.

Again, there is some talk in the world—I hope not among professors— which has no salt in it even of common morality and, consequently, it corrupts and becomes impure and obnoxious. Old Trapp says, somewhat roughly, that it is full of maggots and that is, perhaps, what Job meant. That is to say, many persons use coarse allusions and evil suggestions—to such things shut your ears! Things are often said which sparkle, but the flash is born of decay. The wit which owes its

pungency to sin is of the devil. The brilliance which comes of corruption is not for holy eyes. Oh, child of God, never tolerate it in your company! If it is not in your power to stop evil communications, remove yourself out of their reach. It is not for us to associate with those whose lips are cankered with lascivious words.

We have enough within these gunpowder hearts to make us afraid to go near the forge when the sparks are flying about. Let us keep ourselves from ever permitting corrupt communication to proceed out of our own lips—that would be horrible, indeed. Let us avoid all company in which the purity of a renewed heart would be in danger of taint. Yet I fear that in our daily avocations we shall have grave cause to watch against the things which are unsavory and corrupt, for the preserving salt is not so abundantly used in these days as it ought to be.

Now, the same thing is true, not only of common conversation, but of a great deal of modern teaching. Have nothing to do with teaching that is tainted with heresy, Brothers and Sisters! If a man's discourse has not salt enough in it to keep false doctrine out of it, it is not the kind of food for you. Clean provender is not so scarce that you need to eat carrion. Some like their meat rather high and there are hearers who are inclined to a preacher who has a sniff of heresy about him. But, as for us, our taste conducts us where salt is found. Where Grace is lacking we are not eager to be feeding! The banquets of the Truth of God need not be supplemented by the tables of error. But I shall not dwell upon this because I require all my time for the third head.

III. The third point is that THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS IN THE WORLD WHICH NEED SOMETHING ELSE WITH THEM. "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" There are many things in this world which we cannot tolerate by themselves—they need seasoning. One of the first of these may read us a lesson of prudence, that is, reproof. It is a Christian duty to reprove a Brother who is in a sin—we should speak to him with all gentleness and quietness—that we may prevent his going farther into evil and lead him back to the right way.

But will you please remember, Brothers and Sisters, that the giving of reproofs is delicate work and needs a delicate hand. It was said of good Andrew Fuller that frequently he gave a rebuke so severely that it reminded you of one who saw a fly upon his Brother's forehead and seized a sledge hammer to knock it off. It is the habit of some Brethren to do everything forcibly. But in this case one needs more love than vigor, more prudence than warmth, more Grace than energy. Some persons have a very quick eye for the faults of others and they have a ready tongue to descant upon them when they perceive them—to all which they add a tendency to exaggerate the importance of the fault.

Now, these Brethren always reprove in a wrong way. Listen. One of them cries—"Come here, Brother! Come here. Let me take that beam out of your eye." The aforesaid "beam" is really only a gnat and the Brother who is addressed becomes indignant at such injustice and will not have his eye touched at all. Why destroy your own influence by such unwisdom? If the gnat can be removed, well and good. But if you will ruin the eye in the process, would it not be better to leave it alone? We have known persons who, to spread the Truth of God, have killed love, which is the Truth of God's life. They wish to set a Brother right in doctrine and, in order that his sight may be clearer, they knock his eyes out and call it "controversy."

It is one thing to be "valiant for the truth," and quite another thing to be bitter for your own opinion. Rebuke, however kindly you put it, and however prudently you administer it, will always be an unsavory thing! Therefore, salt it well. Think over it. Pray over it. Mix kindness with it. Rub the salt of brotherly love into it. Speak with much deference to your erring friend and use much tenderness, because you are not faultless yourself. Speak acknowledging all the excellences and virtues of your Brother which may, after all, be greater than your own. And try, if you can, to wrap up what you have to say in gentle words of praise for something else in which the friend excels. Express the rebuke in one of your Master's sentences, if you can find one that will exactly fit. Give your patient the pill silver-coated with gentleness—it will be received the more willingly and have none the less efficacy.

If you speak unkindly, the reproved one may turn round upon you in anger. And if you ask him why he is angry, he may answer, "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" Do not expect your neighbor to eat your eggs without salt! Do not expect him to receive your words of rebuke without the true kindness of voice and spirit which will act as salt. Be not silent about sin, but be not harsh in your rebuke of it. Savor your admonitions with affection and may the Lord make them acceptable to those who need them. Now, for other matters which many people do not like by themselves. I mean the Doctrines of the Gospel. The true Doctrines of the Gospel never were popular and never will be, but there is no need for any of us to make them more distasteful than they naturally are. The human heart especially revolts at the Sovereignty of Divine Grace. Man is a king, so he thinks, and when he hears of another King, he straightway grows rebellious. Man would have God bound hand and foot to give His mercy as man likes—and when the Lord defies the bond and declares, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion," man burns with wrath!

When the Lord says, "It is not of him that wills or of him that runs, but of God who shows mercy," man is up in arms! He will not tolerate the Divine prerogative. It becomes us who preach this doctrine to take care that we do not add needless offensiveness to it. Not one of the Doctrines of Grace is palatable to natural man. He does not like the truth of Total Depravity. Over that he grows exceedingly angry. He calls it a libel upon the nobility of human nature. I have often read of human nature as a noble thing, but I am sorry to say that I have never seen it in that aspect. I am told that our fallen nature is sublime and that we defame mankind when we speak of them as altogether fallen and say, "There is none that does good, no, not one." It is little wonder that this is unsavory to carnal pride!

As to the doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone, Mrs. Toogood stamps her foot at such teaching—is she to be none the better for all her good works? Mr. Good-Enough gnashes his teeth at the idea that human merits cannot save! He cannot endure to hear that we must be saved by faith in Jesus Christ and that the most moral and excellent need Christ just as much as the most depraved and abandoned! Carnal minds have no taste for the Gospel—they rave against the system of theology that glorifies God! Man wants to be the great MAN and he would have God to be the little god and then he will be satisfied. But if God is set on high as being All in All, then straightway many are offended.

Brothers and Sisters, since we need people to receive these doctrines, what must we do? We must mix an abundance of salt with them! If the Gospel is distasteful, we must add flavoring to it.

What shall it be? We cannot do better than flavor it with holiness! Where there is a holy life, men cannot easily doubt the principles out of which it springs. If it is so that men and women are kindly, generous, tender, affectionate, upright, truthful, Christ-like because of the doctrines they hold, then the world begins to think that there must be truth in those doctrines! The evangelical school must always draw its strongest arguments, first, from the Gospel and, next, from the lives of its believers—and if we cannot point to those who profess this faith as being famous for holiness—what will the world say?

In former ages, holy living has been our battle-ax and weapons of war. Look at the Puritan age. To this day it is the stumbling-block of infidelity! In these times it is very common to laugh at the Puritans and to say that their faith is worn out and that we have got beyond their teaching. And yet the very same men who say this cannot read Carlyle's writings without marveling at Oliver Cromwell and the great men who trooped around him. Do they never say to themselves, "Upon what meat did these men feed that they have grown so great?" They cannot turn to the lives of the Puritans without reading how they saturated all England with godliness, till, as you passed down Cheapside in the morning, you would have noticed that there was scarcely a single house in which the blinds were not drawn down because the inhabitants were at family prayer!

The whole land felt the force of the Truth of God and righteousness through these men—these poor, benighted, foolish Puritans whom our boys fresh from college call by names. In their contests for the Truth of God, the Puritans were as mighty as Cromwell's Ironsides in the days of battle when they drove the foe before them like chaff before the wind! Then there followed an age of driveling in which our Non-conformity existed—but gradually dwindled down, first into Arminianism and then into Unitarianism—until it almost ceased to be. Men know that it was so and yet they would act it all over again! They read history and yet demand that the old Doctrines of Grace should again be given up—and the experiment be tried again of starving our churches with human philosophies. Oh, fools and slow of heart! Will not history teach them?

No, it will not if the Bible does not. If they hear not Christ and His Apostles, neither will they believe even though another Unitarian ghost should pass before their eyes. Surely evil days are near unless the Church shall again clasp the Truths of God to her heart! But I diverge. The point I had in hand was this—that in the case of the Puritans, their doctrines were rendered respectable and forceful by their glorious lives—and it must be so now. Holy living must salt our doctrines! We must be like Christ that men may believe what we have to say about Christ!

Now, a third egg which cannot be eaten without salt is affliction. Afflictions are very unsavory things. I think I hear one say, "I should not mind any affliction except the one which now oppresses me." Brother, you speak as other foolish Brethren have done before you! This has been my language in my turn! Somebody sitting next to you would not mind your affliction at all—at least that is what he thinks! He thinks it is his own cross which is so galling. The loads borne by people in yonder street have no great weight for you. But if you had to carry a sack of flour, yourself, the sack would prove very heavy. We all know the weight of our own burden and we underestimate that of others. People in trouble know where their own shoe pinches—yet other people's shoes pinch, too—and other people's crosses are weighty. "No affliction for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous."

Afflictions are unsavory meat. What is to be done with them, then? Why, let us salt them, if we can. Salt your affliction with patience and it will make a royal dish! By Grace, like the Apostle, we shall, "glory in tribulations also." Look at those who endure constant infirmities. Do you know any? I do. A dear Sister has been blind many years and yet I do not know a happier woman than she. She has more visions of joy than the most of us, though her eyes are closed to the light of the sun. I know a Brother in the ministry who has lost his sight almost entirely, but he preaches more sweetly than he ever did! He has become a seer in our Israel, enjoying a depth of insight into the Truths of God which few possess. Truly the lame take the prey!

Some that are deaf hear the voice of their Master better than others. And so infirmities become things to glory in, since more of Christ's power rests upon us. It is so when the Lord gives Grace to the poor man and he becomes content with his lot. Has he not far greater joy than the rich man who still craves for more? Many of God's poor prisoners in the martyr days were happier in prison than they ever were out of it. In the days of the Covenanters, when they worshipped God on the bleak hill or by the moss side, the Lord was specially near to them. When those times had passed away and they went to plenty and sat with the congregation undisturbed, they said, "Ah, man, the Lord was not here today as He was out on the brae and on the hillside." The Master was transfigured before His disciples among the mists of the glens. Then He wore no veil over His face, but He revealed Himself so clearly that the sanctuary among the hills was none other than the House of God and the very gate of Heaven!

The Lord salted their afflictions with His Presence and with the abundant power of the Holy Spirit—and so they enjoyed a sweet savor in them. It is even thus with you and me—

"I can do all things, or can bear All sufferings if my Lord is there. Sweet pleasures mingle with the pains, While His left hand my head sustains."

There now, Brother, do not go on eating that egg without salt! No longer say to yourself, "Here is nothing but the white, with no taste in it. I cannot bear to eat such loathsome food." Put the salt in, Brother! Put the salt in, Sister! Have you been forgetting that salt? Have you failed to ask the Lord for Grace equal to your day? Grace to see that "all things work together for good to them that love God"? Be forgetful no longer, but throw in a pinch of salt! Then the tasteless thing will go down comfortably enough and you will bless the name of the Lord for it.

I will not detain you longer to speak about persecution, though that is another unsavory article with which salt of consolation is much to be desired. But, lastly, there is the thought of death. Is not death an unsavory thing in itself? The body dreads dissolution and corruption and the mind starts back from the prospect of quitting the warm precincts of this house of clay and going into what seems a cold, rarefied region where the shivering spirit flits naked into untried mystery. Who likes to sit down and think of his last hour—the corpse, the coffin and the shroud? The spade, the mattock and the falling clods make poor music for happy minds! Who cares for morgues?

Oh, but dear Friends, thoughts of death, when they are salted, are among the richest, daintiest things that ever come to the Believer's table! What is it to die? Is it not to end our pilgrimage and come to the place where the many mansions are? Is it not to quit the storm-tossed seas for the Fair Havens where all is forever bliss? Death strips the soul of its garments and, by itself, this seems a trying process—but season it well and you will long for evening in order to undress that

you may rest with God! Salt it well and you will almost grow impatient of your length of days and look for your last hours as children do for their holidays when they may go home!. Salt it well and your heart will grow like hers whose husband tarries away and she reckons how long it will be before he will come home, again, to her house and to her heart!

You will cry, "Why are His chariots so long in coming?" I have known saints to salt their thoughts of death until they were transfigured into visions of Heaven and they began to drink of that wine of the Kingdom which the Beloved will drink new with us in the day of His appearing! Oh, happy spirits who can do this! "What salt," you ask, "shall I mingle with my thoughts of death?" Why the thought that you cannot die! Because He lives, you shall live, also! Add to it the persuasion that though you are dead, you shall yet live. Thoughts of the Resurrection and the swinging open of the pearly gates and of your entrance there! Thoughts of the vision of the Well-Beloved's face! Thoughts of the glory that shall be yours forever and ever at His own right hand! These are the things with which to savor your meditations among the tombs.

As for you that are not in Christ, you must eat this unsavory meat and there will be no salt with it. I see you put it away from you. You say, "No, I do not mean to think of death." Oh, Man, but you will have to die, and it may be soon. Oh, Woman, you will have to die—the seeds of death are now in your bosom. As surely as you live, you will have to die! And after death, the judgment. This is the meat which will be laid in your dish and there will be no leaving it. This is the white of the egg and you must even down with it, whether you will or not! It has no taste which your palate can enjoy. It has no savor about it but that of fear. Ah, when your conscience awakes, what will you do with the burning thought that, dying, you must go where hope can never come?

O Soul, if you pass out of this world as you are, you can never see the face of God with joy! You will be driven from His Presence and from the glory of His power to experience what it means—"Where their worm dies not and their fire is not quenched." They say that everlasting does not mean everlasting. What then? Are the righteous to perish after a while? In these two sentences the same word must mean the same thing—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." If eternal life lasts forever, so must eternal punishment!

When the righteous cease to be, the wicked will cease to be. When the godly cease their joy, the ungodly will cease their misery—but not till then! That is unsavory meat for you. The Lord help you to salt it, even now, by believing in Jesus and so finding eternal salvation. Amen.

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Job 7,1 #1258 - The Hand of God in the History of

THE HAND OF GOD IN THE HISTORY

OF A MAN

NO. 1258

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 10 1875,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? Are not

his days also like the days of an hireling?"

Job 7:1.

I WAS settling myself down yesterday to meditate upon the Word of God and to prepare my mind to preach the Gospel to you today, when, all of a sudden I had my subject marked out for me by a mournful messenger, for the Angel of Death pointed to it with his finger. There came into my chamber an honored elder of this Church, who in broken accents told me, "Our beloved Brother, Henry Olney, is dead." He is my near neighbor and I was in his house so lately that I could not believe the news. It seems that when he left the City at noon he felt a severe rheumatic pain in his shoulder, and on reaching home he sent for a doctor, who prescribed a slight remedy and advised him to lie down. He did so, and with a gasp or two, he expired.

A man in the prime of life and apparently in full vigor of health, he went to his business for the last time that morning and returned to die. The blow has fallen so suddenly that I am stunned and staggered by it, nor do I think that either of his three brothers, whose familiar faces we miss this morning, have yet recovered from the amazement caused by the stroke. Many around me were with him so short a time since that it is hard to believe one's own eyes and feel sure that there he lies, a cold corpse, motionless upon the bed. But, oh, my Brothers and Sisters, how true it is that in the midst of life we are in death! And those who often die first are they who least expected to go. If I had said to you this morning that our Brother, William Olney, was gone, you would have said, "We are grieved at our loss, but we do not wonder, for he has been long sick."

But here, the strong and stalwart brother, who ailed nothing, has been taken away, while, thank God, the languishing invalid is still spared to us. Thus do they remain who expected to depart, and they depart who expected to remain. Who among us can reckon upon a single hour? We talk of being living men—let us correct ourselves and feel, from this moment on, that we are dying men, whose every breath brings us nearer to the grave! We are and are not. We walk in a vain show and are disquieted in vain. We are unsubstantial as the shadows of the flying clouds which on a summer's day flit over the face of the field and are gone!

When I look at that seat where our departed friend sat for years, the Lord seems to have come very near to us. I could almost take my shoes off in awful consciousness of His terrible Presence. We can no longer think of the Lord as far away in Heaven. He has been among us—He who touches the hills and they smoke has set His eyes upon our Brother, and lo, he is not! Let me put it in a gentler manner—our Lord came into His garden to gather lilies and His hand has been filled to our sorrow. When our heavenly Father comes so near to us and in so solemn a manner, let us ask Him why He contends with us. Let us, in solemn reverence, approach Him that we may hear His answer and may be obedient to His Word.

The flower of the field stands amid the grass, unconscious that the mower's scythe is busy, and though swath after swath has fallen beneath the pitiless stroke, the flower smiles gaily! It cares not for its associates in the same field and reckons not of its own speedy fall. Its leaves are wet with dew and its colors are bright in the sun. It mourns not for its fellows, but rejoices in unconsciousness of all that happens around it. In this respect you are not as the grass of the field, but are endowed with understanding, so that you are able to be instructed, or at least, warned, by the fall of those around you.

The sheep in their folds remark not that their fellows are taken away to the slaughter. The cattle graze in the meadows in happy ignorance that death is all around. You, however, are not "dumb, driven cattle." To you it is given to know your own mortality—and you cannot suffer your comrades to be taken away, one after another so rapidly, without feeling emotion and gathering wisdom. You will hear the rod and Him that has appointed it, and this morning you will ask Divine Grace that the dead may be your schoolmasters and yourselves the scholars who cry, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

As best I shall be able, this morning, I shall try and teach you, by the help of God's Spirit, one lesson. It is this—Divine appointment rules human life. And when we have learned that lesson, we shall, in the second place, draw inferences from this Truth of God.

I. First, then, let us consider a Truth of God which, I trust, none of us have ever denied, but have heartily accepted ever since we have been Believers. THERE IS A DIVINE APPOINTMENT RULING ALL HUMAN LIFE. Not that I single out man's existence as the sole object of Divine forethought, for I believe it to be but one little corner of illimitable Providence. A Divine appointment arranges every event, minute or magnificent!. As we look out on the world from our quiet room, it appears to be a mass of confusion. He who studies history and forgets God might think that he was looking out on chaos, for events seem flung together in terrible disarray, and the whole scene is as darkness itself, without any order.

Events happen which we deeply deplore—incidents which appear to bring evil, and only evil—and we wonder why they are permitted. The picture before us, to the glance of reason, looks like a medley of color with dark shades where lights seemed necessary, and glowing color where we might have looked for masses of black. Human affairs are a maze of which we cannot discover the clue. The world appears to be a tangled mess and we weary ourselves with vain endeavors to disentangle it. But, Brethren, the affairs of this world are neither tangled, nor confused, nor perplexing to Him who sees the end from the beginning. To Him all things are in due course and order, and before Him all forces keep rank and file. God is in all and rules all!

In the least as well as in the greatest, Jehovah's power is manifested. He guides the grain of dust in the March wind and the comet in its immeasurable pathway. He steers each drop of spray which is beaten back from the face of the rock and He leads forth Arcturus with his sons. God is the dictator of destinies and appoints both means and ends. He is the King of kings, ruling rulers and guiding counselors. Alike in the crash of battle and in the hush of peace, in the desolation of pestilence and famine, and in the joy of abounding harvests, He is Lord! He does according to His will, not only in the army of Heaven, but among the inhabitants of this lower world. Yon fiery steeds, which dash so terribly along the highway of time, are not careering madly—there is a Charioteer whose almighty hands have held the reins for ages—and will never let them go!

Things are not in the hurry-burly which we imagine, but driven onward by a power which is irresistible. They are under law to God, and speed onward without deviation towards the goal which He designs. All is well, Brothers and Sisters! It is night, but the Watchman never sleeps, and Israel may rest in peace. The tempest rages, but it is well, for our Captain is governor of storms! He who trod the waves of the Galilean lake is at the helm and, at His bidding, winds and waves are quiet. Our main point is that God rules mortal life and He does so, first, as to its term—"Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?" He rules it, secondly, as to its warfare, for so the text might most properly be read—"Is there not an appointed warfare for man upon earth?" And, thirdly, He rules it as to its service, for the second clause of the text is, "Are not his days as the days of an hireling?"

First, then, God's determination governs the time of human life. We shall all acknowledge this as to its commencement. Not without infinite wisdom did any infant's life commence then and there, for no man is the offspring of chance. Not without a world of kindness did your life commence, dear Friend, just where and when it did. Our child's little hymn, in which he thanks God that he was not "born a little slave to labor in the sun," contains a good deal of truth in it. A man's whole life is mainly guided by its commencement—had we been born as thousands are where God was never known, we might have been idolaters at this hour!

Who would wish to have first seen the light at the era when our naked forefathers sacrificed to idols? Who would wish to have stepped upon the stage of life amid the dense darkness of popery, when our childish hands would have been lifted up by superstitious parents in adoration of the Virgin Mary, and we should have been taught to worship some bone fragment or rotten rug, superstitiously believed to be a relic of a saint? 'Tis no small thing to have been born in the nineteenth century, when works of Grace are to be seen on every side! Many of us should bless the Lord every day because in infancy we lay upon a Christian woman's bosom and were lulled to sleep with the sound of holy hymns of which the name of Jesus was the theme! Our tiny feet were taught to run in the ways of righteousness, as far as parental instruction could effect the same, and this was no insignificant advantage. Blessed are the eyes which see the things which we see and hear the things which we hear! All this is by the appointment of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Our presence on earth in this day of Grace was a matter altogether beyond our control, and yet it involves infinite issues—therefore let us, with deepest gratitude, bless the Lord, who has cast our lot in such an auspicious season.

The continuance of life is equally determined by God. He who fixed our birth has measured the interval between the cradle and the grave, and it shall not be a day longer or a day shorter than the

Divine decree. How many times your lungs shall heave and your pulses beat have been fixed by the eternal calculator from of old. What reflections ought to arise out of this! How willing we should be to labor on, even if we are weary, since God appoints our day and will not over-weary us, for He is no hard taskmaster!

How glad we ought to be, even, to suffer if the Lord so ordains it. It is sweet music, that God draws forth from patient sufferers, and though the strings have to be painfully tightened every now and then with many a grief and pang to us, yet if those dear hands of the Chief Musician can fetch out richer melody from those tightened strings, who among us would wish to have it otherwise, or ask to have the harp withdrawn from that beloved Harper's hand before the wondrous strain is over?

No, let us wait, for He appoints. If our griefs were the offspring of chance, we might pine to have them ended, but if the loving Lord appoints, we would not hurry Him in His processes of love. Let the Lord do what seems good to Him. Here is good cheer for those who have lain so long upon the bed of pain and who are apt to ask—"Will it never end? O Lord, will the chariots of salvation never come? Have the angels quite forgotten Your servant in his sickness? Must he forever remain a prisoner under his infirmity, loneliness and decay? Have You placed me as a sentinel to stand upon my watchtower through a night which will never end? And shall I never be relieved from my weary guard? Shall I never know rest? Must I forever peer into the dark with these eyes so red with weeping?"

Courage, Brother! Courage, Sister, the Lord, the Ever Merciful, has appointed every moment of your sorrow and every pang of your suffering. If He ordains the number 10, it can never rise to 11, neither should you desire it to shrink to nine. The Lord's time is best—to a hair's breadth your span of life is rightly measured. God ordains all—therefore peace, restless spirit, and let the Lord have His way. So, too, has He fixed life's termination. "Is there not an appointed time for man upon earth?" A time in which the pulse must cease, the blood stagnate and the eyes are closed? Yes, my Brethren, it is of no use for us to indulge any idle dream of living forever here! A time of departure must come to every one of us, unless the Lord, Himself, should appear all of a sudden and then we shall not die, but be changed. There is no man among us that lives and shall not see death. In this war there is no discharge. Not only do the Scriptures teach us so, but our common sense and reason put the matter beyond all question. What do the gray hairs mean which fall like snow flakes upon our heads? What do that stooping gait and failing strength mean? What do the dimness of the eyes and the tottering of the limbs mean? Do they not all show that the house is about to come down, for the frame and plaster of it are beginning to give way? Yet our earthly house will not fail us till the time ordained of Heaven! There is an appointed time for death and God has fixed how we shall die, when we shall die and where we shall die—

"Though plagues and deaths around me fly, Till He pleases I cannot die Not a single shaft can hit Till the God of love sees fit."

Diseases eager to slay are in ambush all around us, but none of their swords can come at us till Jehovah gives them leave. Behold, the Lord shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust, nor shall nightly pestilence nor midday destruction make you afraid—

"What, though a thousand at your side At your right hand ten thousand died, Our God, His chosen people saves Amongst the dead, amidst the graves."

We are immortal till our work is done, but that work will not last forever, and when it is concluded we shall have fulfilled our day and shall receive our summons Home. All this is true. None will venture to dispute it, but let us remember that it is true for ourselves at this moment. For you, my Brothers and Sisters, it is true while you sit here. Realize it, and do not look on others as dying men while you, yourselves, are secure of a long life. Be you, also, prepared to meet your God suddenly, for so you may be called to do. This fact is most solemn. We shall not live, but die, and that death may come in an instant. As I saluted my Brothers, this morning, in the vestry, I could not help expressing my pleasure and surprise that any of us were alive, for certainly it was quite as much a wonder that certain of us were alive, as that our friend should be dead.

We might as readily have been taken away as he, and even more readily. God had ordained his death, but He might have ordained ours. "Be you, also, ready; for in such an hour as you think not the Son of Man comes." Yet this fact, to my mind, is most strengthening. The doctrine of Predestination, when really believed, is like steel medicine. It infuses a deal of iron into the mental system and builds up strong men! I am not such a Predestinarian as Mohammed, who bade his soldiers rush to the fight, "for," he said, "when your time comes to die you will die at home as well as in the battle, and Paradise is to be found beneath the shadow of swords." But still I see that while the doctrine makes some men slumber, it is, to nobler souls, a mighty source of energy and a fountain of courage.

If duty calls you into danger—if you have to nurse the sick who are laid low with foul diseases—never shrink, but run all risks if love to God or man demand them of you. You will not die by a stray arrow from Death's quiver! The Lord, alone, can recall your breath. Your death is not left to chance—it is determined by a heavenly Father's gracious will—therefore be not afraid. Be not so fearful of pain, or so anxious to preserve life as to be held back where Jesus calls you, for in such a case he that saves his life shall lose it. You may not be reckless and rush on danger without reason—that were madness—but you will, I trust, be brave and never fear to face death when the voice of God calls you into peril.

Moreover, how consoling is this Truth of God for, if the Father of our Lord Jesus arranges all, then our friends do not die untimely deaths! The beloved of the Lord are not cut off before their time. They go into Jesus' bosom when they are ready to be received there. God has appointed the times for the gathering in of His fruit. Some of them are sweet, even, in early spring, and He gathers them. Others are as a basket of summer fruit and He takes these, also, while the year is young, while yet another company needs to remain among us till autumn mellows them. Each class shall be gathered in its season. Now of all this we are, by no means, competent judges. We know nothing, for we are infants of a day. God knows best. It were better that our friend should die, as die he did, than that he should live, otherwise he had lived. Be sure of that. Yes, God has appointed the commencement, the continuance and the conclusion of this mortal life.

But we must now consider the other translation of our text. It is generally given in the margin of the Bibles. "Is there not an appointed warfare to man upon earth?" Which teaches us that God has appointed life to be a warfare. To all men it will be so, whether bad or good. Every man will find himself a soldier under some captain or another. Alas, for those men who are battling against God and His Truths—they will, in the end, be clothed with dishonor and defeat. I shall, however, speak mainly of the righteous and, truly, their experience shows that life is one long struggle from which

we never cease till we hear the words, "Your warfare is accomplished."

Brothers and Sisters, life is a warfare and, therefore, we are all men under authority. No Christian is free to follow his own devices. We are all under law to Christ. A soldier surrenders his own will to that of his commander. His captain says to him, "Go," and he goes, or, "Do this," and he does it. Such is the Christian's life—a life of willing subjection to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. In consequence of this we have our place fixed and our order arranged for us—and our life's relative positions are all prescribed. A soldier has to keep rank and step with the rest of the line. He has a relation to the man on his right, to his comrade on his left. He bears a relation which he must not violate to each officer and, especially, to his commander-in-chief.

God has appointed for you, then, dear Brother, to be a father or to be a son, to be a master or to be a servant, to be a teacher or to be taught. See that you keep your place. As a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man that wanders from his place. In our appointed warfare happy is the man who, from first to last, keeps in order with the forces of the Lord of Hosts and cheerfully fulfils the Divine purposes. As we have a warfare to accomplish, we must expect hardships. A soldier must not reckon upon ease. During a campaign he has neither house nor home. Perhaps last night he pitched his tent in a happy valley, but he must be up and away, and his tent must, tomorrow, be exposed on the bleak mountain side.

He has renounced the luxuries of life and the joys of repose. Forced marches, light slumbers, scant fare and hard blows are his portion—he would be foolish to look for ease and enjoyment during a campaign. O you sons of men, the Lord has appointed life to be a warfare! Why, then, do you wrap yourselves about with silken garments and sew pillows for your armholes, and say to yourselves, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years! Eat, drink and be merry"? You must not do so! And if the Lord, by trial, prevents your doing so, you must not quarrel with Him, but must feel that such treatment must be expected in this war.

If life is a warfare, we must look for contests and struggles. The Christian man must not expect to go to Heaven without opposition. A soldier who never meets an enemy at all is not renowned. We count his valor light and reckon him to be as some vain carpet knight, "whose best delight is but to wear a braid of his fair lady's hair." The man who is scarred and gashed, maimed and wounded—he is the hero to whom men pay homage! You must fight if you would reign! Your predecessors swam through seas of blood to win the crown and, though the form of battle may be changed, yet the spirit of the enemy is unaltered! You must still contend against sin and bear up under trouble, for only through much tribulation will you inherit the kingdom of God!

It is a warfare, Brothers and Sisters, for all these reasons and yet more so because we must always be upon the watch against danger. In a battle no man is safe. Where bullets fly, who can reckon upon life for a moment? Brethren, the age is peculiarly dangerous! Perhaps every preacher before me has said as much and every preacher after me will say the same for his times—yet still, I say—in this peculiar age there are a thousand perils for the soul, from superstition on the one hand and skepticism on the other! From rude self-reliance and indolent trust in others, from a wicked world and an apostate church! You must not marvel that it is so, for war is raging! The enemy has not laid down his weapons. The war drum is still beaten, therefore do not lay down your arms, but fight manfully for your King and country—for Christ and for His Church.

Blessed be God that the text says "Is there not an appointed warfare?" Then, Brothers and Sisters, it is not our warfare, but one that God has appointed for us, in which He does not expect us to wear out our armor, or bear our own charges, or find our own rations, or supply our own ammunition! The armor that we wear we have not to construct. The sword we wield we have not to fabricate. All things are ready for us! Our great Captain manages the commissariat with unquestioned skill and unbounded liberality. Yes, the warfare is so much His warfare that He is with us in it! The Greek soldiers, when they marched against the Persians, traversed many a weary league, but that which comforted them and made every man a hero was that Alexander marched when they marched!

If he had been carried luxuriously, like the Persian monarch, while they were toiling over the hills and dales, they might have murmured. If he had been seen to drink of costly wines while they were parched with thirst, they might have complained. But Alexander, like the great commander he was, marched in the ranks with his soldiers, so that they saw him faint and weary as they were! They saw him wiping the sweat from his brow as they did. And when, as was his due, they brought him the first crystal draught they could obtain, he put it to the side and said, "Give it to the sick soldiers, I will not drink till every man can take a draught."

O glorious Jesus! Surely You have done the same and more! You have borne resistance even unto blood! You have known toil and agony even to a sweat of gore! Suffering, weakness and self-denial You have drank of, for You saved others, but You could not save Yourself! Courage, Brothers and Sisters, then! Our warfare is of the Lord. Let us go forth to it, conquering and to conquer!

Thirdly. The Lord has also determined the service of our life. All men are servants to some master or another, neither can any of us avoid the servitude. The greatest men are only so much the more the servants of others. The Prime Minister is only the first and most laborious of servants. The yoke upon the neck of the Emperor is heavier than that which galls the shoulders of the serf. Despots are the most in bondage of all men. Happy will it be for us if, through Divine Grace, we have chosen Jesus for our Master and have become His servants for life—then, indeed, we are free, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light—and in learning of Him we shall find rest unto our souls.

If we are now the servants of the Lord Jesus, this life is a set time of a labor and apprenticeship to be worked out. I am bound by solemn indentures to my Lord and Master till my term of life shall run out, and I am right glad to have it so. Jacob, when he had served seven years, was glad to serve seven more for the love of Rachel and we, for love of Jesus, would serve 70 times seven if He desired it! But even then, the longest term of life would have an end, even as ours, also, will. Here below our term is fixed, even as the days of an hireling.

Now, a servant who has let himself out for a term of years has not a moment that he can call his own, nor have any of us, if we are God's people. We have not a moment, no, not a breath, nor a faculty, nor a farthing that we may honestly reserve. We have transferred ourselves to Jesus Christ forever and we belong wholly to Him. A servant does nothing of his own mind, he does what his master tells him—this also is our condition. We have an appointed service and we receive orders from our Lord, which orders are our Law. A servant has his occupations prescribed. He may have to work indoors or outdoors. He may have to be near the house or far off in the field. He

may be sent on errands, or bid to stay at home, but he does not choose his labor or the place of it—he accepts what is chosen for him by his superior. Are we not glad to have it so? Does not our heart say, "anything, everything for Jesus?" That should be our spirit!

The servant, moreover, expects to be sometimes weary and spent, is it not natural? To a servant who applies for your situation and says, "I do not expect to work hard. I want large wages and little work," you would say, "Yes, there are many of your mind, but I shall not employ one of the sort if I know it." Your Lord and Master thinks the same. You must expect to toil in His service till you are ready to faint. And then His Grace will renew your strength. A servant knows that his time is limited. If it is weekly service, he knows that his engagement may be closed on Saturday. If he is hired by the month, he knows how many days there are in a month and he expects it to end. If he is engaged the year, he knows the day of the year when his service shall run out.

As for us, we do not know when our term will be complete, but we do know that it will conclude, therefore we would live in view of that conclusion. It is as well that the Lord has not told us when the appointed end will be, or we might have loitered till near the close. But He has left that period unrevealed that we may be always laboring and waiting for His coming. None the less, it is sure that there is an appointed time and our work will come to an end. The hireling expects his wages—that is one reason for his industry. We, too, expect ours—not of debt, truly, but of Grace—still a gracious reward. God does not employ servants without paying them wages, as many of our merchants now do. They are His own children and, therefore, they would be glad enough to serve without a hope of wage, but that is not God's way. He prefers that they, also, should have "respect unto the recompense of reward."

While the child's relationship shall be carried out with blessed liberality, so shall the servant's relation, too, and wages shall be liberally given. Let us look forward, Brothers and Sisters, let us look forward to the Great Day when the Master shall call His servants together and give them their wages! The reward, if it were of debt, would be a very scanty one, and, in fact, it would be none at all, for we are unprofitable servants. But, the wages being of Grace, there is room for giving every man his penny—room for giving to us exceeding abundantly above what we ask or even think!

There I leave the subject of service—it is all appointed for us, let us fulfill it.

II. Secondly, and briefly, THE INFERENCES TO BE DRAWN FROM THIS FACT. First, there is Job's inference. Job's inference was that as there was only an appointed time and he was like a servant employed by the year, he might be allowed to wish for life's speedy close and therefore he says—"As a servant earnestly desires the shadow, and as an hireling looks for the reward of his work." Job was right, in a measure, but not altogether so. There is a sense in which every Christian may look forward to the end of life with joy and expectancy and may pray for it. I wish that some Believers were in a state of mind which would fairly admit of their doing so. Many of us can heartily sympathize with the songster who penned the verses beginning—

"I would not live always, I ask not to stay Where storm after storm rises dark o'er the way. The few fleeting mornings that dawn on us here Are enough for life's sorrows, enough for its cheer. Who, who would live always away from his God— Away from yon Heaven, that blissful abode, Where rivers of pleasure flow o'er the bright plains, And the noontide of glory eternally reigns?" At the same time, there are necessary modifications to this desire to depart and a great many of them,

for, first, it would be a very lazy thing for a servant to be always looking for Saturday night, and to be always sighing and groaning because the days are so long. The man who wants to be off to Heaven before his life's work is done does not seem, to me, to be quite the man that is likely to go there at all! He that is fit to go there and serve God is one who is willing to stop here and do the same! Besides, while our days are like those of a hireling, we serve a better Master than other servants do. There are employers of such a kind that servants might be very glad never to see their faces any more. They are so sharp, so acid, so domineering.

But our Master is Love itself. Blessed be His name, His service is perfect freedom! We are never so happy and never so truly helping ourselves as when we are altogether serving Him. For my part, I can say of Him that I love my Master, I love His service, I love His house, I love His children and I love everything about Him! And if He were going to discharge me at the end of this life, I would beg Him to let me live here forever, for I could not bear to be dismissed. It is one of my dearest hopes, in going to Heaven, that He will employ me still. Moreover, we are not like other servants, for this reason—we are one with our Master—His brethren, His spouse, His body—and we are under such deep obligation to Him that it is unspeakable joy to work for Him. If He gave us no wages it would be wage enough to be allowed to wait upon Him—

"For why, O blessed Jesus Christ, Should I not love You well? Not for the sake of winning Heaven, Or of escaping Hell."

But because of Your own sweetness, goodness and dear love to me, ought I not to be Yours forever?

Yes, yes! Under some aspects you might feel that it was better to depart and be with Christ, but from other points of view you see differently and check the wish, so that, like Paul, you are in a strait betwixt the two and you don't know which to choose. It is a great mercy that the choice does not lie with you! All things are settled for us. Thus you see there are facts which modify Job's inference and forbid our excessive longing to close life's weary day. I will tell you the devil's inference. The devil's inference is that if our time, warfare and service are appointed, there is no need to care and we may cast ourselves down from the pinnacle of the temple, or do any other rash thing, for we shall only work out our destiny. So argues the arch-enemy, though he knows better.

How many men have drawn most damnable conclusions from most blessed Truths of God! And these men know, when they are doing it, that their conclusions are absurd. "Oh," they say, "we need not turn to Christ, for if we are ordained to eternal life we shall be saved." Yes, Sirs, but why will you eat at mealtime today? Why do you eat at all? For if you are to live you will live. Why go to bed tonight? If you are ordained to sleep you will sleep. Why will you take down your shop shutters tomorrow and exhibit your goods and try to sell them? If you are predestinated to be rich you will be rich. Ah, I see, you will not act the thing out. You are not such fools as you look! You are more knaves than fools, and your excuse is a piece of deceit. If it is not so, why not act upon it in daily life? He has a false heart who dares to suck out of the blessed Truth of Predestination the detestable inference that he may sit still and do nothing! Why, Sirs, nothing in the world more nerves me for work than the belief that God's purposes have appointed me to this service! Being convinced that the eternal forces of Immutable Wisdom and unfailing power are at my back, I put forth all my strength as becomes a "worker together with God."

The bravest men that ever lived, like Cromwell and his Ironsides, believed in God's decrees, but they also kept their powder dry. They relied upon everlasting purposes, but also believed in human responsibility, and so must you and I. Your years are appointed, but do not commit lewdness or drink with the drunk, or you will shorten your days. Your warfare is appointed, O Man, but do not go and play the fool, or your troubles will be multiplied! Your service is allotted you, O Believer, but do not loiter, or you will grieve the Spirit of God and mar your work.

I will now give you the sick man's inference—"Is there not an appointed time to men upon earth? Are not his days also like the days of an hireling?" The sick man, therefore, concludes that his pains will not last forever and that every suffering is measured out by Divine Love. Truly, disease is a bitter draught, but Jehovah Rophi often prescribes it as a medicine for spiritual disease. When the Lord knows that the appointed affliction has worked out all His purpose He will either raise up the patient to walk among the sons of men, again, or else He will take him to His bosom in Glory. Let him be patient, therefore, and in confidence and quietness shall be his strength.

Next comes the mourner's inference—one which we do not always draw quite so readily as we should. It is this—"My child has died, but not too soon. My husband is gone, ah, God, what shall I do? Where shall my widowed heart find sympathy? Still he has been taken away at the right time. The Lord has done as it pleased Him and He has done wisely." If you have not yet come to mourning over the dead, but have everyday to sympathize with a living sufferer who is gradually melting away amidst wearisome pain and constant anguish, ask Grace to enable you to feel, "It is well." It is a grand triumph of Grace when the heart is neither stoic, unsympathetic, nor rebellious—when you can grieve but not rebel in the grieving, mourn without murmuring—and sorrow without sinning. Pray for some who have this trial. Pray for them that Grace may be perfect in their weakness.

Furthermore, let us draw the healthy man's inference. Do you know what inference I have drawn from the sudden death of my friend? I thought—in a moment it struck me—"Ah, if I had died last Saturday afternoon instead of Mr. Henry Olney, should I have left all the concerns that I have in hand quite in order?" I have no end of business— a great deal too much—and I resolved, "I will get all square and in order as if I were going off, for perhaps I am." Dear Brothers and Sisters, I want you to feel the same. You are healthy, but be prepared to die. Have your will made and your accounts squared and fit for your successor to take up.

What you do, do quickly! Have your will made and if you are wealthy, do not forget the Lord's work. Mr. Whitfield used to say, "I could not sleep at night if I had left my gloves out of their place, for," he said, "I would leave everything in order." Trim the ship, Brothers and Sisters, for you know not what weather is coming. Clear the decks for action, for no one knows when the last enemy will be in sight. Your best Friend is coming, make ready for His entertainment. Be as a bride adorned for her husband, and not as a slovenly woman, ashamed to be seen. Lastly, there is the sinner's inference. "My time, my warfare and my service are appointed, but what have I done in them? I have waged a warfare against God and have served in the pay of the devil, what will the end be?"

Sinner, you will run your length. You will fulfill your day to your black master. You will fight his battle and earn your pay, but what will the wages be? The end comes and the wage-paying—are you ready to reap what you have sowed? Having taken sides with the devil against yourself and against your God, are you prepared for the result? Look to it, I pray you, and beseech the Lord,

through Jesus Christ, to give you Grace to escape from your present position and enlist on the side of Christ. I ask you, Sirs, who are sitting in this gallery and who have not believed in Jesus—and you men and women all over this building who are unregenerate—if, instead of the decease of the Brother who has fallen I had to speak of your death, where must you have been?

If you had died in sin, we are not among those who would have read a hypocritical service over you and thanked God that you were taken! We would not have insulted the Most High by saying that we, ourselves, hoped to die in that fashion! We dare not so have blasphemed the Majesty of Heaven! You know we should have laid you into the grave very silently with many a tear more salty than usual, because deep down in our spirit there would have been that dreary thought, "He died impenitent. He died unregenerate. He is lost! He is lost!" Weep not for our Brother, dead in his prime, whose children mourn him! Weep not for him, though his sorrowing wife bends over his corpse and cannot persuade herself that his spirit is gone!

Weep not for him, but weep for those who have died and are lost forever, driven from the Presence of God! In their eternal warfare there will be no discharge! And in their dreadful slavery there will be no end, for there is no appointed time for man when once he leaves this earth! Time is over and the angel who puts one foot upon the sea, and another upon the land, swears by the Eternal that time shall be no more and the condition of the lost spirit is finally settled, settled forever! Beware, therefore, and be wise, for Christ's sake and your own. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job 7:1-21.

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Job 7,12 #2206 - Am I a Sea-Or a Whale

"AM I A SEA, OR A WHALE?"

NO. 2206

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY, MAY 31, 1891,

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON BEHALF OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN SAILORS' SOCIETY,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 7, 1891.

"Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?"

Job 7:12.

JOB was in great pain when he thus bitterly complained. These moans came from him when his skin was broken and had become loathsome and he sat upon a dunghill and scraped himself with a potsherd. We are amazed at his patience, but we are not amazed at his impatience! He had fits of complaining and failed in that very patience for which he was noted. Where God's saints are most glorious, there you will find their spots. The weaknesses of the saints lie near their strength. Elijah is the bravest of the brave and flees from Jezebel. Moses is the meekest of the meek and speaks in passion. Job is the most patient of men and cries, "I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." As part of his bitter complaint, he asks, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?"

He seemed to be watched and whipped—and then watched again. It seemed to him that God concentrated all His strength upon him in afflicting him. He was beaten black and blue and, whereas, other culprits had 40 stripes save one, he had 50 stripes save none! He was spared no suffering and, he cries at last, "I am watched, and checked, as if I were a great sea needing always to be held in bounds or a terrible sea monster needing always a hook in its jaws. Lord, why do You harass me thus? I am such a poor, insignificant thing, that it seems out of Your usual way to be so rough upon one so feeble. The raging ocean, or the mighty leviathan may need such watching, but why do You spend it on me? Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?"

I shall not moor myself to Job's sense of the words, but I shall spread my sail for a voyage further out to sea. This sort of talk may have been used by many a man who is now within hail of my voice—may have been used by sailors now before me.

Let me point out the channel along which I shall steer in my discourse. We shall begin by saying that some men seem to be narrowly watched by God. They think that the Lord's eyes are as much fixed on them as though they were great as a sea, or huge as a whale. My second point will be

that they do not like this watching. They complain about it and wish they could

Volume 37 1get rid of it. Therefore they argue with God against it. Our third head is that their argument is a bad one. They think they are very harshly treated, but the fact is that all they complain of is in love. See, my messmates, the way I shall try to steer, but if the heavenly wind blows me out of my course, don't be surprised if I tack about and go, nobody knows where!

I. I have, first, to say that SOME MEN SEEM TO BE ESPECIALLY TRACKED AND WATCHED BY GOD. We hear of persons being "shadowed" by the police—and certain people feel as if they were shadowed by God—they are mysteriously tracked by the great Spirit and they know and feel it. Wherever they go, an eye is upon them and they cannot hide from it. They are like prisoners under arrest—they can never go out of reach of the law. They cannot get away from God, do what they may! There are men who have been in this condition for years and they know what I mean.

All men are really surrounded by God. He is not far from everyone of us. "In Him we live, move and have our being." "Where shall we flee from Your Presence?" To the heights above, or to the depths beneath? To oceans frozen into ice, or seas where the sun shines with burning heat? In vain we rise or dive to escape from God. "You, God, see me," is as true in the watches of the night as in the blaze of day. God is with us and we are always beneath His eyes. Yet there are certain people to whom this is more clear than it is to others.

Some are singularly aware of the Presence of God. Certain of us never were without a sense of God. As children, we could not go to sleep till we said, "Our Father which are in Heaven." As youths, we trembled if we heard God's holy name blasphemed. As men, engaged in the cares of life, we have seen the Lord's goodness, all along. We delight to see Him in every flower that blooms and to hear His voice in every wind that blows. It has made us happy to see God in His works. "The fool has said in his heart, No God," but this folly we never cared for. We knew that God was good even when we felt we had offended Him. He has taught us from our youth and manifested Himself to us. Softly has the whisper fallen on our ear, "God is near you. God is with you. God has an ear to hear you. God has a heart to love you. God has a hand to help you." I have known those who, even when they have sinned and gone against their consciences, have never at any time quite lost a sense of the nearness of God even though its only fruit was fear—a fear which has torment!

With others, God's watch is seen in a different way. They feel that they are watched by God because their conscience never ceases to rebuke them. The voice of conscience is not pitched to the same key in all men, neither is it equally loud in all people. Conscience can be made like a muzzled dog and then it cannot bite the thief of sin. Conscience can grow like a man with a cold who has lost his voice. But it is not so with all men, even after years of sin. Some have a naturally tender conscience and, while living in sin, they are never easy. They make merry all the day, for, "they count it one of the wisest things to drive dull care away"—but dull care, like the chickens, comes home to roost at night! The sailor in company is jolly, but if he has to keep a lone watch beneath the silent stars, his heart begins to beat and his conscience begins to call him to account for the follies of the day. He starts in his sleep—he dreams over his past sin and the judgment to come—for conscience will wake even when the rest of the man sleeps. "You were wrong," says conscience, and his voice is very solemn.

Even great sin in certain men has not prevented Conscience speaking out honestly to them. Again and again the inward monitor cries, "You were wrong and you will suffer for it." We read that, "David's heart smote him"—the heart deals us an ugly knock. When the blow is within us, it tells. I am addressing some who, though they do not feel pleased about it, yet must know that there is a something within that will not let them sin cheaply. God has a bit in their mouths and a bridle upon their jaws—and every now and then He gives a tug at it and pulls them right up. They are not at home in sin! They have not yet got their sea legs upon the ocean of vice. They sing the songs of the devil with a quake and a shake which shows that the music does not suit them! Thus God has set a watch upon them—they carry a detective in their bosoms.

In some this watching has gone farther, for they are under solemn conviction of sin. They are convinced of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come. God's custom-house officer has boarded them and their smuggling is found out. I remember when I was in that state, myself—a criminal who dared not deny his guilt, but dreaded punishment. I would not go back to that condition for a hundred worlds! There was no rest for me then. I was only a youth, but boyish sports lost their relish for me because I knew that I was a sinner and that God must punish sin. I awoke in the morning and my first act for many a day was to read a chapter of the Bible, or a page of some awakening book which kept my conscience still awake. The Holy Spirit put me in irons and there I lay both day and night! My bed was, at times, a very weary place for me, because the eyes of God's anger seemed to be always watching me. I knew I had offended God and I had not yet found out the way of reconciliation by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now, it may be that I speak to some here who have been to the ends of the earth and they have said, "Well, when we get away where the Sabbath bell is never heard, we shall get rid of these fears and take our swing in sin." They sailed off and as soon as they reached port, they hurried to a place of vicious amusement—where no one knew them. But the dog of fear howled at their heels and merriment seemed mockery to them. On the lone ocean the very stars pierced their hearts with their rays. At length their messmates began to notice it and call them Old Sobersides. "Jack, what ails you?" was the frequent question, and well it might be, for Jack was very heavy and it is hard to be merry with a broken heart! In some such fashion as this the man feels that God has set a watch upon him and that he has become like a sea which never rests, or a whale which roams the waste of water and knows no home. God watched him and though he would gladly have run the blockade, he could not find an hour in which his vessel was left alone. Certain men are not only plagued by conscience and dogged by fear, but the Providence of God seems to have gone out against them. Just when the man had resolved to have a bout of drinking, he fell sick of a fever and had to go to the hospital. He was going to a dance, but he became so weak that he had not a leg to stand upon. He was forced to toss to and fro on bed—to quite another tune from that which pleases the ballroom! He had yellow fever and was long in pulling round. God watched him and put the skid on him just as he meant to have a breakneck run downhill! The man gets better and he says to himself, "I will have a good time, now." But then he is out of berth and perhaps he cannot get a ship for months—and he is brought down to poverty. "Dear me!" he says, "everything goes against me. I am a marked man!" And so he is. Just when he thinks that he is going to have a fair wind, a tempest comes on and drives him out of his course, and he sees rocks ahead. After a while he thinks, "Now I am all right. Jack is himself, again, and piping times have come." A storm hurries up; the ship goes down and he loses all but the clothes he has on his back. He is in a

wretched plight—a shipwrecked mariner far from home. God seems to pursue him even as He did Jonah!

He carries with him misfortune for others and he might well cry, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?" Nothing prospers. His tacklings are loosed. He cannot well strengthen his mast; his ship leaks; his sails are torn; his yards are snapped and he cannot understand it. Other people seem to get on, though they are worse than he is. Time was when he used to be lucky, too—but now he has parted company with success and carries the black flag of distress. He is driven to and fro by contrary winds. He makes no headway. He is a miserable man and would wish that the whole thing would go to the bottom, only he dreads a place which has no bottom, from which there is no escape, if once you sink into it. The Providence of God runs hard against him and thus he sees himself to be a watched man.

Yes, and God also watches over many in the way of admonition. Wherever they go, holy warnings follow them. They cannot escape from those who would be friends to their souls. They seem to be surrounded with a ring of prayers and sermons and holy talks. The boy said, "If I could get away from my mother, I should be free! I have been tied long enough to her apron strings. I am old enough to do as I like. If I can get away from my father's chidings and prayers, I shall have a fine time of it." So the boy ran away and went to sea—and when he got on board, a good old sailor tackled him—and talked to him about his soul! And then another pleaded with him. The boy said to himself, "Why, I have got out of the frying pan into the fire! I came here to be out of the way of religion and here it is!"

I have known a sailor to go from port to port, and wherever he has landed there has been some gracious man or woman waiting to lead him to Christ. May it be often so! May the Bethel flag be found flying in all waters, till every runaway says, "Why, I am watched wherever I go!" May it be as it was with our dear friends, Fullerton and Smith, on board the steamboat! Mr. Fullerton spoke to a rough man and asked him if he was saved. And the man was angry, cross, vexed and went to the other side of the vessel. There he complained to Mr. Smith, "That man over there asked me if I was saved; he is a fool!" "Very likely," said Smith, "but then, you see, he is a fool for Christ. I think it is better to be a fool for Jesus than to be wise for the devil." He began to plead with the sailor, when the man cried out, "There is a regular gang of them! I cannot go anywhere but they are on to me."

It has been made hot for some of you by the British and Foreign Sailors' Society which has placed missionaries in so many ports. "There's a gang of them," and wherever you go, you stumble on an earnest Christian man who will not let you alone. If I could stir up Christian people here, I would make it hard for sinners, so that wherever they went they would find a hand outstretched to stop them from going to destruction! Oh, that each one might be met with tears and entreaties, that thus each one might be snatched from the waves of fire and landed on the rock of salvation! Some here present have had to dodge a great deal to keep out of the way of Gospel shots. Their track has been followed by mercy and they have been pursued by swift cruisers of Grace. They have been like fish taken in a net—surrounded on all sides—and neither able to pass through the meshes, nor to break the net, nor to leap out of it! Oh, that the net of Christ's love may so entangle you all, that you may be His forever!

That is our first point—there are some men who seem especially watched of God.

II. Secondly, we notice that THEY ARE VERY APT TO DISLIKE THIS WATCHING. Job is not pleased with it. He asks, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?" These people, to whom God pays such attention, are foolish enough to murmur that they are so hedged in and they are vexed to be made to feel that God has His eyes upon them.

Do you know what they would like? They want liberty to sin! They would like to be let loose and to be allowed to do just as their wild wills would suggest to them. They would cast off every restraint and have their fling of what the world calls "pleasure." They would climb from sin to sin, hand over hand. They would like to empty all the cups on the devil's sideboard and be as merry as the worst of men when they are taking it free and easy. That is why they would send their consciences to sleep, drown their fears and escape from chastening Providences and warning admonitions. They would like to live where no Christian would ever worry them again with wearisome exhortation! They demand liberty—liberty to put their hands into the fire! Liberty to ruin themselves! Liberty to leap into Hell before their time! Liberty! What destruction has been worked in your name! Free thinking! Free living! Free loving and all that! What misuse of terms! What a libel upon the name of freedom, to use the word, "free," in connection with the slavery of sin! Yet, I am speaking to some who say, "That is just what I want! I want to cut myself clear of all this hamper which blocks me up from having my own way." Ah me! This is the cry of a man who is bent on soul-suicide! They also wish that they could be as hard of heart as many others are. Some men can drink any quantity and yet do not seem as if they were greatly affected by it. And many a young sailor has wished that he could pour down his grog without a wink, after the style of the old toper. He meets with a foul-mouthed being who can swear till all is blue, while he himself has only dropped an oath or two, and then felt wretched. The young man begins to wish that he was as tough as old Jack, and as much a daredevil as he. The hardened profligate is foolishly envied and looked upon as a man of "pluck." But is it true bravery to ruin one's soul? Is it manly to be wicked? Is it a great gain to have a seared conscience? We don't envy the blind because they cannot see danger, nor the deaf because they cannot hear an alarm—why envy the hardened old sinner because he has become spiritually blind and deaf?

There are monsters, both on land and on sea, whose very breath is pestilent and whose talk is enough to choke up a town with vice. And yet certain young men, whom God will not allow to descend into such rottenness, are almost angry that they are restrained! A tender conscience is a great possession, but these simple ones know not its value. They wish that they could have a heart as hard as the nether millstone. Ah, poor souls! You know not what you wish, for you have no idea how deep is the curse that lies in a callous conscience! When God gave Pharaoh up to hardness of heart, it was a tremendous punishment for his pride and cruelty and, short of Hell, there is no judgment that God can inflict like letting a man have his own way! "Let him alone," says God, "he is joined to idols." And if the Lord says that, there is only one other word more dreadful—and that is the final sentence—"Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." O you beginners in vice who cannot yet stifle the cries of your suffering consciences, I pray that you may see your folly and no longer do violence to your own mercy!

Men do not like this being surrounded by God—this wearing the bit and kicking strap—because they would drop God from their thoughts. If tomorrow we could hear, by telegram from Heaven, that God was dead, what crowds would buy the newspaper! It would be the greatest relief in the

world to many a godless wretch if he could feel sure that there was no God! To some of us this news would be death—we would have lost our Father, our Comforter, our Savior, our All! Alas, many wish that there were no God, and if they cannot persuade themselves that there is none—and it is very hard for a sailor to do that—yet they try to forget Him. If God is out of mind, He is as good as out of the world to the careless sinner.

When God comes with inward fears and awakens conscience—and sends cross Providences, so that the man feels pulled up and made to pause—then he knows that there is a God, for he feels a Power which works against his sin from which he cannot get away. He longs to be clear of this secret force, but it wraps him about on every side. He does not read his Bible and yet Scripture rises in his memory! It is long since he bent his knee in prayer—he has almost forgotten what his mother said to him when she lay dying—but still he feels that there is a God and, somehow, that belief sounds a trumpet blast through his soul, summoning him to his last account. Come to judgment! Come to judgment! Come to judgment! The call rings in his ears and he cannot get away from the terrible sound! Then it is that he cries "Why am I thus? Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?"

Once more, there are some who do not like to be shadowed in this way because they want to have their will with others. Shall I speak a sharp word, like a two-edged sword? There are men—and seamen to be found among them—who are not satisfied with being ruined, themselves, but they thirst to ruin others! They lay traps for precious souls and they are vexed that their victims should escape them. They are angry because certain poor women are not altogether in their power. Woe unto the men who lead women astray! I have heard of sailors who, in every port they enter, try to ruin others. I charge you to remember that you will have to face these ruined ones at the Day of Judgement! You sailed away and they never knew where you went, but the Lord knew. It may be, when you lie in Hell, eyes will find you out and a voice will cry aloud, "Are you here? You are the man that led me to Perdition!"

You will have to keep everlasting company with those whom you dragged down to Hell—and these will, forever, curse you to your face. I say there are men who would like to have full license to commit wantonness and they are grieved that they are hindered in their carnival of sin! May God grant that you may be stopped altogether and, instead of lusting to pollute others, may you have a desire to save them! May God grant that the channel of evil may be blocked for you and may you be piloted into the waters of repentance and faith!

This is why some kick against God. I fear these people will be much vexed with me for speaking so plainly, but you must not think that it will alarm me should you be angry. I am rather glad when fellows get angry with my preaching. "Oh," I say to myself, "those fish feel the hook in their jaws and so they struggle to escape." Of course a fish does not like the hook which lays hold of him! But these angry hearers will come again. You people with whom the sermon goes in at one ear and out at the other, you get no good, whatever—but a man who fires up with wrath and says, "How dare that fellow speak thus to me?" is sure to listen again—and it is very likely that God will bless him. But whether it offends you or pleases you—I repeat my warning—I charge you, do not drag others down to Hell with you! If you must go there yourselves, seek not to destroy those around you! Do not teach boys to drink and to swear. Neither tempt frail women to commit uncleanness with you. God help you to shake off all vice, for I know that vile habits are often the reason why

men kick against the restraint of God's loving hand.

III. And now I have got to the very heart of my text. The third part is this—that THIS ARGUMENT AGAINST THE LORD'S DEALINGS IS A VERY BAD ONE. Job says, "Am I a sea, or whale, that You set a watch over me?" Listen! To argue from our insignificance is poor pleading, for the little things are just those against which there is most need to watch! If you were a sea, or a whale, God might leave you alone, but as you are a feeble and sinful creature who can do more hurt than a sea, or a whale, you need constant watching! In life, men fall by very little things. One does not need to watch against his dog one half as much as against a horsefly, or a mosquito, for these will sting you when you least expect it. The little things need most watching, therefore it is poor reasoning when we complain that God watches us as if we were a sea, or a whale.

After all, there is not a man here who is not much like a sea, or a sea monster in this respect, that he needs a watch to be set over him. A man's heart is as changeable and as deceitful as the sea. Today it is calm as a sea of glass, unruffled by a breath of air. Oh, trust not yourself upon it, for before tomorrow's sun is up, your nature may be rolling in tremendous billows of passion! You cannot trust the sea, but it is more worthy of confidence than your heart! Here you are, tonight, and oh, how good you look as you sit and listen and then stand up and sing! Ah, my men! I should not like to hear you if you take to blaspheming your Maker, as many do! When you are down in the forecastle with a little band of praying men, how very good you feel! Let us see you when you are on shore and there is plenty of grog about. It is easy to have a calm sea when there is no wind, but how different is the ocean when a gale is blowing! We are all very well when far away from temptation, but how are we when the devil's servants are around us? Then, I fear, that too often good resolutions prove to be—

"False as the smooth, deceitful sea, And empty as the whistling wind."

It may be that I speak to one who has undergone a dreadful change. Once you led others in the way of righteousness, but now you draw them into evil. Once you sailed under the Bethel flag, but now the old Pirate of the infernal lake is your captain. You have gone back to your old ways and have again become the slave of the world, the flesh and the devil. Your religious profession had no foundation. Ah me, you need not say, "Am I a sea, or a whale?" for seas and sea monsters are more to be trusted than you are! The sea is immeasurable and, as for you, your sinfulness is unsearchable. Your capacity is almost without measure—your mind reaches far and touches all things. Man's mind can rise in rebellion against the God of the whole earth, till, like the raging waves of the sea, it threatens to put out the lights of Heaven! When man is in a rebellious state he will rage in his thoughts as though he would wash away the shores of Heaven and beat like the surf upon the iron rocks of Hell. A man is an awful mystery of iniquity when left to himself. You cannot fathom his pride, nor measure his daring. Deep down in his mind there are innumerable creeping things, both small and great beasts—for all manner of evils and sins multiply in the heart like fishes in the sea! Do not ask, "Am I a sea, or a sea-monster, that You set a watch over me?" for the Lord may answer, "You are more capacious for evil than a sea and more wild than a sea monster."

I shall now go further and show that, by reason of our evil nature, we have become like the sea. This is true in several ways, for, first, the sea is restless and so is our nature. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." You need not go far to

find hearts always agitated, always seeking rest and finding none. They know not Christ and, until they do know Him, they cannot rest. They are always seeking a something—they know not what. They run first in one direction and then in another, but they never follow the right thing. When they are thoughtful, no good comes of their thoughts. Their waters cast up—what? Pearls and corals? No—"mire and dirt." I do not need to explain those words. If any of you have to keep company with these restless beings, you know how foul-mouthed they can be. They cast up worse things than mire and dirt when they are stirred up. Oh, say not, "Am I a sea, or a whale?" Think of yourself as being as restless as a whale when the harpoon is in him—as restless as the sea when a storm is moving its lowest depths.

Let us say, next, that the sea can be furious and terrible—and so can ungodly men. When a man is in a fury, what a wild beast he can be! A landsman looks on the sea when it has put on its best behavior and he says, "I should not mind going on a voyage. It must be splendid to steam over such a sea! I feel I shall make a splendid sailor." Let him look at that same ocean, by-and-by. Where is the sea of glass, now? Where are the gentle waves which seemed afraid to ripple too far upon the sand? The sea roars and rages and raves. The Atlantic in a storm is terrible, but have you ever seen a tempest in a man's nature? It is an awful sight and one which causes gracious eyes to weep! What a miserable object is a man with the drink in him! He was as decent a fellow as one could talk with, but now that the drink has mastered him, the devil has come on board and you will do well to give him a wide berth. The same is true of passion. Concerning angry men our advice would be, "Put not to sea in a storm, neither argue with a man in a passion." You do not know what he will do, and he does not know, himself! Such a man will be grieved enough when he sobers down, but meanwhile, while the storm is on, he cares for nothing. His eyes flash lightning, his face is black as tempest, his mouth foams and his tongue rages. In his case, "The sea roars and the fullness thereof." When you feel the Lord's restraint, you need not ask, "Am I a sea, or a whale?" for your own heart may answer, "You can be more furious than the sea itself."

Think, again, how unsatisfied is the sea. It draws down and swallows up stretches of land and thousands of tons of cliff, but it is not filled up. "All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full." Huge Spanish galleons went to the bottom, with thousands of gold and silver pieces on board—but the sea was never the richer. When, on some dreadful night, our coasts are strewn with wrecks and hundreds of lives are lost, the devouring deep is never the more satisfied. The sea is a hungry monster which could swallow a navy and then open its mouth for more! Are not many men made of the same craving sort? If you gave them half a world, they would cry for the other half, and if they had the whole round globe, they would weep for the stars! Man's mind never rests in sweet content till God, Himself, satisfies it with Himself. O man, without true religion it is your fate to go hungry and thirsty forever, or, like the sea, yeasting and foaming after you know not what!

Human nature is like the sea for mischief. How destructive is the ocean and how unfeeling! It makes widows and orphans by the thousands—and then smiles as if it had done nothing! Terrible havoc it can work when once its power is let loose! Do not talk of the destructiveness of the sea—let the reckless sinner think of the destructiveness of his own life! You that are living in sin and vice, what wrecks you have caused! How many who set out on the voyage of life and bade fair to make a splendid passage, have gone upon the rocks through you! A foul word, a loose song, a filthy act and a frivolous craft has become a wreck! Conscience can fill in the details. Ah me, one

cannot say to God, "Am I a sea, or a sea monster?" or He might well reply, "No shark has devoured so many as the drunkard in his cups, the swearer in his presumption and the unclean in his lust!" Ah me, I could weep to think how much of mischief any one of you who are unconverted may yet do! The Lord deliver you from being left derelict, to cause wreck to others!

We must not forget that we are less obedient to God than the sea is. Nothing keeps back the sea from many a shore but a belt of sand—and though it rages in storm and tempest, the sea goes back in due time and leaves the sand for children to play upon. It knows its bounds and keeps them. When the time comes for the tide to rise, the obedient waters march upon the shore in unbroken ranks and fill up every creek. They do not linger behind their time. When the moment comes to stay where they are, they rest at flood. Then comes the instant to begin the ebb and, no matter how boisterous the waves may be, they fall back at God's bidding. What, after all, is more orderly than the great sea? Would to God we were like it in this! How readily this great creature yields! A little wind springs up and its waves answer at once to the breath of Heaven. When the sun crosses the line, the equinoctial gales know their season, while at all times the great currents cease not the flow which God has appointed them.

The sea is obedient to the Lord and so was that great fish of which we read just now—"The Lord spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." As for us, we refuse to obey! And when left to ourselves, what law can restrain us? Is there anything in Heaven or earth which a proud sinner will not venture to attempt? God blocks up the road to Hell with hedge, ditch and chain—but we break them all! He digs a trench across our way and we leap over it. He piles a mountain in the road and as if our feet were like hinds' feet, we leap upon the high places of presumption! A man will go against wind and tide in his determination to be lost! O Sea! O Sea! You are but a child with your father compared to the wicked and rebellious heart of man! It is a bad argument, then. We need to be looked after. We need to be watched. We need to be kept in check even more than a sea or a whale! We need the restraining Providence and constraining Grace of God to keep us from deadly sin. IV. Last of all, I would remark that ALL THEY COMPLAINED OF WAS SENT IN LOVE. They said, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?" but if they had known the truth, they would have blessed God with all their hearts for having watched over them as He has done.

First, God's restraint of some of us has kept us from self-ruin. If the Lord had not held us in, we might have been in prison! We might have been in the grave! We might have been in Hell! Who knows what would have become of us? An old Scotchman said to Mr. Rowland Hill what, I am quite sure, would have been as true of me. He looked into Mr. Hill's face so keenly and so often that at last good Rowland asked him, "Why are you looking at my face so much?" "I was thinking," said the Scotchman, "that if you had not been converted by the Grace of God, you would have been a terrible sinner." And, surely, this would have been my case. Nothing halfand-half would have contented me. I would have gone to the end of my tether.

Is not the same true of some of you? How many times has the Lord laid His own hand on us to stay us from a fatal step! If we were checked in our youth and brought, then and there, to Jesus, it was a gracious deed on God's part. If we have been hindered during a sinful manhood and have, at length, been made to bow before the will of the Lord, this, also, is great Grace. Left to ourselves, we would have chosen our own destruction! Do you not think that God's taking you apart and

giving you a tender conscience—and admonishing you so often—proves His great love to you! Surely someone has prayed for you! There is a mother here tonight. I hope she will not mind my telling you what she did last Tuesday when I was sitting in my vestry. She brought me a little brown paper parcel with £50 in it and she gave it for the British and Foreign Sailors' Society. She has a son whom she has not heard of for years. He went to sea and she cannot find him, or get any tidings of his whereabouts. But she hopes that a missionary of this Society may meet him in some strange place and bring him to the Savior.

She prays that it may be so and, therefore, she brings her selfsacrificing offering—a great sum, I am sure, for her—that she may help to support the good Society which, she hopes, may be a blessing to her boy. There are other sailors to whom God's love is seen in their being followed up by a mother's pleading. Ah, Friend, the Lord would not have checked you so if He had not intended to bless you! That broken leg of yours is to keep you from running too far into sin. That yellow fever was sent to cool the fever of your sin. Your missing that ship caused you to miss shipwreck and death. These mishaps were all tokens of love to you. The Lord would not let you perish! He resolves to save you. You are one of His chosen. Christ bought you with His blood and He means to have you for His own. If you will not come to Him with a gentle breeze, He will fetch you by a storm! Yield to the pressure of His love. If you will be as the horse and the mule which have no understanding, He will break you in and manage you with bit and bridle—but it would be far better if you would be ruled by love. I think I see tokens of electing love upon you in those very things which you have kicked against. The Lord is working to bring you to Himself, and to Himself you must come. The prodigal son was driven home by stress of weather. If his father had had the doing of it, he could not have worked the matter better! His hungry belly and his pig-feeding fetched him home. The unkindness of the citizens of the far country helped to hurry him back to his father. Hardship, need and pain are meant to bring you back—and God has used them to that end! And the day will come when you will say, "I bless God for the rough wave which washed me on shore. I bless God for the stormy Providence which drowned my comfort, but saved my soul."

Once more and I have done. God will not always deal roughly with you. Perhaps tonight He will say His last sharp word. Will you yield to softer means? They say that oil poured on troubled waters will make them smooth—God the Holy Spirit can send to your troubled soul a lifelong calm! The winds and waves on the Galilean sea all went to sleep in an instant. How? Why, when Jesus came walking on the water, He said to the warring elements, "Be still." The waves crouched like whipped dogs at His feet, though they had, just before, roared like lions! He said to the winds, "Hush!" and they breathed as softly as the lips of a babe! Jesus is here at this hour. He that died on Calvary looks down on us—believe on Him! He lifts His pierced hands and cries, "Look unto Me, and be you saved!" Will you not look to Him? Oh, that His Grace may lead you at once to say, "He is All in All to me!"

Here is a soul-saving text for you—"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Accept the Savior and though you are as a sea, or as a whale, you shall no longer complain of the Lord's watching you, but you shall rejoice in perfect liberty! He is free who loves to serve his God! He makes it his delight that he is watched of the Lord. The Lord bless sailors! May we all meet in the Fair Havens! May the flag of your Society bless every sea because God blesses its missionaries! I wish for it the utmost prosperity and I judge it to be worthy of the most generous aid of all Christians. In all

respects it is exactly to my mind. The Lord send prosperity to it! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jonah 2:1-10.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—42 (VER I) 590, 551.

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Chapter 29

Job 7,21 #2705 - Why Some Sinners Are Not Pardoned

WHY SOME SINNERS ARE NOT PARDONED

NO. 2705

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 16, 1900.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 30, 1881.

"And why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?"

Job 7:21.

NO man should rest until he is sure that his sin is forgiven. It may be forgiven and he may be sure that it is forgiven—and he ought not to give rest to his eyes, nor slumber to his eyelids till he has been assured, with absolute certainty that his transgression is pardoned and that his iniquity is taken away. You, dear Friends, may be patient under suffering, but not patient under sin. You may ask for healing with complete resignation to the will of God as to whether He will grant it to you, but you should ask for pardon with importunity, feeling that you must have it. You may not be sure that it is God's will to deliver you from disease, but you may be quite certain that it is His will to hear you when you cry to Him to save you from sin. And if at your first crying unto Him, you are not saved, seek to know the reason why He is refusing to grant you the blessing you so much desire. It is quite legitimate to put this question to God again and again, "Why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?" We also ought to press this matter home upon our own heart and conscience, to see whether we cannot discover the reason why pardon is, for a while, withheld from us, for God never acts arbitrarily and without reason. And, depend upon it, if we diligently search by the light of the candle of the Lord, we shall be able to find an answer to this question of Job, "Why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?" Job's question may sometimes be asked by a child of God, but it may be more frequently asked by others who, as yet, are not brought consciously into the Lord's family.

I. I shall first take our text as A QUESTION THAT MAY BE ASKED, AS IN JOB'S CASE, BY A TRUE CHILD OF God—"Why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?"

Sometimes, beloved Friends, this question is asked under a misapprehension. Job was a great sufferer and although he knew that he was not as guilty as his troublesome friends tried to make out, yet he feared that possibly his great afflictions were the results of some sin and, therefore, he came before the Lord with this sorrowful enquiry, "Why do You con

Volume 46 1tinue to me all this pain and agony? If it is caused by sin, why do You not, first, pardon the sin, and then remove its effects?"

Now I take it that it would have been a misapprehension on Job's part to suppose that his afflictions were the result of his sin. Mark you, Brothers and Sisters, we are, by nature, so full of sin that we may always believe that there is enough evil within us to cause us to suffer severe affliction if God dealt with us according to justice. But also remember that in Job's case, the Lord's objective in his afflictions and trials, was not to punish Job for his sin, but to display in the Patriarch, to His own honor and Glory, the wonders of His Grace by enabling Job, with great patience, to still hold on to God under the direst suffering and to triumph in it all. Job was not being punished—he was being honored. God was giving to him a name like that of the great ones of the earth. The Lord was lifting him up, promoting him, putting him into the front rank, making a great saint of him, causing him to become one of the fathers and patterns in the ancient Church of God! He was really doing for Job such extraordinarily good things that you or I, in looking back upon his whole history, might well say, "I would be quite content to take Job's afflictions if I might also have Job's Grace and Job's place in the Church of God." It may happen to you, Beloved, that you think that your present affliction is the result of some sin in you, yet it may be nothing of the kind.

It may be that the Lord loves you in a very special manner because you are a fruit-bearing branch, and He is pruning you that you may bring forth more fruit. As Rutherford said to a dear lady, in his day, who had lost several of her children, "Your ladyship is so sweet to the WellBeloved that He is jealous on your account, and is taking away from you all the objects of your earthly love that He may absorb the affection of your whole heart into Himself." It was the very sweetness of the godly woman's character that led her Lord to act as He did towards her, and I believe that there are some of the children of God who are now suffering simply because they are gracious. There are certain kinds of affliction that come only upon the more eminent members of the family of God—and if you are one of those who are thus honored, instead of saying to your Heavenly Father, "When will You pardon my sin?"—you might more properly say, "My Father, since You have pardoned my iniquity and adopted me into Your family, I cheerfully accept my portion of suffering, since in all this, You are not bringing to my mind the remembrance of any unforgiven sin, for I know that all my transgressions were numbered on the Scapegoat's head of old. Since You are not bringing before me any cause of quarrel between myself and You, for I am walking in the light as You are in the light, and I have sweet and blessed fellowship with You, therefore will I bow before You and lovingly kiss Your rod, accepting at Your hands whatever Your unerring decree appoints for me." It is a blessed thing, dear Friends, if you can get into this state of mind and heart. And it may happen that your offering of the prayer of the text may be founded upon a complete misapprehension of what the Lord is doing with you. Sometimes, also, a child of God uses this prayer under a very unusual sense of sin. You know that in looking at a landscape, you may so fix your gaze upon some one object that you do not observe the rest of the landscape. Its great beauties may not be seen by you because you have observed only one small part of it. Now, in like manner, before the observation of the Believer, there is a wide range of thought and feeling. If you fix your eyes upon your own sinfulness, as you may well do, it may be that you will not quite forget the greatness of Almighty Love, and the grandeur of the Atoning Sacrifice, but, yet, if you do not forget them, you do not think so much of them as you should, for you seem to make your own sin, in all its heinousness and aggravation, the central objective of your consideration! There are

certain times in which you cannot help doing this—they come upon me, so I can speak from my own experience. I find that, sometimes, do what I will, the master thought in my mind concerns my own sinnership—my sinnership even since my conversion, my shortcomings and my wanderings from my gracious God—and even the sins of my holy things.

Well, now, it is well to think of our sin in this way, but it is not well to think of it out of proportion to other things. When I have gone to a physician because I have been ill, I have, of course, thought of my disease. But have I not also thought of the remedy which he will prescribe for me, and of the many cases in which a disease similar to mine has yielded to such a remedy? So, will it not be wrong to fix my thoughts entirely upon one fact to the exclusion of other compensating facts? Yet, that is how many of us sometimes act, and then we cry to God, as did Job, "Why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?" when, indeed, it is already pardoned and taken away! If we try to look at it, there flows before us that sacred stream of our Savior's atoning blood which covers all our guilt, so that, great though it is, in the sight of God it does not exist, for the precious blood of Jesus has blotted it all out forever!

There is another time when the Believer may, perhaps, utter the question of our text. That is, whenever he gets into trouble with his God. You know that after we are completely pardoned—as we are the moment we believe in Jesus—we are no longer regarded as criminals before God—we become His children. You know that it is possible for a man who has been brought before the court as a prisoner, to be pardoned. But suppose that after being forgiven, he should be adopted by him who was his judge, and taken into his family so as to become his child? Now, after doing that, you do not suppose that he will bring him up again before the judgment seat and try him, and put him in prison. No, but if he becomes the judge's son, I know what the judge will do with him—he will put him under the rules of his house, to which all the members of his family are expected to conform. Then, if he misbehaves as a son, there will not be that freeness of conversation and communion between himself and his father that there ought to be. At night the father may refuse to kiss the wayward and disobedient child. When his brethren are enjoying the father's smile, he may have a frown for his portion—not that the father has turned him out of his family, or made him to be any the less a child than he was—but there is a cloud between them because of his wrongdoing.

I fear, my dear Friends, that some of you must have known, at times, what this experience means, for between you and your Heavenly Father—although you are safe enough and He will never cast you away from Him—there is a cloud. You are not walking in the Light of God, your heart is not right in the sight of God. I would earnestly urge you never to let this sad thing happen, or if it does ever happen, I beg you not to let such a sorrowful state of affairs last for even a day! Settle the quarrel with your God before you go to sleep. Get it put right, as I have seen a child do after he has done wrong. Perhaps he has been pouting and scowling and his father has had to speak very roughly to him. For a long while he has been too high-spirited to yield, but, at last, the little one has come and said, "Father, I was wrong, and I am sorry." And in that moment there was perfect peace between the two! The father said, "That is all I wanted you to say, my dear child. I loved you even while you were naughty, but I wanted you to feel and admit that you were doing wrong. And now that you have felt it, and acknowledged it, the trouble is all over. Come to my bosom, for you are as much loved as all the rest of the family." I can quite imagine that when any of you have been at cross purposes with God, He has refused, for a time, to give you the sense of His fatherly love in your heart. Then, I beseech you, go to Him, and I suggest that you cannot pray to Him more

appropriately than in the words of the text, "Why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?" Or pray, as Job did, a little later, "Show me why You contend with me, for I wish to be at peace with You, and there can be no rest to my new-born spirit while there is any cause of quarrel between us.

Thus far have I spoken to the children of God. Now I ask for your earnest prayers that I may be guided to speak wisely and powerfully to others.

II. THE QUESTION IN OUR TEXT MAY BE ASKED BY SOME WHO ARE NOT CONSCIOUSLY GOD'S CHILDREN. "Why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?"

And, first, I think that I hear somebody making this kind of enquiry, "Why does not God pardon my sin and have done with it? When I come to this place, I hear a great deal about atonement by blood, and reconciliation through the death of Christ. But why does not God just say to me, 'It is true that you have done wrong, but I forgive you, and there is the end of the matter'?" With the utmost reverence for the name and Character of God, I must say that such a course of action is impossible! God is infinitely just and holy. He is the Judge of all the earth and He must punish sin. You know, dear Friends, that there are times, even in the history of earthly kingdoms, when the rulers say, by their actions, if not in words, "There is sedition abroad, but we will let it go on. We do not want to seem severe, so we will not strike the rebels down." What is sure to be the consequence of such conduct? Why, the evil grows worse and worse—the rebellious men presume upon the liberty allowed them, and take still more liberty—and, unless the law-giver intends that his law shall be kicked about the street like a football, unless he means that the peace and safety of his law-abiding subjects should be absolutely destroyed, he is at last obliged to act! And so he says, "No, this state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue. I shall be cruel to others unless I draw the sword and make justice to be respected throughout my realm."

I tell you, dear Friends, that the most awful thing in the universe would be a world full of sin and yet without a Hell for its punishment! The most dreadful condition for any people to be in is that of absolute anarchy, when every man does what he pleases, and law has become utterly contemptible. Now, if, after men had lived lives of ungodliness and sin, of which they had never repented, and from the guilt of which they had never been purged, God were just quietly to take them to Heaven, that would be the end of all moral government, and Heaven itself would not be a place that anybody would wish to go! If ungodly people went there in the same state as they are in here, Heaven would become a sort of antechamber of Hell, a respectable place of damnation! But that can never be the case. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He has devised a wondrous plan by which He can pardon the guilty without to the slightest degree shaking the foundations of His Throne, or endangering His government. Will you be saved in that way, or not? If you reject God's way of salvation, you must be lost and the blame must lie at your own door! God will not permit anarchy in order that He may indulge your whims, or vacate the Throne of Heaven that He may save you according to your fancy. At the infinite expense of His heart's love—by the death of His own dear Son—He has provided a way of salvation! And if you reject that, you need not ask Job's question, for you know why He does not pardon your transgression and take away your iniquity—and upon your own head shall lie the blood of your immortal soul!

Perhaps somebody else says "Well, then, if that is God's way of salvation, let us believe in Jesus Christ and let us have pardon at once. But you talk about the need of a new birth and about

forsaking sin, and following after holiness, and you say that without holiness no man can see the Lord." Yes, I do say it, for God's Word says it! And I repeat that for God to give pardon, and then allow men to go on in sin just as they did before, would be a curse to them instead of a blessing! Why, if the dishonest man prospers in the world, is that a blessing to him? No, certainly not, for he only becomes the more dishonest. If a man commits licentiousness and he escapes the consequences of it in this life, is that a blessing to him? No, for he becomes the more licentious—and if God did not punish men for their sin, but permitted them to be happy in the sin, it would be a greater curse to them than for Him to come and say to them, "For every transgression of My righteous Law, there shall be due punishment. And for all moral evil there shall also be physical evils upon those who commit it." I thank God that He does not permit sin to produce happiness! I bless Him that He puts punishment at the back of evil, for so it ought to be. The curse of sin is in the evil, itself, rather than in its punishment. And if it could become a happy thing for a man to be a sinner, then men would sin, and sin again, and sin yet more deeply—and this, God will not have.

"Well," says another friend, "that is not my trouble. I am willing to be saved by the Atonement of Christ, and I am perfectly willing to be made to cease from sin, and to receive from God a new heart and a right spirit. Why, then, does He not pardon me and blot out my transgressions?" Well, it may be, first, because you have not confessed your wrongdoing. You remember that the Apostle John says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Do you ask, "To whom shall I confess my sins?" Shall you come to me with your confession? Oh no, no, no! I could not stand that! There is an old proverb about a thing being "as filthy as a priest's ear." I cannot imagine anything dirtier than that and I have no wish to be a partaker in the filthiness. Go to God and confess your sin to Him—pour out your heart's sad story in the ear of Him against whom you have offended! Say with David, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight."

Dear anxious Friend, if you say to me, "For months I have sought the Lord, but I cannot find Him, or get peace of conscience." I advise you to try the effect of this plan—shut yourself up in your room and make a detailed confession of your transgression. Perhaps confessing it in the bulk may have helped you to be hypocritical, so try and confess it in detail, especially dwelling upon those grosser sins which most provoke God and most defile the conscience, even as David prayed, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God." That was his great crime—he had been the cause of the death of Uriah, so he confessed that he was guilty of blood and prayed to be delivered from it. In like manner, confess your sin, whatever it has been. I am persuaded that, often, confession to God would relieve the soul of its load of guilt. Just as when a man has a gathering tumor, and a wise physician lets in the lancet, and that which had gathered is removed, and the inflammation subsides, so often would it be with what the conscience has gathered if, by confession, the heart were lanced, and the accumulated evil dispersed. How can we expect God to give rest to our conscience if we will not confess our sins to Him?

May it not be possible, also, dear Friends who cannot obtain pardon and peace, that you are still practicing some known sin? Now, your Heavenly Father means to give you mercy in a way that shall be for your permanent benefit. What are you doing that is wrong? I do not know you so intimately as to be able to tell what is amiss with you, but I have known a man who never could get peace with God because he had a quarrel with his brother and, as he would not forgive his

brother, it was not reasonable that he should expect to receive forgiveness from God. There was another man who sought the Lord for a long while, but he never could get peace for this reason—he was a traveling draper and he had what was supposed to be a yard measure, but it was not full length—and, one day, during a sermon, he took up his short measure in the place of worship and just snapped it across his knee—and then he found peace with God! He gave up that which had been the means of his wrongdoing. He had sought for pardon in vain all the while that he had persevered in evil. But as soon as that was given up, the Lord whispered peace to his soul.

Do any of you take "a drop too much" at home? Is that your besetting sin? I mean women as well as men when I ask that question! You smile at the suggestion, but it is no laughing matter, for it is only too true that many who are never suspected of such a thing, are guilty of drinking to excess. Now it may be that there will never be peace between God and your soul until that glass goes. It will have to go if God is to forgive your sin—so the sooner it goes, the better will it be for you. Perhaps, in your case, the sin is that you do not manage your families right. Are your children never corrected when they do wrong? Are they, in fact, allowed to grow up to be children of the devil? Do you expect God and you to be agreed while it, if so? Think what a quarrel God had with His servant, Eli, over that matter, and remember how that quarrel ended because Eli mildly said to his sons, "Why do you do such things?" but restrained them not when they made themselves vile.

Look, dear Friends, God will not save us because of our works! Salvation is entirely by Grace, but then that Grace shows itself by leading the sinner upon whom it is bestowed to give up the sin in which he had formerly indulged. Which, then, will you have—your sin or your Savior? Do not try to hold sin with one hand and the Savior with the other, for they cannot both of them be yours. So choose which you will have. I pray that God may show you what is the sin which is keeping you from peace, and then grant you the Grace to give it up.

"Well," you say, "I do not know that this is my case at all, for I really do, from my heart, endeavor to give up all sin, and I am sincerely seeking peace with God." Well, Friend, perhaps you have not found it because you have not been thoroughly earnest in seeking it. You seem to be in earnest while you are here on a Sunday night, but how earnest are you on Monday night? Perhaps you are fairly so, then, because you come to the Prayer Meeting, but how about Tuesday, and Wednesday, and the rest of the week? When a man really wants to have his soul saved, he should let everything else go until he gets that all-important matter settled. Yes, I will venture to say as much as that. Remember what the woman of Samaria did when she had received Christ's word at the well at Sychar? She had gone to the well for water, but look at her as she goes back to the city! Is there any water pot on her head? No! The woman left her water pot—she forgot what had been to her a necessary occupation when once she had been brought seriously to think about her soul and her Savior! I do not want you to forget that when you have found Christ, you can carry your water pot, and yet cleave to Christ, but, until you have really received Him by faith, I should like to see you so fully absorbed in the pursuit of the one thing necessary that everything else should be put into the second place, or even lower than that! And if you were to say, "Until I am saved, I will do absolutely nothing. I will get to my chamber and I will cry to God for mercy, and from that room I will never come until He blesses me," I would not charge you with fanaticism, nor would anybody else who knew the relative value of eternal things and things of time and sense! Why, Man, in order to save your coat, would you throw away your life? "No," you would say, "the coat is but a trifle compared with my life." Well, then, as your life is of more value than your coat, and as your

soul is of more value than your body, and as the first thing you need is to get your sin forgiven that your soul may be saved— until that is done, everything else may well be let go! God give you such desperate earnestness that you must and will have the blessing! When you reach that resolve, you shall have it. When you cannot take a denial from God, you shall not have a denial.

There is still one more thing that I will mention as a reason why some men do not find the Savior, and get their sins forgiven, and that is, because they do not get off the wrong ground on to the right ground. If you are ever to be pardoned, dear Friend, it must be entirely by an act of Divine, unmerited favor. Now perhaps you are trying to do something to recommend yourself to God. You would scorn with derision the doctrine of being saved by your own merits, but, still, you have a notion that there is something or other in you that is to recommend you to God in some measure or degree, and you still think that the ground of your forgiveness must lie, to some extent, with yourself. Well, now, you never can have forgiveness in that way! Salvation must be all of works, or else all of Grace. Are you willing to be saved as a guilty, Hell-deserving sinner—as one who does not deserve salvation, but, on the contrary, deserves to endure the wrath of God? Are you willing that, henceforth, it shall be said, "That man was freely forgiven all his trespasses, not for his own sake, but for Christ's sake alone?"

That is good ground for you to stand upon! That is solid rock. But some men seem to get one foot upon the rock and they say, "Yes, salvation comes by Christ." Where is that other foot of yours, my Friend? Oh, he says that he has been baptized, or that he has been confirmed, or that he has, in some way or other, done something in which he can trust. Now, all such reliance as that is simply resting on sand—and however firmly your other foot may be planted on the rock, you will go down if this foot is on sand. You need good standing for both your feet, dear Friends—and see that you get it. Let this be your language—

"You, O Christ, are all I need; More than all in You I find."

Do not look anywhere else for anyone or anything that can save you, but look to Christ, and to Christ alone! Are you too proud to do that? You will have to humble yourself beneath the mighty hand of God—and the sooner you do so, the better will it be for you. "Oh, but I, I—I must surely do something!" Listen—

"Till to Jesus' work you cling By a simple faith, 'Doing' is a deadly thing, 'Doing' ends in death! Cast your deadly 'doing' down, Down at Jesus' feet, Stand in Him, in Him alone, Gloriously complete!"

This is the Gospel—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." You will never see up in Heaven a sign bearing the names ,"Christ, and Co." No, it is Christ, and Christ alone, who is the sinner's Savior! He claims this for Himself—"I am Alpha and Omega." That is, "I am A, and I am Z. I am the first letter of the alphabet, and I am the last letter, and I am every other letter from the first down to the last." Will you make Him to be so to you, dear Friend? Will you take Him to be your Savior now? "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life." A friend told us, at one of our Prayer Meetings, that "H-A-S spells, "got it." "He that believes on the Son is a saved sinner, he has got that everlasting life that can never die and can never be taken away from him. Therefore, Beloved Friends, believe in Jesus and you, too, shall have this eternal life! You shall have pardon, you shall have peace, you shall have God, and you shall have Heaven, itself, to enjoy before long! God do so unto you, for His great mercy's sake in Christ Jesus! Amen and Amen.

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Job 7:1-21; John 3:14-17.

Job was sorely troubled by the cruel speeches of his friends and he answered them out of the bitterness of his soul. What we are first about to read is a part of his language under those circumstances.

Job 7:1. Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? Are not his days also like the days of an hireling? Is there not a certain time for each one of us to live? Is there not an end to all the trouble and sorrow of this mortal state? "Woe is me," says Job, "will this sad condition of things never come to a close? Must it always be thus with me?"

2. As a servant earnestly desires the shadow. When the day shall close, and he can go to his home.

2, 3. And as an hireling looks for the reward of his work: so am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. If that is the case with any of you, dear Friends, you ought to be comforted by the thought that a better man than you are underwent just what you are enduring—and underwent it so as to glorify God by it. Remember what the Apostle James wrote, "Behold, we count them happy which endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." But if our case is not so bad as Job's was—if we are in good health and surrounded by God's mercy—let us be very grateful. Every morning that you wake after a refreshing night's rest, praise God for it, for it might have been far otherwise—you might have had wearisome nights through pain and suffering. 4, 5. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone and I am full of tossing to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome. Such was the dreadful disease under which this man of God labored, for the worst of pain may happen to the best of men. Sometimes God plows His best fields most, and why should He not do so? Do not men try to do most with that which will yield most? And so God may most chasten those who will best repay the strokes of His hand. It is no token of displeasure when God smites us with disease—it may be an evidence that we are branches of the vine that bring forth fruit, or else He would not have taken the trouble to prune us.

6. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. His spirits are sunk so low that he had not any hope left at all—at least, there was none apparent just then. O you poor tried children of God, I beseech you once again to see that you are only walking where others have gone before you! Mark their footprints and take heart!

7, 8. O remember that my life is wind: my eyes shall no more see good. The eyes of Him that have seen me shall see me no more: Your eyes are upon me, and I am not. As if God only looked at him and the very look withered him. Or as if there was only time for God to look at him, and then he disappeared as though he had been but a dream, an unsubstantial thing. It is good, my Brothers and Sisters, sometimes, to know what vanities we are. And if we complain that things around us are vanity, what are we ourselves but the shadows of a shade?

9-12. As the cloud is consumed and vanishes away: so he that goes down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him anymore.

Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me? Am I such a big thing, such a dangerous thing, that I ought to be watched like this, and perpetually hampered, and tethered, and kept within bounds? Ah, no! Job, you are neither a sea nor a whale, but something worse than either of them! So are we all—more false than the treacherous sea, harder to be tamed than the wildest of God's creatures. God does set a watch over us and well He may. But hear Job's complaint—

13-15. When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; then You scare me with dreams, and terrify me through visions: so that my soul chooses strangling, and death rather than my life. Were you ever in this terrible place, dear Friend? Some of us have been there and we have used the very language of Job! And yet, for all that, we have been brought up out of the utmost depths of despondency into the topmost heights of joy. Therefore, be comforted, you poor prisoners. Through the bars and grating of your soul dungeon, we would sing unto you this song—the Lord who has brought us forth can bring you forth, also, for "the Lord looses the prisoners." The God of Job is yet alive, strong as ever for the deliverance of such as put their trust in Him. 16, 17. I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity. What is man, that You should magnify him? And that You should set Your heart upon him? Job seems to say, "I am too little for God to notice me; why does He make so much of me as to chasten me so sorely?"

18, 19. And that You should visit him every ,morning, and try him every moment? How long will You not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle? Blow followed blow in quick succession. Pain came fast upon the heels of pain till Job seems to have had no rest from his anguish. This is the mournful moaning of a man on a sickbed, worn out with long-continued grief. Do not judge it harshly. You may have to use such words yourself, one day, and if you ever do, then judge not yourself harshly, but say, "I am only now where that eminent servant of God, the Patriarch Job, once was, and the Lord who delivered him will also deliver me."

20. Have I sinned? What have I done unto You, O You Preserver of men? We did not expect him to call God by that name, yet sorrow has a quick memory to recall anything by which it may be cheered. "You Preserver of men," says Job, "Have I sinned? What have I done to You?"

20. Why have You set me as Your target? "Drawing Your bow, and directing all Your arrows against my poor heart. Have You no targets, that you must make me Your target and test Your holy archery upon me?"

20. So that I am a burden to myself? Oh, what heavy words, "a burden to myself!"

21. And why do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity? For now shall I sleep in the dust and You shall seek me in the morning, but I shall not be. Speaking after the manner of man, he seems to think that if God does not pardon him soon, the pardon will come too late, for if God comes in mercy, by-and-by, he will be dead and gone— and God may seek him, but he shall not be found! This is how men talk when they get a little off their head through the very extremity of grief. We, too, may perhaps talk in the same fashion, one day, so let us not condemn poor Job. Now let us read a few Verses in the 3rd Chapter of the Gospel according to John, that we may be comforted. If any of you are laboring under a sense of sin, I would take you straight

away to sin's only cure.

John 3:14-15. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. "Whoever." Note that word, for it means you, and it means me. No matter though you are near to death's door, crushed and broken, bruised and mangled, look to the Crucified One and, looking, you shall find that there is eternal life for you! Though your soul has been ready to choose strangling rather than your life, yet there is a better life for you by trusting in Christ. Choose that and rest in Him. Say, from your heart, the last lines of the hymn we sang just now—

"Jesus, to Your arms I fly; Save me, Lord, or else I die." 16, 17. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. Now this, which is good teaching for those who have but lately come to Christ, or for those who are seeking to come to Him, is the very same teaching which will bring comfort to the most advanced and best instructed of the saints. How I love to continually begin with Christ over again as I began at the first! They say when a man is sick, it is a good thing to take him to his native place. And when a true Believer's soul gets faint and unbelieving, let him breathe the air of Calvary again! The learned Grotius, who had spent the most of his life in theological disputations—not always or even often on the right side—when he was dying said, "Read me something." And they read him the story of the publican and the Pharisee. He said, "And that poor publican I am. Thank God, that I am publican.' God be merciful to me, a sinner.'" That was the word with which the great scholar entered into Heaven—and that is the way in which you and I must come to God! May the Holy Spirit help us to come to Him thus! Amen.

. Adapted from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 8,11-13 #651 - A Sermon from a Rush

A SERMON FROM A RUSH

NO. 651

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 24, 1865,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Can the rush grow up without a marsh? Can the reeds grow

without water? While it is yet green and not cut down,

it withers before any other plant. So are the

paths of all that forget God. And the hypocrite's hope shall perish."

Job 8:11-13.

ISAAC walked in the fields at eventide to meditate. I commend him for

his occupation. Meditation is exceedingly profitable to the mind. If we talked less, read less, and meditated more we should be wiser men. I commend him for the season which he chose for that occupation—at eventide—when the business of the day was over and the general stillness of nature was in harmony with the quiet of his soul. I also commend him for the place which he selected—the wide expanse of nature—the field.

Wise men can readily find a thousand subjects for contemplation abroad in the open country. Our four-square room is not very suggestive. But when a man walks in the fields, having the Lord in his heart and his whole mental faculties directed towards heavenly things, all things aid him in his pleasing occupation. If we look above to the sun, moon and stars, all these remind us of the grandeur of God and make us ask ourselves, "What is man, that the Lord should be mindful of him, or the son of man, that Jehovah should visit him?"

If we look below, the green meadows, or golden cornfields all proclaim Divine care and bounty. There is not a bird that sings, nor a grasshopper that chirps in the grass which does not urge us to praise and magnify the name of the Most High—while the plants, from the hyssop on the wall to the cedar which spreads its boughs so gloriously on Lebanon—exhibit to observant eyes the wisdom of the great Creator of all things. The murmuring brook talks to the listening ear in hallowed whispers of Him whose cloudy Throne supplies its stream. And the air, as it sighs amid the trees, tells in mysterious accents of the great unseen but ever-active Spirit of the living God.

The great book of Nature only needs to be turned over by a reverent hand and to be read by an attentive eye to be found to be only second in teaching to the Book of Revelation. He who would

have us forget to study the fair creation of God is foolish. He would have us neglect one book by a great Author in order that we may the better comprehend another from the same hand. The pages of Inspiration reveal God far more clearly than the fields of creation—but having once obtained the light of God, the Holy Spirit, we can then enter the world of nature which has become consecrated to our best devotions and find that "in His temple does everyone speak of His Glory."

Down by the river's bank let us go, like Pharaoh's daughter, and perhaps among the rushes we shall find a subject for thought of which we may say, as she did of Moses, "I drew it out of the water." The reed, as it waves in yonder marsh, has a word of warning and whoever has ears to hear, let him hear. I claim your attention for a preacher who is not often heard—lend him your ears and when any shall ask you, "What did you go out to see?" you need not blush to answer, "A reed shaken by the wind."

The rush shall, this morning, by God's Grace, teach us a lesson of selfexamination. Bildad, the Shuhite, points it out to us as the picture of a hypocrite—so, going to our work at once we shall have three things to talk about this morning. The hypocrite's religion—first, what is it like? Secondly, what it lives on. And thirdly, what will become of it?

I. First, then, THE HYPOCRITE'S PROFESSION—WHAT IS IT LIKE? It is here compared to a rush growing in the mire and a reed flourishing in the water. This comparison has several points in it.

1. In the first place, hypocritical religion may be compared to the rush for the rapidity with which it grows. True conversions are often very sudden—as, for example, the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus and the conversion of the Philippian jailer when suddenly startled out of his sleep and made to cry, "What must I do to be saved?" But the aftergrowth of Christians is not quite so rapid and uninterrupted—seasons of deep depression chill their joy. Hours of furious temptation make a dreadful onslaught upon their quiet.

They cannot always rejoice. Their life is checkered. They are emptied from vessel to vessel and are acquainted with grief. True Christians are very much like oaks which take years to reach their maturity—many March winds blow through them before they are well rooted. And oftentimes tempest and flood and drought and hurricane exercise their tremendous powers upon them.

Not so the hypocrite—once having made a profession of being converted, things generally go very smoothly with him. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." They are strangers to lamentations over inbred corruption. When Believers talk of a warfare within, they are astonished! If we groan out, "O wretched man that I am—who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" these gentlemen say, "What bad people these Christians must be, to talk in that way! What black hearts they must have! And how inconsistent for them to claim to be children of God!"

The hypocrite can always pray well and sing well. He meets no hindrances in coming to the Mercy Seat, has no groans to mingle with his formal songs. The backs of living men ache under their loads, but a steam-engine having no living sensibilities knows no pains. A horse may stumble from weariness, but a locomotive, never! Even so, the mechanical professor goes on and on and on at an even rate—when living souls enjoy no such perfect equanimity.

Strong temptations do not grieve the mere professor. The devil does not care to molest him—he knows he is sure of him and so he lets him very much alone. The Pharisee's house stood very firmly though it was built on sand—and it neither shook nor stirred till the flood came. It was as firm to all human appearance as if it had been founded on the Rock of Ages. When the trial-hour came—then the destruction was terribly complete— but meanwhile its foundations were dug without labor and its timbers were set up without trouble.

It is an ill sign, dear Friend, if you never have to search your heart with deep anxiety lest you should be deceived. To have such strong faith that you never waver is one thing—but to be filled with such strong presumption that you never examine yourself is quite another. "Tush!" says this man, "I can do all things. I can run and not be weary! I can walk and not faint! I do not understand these sighgs of Little-Faith, and limping of Ready-to-Halt. I cannot understand all this noise about conflict within—I am peaceable and quiet always." Yes, so it may be. Alas, many have heard the voice, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace."

So, like the rush by the river, the hypocrite grows up suddenly and flourishingly in Divine things, to all appearances, and finds it easy work to be green and fair in the ways of the Lord.

2. The rush is of all plants one of the most hollow and unsubstantial. It looks stout enough to be wielded as a staff, but he that leans upon it shall most certainly fall. It is a water-loving thing and it partakes of the nature of that on which it feeds—it is unstable as water and it does not excel. It has a fine appearance, but it is of no service whatever where stability is needed.

So is it with the hypocrite! He is fair enough on the outside, but there is no solid faith in Christ Jesus in him—no real repentance on account of sin—no vital union to Christ Jesus. He can pray, but not in secret, and the essence and soul of prayer he never knew. He has never wrestled with the angel, never sighed and cried unto God and been "heard in that he feared." He has a pretended confidence, but that confidence never was founded and bottomed on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

He was never emptied of self, never brought down to feel that all his own doing, and willing, and power are less than nothing and vanity. If there had been a deep repentance, and a real confidence, and a true life in Jesus, then he had not been the hypocrite that he now is. Oh, dear Friends, while I speak upon these things, I have over my spirit the overshadowing of a great gloom. What if some of us should be found to have been as unsubstantial as the rush by the river when God comes to judge the world?

What? When you need a hope to bear you up in the hour of death— what if it should snap beneath you? You high professors! You ancient members and revered Church officers! You eloquent preachers of the Word—what if all your profession should, like the baseless fabric of a vision, pass away? You have been drinking of the cup of the Lord. You have been feasting at His sacramental table. You have talked a great deal of rich experiences. You have boasted of the Divine Graces which you think the Spirit of God has given you—but what if it should all be a delusion? What if you should have fostered in your soul self-deception and should now be traversing the way of darkness while you dream that you are in the way of light?

May the Lord search us and give us that true, solid, substantial, real, strong-hearted faith in Christ which will stand the test! The reed is hollow and has no heart—and the hypocrite has none

either—and lack of heart is fatal, indeed. When the Roman seer killed the victim to take an omen from the innards, he always considered it to be the worst sign of all if no heart was found, or if the heart was shriveled. "Their heart is divided," said Hosea, "now shall they be found wanting."

God abhors the sacrifice where the heart is not found. Sirs, if you cannot give God your hearts, do not mock Him with solemn sounds upon thoughtless tongues! If you do not mean your godliness, do not profess it! Above all things, abhor mere profession. Jonathan Edwards tells us that in the great revival in America there were conversions of all sorts of people—from harlots upwards, but not one single conversion, he said—of ungodly professors. Those seemed to have been the only persons upon whom the Spirit of God did not descend. Beware, then, of having the outward form of religion and being hollow and heartless like the rush, for then your case is desperate, indeed.

3. A third comparison very naturally suggests itself, namely, that the hypocrite is very like the rush for its bending properties. When the rough wind comes howling over the marsh, the rush has made up its mind that it will hold its place at all hazards. So if the wind blows from the north, he bends to the south and the blast sweeps over him. And if the wind blows from the south, he bends to the north and the gale has no effect upon him. Only grant the rush one thing—that he may keep his place—and he will cheerfully bow to all the rest.

The hypocrite will yield to good influences if he is in good society. "Oh yes, certainly, certainly, sing, pray, anything you like." With equal readiness he will yield to evil influences if he happens to be in connection with them. "Oh, yes, sing a song, talk wantonness, run into gay society, attend the theater, take a turn with the dice! Certainly, if you wish it! 'When we are at Rome we do as Rome does.' "

Anything to oblige anybody is his motto. He is an omnivorous feeder and like the swine can eat the vegetable of propriety, or the flesh of iniquity. One form of doctrine is preached to him—very well, he would not wish to contend against it for a moment! It is contradicted by the next preacher he hears—and really, there is a great deal to be said on the other side—so he holds with hare and hounds, too. He is all for heat when the weather is hot and quite as much for cold when it is the season. He can freeze and melt and boil, all in an hour—just as he finds it pays best to be solid or liquid. If it is most respectable to call a thing black, well, then, it is black! If it will pay better to call it white, well, then, it is not so very black—in fact it is rather white, or white altogether if you like to call it so!

The gross example of the Vicar of Bray comes at once to one's mind. He had been a papist under Henry VIII, then a Protestant under a Protestant reign—then a papist under Mary—then again a Protestant under Elizabeth. And he declared he had always been consistent with his principle, for his principle was to continue the Vicar of Bray! Some there are who are evidently consistent in this particular and in the idea that they will make things as easy for themselves as they can—and will get as much profit as they can—either by truth or lies.

Do you not know some? They have not an atom of that stern stuff of which martyrs are made in the whole of their composition. They love that modern goddess, Charity. When Diana went down Charity went up. And she is as detestable a goddess as ever Diana was. Give me a man who will be all things to all men to win souls, if it is not a matter of principle—but give me the man who, when it comes to be a matter of right and wrong, would rather die than deny his faith—who could

burn, but could not for a moment conceal his sentiments, much less lay them aside until a more convenient season. True godliness, such as will save the soul, must not be the mere bark, but the heart, the sap, the essence of a man's being—it must run right through and through, so that he cannot live without it. That religion which you do not carry with you every day and which is not the dearest object for which you live is not worth picking up from a dunghill! Beloved, we must be ready to die for Christ or we shall have no joy in the fact that Christ died for us.

4. Yet again the bulrush has been used in Scripture as a picture of a hypocrite from its habit of hanging down its head. "Is it to hang your head like a bulrush?" asks the Prophet, speaking to some who kept a hypocritical fast. Pretended Christians seem to think that to hang down the head is the very index of deep piety. To look piously miserable. To speak in a wretched tone of voice. To be constantly lamenting the wickedness of the times and bewailing the badness of the harvests and the wickedness of our legislature.

To see nothing anywhere but what is vile, deceptive and abominable is thought to be the trademark of superfine godliness. It is the mark of a hypocrite to wear always a sad countenance—Job says of the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" And the answer that he expected was, "No, it is altogether impossible!" A real hypocrite finds no satisfaction in his religion. He goes through with it because he thinks he must. He walks to his place of worship with his books under his arm just as a culprit might be supposed to walk up the gallows stairs. And when he gets to a place of worship he is very proper in all his demeanor—very proper, indeed, but he is never joyous.

Smile on Sundays? Shocking! What? Enjoy anything like mirth at any time! Awful! Now you understand all about this. There are some things which you must handle very tenderly because they will break if you don't. A man, dressed in shoddy garments, walks very demurely for fear the rubbish should tear. But good broadcloth allows us liberty of action without fear of such an accident. Gingerbread religionists may only be looked at in their somber aspects—genuine Believers are not ashamed to be viewed even when their cheerfulness is at its full.

A person who has bought a pair of shoes made of brown paper must mincingly tread with delicate steps. But he who, according to Scripture, is shod with iron and brass may, with manly gait, march on and even leap for joy without fear! I love Christian preciseness of action, but I abhor hypocritical decorum and formalistic exactness of worship. I would advocate holy cheerfulness—a Christian freedom which lets the whole man show itself—a freedom of sorrowing when it is the time for sorrow and a freedom of rejoicing when it is the time for rejoicing!

That constrained, stiffly starched religion which some people think such a great deal of is nothing but the bulrush religion of the hypocrite and the Pharisee—and the sooner we throw it out the better. The man whose heart is right with God does not stop to say, "How will this look?" His heart tells him, as he reads the Word, that such a course is right and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he follows it. Right with him is delight. He knows that evil is not denied to him as though he were debarred from pleasure, but that it is only kept from him as a tender parent would keep poison from a child. Our life is the life of liberty. And we find, of true religion, that "Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace."

5. Once more—the rush is well taken as an emblem of the mere professor from its bearing no fruit. Nobody would expect to find figs on a bulrush, or grapes of Eshcol on a reed. So it is with the hypocrite—he brings forth no fruit. The hypocrite gets as far as this—"I do not drink. I do not swear. I do not cheat. I do not lie. I do not break the Sabbath." His religion is all negative. And when it comes to anything positive he fails. What have you ever done for Christ? You may look at the whole of the hypocrite's life and it yields nothing.

Perhaps he has given a guinea or two to a charity. Yes—but did he give it to God? He has been kind to the poor. Did he look at the poor as being God's poor and care for them because God cares for them? Did he do it for God? Throughout the whole life of the hypocrite there is nothing in which he really serves God. What? Not when he has made that long prayer? He did it either to satisfy his conscience or to please those who were listening to him. Did he really pray to God and do it for God's Glory and in order that he might have fellowship with God?

If so, he is no hypocrite—but the hypocrite proper—though he has left off many wrong things, yet he has not advanced so far as to bring forth fruit meet for repentance. He has not run in the way of holiness. He has not sought after the image of Christ. He does not delight in communion with Christ. He has no faith, no joy, no hope, no conformity to the Spirit of the Master. He lacks fruit and therefore he is as the rush and not as a plant of the Lord's right hand planting.

I will not stay further to work out this parallel—only if any words have seemed to strike you—let them strike you. If there has been a sentence in what I have said that suited my own case, I do desire to feel its power. The worst is that some of you who are most sincere will be troubled when you search yourselves, when we do not want you to be. And others who are really hypocrites are the very last persons to think they are. When our young members come to me in such trouble, crying, "Sir, I am afraid I am a hypocrite," I always think, "I believe you are not, or else you would not be afraid of it."

But those who are never afraid—who have just written it down as a matter of fact that all is well with them—should listen to the word of the Prophet, "Strangers have devoured his strength and he knows it not: yes, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not." The worm may be in the center of the apple when the cheek of the fruit is still beautiful to look upon. God save us from hypocrisy and grant us Grace to see ourselves in a true light!

II. Secondly, we have to consider WHAT IT IS THAT THE HYPOCRITE'S RELIGION LIVES ON. "Can the rush grow up without a marsh? Can the reeds grow without water?" The rush is entirely dependent upon the ooze in which it is planted. If there should come a season of drought and the water should fail from the marsh, the rush would more speedily die than any other plant. "While it is yet green and not cut down, it withers before any other plant." The Hebrew name for the rush signifies a plant that is always drinking. And so the rush lives perpetually by sucking and drinking in moisture. This is the case of the hypocrite. The hypocrite cannot live without something that shall foster his apparent piety. Let me show you some of this mire and water upon which the hypocrite lives. Some people's religion cannot live without excitement—revival services, earnest preachers and zealous Prayer Meetings keep them green. But the earnest minister dies, or goes to another part of the country. The Church is not quite so earnest as it was and what then? Where are your converts?

Oh, how many there are who are hot-house plants—while the temperature is kept up to a certain point they flourish and bring forth flowers, if not fruits! But take them out into the open air. Give them one or two nights' frost of persecution and where are they? My dear Hearers, beware of that godliness which depends upon excitement for its life! I do not speak against religious excitement—men get excited over politics, and science, and trade—why should they not be excited about the far weightier things of religion?

But still, though you may indulge yourself with it, sometimes, do not let it be your element. I am afraid that many Churches have been revived and revived till they have become like big bubbles full of wind and now they have almost vanished into thin air! The grace which man gives, man can take away. If your piety has sprung up like a mushroom, it will be about as frail. Doubtless many are converted at revivals who run well and hold out. And then their conversion is the work of the Spirit of God.

But there are as many, I fear, of another kind! They get delirious with excitement—they fancy that they have repented, dream that they have believed—and then imagine themselves to be the children of God! They may go on in such a delusion perhaps year after year. Beware! Beware! Some hypocrites can no more live without excitement than the rush can live without water! Dear Hearers, pray that you may be like the palm tree, which even in the desert still continues green and brings forth its fruit in the year of drought.

Many mere professors live upon encouragement. You are the child of godly parents—those parents naturally look with great delight upon the first signs of Divine Grace in you and they encourage and foster, as they should do, everything that is good. Or you belong to a class such as some of those most blessed classes which meet here, presided over by tender, loving spirits—and whenever you have a little difficulty you can run to these kind helpers. Whenever any fresh temptation arises you find strength in their warning and counsel.

This is a very great privilege. I wish that in all Churches we would practice the text, "Encourage him," more and more. We ought to comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak. But, dear Friends, beware of the piety which depends upon encouragement. You will have to go, perhaps, where you will be frowned at and scowled at, where the head of the household, instead of encouraging prayer, will refuse you either the room or the time for engaging in it. You may meet with hard words, bitter sneers, and cruel mockery because you profess to be a Christian. Oh, get Grace which will stand that fiery trial! God give you a Grace that will be independent of human helpers because it hangs upon the bare arm of God Himself!

Some, too, we know, whose religion is sustained by example. It may be the custom in the circle in which you move to attend a place of worship— no, more—it has come to be the fashion to join the Church and make a profession of religion. Well, example is a good thing. When I was crossing the Humber from Hull to New Holland the other day, a steamer came in with sheep on board and there was some difficulty in getting them from the boat to the pier. The butcher first dragged one sheep over the drawbridge and then the others came along readily enough. Example is a good thing—one true sheep of Christ may lead the rest in the way of Truth and obedience.

But a religion which depends entirely on other people must obviously go to ruin when subjected to the temptation of an evil example. Why, if you simply join the Church because other young people

do it, or profess such-and-such a faith because it happens to be the prevailing doctrine in the district where you reside—why, then, your religion will depend on the locality! And when you move somewhere else, your religion will move off, too, or you from it. Young man, avoid this feeble sort of piety. Be a man who can be singular when to be singular is to be right.

If the whole world shall run headlong down the broad road, be it yours to thread your way through the crowd against the current along the uphill way of life. The dead fish floats down the stream, the live fish goes against it. Show your life by shunning unholy example. Furthermore, a hypocrite's religion is often very much supported by the profit that he makes by it. Mr. By-Ends joined the Church because, he said, he should get a good wife by making a profession of religion.

Besides, Mr. By-Ends kept a shop and went to a place of worship because, he said, the people would have to buy goods somewhere—and if they saw him at their place—very likely they would come to his shop and so his religion would help his trade. Thus he argued that there were three good things—a profession of religion, a good wife and a good trade as well. Suppose, Mr. By-Ends, that your religion involved your missing the supposed good wife, and losing the good customers, what about it then? "Why, then," says he, "I'm very sorry, but really we must look to the Mal. chance. We must not commit ourselves too far."

That is Mr. By-Ends' way of judging. He does not look upon the things of God as the Mal. choice. They are means to an end—that is all. I fear there is much of this everywhere. You will know best, any of you, how far you are affected by it. I am sure there are few, if any of you, who can be suspected of coming here to gain trade, for the thing does not answer in such a city as London. But in country towns this operates marvelously. You can have the Dissenting trade if you go to meeting, or you can have the Church trade if you go to the steeple-house.

Well, worshippers of the golden calf, do you know what Christ will do with you if you are found in His temple when He comes? That scourge of small cords will be on your backs! "Take these things from here," He will say, as He sees your tables and your doves and your shekels. "My Father's house shall be called a House of Prayer—you have made it a den of thieves." The rush will grow where there is plenty of mire, plenty of profit for religion—but dry up the gains and where would some people's religion be? Pray with all your might against this loathsome disgusting sin of making a pretension to godliness merely for the sake of getting something by it. Yet, doubtless, there are crowds who do this. With certain persons their godliness rests very much upon their prosperity. "Does Job serve God for nothing?" was the wicked question of Satan concerning that upright man. And of many it might be asked with justice, for they love God after a fashion because He prospers them. But if things went ill with them they would give up all faith in God. I remember two who joined this Church. I remember them with sorrow. I faintly hope good things of them, but I frequently fear the worst.

They joined this Church when things were going very well. But almost from that very time they had a succession of losses and they imputed this to their having made a profession of religion. And so they gave up outward religious duties. Whether they did that out of a scrupulous honesty, I scarcely can tell. Or whether it really was this—that they could not receive evil at the hand of God as well as good—I do not know. I am inclined to fear it was the latter. There are some who quarrel with the most High. If they can clearly see that since the time of their supposed conversion, the world has gone prosperously with them, then they will love God in their poor carnal way. But if it

has been nothing but adversity then they are astonished and think God is not kind with them.

Do you know that the promise of the old Covenant was prosperity, but the promise of the new Covenant is adversity? Listen to this text—"Every branch in Me that bears not fruit He takes away and every branch that bears fruit"—what? "He purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit"! If you bring forth fruit you will have to endure affliction! "Alas," says one, "that is a terrible prospect!" Ah, but, Beloved, this affliction works out such comfortable fruit that the Christian, who is the subject of it, has learned to rejoice in tribulations—because as his tribulations abound so his consolation abounds by Christ Jesus!

Rest assured if you are a godly man, you will be no stranger to the rod. Trials must and will befall. But do not let me mislead anybody into the idea of praying for trouble! I have heard of one who did so—he only did it but once—many trials made him wiser! The true-born child knows how to bear the rod, but he will not ask for it—if he asked for it he would be very silly—and it would be of no service to him. You will have it sooner or later! And though it may be months and years will roll very quietly with you, yet there will be days of darkness and you ought to rejoice that there are such, for in these you will be weaned from earth and made ready for Heaven! You will be delivered from your clinging to the present and made to long, and pine and sigh for the things which are not seen but eternal, so soon to be revealed to you.

To conclude this point. The hypocrite is very much affected by the respectability of the religion which he avows. John Bunyan's pithy way of putting it is, "Many walk with religion when she wears her silver slippers." But they forsake her if she goes barefoot. May I ask you this question? What would you do if to follow Christ were penal according to the laws of the land? If you had to live under perpetual jeopardy of life for reading the Word—would you hide it as the saints of God did, behind the wainscot or under the floor—and read it down in the cellar or up in the attic at spare moments?

Could you come forward in the day of trial as those did in Pliny's time and say, "I am a Christian"? Do you think that like poor Tomkins, when Bonner held his finger over the candle to let him see what it was like, you could still say you could burn but you could not turn? Could you stand as some of the martyrs did at the stake, telling those who looked on that if they did not clap their hands at the last they might know their religion was not true, and so at the very last, when their poor fingers were all on fire, they would still lift them up and wave their hands to and fro, and cry out, "None but Christ! None but Christ!"?

Do you think you would have the Grace to suffer for Christ Jesus? You may say, "I fear I should not." My dear Friends, that fear is a very natural one. But mark you, if you can bear the ordinary trials of the day, the constant trials of the world, and take them before God and exhibit Christian patience under them, you may hope that as a Believer in Christ you would have more Grace given you when the trials became more severe. And so you would be able to pass through them as the saints of old did!

But mark you, if the present trials and troubles of the day are too much for you and you cannot exhibit Christian patience under them, I am compelled to ask you in the language of Jeremiah, "If you have run with the footmen and they have wearied you, how will you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace wherein you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the swelling

of Jordan?" This may help us to try ourselves.

III. We have a third point to close with and that is, WHAT BECOMES OF THE HYPOCRITE'S HOPE? "While it is yet green and not cut down, it withers before any other plant. So are the paths of all that forget God. And the hypocrite's hope shall perish. Long before the Lord comes to cut the hypocrite down it often happens that he dries up for want of the mire on which he lives. The excitement, the encouragement, the example, the profit, the respectability, the prosperity upon which he lived fail him and he fails, too.

Alas, how dolefully is this the case in all Christian Churches! Little have we had to mourn over defections during the years of our ministry. But we have had some sorrowful, very sorrowful cases, and I doubt not we shall have more. "Lord, is it I?" "Lord, is it I?" is a question that may be passed round among professing Christians. I fear that there are those here this morning who one day will deny the Lord that bought them and crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.

"Oh," says one, "it cannot be me." Do not be too sure, Friend, do not be too sure! If I could come in Prophetic spirit to some of you who will do this and look you in the face and tell you what you will do, you would say like Hazael, "Is your servant a dog that he should do this thing?" And I should have to settle my countenance until I became ashamed and look at you yet again and say, "You are no dog and yet you will play the dog and return to your vomit and become yet again what once you were, only with this aggravation, that you will have sinned against light and against knowledge, against sacred influences and professed enjoyments of Divine love."

You have cleansed the house. You have swept it. You have garnished it and the evil spirit is gone. But if the Holy Spirit has not driven him out—if this has not been a work of power on the part of God—that evil spirit will come back and he will take unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself and they shall enter in and dwell there and your last end will be worse than the first! Better not to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to be turned back again.

The worst of men are those traitors who leave the army of Truth to side with the foe. I believe in the doctrine of the final perseverance of every true child of God—but there are in all our Churches certain spurious pretenders who will not hold on their way—who will blaze and sparkle for a season and then they will go out in darkness. They are "wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." Better far make no pretension of having come to Christ and of having been born again, unless through Divine Grace you shall hold fast to the end! Remember the back door to Hell! Remember the back door to Hell!

There is a public entrance for the open sinner—but there is a back door for the professed saint. There is a back door for the hoary-headed professor who has lived many years in apparent sincerity but who has been a liar before God. There is a back door for the preacher who can talk fast and loudly, but who does not, in his own heart, know the Truth of God he is preaching. There is a back door to Hell for Church members who are amiable and excellent in many respects, but who have not really looked unto the Lord Jesus Christ and found true salvation in Him. God grant that this may wake some who otherwise would sleep themselves into perdition!

Yet again, where the rush still continues green because it has mire and water enough on which to feed, another result happens, namely, that before long the sickle is used to cut it down. So must it be with you, Professor, if you shall keep up a green profession all your days. Yet if you are

heartless, spongy, soft, yielding, unfruitful like the rush—you will be cut down and sorrowful will be the day when, with a blaze, you shall be consumed! Oh, to be cut down at the last! Death, I hope, Beloved, will be to many of you the season of your greatest joy!

You will climb to Pisgah's top with weary footsteps, but when once there, the vision of the landscape will make amends for all the toil. The brooks, and hills, and valleys will flow with milk and honey! And your delighted eyes shall gaze upon your portion—your eternal heritage! But oh, how different will be our lot, if instead of this, "Tekel" shall be written upon us at the last because we are found wanting!

"O my God! My God! Have You forsaken me? Am I, after all, mistaken? Have I played the hypocrite and must I take the mask off now? Have I covered over the cancer? Have I worn a golden cloth over my leprous forehead and must it be torn away? And must I stand the mockery of devils and the laughter of all worlds? What? Have I drunk of Your cup? Have I eaten with You in the streets and must I hear You say, 'I never knew you, depart from Me you worker of iniquity'? Oh, must it be?"

Then how hard will be the bed on which I die! How stuffed with thorns that pillow! How tortured and anguished my poor broken heart, when every prop is knocked away and the house comes tumbling down about my ears! When every drop of comfort is dried up and even here the thirsty spirit lacks a drop of cordial to afford it comfort! O my dear Hearers, by the eternal God I do beseech you—seek a genuine religion! Do not put off self-examination! I dare not put it off on my own account and I pray you do not postpone it on yours. If I have not said a word to comfort and to cheer you this morning, forgive that lack of service, for my aim is to drive at this one thing—it will in the end be the best and most comforting to you all if you will set to work now and with diligence to try yourselves— whether you are in the faith.

Cry to God to aid you in this! You cannot do it well yourself, for, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" O Cry to Him—"Search me, O God and know my heart, try me and know my ways." Time is flying—set about the business before it is gone! Death is coming on—search yourselves before the darkness thickens into midnight gloom. The Judgment Day will soon arrive! The King will sit upon the Great White Throne. Oh, before He judges you, judge yourselves, that you be not judged!

The division will soon take place between the goats and the sheep. O, seek to be under Christ, the heavenly Shepherd now, that you are not banished from His Presence at the last. What more can I say? It is not your body that is at stake—it is not your estates that are in jeopardy— your soul, your undying SOUL—destined to Heaven's glories or to Hell's miseries are now in question! Search yourselves, search yourselves and God Almighty search you, too!

Ah, there are some of you who have no need to search. Without any trial you know yourselves to be on the wrong side. And there are others of you who, when you have searched, will still be afraid that you are wrong. Ah, well, whatever we are, or may have been, remember Jesus came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Looking to that thorn-crowned head, those dear hands and feet nailed to the tree, that blessed heart all exposed by the soldier's spear—looking there, looking there only, looking there NOW—we find

salvation!

Believers, you have looked before. But if that is a matter of question, look now. "Look unto Me and be you saved, all you ends of the earth." Repeat that glance which gave you comfort. There is life still in a look at that Crucified One. There is life at this moment for you. Jesus! Your people look to You again! Lover of our souls! Accept us! Oh, you who never looked before, He reigns in Glory, mighty to save! He gives repentance and remission of sins!

Only trust Him with your soul. Have done with all your works, your willings, your prayers, your tears, your everything as a ground of confidence, and trust in HIM who died for sinners and you "shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of His hands." The Lord grant we may be found right at last for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms 139:1-24.

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Job 8,7 #311 - The Beginning-Increase and End of

THE BEGINNING, INCREASE AND

END OF THE DIVINE LIFE

NO. 311

DELIVERED ON SABBATH EVENING, APRIL 29, 1860,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

"Though your beginning was small, yet your

latter end should greatly increase."

Job 8:7.

THIS was the reasoning of Bildad the Shuhite. He wished to prove that Job could not possibly be an upright man, for if he were so, he here affirms that his prosperity would increase continually. Or that if he fell into any trouble, God would awake for him and make the habitation of his righteousness prosperous. And though his family were now all destroyed and his wealth scattered to the winds—if he were an upright man, God would surely appear for him and his latter end would greatly increase.

Now the utterances of Bildad and of the other two men who came to comfort Job, but who made his wounds tingle, are not to be accepted as being inspired. They spoke as men—as mere men. They reasoned no doubt in their own esteem logically enough. But the Spirit of God was not with them in their speech, therefore with regard to any sentiment which we find uttered by these men, we must use our own judgment. And if it is not in consonance with the rest of Holy Scripture, it will be our bounden duty to reject it as being but the word of man—of a wise and ancient man it is true—but still of a man only.

With regard to the passage which I have selected as a text, it is true— altogether apart from its being said by Bildad, or being found in the Bible at all—it is true, as indeed the facts of the book of Job prove—for Job did greatly increase in his latter end. His beginning was small—he was brought down to poverty! To the potsherd and to the dunghill he had many graves, but no children. He had had many losses, he had now nothing left to lose. And yet God did awake for him. His righteousness came out from the darkness which had eclipsed it. He shone in sevenfold prosperity so that the words of Bildad were prophetic, though he knew it not. God put into his mouth language which did come true, after all. Indeed, we have here a great principle—a principle against which none can ever contend—the beginning of the godly and the upright man may be but very small, but his latter end shall greatly increase.

Evil things may seem to begin well, but they end badly. There is the dash and the glare, but afterwards the darkness and the black ash. They promise fairly—their sun rises in the zenith and then speedily sets, never to rise again. Evil things begin as mountains. They end as molehills. You sail upon their ocean at first and as you sail onward it grows into a river and afterwards into a dry bed, if not into burning sands. Behold Satan in the garden of Eden. Sin begins with the promise, "You shall be as gods!" How grand is its beginning! Where ends it? Shivering beneath the trees of the garden, complaining of nakedness, sin comes to its end.

Or see it in Satan himself. He stretches out his right hand to snatch the diadem of Heaven—he would be Lord paramount. He cannot bear to serve, he longs to reign. Oh, glittering vision that enchants the eye of an archangelic splat! But where ends it? The vision is all gone and is succeeded by "the blackness of darkness forever." And the chains reserved in fire for those that kept not their first estate—so will it be with you, too, my Friend—if you have chosen the path of evil today. Your mirth is as the crackling of thorns under a pot—it blazes, it crackle with excess of joy. Tomorrow you shall find nothing there but a handful of ashes and darkness and cold. Yes, the path of evil is downhill from its sunny summits to its dark ravines—from the pretended loftiness, which it assumes when it professes to be a cherub—to that lowliness in which it finds itself to be a devil.

Evil goes downward. It has its great things first and then its terrible things last. Not so, however, with good. With good the beginning is even small. But its latter end does greatly increase. "The path of the just is as the shining light," which sheds a few flickering rays at first, which exercises a combat with the darkness, but it "shines more and more unto the perfect day." As the coming forth of stars at even-tide, when first one, and then another, and yet another struggles through the darkness, then at last the whole starry host are marshaled on the heavenly plains. So is it with good—it begins with grains of sand, it goes on to hills and later it swells up to mountains.

It begins with the rippling rill—the little cascade that leaps from its secret birthplace and down the mountain it dashes. It swells to a joyous stream, wherein the fish do leap. Later it becomes a river which bears upon its surface the navigation of nations and then it rolls at last an ocean that belts the globe. Good things progress. They are like Jacob's ladder—they ascend round by round. We begin as men, we end as angels. We climb until the promise of Satan is fulfilled in a sense in which he never understood it. We become as gods and are made partakers of the Divine, being reconciled unto God and then having God's grace infused into us.

The principle, then, upon which I have to speak this morning, is this— that though the beginnings of good things are small, yet their latter end shall greatly increase. Instead, however, of dealing with this as a mere doctrine, I propose to use it practically—assume the fact and then make a practical use of it. Three ends shall I hope to serve—first—to quiet the fears of those who are but beginners in grace. Secondly, to confirm their faith. And, thirdly, to quicken their diligence.

May I ask the prayers of God's people here that I may be strengthened in this preaching? I cannot tell how it is—the cold clammy sweat comes over me now. I am about to address you and I feel almost quivering with weakness. Nevertheless, this is a subject which may strengthen me as well as you and therefore let us go to it at once.

I. First, then, for THE QUIETING OF YOUR FEARS. You say, my Hearer, "I am but a beginner in grace and therefore I am vexed with anxiety and full of timorousness." Yes and it shall be my

business, if God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, shall enable me, to give you some few sweet words which, like wafers made with honey, you may roll under your tongue and find them satisfactory and pleasant, even as that manna which came down from Heaven and fed the Israelites in the wilderness. Perhaps your first fear, if I put it into words, is this—"My beginning is so small that I cannot tell when it did begin and therefore, methinks I cannot have been converted, but am still in the gall of bitterness."

O Beloved, I know many thousands like yourself have been exercised with doubts upon this point! They were not converted in an instant. They were not stricken down as in the Revivals. They were not nerved with terrible alarms, such as John Bunyan describes in his "Grace Abounding." But they were called of God, as was Lydia, by a still small voice. Their hearts were gradually and happily opened to receive the Truth of God, it was not as if a tornado or a hurricane rushed through their spirits. But a soft zephyr blew and they lived and came to God.

And you doubt, do you, because from this very reason you cannot tell when you were first converted? Be encouraged. It is not needful for you to know when you were regenerated. It is but necessary for you to know that you are. If you can set no date to the beginning of your faith, yet if you do believe now, you are saved. If in your diary there stands no red-letter day in which your sins were pardoned and your soul accepted—yet if your trust is in Jesus only—this very day you are pardoned. And you are accepted, despite your ignorance of the time when.

God's promises bear no dates. Our notes are dated because there is a time when they run due and we are apt to forget them. God's promises bear none and His gifts sometimes do not bear any. If you are saved— though the date be erased—yet you may rejoice and triumph evermore in the Lord your God. True, there are some of us who can remember the precise spot where we first found the Savior. The day will never be forgotten when these eyes looked to the Cross of Christ and found their tears all wiped away. But thousands in the fold of Jesus know not when they were brought in. Be it enough for them to know they are His.

Let them feed upon the pasture, let them lie down beside the still waters for whether they came by night or by day—they did not come at a forbidden hour. Whether they came in youth or in old age, it matters not. All times are acceptable with God, "and whoever comes," come he when he may, "He will in nowise cast out." Does it not strike you as being very foolish reasoning if you should say in your heart, "I am not converted because I do not know when?" No, with such reasoning as that, I could prove that old Rome was never built, because the precise date of her building is unknown. No, we might declare that the world was never made, for its exact age even the geologist cannot tell us.

We might prove that Jesus Christ Himself never died, for the precise date on which He expired on the tree is lost beyond recovery. Nor does it signify much to us. We know the world was made, we know that Christ did die and so you—if you are now reconciled to God, if now your trembling arms are cast around that Cross, you too are saved—though the beginning was so small that you cannot tell when it was. Indeed, in living things, it is hard to put the finger upon the beginning. Here is a fruit—will you tell me when it began to be? Was it at the time when first the tree sent forth its fruit bud? Did this fruit begin when first the flower shed its exhalations of perfume upon the air?

Indeed, you could not have seen it if you had looked. When was it? Was it when the full-ripe flower was blown away and its leaves were scattered to the wind and a little embryo of fruit was left? It were hard to say it did not begin before that and equally hard to say at what precise instant that fruit began to be formed. Yes, and so is it with Divine Grace—the desires are so faint at the beginning, the convictions are but the etchings upon the plate—which afterwards must be engraved with a harder instrument. And they are such flimsy things—such transient impressions of Divine Truth, that it were difficult to say what is transient and what permanent— what is really of the Spirit of God and what is not. What has saved the soul, or what only brought it to the verge of salvation. What made it really live, or what was really the calling together of the dry bones before the breath came and the bones began to live. Quit your fears, my Hearers, upon this point—for if you are saved—no matter when, you never shall be unsaved.

Another doubt also arises from this point. "Ah, Sir," says a timid Christian, "it is not merely the absence of all date to my conversion, but the extreme weakness of the grace I have." "Ah," says one, "I sometimes think I have a little faith, but it is so mingled with unbelief, distrust and incredulity, that I can hardly think it is God's gift—the faith of God's elect. I hope sometimes I have a little love, but it is such a beginning, such a mere spark, that I cannot think it is the love which God the Holy Spirit breathes into the soul. My beginning is so exceeding small, that I have to look and look and look again, at times, before I can discern it for myself. If I have faith, it is but as a grain of mustard seed and I fear it will never be that goodly tree, in the midst of whose branches the birds of the air might rest."

Courage, my Brothers and Sisters, courage. However small the beginnings of grace, they are such beginnings that they shall have a glorious end. When God begins to build, if He lays but one single stone He will finish the structure. When Christ sits down to weave, though He casts the shuttle but once—and that time the thread was so filmy as scarcely to be discernible—He will, nevertheless, continue till the piece is finished and the whole is worked. If your faith is ever so little, yet it is immortal and that immortality may well compensate for its littleness. A spark of Grace is a spark of Deity—as soon may Deity be quenched as to quench grace—that grace within your soul given you of the Spirit shall continue to burn. And He who gave it shall fan it with His own soft breath, for "He will not quench the smoking flax." He will bring it to a fire and afterwards to a furnace, till your faith shall attain to the full assurance of understanding. Oh, let the littleness of God's beginnings stagger you! Who would think, if he stood at the source of the Thames, that it would ever be such a river as it is—making this city rich? So little is it that a child might stop it with his hand and but a handful of miry clay might dam its course, but there it rolls—a mighty river that man cannot stop.

And so shall it be with you. Your faith is so little that it seems not to exist at all and your love so faint that it can scarcely be called love. But your latter end shall greatly increase, till you shall become strong and do exploits—the babe shall become a giant. And he that stumbled at every straw shall move mountains and make the very hills to shake.

Having thus spoken upon two fears, which are the result of these small beginnings, let me now try to quiet another. "Ah," says the heir of Heaven, "I do hope that in me grace has commenced its work, but my fear is that such frail faith as mine will never stand the test of years. I am," says he, "so weak, that one temptation would be too much for me. How then can I hope to pass through yonder forest of spectra held in the hands of valiant enemies? A drop makes me tremble. How

shall I stem the roaring flood of life and death? Let but one arrow fly from Hell—it penetrates my tender flesh. What then if Satan shall empty his quiver? I shall surely fall by the hand of the enemy. My beginnings are so small that I am certain they will soon come to their end and that end must be black despair."

Be of good courage, Brothers and Sisters. Have done with that fear once and for all. It is true, as you say, the temptation will be too much for you, but what have you to do with it? Heaven is not to be won by your might, but by the might of Him who has promised Heaven to you! Your crown of life is to be obtained, not by your arm, but by that arm which now holds it out and bids you run towards it. If your perseverance rested upon yourself you could not persevere an hour. If spiritual life depended on itself, it would be like the shooting-star, which makes a shining trail for a moment and then is gone.

But thanks be unto God, it is written—"Because I live, you shall live also." "For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God."—

"The feeblest saint shall win the day, Though death and Hell obstruct the way,"

because that feeble saint is girded with Jehovah's strength. If I had to fight in another man's strength and I knew that he had gigantic force, I should not estimate the power of my own limbs and muscles, but of his limbs and muscles. And so if I have to fight in the strength of God, I am not to reckon by what I can do, but what He can do—not what I am able, but what He is able to accomplish. I am not to go forth bound and limited and cramped and bandaged by my own infirmity, but made free and valorous and unconquerable through that Divine Omnipotence, which first spoke all things into existence and now maintain all things by the word of His power.

Stand up, poor Brothers and Sisters, full of fears though you are, and for once glory in your infirmities and boast in your Master. I say it in your behalf and on my own—you principalities and powers of darkness, you leaguered hosts of Hell, you enemies in human form or in form of demons, I challenge you all. More than a match for every one of you am I, if God is with me, less than nothing were I, if left alone. But were I weaker than I am I would defy you. But God is my strength. Jehovah is become my strength and my song. He also has become my salvation, therefore will we tread down our enemies and Moab shall become as straw that is trod down for the dunghill. In God will we rejoice, yes in God will we greatly rejoice and in Him will we rejoice all the day.

Thus have I dealt with a third fear. Let me seek to quiet and pacify one other fear. "No, but," say you, "I never can be saved. For when I look at other people, at God's own true children—I am ashamed to say it—I am but a miserable copy of them. So far from attaining to the image of my Master, I fear I am not even like my Master's servants. Look at such-anone, how he preaches the Truth of God with power. What fluency he has in prayer, what service he undertakes! But I—I am such a beginner in grace, that—

'Hosannas languish on my tongue, And my devotion dies.'

I live at a poor dying rate. I sometimes run, but oftener creep and seldom or ever fly. Where others are shaking mountains, I am stumbling over molehills. The saints seem to bestride this narrow world like some great colossus. But I walk under their huge legs and peep about to find myself a

poor dishonored slave. I have no power, no strength no might."

Pause, Brothers and Sisters, pause. Stop your murmuring for a moment. If some little star in the sky should declare it was not a star, because it did not shine as brightly as Sirius or Aroturus, how foolish would be its argument! If the moon should insist upon it that she was never made by God because she could not shine as brightly as the sun, then she cannot be content to be what her Lord has made her! If the nettle would not bloom, because it was not a pine and if the hyssop on the wall refused to grow because it was not a cedar, oh, what dislocation would there be in the noble frame of this universe! If these murmurings that vex us vexed the whole of God's creatures, then were this earth a howling wilderness, indeed.

Now, let me talk to you a moment, to calm your fears. Have you, my Brothers and Sisters, ever learned to distinguish between Grace and gifts? For know that they are marvelously dissimilar. A man may be saved who has not a grain of gifts—but no man can be saved who has no grace. Yonder brother who prayed, yonder friend who preaches, yonder sister who spoke—all these perhaps acted so well because God had given them excellent gifts. It might not be that it was because of Grace. When you are in the Prayer Meeting and hear a Brother extremely fluent, remember that there are men quite as fluent about their daily business and that fluency is not fervency and that even the appearance of fervency is not absolutely an evidence that there is fervency in the soul.

If you are so mean a thing that you can not spell a word in any book, or put six words together grammatically. If you can offer no prayer in public. If you are so poor a scholar that every fool is wiser than you are—yet if you have Christ in your heart, you are saved and that is the matter in point just now—whether you are saved or not. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." But still, sit not down and murmur because you have them not—for one grain of Grace outweighs a pound of gifts. One particle of grace is far more precious than all the gifts that a Byron ever had, or that Shakespeare ever possessed within his soul—vast and almost infinite though the gifts of those men certainly were.

And yet another question would I put to you. My dear Brothers and Sisters, have you ever learned to distinguish between grace that saves and the grace which develops itself afterwards? Remember, there are some graces that are absolutely necessary to the saving of the soul. There are some others that are only necessary to its comfort. Faith, for instance, is absolutely necessary for salvation. But assurance is not. Love is indispensable, but that high decree of love which induces the martyr's spirit does not reign in the breast of everyone—even of those who are saved.

The possession of grace in some degree is needful to salvation. But the possession of grace in the highest degree, though it is extremely desirable, is not absolutely necessary for an entrance into Heaven. Remember, then, thus to yourself, if I am the meanest lamb in Jesus' fold, I would be happy to think that I am in the flock. If I am the smallest babe in Jesus' family, I will bless His name to think that I have a portion among the sanctified. If I am the smallest jewel in the Savior's crown, I will glisten and shine as best I can, to the praise of Him that bought me with His blood. If I cannot make such swelling music in the orchestra of Heaven as the pealing organ may, then will I be but as a bruised reed, which may emit some faint melody.

If I cannot be the beacon fire that scares a continent and throws its light across the deep, I will seek to be the glowworm that may at least let the weary traveler know something of its whereabouts. O Christians! You that have but little beginnings, quiet your fears. For these little beginnings, if they are of God, will save your soul and you may in this rejoice. Yes, rejoice exceedingly. I must ask your patience, now, while I turn to the second head and I shall dwell upon that very briefly, indeed.

II. Upon this head I wish to say a word or two for THE CONFIRMATION OF YOUR FAITH. I am sure you will give me your prayerful attention while I speak for the confirmation of my own faith as well as yours.

Well, Brothers and Sisters, the first confirmation I would offer you is this—our beginnings are very, very small, but we have a joyous prospect in our text. Our latter end shall greatly increase. We shall not always be so distrustful as we are now. Thank God we look for days when our faith shall be unshaken and firm as mountains. I shall not forever have to mourn before my God that I cannot love Him as I would. I trust that He in my latter end will give me more of His Spirit, that I shall love Him with all my heart and soul and strength.

We have entered into the Gospel school. We are ignorant now, but we shall one day understand with all saints what are the heights and depths and lengths and breadths and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. We have hope that, as these hairs grow gray, we shall "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Time, that plows its furrow in the brow, we hope will sow the seeds of wisdom there. Experience, which shall furrow our back with many a sorrow and a wound, shall nevertheless, we trust, work patience and hope that makes us not ashamed and holy fellowship with Christ and His sufferings and nearer and sweeter fellowship than as yet we have come to know.

Think not, Mr. Ready-to-Halt, that you shall always need your crutches. There may come days of leaping and of dancing even for you. Oh, Mistress Despondency, the dungeons of Giant Despair's castle are not to be your perpetual abode. You, too, shall stand upon the top of Mount Clear and you shall see the Celestial City and the land that is very far off. We are growing things. Methinks I hear the green blade say this morning, "I shall not forever be trod under foot as if I were but grass. I shall grow. I shall blossom. I shall grow ripe and mellow. And many a man shall sharpen his sickle for me."

I hear the little sapling say, "I shall not forever be shaken to and fro by winds, I shall grow into an old stalwart oak—gnarled though the roots may be and twisted though my branches are—I shall one day stand and out laugh at the tempest, while all its waves of wind break harmlessly over me." I shall be strong through Him that strengthens me, for I feel a growth within me that can never stop till I have grown to be next to a God—a son of God, a partaker of the Divine nature.

Courage then, courage, I say, Brothers and Sisters! These weak days are not always to last. We are not to be shorn lambs always—not always the weaklings of His cattle. We shall one day be as the firstlings of His bullocks and we shall push our enemies to the ends of the earth and tread upon them and destroy them.

But further, this cheering prospect upon earth is quite eclipsed by a more cheering prospect beyond the river Death. "Our latter end shall greatly increase." Faith shall give place to fruition.

Hope shall be occupied with enjoyment. Love itself shall be swallowed up in ecstasy. My eyes shall not forever weep. There are sights of transport for them. Tongue, you shall not forever have to mourn and be the instrument of confession. There are songs and hallelujahs for you. Feet, you shall not always be weary with this rough road. There are celestial leaping for you.

O my poor heart, often cowed and broken, often disappointed and trod down, there waits for you the palm-branch and the robe of victory and the immortal crown—

"My spirit leaps across the flood, And antedates the hour," when I shall come into possession of these joys which could not belong to my childhood here—but which await me in my manhood up there—when the spirit shall be perfected and made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Courage, Christian! "The way may be rough, but it cannot be long." And the end will make amends for all the toil that you can endure when on the road. Oh, quicken your footsteps—sit not down in despair. Your latter end shall greatly increase, though your beginnings are but small.

Perhaps someone may say, "How is it that we are so sure that our latter end will increase?" I give you just these reasons—we are quite sure of it because there is a vitality in our piety. The sculptor may have oftentimes cut in marble some exquisite statue of a babe. That has come to its full size—it will never grow any greater. When I see a wise man in the world, I look at him as being just such an infant. He will never grow any greater. He has come to his full. He is but chiseled out by human power. There is no vitality in him.

The Christian here on earth is a babe, but not a babe in stone. A babe instead with life. It is a happy thought sometimes to have of one's self down here compressed, small and insignificant. And one day Death shall come and say, "Rise to your proper altitude," and we shall begin to grow and expand. And bursting all our cerements and every limit of humanity, we shall become greater than the angels are. I think it is Milton who pictures the spirits in Pandemonium as condensing themselves, so that multitudes of them could sit in a little space and then at their own volition mounting up till they attained a prodigious height.

So is it now. We are little spirits, but we shall grow and increase and we know this because there is life in us—eternal life. Now the life of twenty years develops itself into something vastly superior to what it was in childhood. And what will the eternal life be when that vitality within us shall make the littleness of our beginning seem as nothing at all, when our latter end shall have greatly increased?

Besides this, we feel that we must come to something better because God is with us. We are quite certain that what we are cannot be the end of God's design. When I see a block of marble half chiseled, with just perhaps a hand peeping out from the rook, no man can make me believe that that is what the artist means it should be. And I know I am not what God would have me to be, because I feel yearnings and longings within myself to be infinitely better, infinitely holier and purer than I am now. And so is it with you. You are not what God means you to be. You have only just begun to be what He wants you to be. He will go on with His chisel of affliction, using wisdom and the engraving tool together, till by-and-by it shall appear what you shall be—you shall be like He and you shall see Him as He is.

Oh, what comfort this is for our faith—that from the fact of our vitality and the fact that God is at work with us—it is clear and true and certain, that our latter end shall be increased. I do not think that any man yet has ever got an idea of what a man is to be. We are only the chalk crayon, rough drawings of men—yet when we come to be fired up in eternity, we shall be marvelous pictures—and our latter end, indeed, shall be greatly increased.

And now, one other thought and I will turn to the last point. Christian! Remember for the encouragement of your poor soul, that what you are now is not the measure of your safety. Your safety depends not upon what you are, but on what Christ is. If the Rock of our salvation were within us, indeed the house would soon be overturned. But we live by what Christ is—

"What Adam had and forfeited for all,

That Jesus is, who cannot fail or fall."

Till He can falter, my spirit need not tremble. Till Jesus sins, till Jesus dies, till Jesus is overcome, till He is powerless with His God, till He ceases to be Divine—the soul that trusts Him must be secure.

Look not within you for consolation, but look above, where Jesus pleads before the Throne the efficacy of His once-offered blood. If you will look at your own state and then judge your eternal standing by your own feelings, or willing, or doings, you will be an undone and miserable wretch. Measure yourself by Jesus' doings, by Jesus' standing, by Jesus' acceptance, by the love of His heart, by the power of His arm, by the Divinity of His nature, by the constancy of His faithfulness, by the acceptance of His blood, by the prevalence of His plea. And so measuring, your faith need never, never fear—

"For should the earth's old pillar's shake, And all the walls of nature break, Our steadfast souls need fear no more Than solid rocks when billows roar."

III. Now for our last point, namely, FOR THE QUICKENING OF OUR DILIGENCE.

It was never intended that the promises of God should make men idle. And when we tell them that their small beginnings shall doubtless come to glorious endings, we tell them this for their encouragement—not that they may sit still and do nothing—but that they may gird up the loins of their mind, confident of their success, to do all that lies in them, God helping them. Brothers and Sisters, there are many of you here, who, like myself, have to mourn over little beginnings. Let me say to you, be very diligent in the use of those means which God has appointed for your spiritual growth.

First, take heed to yourself that you obey the Commandments which relate to the ordinances of Christ. Neglect not Baptism. True, there is nothing saving in it, nothing meritorious. But Baptism is a means of grace. There have been many who have found, like the eunuch, that when they have been baptized they have gone on their way rejoicing—rejoicing as the effect of grace given when they have obeyed their Master.

Be careful, too, not to neglect that most blessed Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, but let Him be known to you in the breaking of bread and in pouring forth of wine. Do this often in remembrance of Him. Ah, I am speaking to some here today

who love Jesus, but who have neglected His last dying injunction, "This do in remembrance of Me." And you have not grown in grace and are still little in Israel, as you used to be. Do you wonder at it? You have neglected God's appointed means.

"Oh," says one, "but I am a spiritual man. I do not need these carnal ordinances." There is no man so carnal as he who calls God's ordinances carnal and no man more spiritual than he who finds spiritual things best brought home to him by what others have ventured to call "beggarly elements." We do not know ourselves if we think we can dispense with these Divine signs.

Christ knew what was best for us. He has said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized." He would not have appended the last command if it were not important. He has bid us also, as often as we drink the cup, to do it in remembrance of Him. He would not have commanded us that, if it were not for our benefit and for His glory.

But further, if you would get out of the littleness of your beginnings, wait much upon the means of grace. Read much the Word of God alone. Seek out one who understands it well—a man whom God has taught in it—and listen with reverence to the Word as it is preached. Frequent sermons, but prayers, most. Praying is the end of preaching. Make use of every means that lies before you. Be not like the fool, who calls the books of the old fathers "dead men's brains."

What God spoke to Seers of old, what He spoke to mighty men who preached, is not to be despised. Read as you can and learn as you can. Take care, too, that you are not content with skimming over a page of Scripture. But seek to get the very marrow out of it. Be not as the butterfly, which flits from flower to flower, but rests nowhere. Be you as the bee, which enters the flower blossom and sucks the nectar and bears pollen off upon its heavily-laden thigh. Rest not till you have fed on the Word. And thus shall your little beginnings come to great endings.

Be much also in prayer. God's plants grow fastest in the warm atmosphere of the closet. The closet is a forcing-place for spiritual vegetation. He who would be well fed and grow strong must exercise himself upon his knees. Of all training practice for spiritual battles, knee practice is the most healthy and strengthening. Note that, if you forget anything besides. And, lastly, if your beginning be but small, make the best use of the beginning that you have. Have you but one talent? Put it out at interest and make two of it. Have you two? Seek to have them multiplied into four.

Are you a babe? If you cannot walk, nor lift, nor carry, you can cry. Take care to cry right lustily. Are you a child? You cannot climb. You can not as yet teach. But you can run. Take care to run in the ways of heavenly obedience. Are you a young man? You can not as yet give the reverend advice of hoary age, but be strong and overcome the Wicked One. Are you an old man? You can not now fight the battles of your youth, nor lead the van in heroic deeds, but you can abide with the Truth of God and guard those old doctrines which, like the heavy baggage of the army, must not be lost, lest the battle itself should go from us. Every man to his place and to his post.

And so—and so by using what we have, we shall gain more. Rivers increase by their onward flow, flames by burning, sunlight increases by the sun's shining, lights by kindling other lights. And so do you. You will grow rich by enriching others—rich by spending. Lengthen out yourself by cutting off the ends that you can spare from all you have, for it is the way to grow—by giving up that which was unnecessary you shall get that which shall be a real growth. Oh, use yourself and God shall

make use of you. Come out and God shall lead you forth. Be a man and God shall make you more than an angel. Be an angel, and God shall make you something more. He will make you better, holier, happier, greater. Oh, do this and so shall your latter end be joyous, your peace shall be like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Thus, I have spoken this for the comfort of God's people—would that I could hope that all I have said belonged to all of you! But, ah, if it does not, may God convert you, may the new life be given to you! Oh, remember, if you are longing for it, the way of salvation is freely opened to you. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." God bless us now and forever, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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Chapter 32

Job 9,20 #350 - A Blow at Self-Righteousness

A BLOW AT SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

NO. 350

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, DECEMBER 16, 1860,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

"If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me: if I say,

I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse."

Job 9:20.

EVER since man became a sinner he has been self-righteous. When he had a righteousness of his own he never gloried of it, but ever since he has lost it, he has pretended to be the possessor of it. Those proud words which our father Adam uttered when he sought to screen himself from the guilt of his treason against his Maker, laying the blame apparently on Eve, but really upon God who gave him the woman, were virtually a claim to blamelessness. It was but a fig leaf he could find to cover his nakedness but how proud was he of that fig-leaf excuse and how tenaciously did he hold to it.

As it was with our first parents so is it with us—self-righteousness is born with us and there is perhaps no sin which has so much vitality in it as the sin of righteous self. We can overcome lust itself and anger and the fierce passions of the will better than we can ever master the proud boastfulness which rises in our hearts and tempts us to think ourselves rich and increased in goods while God knows we are naked and poor and miserable. Tens of thousands of sermons have been preached against selfrighteousness and yet it is as necessary to turn the great guns of the Law against its walls today as ever it was. Martin Luther said he scarcely ever preached a sermon without inveighing against the righteousness of man and yet, he said, "I find that still I cannot preach it down. Still men will boast in what they can do and mistake the path to Heaven to be a road paved by their own merits and not a way besprinkled by the blood of the atonement of Jesus Christ."

My dear Hearers, I cannot compliment you by imagining that all of you have been delivered from the great delusion of trusting in yourselves. The godly, those who are righteous through faith in Christ, still have to mourn that this infirmity clings to them. While as to the unconverted themselves, their besetting sin is to deny their guilt, to plead that they are as good as others and to indulge still the vain and foolish hope that they shall enter into Heaven from some doings, sufferings, or weeping of their own. I do not suppose there are any who are self-righteous in as bold a sense as the poor countryman I have heard of.

His minister had tried to explain to him the way of salvation, but either his head was very dull or else his soul was very hostile to the Truth the minister would impart. For he so little understood what he had heard that when the question was put, "Now then, what is the way by which you hope you can be saved before God?" the poor honest simpleton said, "Do you not think, Sir, if I were to sleep one cold frosty night under a hawthorn bush, that would go a great way towards it?" Conceiving that his suffering might, in some degree at least, assist him in getting into Heaven. You would not state your opinion in so bold a manner. You would refine it, you would gild it, you would disguise it—but it would come to the same thing after all.

You would still believe that some sufferings, repentings, or believing of your own might possibly merit salvation. The Church of Rome often tells this so very plainly that we cannot think it less than profanity. I have been informed that there is in one of the Romish chapels in Cork, a monument bearing these words upon it, "I. H. S. Sacred to the memory of the benevolent Edward Molloy. A friend of humanity, the father of the poor. He employed the wealth of this world only to procure the riches of the next and leaving a balance of merit in the book of life, he made Heaven debtor to mercy. He died October 17th, 1818, aged 90."

I do not suppose that any of you will have such an epitaph on your tombstones—or ever dream of putting it as a matter of account with God—striking a balance with Him—your sins being on one side and your righteousness on the other and hoping that a balance might remain. And yet the very same idea, only not so honestly expressed—a little more guarded and a little more refined—the same idea, only taught to speak after a Gospel dialect—is inherent in us all and only Divine grace can thoroughly cast it out of us.

The sermon of this morning is intended to be another blow against our self-righteousness. If it will not die, at least let us spare no arrows against it. Let us draw the bow and if the shaft cannot penetrate its heart, it may at least stick in its flesh and help to worry it to its grave.

I. Endeavoring to keep close to my text, I shall start with this first point—that THE PLEA OF SELFRIGHTEOUSNESS CONTRADICTS ITSELF. "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me."

Come, Friend, you who do justify yourself by your own works, let me hear you speak. "I say that I have no need of a salvation by the blood and righteousness of another for I believe that I have kept the Commands of God from my youth up and I do not think that I am guilty in His sight. I hope that I may be able in my own right to claim a seat in Paradise."

Now, Sir, your plea and this declaration of yours is in itself a condemnation of you, because upon its very surface it is apparent that you are committing sin while you are pleading that you have no sin. For the very plea itself is a piece of high and arrogant presumption. God has said it, let Jew and Gentile stop his mouth and let all the world stand guilty before God. We have it on inspired authority, that "there is none righteous, no, not one." "There is none good, save one, that is God." We are told by the mouth of a Prophet sent from God, that, "all we like wandering sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way." And you, in saying that you are righteous, do commit the sin of calling God a liar. You have dared to impugn His veracity, you have slandered His justice. This boast of your is in itself a sin so great, so heinous, that if you had only that one sin to account for it would be sufficient to sink you to the lowest Hell. The boast, I say, is

in itself a sin. The moment that a man says, "I have no sin," he commits a sin in the saying of it—the sin of contradicting his Maker and making God a false accuser of His creatures. Besides, do you not see, you vain and foolish creature, that you have been guilty of pride in the very language you have used?

Who but a proud man would stand up and commend himself? Who but one who was proud as Lucifer, would in the face of God's declaration declare himself to be just and holy? Did the best of men ever speak thus? Did they not all of them acknowledge that they were guilty? Did Job of whom God said that he was a perfect and an upright man, claim perfection? Did he not say, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me"? Oh, proud Wretch, how are you puffed up! How has Satan bewitched you! How has he made you lift up your horn on high and speak with a stiff neck. Take heed to yourself, for if you had never been guilty before, this pride of yours were quite sufficient to draw Jehovah's thunderbolts out of the quiver and make Him smite you once and for all to your eternal destruction.

But further, the plea of self-righteousness is self-contradictory upon another ground for all that a self-righteous man pleads for is comparative righteousness. "Why," says he, "I am no worse than my neighbors-in fact a great deal better. I do not drink, or swear. I do not commit fornication or adultery. I am no Sabbath breaker, I am no thief. The laws of my country do not accuse, much less condemn me. I am better than the most of men and if I am not saved, God help those who are worse than I am. If I cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven, then who can?"

Just so—but then all that you claim is that you are righteous as compared with others. Do you not see that this is a very vain and fatal plea, because you do in fact admit that you are not perfectly righteous—that there is some sin in you—only you claim there is not so much in you as in another. You admit that you are diseased, but then the plague-spot is not so apparent in you as in your fellow man. You admit that you have robbed God and have broken His Laws, only you have not done it with so desperate an intent, nor with so many aggravations as others. Now this is virtually a plea of guilty, disguise it as you may. You admit that you have been guilty and against you the sentence comes forth—"The soul that sins, it shall die."

Take heed to yourself that you find no shelter in this refuge of lies for it shall certainly fail you when God shall come to judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity. Suppose now for a moment that a command is issued to the beasts of the forest that they should become sheep. It is quite in vain for the bear to come forward and plead that he was not so venomous a creature as the serpent. It would be equally absurd for the wolf to say that though stealthy and cunning and gaunt and grim, yet he was not so great a grumbler nor so ugly a creature as the bear. The lion might plead that he had not the craftiness of the fox. "It is true," says he, "I wet my tongue in blood, but then I have some virtues which may commend me and which, in fact, have made me king of beasts."

What would this argument avail? The indictment is that these animals are not sheep—their plea against the indictment is that they are no less like sheep than other creatures and that some of them have more gentleness and more docility than others of their kind. The plea would never stand. Or use another picture. If in the courts of justice, a thief, when called up, should argue, "Well, I am not so great a thief as some. There are to be found some living in Whitechapel or St. Giles's who have been thieves longer than I have and if there is one conviction in the book against

me, there are some that have a dozen convictions against them."

No magistrate would acquit a man on such an excuse as that. It would be tantamount to his admission of a degree of guilt, though he might try to excuse himself because he had not reached a higher degree. It is so with you, Sinner. You have sinned. Another man's sins cannot excuse you. You must stand upon your own feet. At the Day of Judgment you must yourself make a personal appearance and it will not be what another man has done that will condemn, or acquit you, but your own personal guilt. Take heed, take heed, Sinner, for it will not avail you that there are others blacker with sin than yourself. If there is but a spot upon you, you are lost! If there is but one sin unwashed by Jesus' blood—your portion must be with the tormentors. A holy God cannot look even upon the least degree of iniquity.

But further, the plea of the self-conceited man is that he has done his best and can claim a partial righteousness. It is true if you touch him in a tender place he acknowledges that his boyhood and his youth were stained with sin. He tells you that in his early days he was a "fast lad," that he did many things which he is sorry for now. "But then," says he, "these are only like spots in the sun. These are only like a small headland of waste ground in acres of fruitful soil. I am still good, I am still righteous, because my virtues exceed my vices and my good deeds quite cover up all the mistakes that I have committed."

Well, Sir, do you not see that the only righteousness you claim is a partial righteousness? And in that very claim you do in fact make an admission that you are not perfect? You admit you have committed some sins. Now I am not responsible for what I am about to state, nor am I to be blamed for harshness in it, because I state neither more nor less than the very Truth of God. It is of no saving grace to you that you have not committed ten thousand sins—for if you have committed one you are a lost soul. The Law is to be kept intact and entire and the least crack or flaw, or breakage, spoils it. The robe of righteousness in which you must stand at last must be without spot or blemish. If there s but one microscopic stain upon it, which is supposing what is never true, yet even then the gates of Heaven never can admit you. A perfect righteousness you must have or else you shall never be mitted to that wedding feast. You may say, "I have kept such a Commandment and have never broken it," but if you have broken another you are guilty of the whole, because the whole Law is like one rich and costly vase—it is one in design and fashion. Though you break not the foot and stain not the margin, yet if there is any flaw or damage, the whole vessel is marred. And so if you have sinned in any point, at any time and in any degree, you have broken the whole Law. You stand guilty of it before God—nor can you be saved by the works of the Law or by a Church, do what you may.

"It is a hard sentence," says one, "and who can bear it!" Indeed, who can bear it? Who can bear to stand at the foot of Sinai and hear its thunders roar? "If so much as a beast touch the mountain it must be stoned or thrust through with a dart." Who can stand when the lightnings flash and God descends upon Mount Paran and the hills melt like wax beneath His feet? "By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh living be justified." "Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things that are written in the Law to do them." Cursed is the man who sins but once, yes, hopelessly cursed so far as the Law is concerned.

Oh, Sinner, I cannot help turning aside from the subject for a moment to remind you that there is a way of salvation and a way by which the Law's demands can be fully satisfied. Christ bore all the

punishment of all Believers, so that they cannot be punished. Christ kept the Law of God for Believers and He is willing to cast about any and every penitent sinner that perfect robe of righteousness which He Himself has worked out. But you cannot keep the Law and if you bring up your self-righteousness the law condemns both it and you. Out of your own mouth it condemns you, inasmuch as you have not done all things and have not kept all the Law. A great rock lies in your path to Heaven, a mountain insurmountable. A gulf impassable. And by that road no man shall ever enter into eternal life.

The plea of self-righteousness, then, is in itself self-contradicting and has only to be fairly stated to an honest man for him to see that it will not hold water for a single moment. What need of labored argument to disprove a self-evident lie? Why should we tarry longer? Who but a very fool would maintain a notion which dies in its own face and witnesses against itself?

II. But now I pass to the second point, THE MAN WHO USES THIS PLEA CONDEMNS THE PLEA HIMSELF.

Not only does the plea cut its own throat, but the man himself is aware when he uses it that it is an evil and false and vain refuge. Now this is a matter of conscience and therefore I must deal plainly with you and if I speak not what you have felt, then you can say I am mistaken. But if I speak what you must confess to be true, let it be as the very voice of God to you. Men know that they are guilty. The conscience of the proudest man, when it is allowed to speak, tells him that he deserves the wrath of God. He may brag in public, but the very loudness of his bragging proves that he has an uneasy conscience and therefore he makes a mighty din in order to drown its voice.

Whenever I hear an infidel saying hard things of Christ, it reminds me of the men of Moloch who beat the drums that they might not hear the screams of their own children. These loud blasphemies, these braggart boastings are only a noisy way of drowning the shrieks of conscience. Do not believe that these men are honest. I think all controversy with them is time thrown away. I would never controvert with a thief about the principles of honesty, or with a known adulterer concerning the duty of chastity. Devils are not to be reasoned with—but to be cast out. Parleying with Hell serves no ones turn except the devil's.

Did Paul argue with Elymas? Or Peter with Simon Magus? I would not cross swords with a man who says there is no God—he knows there is a God. When a man laughs at Holy Scripture you need not argue with him— he is either a fool or a knave—perhaps both. However villainous he may be, his conscience has some light. He knows that what he speaks is untrue. I cannot believe that conscience is so dead in any man as to let him believe that he is speaking the truth when he denies the Godhead. And much more I am certain that conscience never did give assent to the utterance of the braggart who says he deserves eternal life, or has no sin of which to repent, or which by repentance may be washed away without the blood of Christ. He knows within himself that he speaks that which is false.

When Professor Webster was shut up in prison for murder he complained to the prison authorities that he had been insulted by his fellow prisoners, for he said that through the walls of the prison he could hear them always crying out to him, "You bloody man! You bloody man!" As it was not consistent with law that one prisoner should insult another, the strictest enquiry was made and it was found that no prisoner had ever said such a word, or that if he had said it, Webster could not

have heard it. It was his own conscience. It was not a word coming through the walls of the prison, but an echo reverberating from the wall of his bad heart, as conscience shouted, "You bloody man! You bloody man!"

There is in all your hearts a witness who will not cease his testimony. It cries "You sinful man! You sinful man!" You have only to listen to it and you will soon find that every pretense of being saved by your good works must crumble to the ground. Oh, hear it now and listen to it for a moment. I am sure my conscience says, "You sinful man! You sinful man!" and I think yours must say the same unless you are given up of God and left to a seared conscience to perish in your sins.

When men get alone—if in their loneliness the thought of death forces itself upon them—they boast no more of goodness. It is not easy for a man to lie on his bed seeing the naked face of death, not at a distance, but feeling that his breath is breathing upon the skeleton and that he must soon pass through the iron gates of death. It is not easy for a man to plead his self-righteousness then. The bony fingers thrust themselves like daggers into his proud flesh. "Ah," says grim Death, in tones which cannot be heard by mortal ear but which are listened to by the mortal heart—"Where now are all your glories?"

He looks upon the man and the wreath of laurel that was upon his brow fades and falls to the earth like blasted flowers. He touches his breast and the star of honor which he wore molds and is quenched into darkness. He looks at him yet again—that breast-plate of selfrighteousness which glittered upon him like golden mail suddenly dissolves into dust, like the apples of Sodom before the touch of the gatherer. The man finds himself to his own surprise naked and poor and miserable when most he needed to be rich, when most he required to be happy and to be blessed. Yes, Sinner, even while this sermon is being uttered, you may seek to refute it to yourself and say, "Well, I believe I am as good as others and that this fuss about a new birth, imputed righteousness and being washed in blood is all unnecessary."

But in the loneliness of your silent chamber, especially when death shall be your dread and grim companion, you shall not need me to state this—you shall see it clearly enough yourselves, see it with eyes of horror. And feel it with a heart of dismay and despair and perish because you have despised the righteousness of Christ.

How abundantly true, however, will this be at the Day of Judgment. I think I see that day of fire, that day of wrath. You are gathered as a great multitude before the eternal Throne. Those who are robed in Christ's fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints, are caught up to the right hand. And now the trumpet sounds—if there are any that have kept the Law of God—if there are faultless ones, if there are any that have never sinned, let them stand forth and claim the promised reward. But, if not, let the pit engulf the sinner, let the fiery thunder-bolt be launched upon the impenitent offenders. Now, stand forth, Sir and clear yourself! Come forth, my Friend and claim the reward, because of the church you endowed, or the row of almshouses that you erected.

What? What? Does your tongue lie dumb in your mouth? Come forward, come forward—you who said you had been a good citizen, had fed the hungry and clothed the naked—come forward now and claim the reward! What? What? Is your face turned to whiteness? Is there an ashy paleness on your cheek? Come forward, you multitudes who rejected Christ and despised His blood. Come now and say, "All the Commandments have I kept from my youth up." What? Are you seized with

horror? Has the better light of judgment driven out the darkness of your selfrighteousness? Oh, I see you, I see you, you are not boasting now!

But you, the best of you, are crying, "You rocks, hide me. You mountains, open your stony bowels and let me hide myself from the face of Him that sits upon the Throne." Why, why such a coward? Come, face it out before your Maker. Come up, infidel. Now, tell God there is no God. Come, while Hell is flaming in your nostrils. Come and say there is no Hell. Or tell the Almighty that you never could bear to hear a Hell-fire sermon preached. Come now and accuse the minister of cruelty, or say that we love to talk on these terrible themes. Let me not mock you in your misery. But let me picture to you how devils shall mock you. "Aha!" say they "where is your courage now? Are your ribs of iron and your bones of brass? Will you dare the Almighty now and dash yourselves upon the bosses of His buckler, or run upon His glittering spear?" See them, see them as they sink! The gulf has swallowed them up. The earth has closed again and they are gone, a solemn silence falls upon the ear. But hark below, if you could descend with them, you would hear their doleful groans and hollow moans, as they now feel that the God omnipotent was right and just and wise and tender when He bade them forsake their righteousness and flee to Christ and lay hold on Him that can save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.

III. THE PLEA IS ITSELF EVIDENCE AGAINST THE PLEADER. There is an unregenerated man here, who says, "Am I blind also?" I an

swer in the words of Jesus, "But now you say we see, therefore your sin remains." You have proved by your plea, in the first place, that you have never been enlightened of the Holy Spirit but that you reMal. in a state of ignorance. A deaf man may declare that there is no such thing as music. A man who has never seen the stars is very likely to say that there are no stars. But what does he prove? Does he prove that there are no stars? He only proves his own folly and his own ignorance.

That man who can say half a word about his own righteousness has never been enlightened of God the Holy Spirit. For one of the first signs of a renewed heart is that it abhors itself in dust and ashes. If you do today feel yourself to be guilty and lost and ruined, there is the richest hope for you in the Gospel. But if you say, "I am good, I have merits," the Law condemns you and the Gospel cannot comfort you—you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity and you are ignorant that all the while you are talking thus—the wrath of God abides on you. A man may be a true Christian and may fall into sin, but a man cannot be a true Christian and boast in his self-righteousness.

A man may be saved though infirmity may bespatter him with much mire. But he cannot be saved who does not know that he has been in the filth and is not willing to confess that he is guilty before God. There are, in one sense, no conditions of salvation on our part, for whatever may be conditions God gives. But thus I know, there never was a man yet who was in a state of grace who did not know himself, in himself, to be in a state of ruin, a state of depravity and condemnation. If you do not know this, then I say your plea of self-righteousness condemns you for ignorance.

But then again, inasmuch as you say that you are not guilty, this proves that you are impenitent. Now the impenitent can never come where God is. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." "But if we say that we have no sins, we make God a liar and the Truth is not in

us." God will pardon all men who confess their iniquity. If we weep and lament and take with us words and say, "We have grievously sinned, forgive us—we have greatly erred, have mercy upon us, through Jesus Christ," God will not refuse the cry. But if we, out of our impenitent and hard hearts, put ourselves upon God's justice, God will give us justice. But not mercy. And that justice shall be the meting out to us of the full vials of His indignation and of His wrath forever and ever. He that is self-righteous is impenitent and therefore he is not and cannot be saved. Further than this, the self-righteous man, the moment that he says he has done anything which can recommend him to God, proves that he is not a believer. Now, salvation is for believers and for believers only. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be damned."

Sir, you will be damned with all your self-righteousness and your selfrighteousness shall be like Dejanira's tunic which she gave to Hercules and which he put upon him and, as the old fable has it, it became a robe of fire to him. He tried to drag it away, but he pulled away pieces of his living, quivering flesh each moment and perished miserably. Such shall your self-righteousness be to you. It seems a pleasant draught and intoxicates for the moment. It is deadly and damnable as the venom of asps and as the wine of Gomorrah. O Soul! Would that you would flee, above all things, from self-righteousness. For a self-righteous man does not and cannot trust Christ and therefore he cannot see the face of God.

None but the naked man will ever go to Christ for clothing. None but the hungry men will ever take Christ to be his food. None but thirsty souls will ever come to this well of Bethlehem to drink. The thirsty are welcome. But those who think they are good, are welcome neither to Sinai nor to Calvary. They have no hope of Heaven, no peace in this world, nor in that which is to come.

Ah, Soul, I know not who you are. But if you have any righteousness of your own you are a graceless soul. If you have given all your goods to feed the poor. If you have built many and many a sanctuary. If you have gone about with self-denial among the houses of poverty to visit the sons and daughters of affliction. If you have fasted thrice in the week. If your prayers have been so long that your throat has become hoarse through your crying. If your tears have been so many that your eyes have become blinded through your weeping. If your readings of Scripture have been so long that the midnight oil has been consumed in abundance. If, I say, your heart has been so tender towards the poor and the sick and the needy that you would have been willing to suffer with them—to bear all their loathsome diseases—no, if adding all this you could give your body to be burned, yet if you trusted in any one of these things your damnation would be as sure as though you were thief or drunkard.

Understand me, I mean what I say. I want you not to think I speak unguardedly now. Christ said of the Pharisees of old the very thing that I have said of you. They were good and excellent in their way. But, said He, the publicans and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you, because they would go the wrong way, while the poor publicans and harlots were led to go the right way. The Pharisee who went about to make a righteousness of his own, did not submit to the righteousness of Christ. The publican and the harlot, knowing that they had nothing whereof to glory, came to Christ and took Him as He was and gave their souls up to be saved by His grace. Oh, that we may do the same. For until we get rid of self-righteousness we are in a state of condemnation and dying—the sentence must be executed upon us forever and ever.

IV. I close now upon the last point, namely, that this plea, if we retain it, not only accuses the pleader now, but IT WILL RUIN THE PLEADER FOREVER.

Let me show you two suicides. There is a man who has sharpened a dagger and seeking out his opportunity he stabs himself to the heart. There he falls. Who shall blame any man for his death? He slew himself. His blood is on his own head.

Here is another: he is very sick and ill. He can scarcely crawl about the streets. A physician waits upon him. He tells him, "Sir, your disease is deadly. You must die. But I know a remedy which will certainly heal you. There it is. I freely give it to you. All I ask of you is that you will freely take it." "Sir," says the man, "you insult me. I am as well as ever I was in my life. I am not sick" "But," says the other, "there are certain signs which I mark in your countenance which prove to me that you will have a deadly disease about you and I warn you."

The man thinks a moment—remembers that there have been certain signs in him of this very sickness. A monitor within tells him that it is so. He obstinately replies to the physician a second time—"Sir, if I want your medicine I will send for it and if I need it I will pay for it." He knows all the while there is not a farthing in his pocket and that he cannot get credit anywhere. And there stands the life-giving cup before him which the physician at great expense has obtained, and which he would freely give to him and bid him freely take. "No," says the man, "I will not take it. I may be somewhat sick, but I am not worse than my neighbors. I am not more ill than other people and I shall not take it."

One day you go to his bed and you find he has slept his last sleep and there he lies stone dead. Who slew this man? Who killed him? His blood is on his own head. He is as base a suicide as the other. Now I will show you two more suicides. There is a man here who says—"Well let what will happen in the next world, I will have my fill in this. Tell me where there are pleasures to be had and I will have them. Leave the things of God to old fools and such like. I shall have the things of the present and the joys and delights of time." He drains the cup of drunkenness, frequents the haunt of folly and if he knows where there is any vice pursued he rushes after it.

Like Byron, he is a very thunderbolt, launched from the hand of an arch-fiend. He flashes through the whole firmament of sin and blazes himself out, until decayed in body and soul, he dies. He is a suicide. He defied God, he went against the laws of nature and of grace, despised warnings, declared he would be damned and he has got what he richly deserved.

Here is another. He says, "I despise these vices. I am the most upright, honest and commendable of men. I feel that I do not need salvation and if I did need it I could get it myself. I can do anything you tell me to do. I feel I have mental force and manly dignity enough remaining in me to accomplish it. I tell you, Sir, you insult me when you bid me trust in Christ." "Well," he says, "I consider there is such dignity in manhood and so much virtue in me, that I need not a new heart nor will I succumb and bend my spirit to the Gospel of Christ on free grace terms."

Very well Sir, when in Hell you lift up your eyes and you will do so as surely as the most profligate and profane, your blood will be upon your own head. And you will be as truly a suicide as he who wantonly and wickedly dashed himself against the Laws of God and man and brought himself to a sudden and hasty end by his iniquity and crimes.

"Well," says one, "this is a sermon well adapted to self-righteous persons, but I am not one." Then what are you, Sir? Are you a believer in Christ? "I cannot say I am, Sir." Why are you not, then? "Well, I would be, but I am afraid I may not believe in Christ." You are self-righteous, Sir. God commands you to believe in Christ and you say you are not fit. Now what does this mean but that you are waiting to make yourself fit and this after all is the spirit of self-righteousness. You are so proud that you will not take Christ unless you think you can bring something to Him—that is it.

"Ah, no," says one poor broken-hearted soul, "I do not think that is fair with me, for I do feel as if I would give anything if I might hope to be saved. But oh, I am such a wretch! I am such a wretch! I cannot believe." Now, that after all is self-righteousness. Christ bids you trust Him. You say, "No, I will not trust you, Christ, because I am such-an-one and suchan-one." So, then, you are wanting to make yourself somebody and then Jesus Christ is to do the rest. It is the same spirit of self-righteousness only in another garb. "Ah," says one, "but if I did but feel my need enough, as you just now said, Sir, then I think I would trust Christ."

Self-righteousness again. You want your sense of need to save you. "Oh, but, Sir, I cannot believe in Christ as I would." Self-righteousness again. Let me just utter a solemn sentence which you may masticate at your leisure. If you trust to your faith and to your repentance, you will be as much lost as if you trusted to your good works or trusted to your sins. The ground of your salvation is not faith, but Christ. It is not repentance, but Christ. If I trust my trust of Christ, I am lost.

My business is to trust Christ. To rest on Him. To depend, not on what the Spirit has done in me, but what Christ did for me, when He did hang upon the tree. Now be it known unto you that when Christ died, He took the sins of all His people upon His head and there and then they all ceased to be. At the moment when Christ died, the sins of all His redeemed were blotted out. He did then suffer all they ought to have suffered. He paid all their debts. And their sins were actually and positively lifted that day from their shoulders to His shoulders, for "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." And now, if you believe in Jesus, there is not a sin remaining upon you, for your sin was laid on Christ. Christ was punished for your sins before they were committed and as Kent says— "Here's pardon for transgressions past,

It matters not how black their caste; And oh, my soul with wonder view, For sins to come here's pardon too."

Blessed privilege of the believer! But if you live and die unbelievers, know this, that all your sins lie on your own shoulders. Christ did never make any atonement for you. You were never bought with blood. You never had an interest in His sacrifice. You live and die in yourselves, lost. In yourselves, ruined. In yourselves utterly destroyed. But believing—the moment you believe—you may know that you were chosen of God from before the foundation of the world.

Believing, you may know that the righteousness of Christ is all yours. That all He did, He did for you. That all He suffered, He suffered for you. You do in fact, in the moment you believe, stand where Christ stood as God's accepted Son. And Christ stands where you stood as the sinner and suffers as if He had been the sinner and dies as if He had been guilty— dies in your place.

Oh, Spirit of God, give faith this morning. Win us all from self. Knit us all to Christ—may we be saved now by His free grace and be saved in eternity. Amen.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job_9:1-35; Job_20:1-29 -Rom_8:1-39 v33-34 #2932 - False Justificati

FALSE JUSTIFICATION AND TRUE

NO. 2932

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, APRIL 20, 1905.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 15, 1876.

"If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me."

Job 9:20.

"It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns?"

Romans 8:33-34.

THE great question for the human race to answer has always been

this, "How can man be just with God?" It is clear to every conscience that is at all awake that the thrice-holy God demands obedience to His Law and that disobedience to the Divine Law will certainly entail punishment. Hence the grand essential for each one of us is to be right towards God— to be accounted just even at His judgment bar. This is a most important matter at all times, but it appears to increase in importance as we advance in years and get nearer to that great testing time when the Lord shall put everyone into His unerring balances, to weigh him and so to prove what he really is. Woe unto the man who shall stand before the Bar of God unjustified! But happy shall he be who, in that last dread day, shall be approved and accepted by the Judge of all the earth!

I am going to speak about the way in which we are justified in the sight of God and I have taken two texts because so many people seem to have thought that there are two ways by which sinners can be justified before God. The first way that I shall describe is the false one. The second is the true way. The first is that which is mentioned by Job, the way of self-justification, of which it may be truly said that it is selfcondemning instead of self-justifying. The second mode of justification is the one that is ordained by God and of that it may rightly be said that it never can be condemned. It challenges Heaven and earth and Hell in those grand words which I have just read to you, "It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns?"

I. First, for a few minutes, let us consider THE SELF-JUSTIFICATION OF WHICH JOB SPEAKS—"If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me."

I call to your remembrance the fact the it is Job who speaks thus, because, if there ever was a man in this world who might have been justified before God by his own works, it was Job. Did not the Lord Himself say of him to Satan, "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil"? Yet, so far was Job from imagining that he had attained a sinless condition that he here declares concerning himself, "If I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet I would not know my soul—I would despise my life." In addition to Job's excellence of character, he paid devout attention to religious observances. When his children met together for feasting, he ordered special sacrifices on their behalf, saying, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Job was evidently as devout towards God as he was upright towards man, yet, you see, he tells us that if he were to justify himself, his own mouth would condemn him! Further, as if to show us how notable Job was in all respects, he had, in addition to his excellent character and his devotional spirit, most remarkable afflictions. But, putting together all his good works, all his religious observances and all his afflictions, he says, "If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me." Job, at any rate, was not one of those who have imagined that they could work out a righteousness of their own which could be acceptable in the sight of God!

Let us try to find out what he meant when he said, "If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me." I think he meant, first, that it would not be true. He could not and dare not say that he was just before God— it would be a lie for him to stand up before the Lord and say, "Great God, I deserve commendation at Your hands, for in me is found true righteousness." Instead of talking like that, Job says, "If I were to say that, my own mouth would contradict me while I was trying to say it. I could not say it—I dare not say it." I hope there are many here who feel that to talk about any righteousness of their own would be utterly absurd. If I were to attempt to justify myself before God, I should have to lie to my conscience, my self-knowledge and my whole being! Whatever anyone else may think or say, I know that I must be saved by the Grace of God or else I shall never be saved at all! I have not done a single good work in which I cannot see any fault—not one solitary thing which I cannot perceive to be marred and stained and, like a vessel spoiled even while it is on the potter's wheel, not fit to be presented before God at all! That is what Job meant when he said, "If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me."

But he meant, next, that his words, themselves, would be sufficient to condemn him. I know that I am addressing a large number of persons whose lives are apparently blameless. The most observant critic here would be unable to bring any very grave or serious charge against you and yet, my dear Friends, if you were to try to justify yourself before God, your words, themselves, would be enough to condemn you, for what sort of words do you use? I do not suppose that you use profane words—I will not imagine that you take the name of God in vain! Though, alas, that is a sin that is not at all uncommon. But do you not often utter proud, boastful words? Do you not often speak in a very lofty way concerning yourselves and your own doing? Do we not all use far too many light and trifling words—not merely such as cheerfulness may warrant, but such as are a mere waste of time, diverting the mind from serious purposes? And did not our Lord Jesus Christ say that, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment"? And, Friends, let me whisper other questions in your ear. Do you never use words of a

very doubtful kind? Is it not far too common in society for people to go to the very verge of propriety in what they say? Have you never done so? And have you never used false words? Have you always spoken the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Has your heart always gone with your tongue? Have there been no false compliments—no lying expressions of an affection that you never felt? I wish that certain people would more often go to the mirror and examine their tongues. Doctors judge their patients' health by looking at their tongues—and we might judge of our moral and spiritual health in a similar way. Oh, what tongues some people would have if their words could blister their tongues as they ought to do! How common it is to hear scandalous words and slanderous words—and how many hearts are made to bleed, full often, by the cruel things that are said! "If I justify myself," says Job, "my own mouth shall condemn me," and I think he means, "because my very words have been sufficient to cause me to plead guilty before God." I trust we also feel like that and if we do, we shall never dare to be self-righteous.

I think, further, that Job meant that if he were to plead that he was righteous before God, he would be sure to make such a muddled statement that, somehow or other, the statement, itself, would contain its own condemnation. If a man says, "I have kept God's Law perfectly, so I can enter Heaven by the merit of my own good works," every intelligent person thinks, "What a proud man that is!" And can a proud man be accepted before God? Is it not written, "Though the Lord is high, yet has He respect unto the lowly: but the proud He knows afar off"? So you see that a statement of justification by betraying the pride of our heart, straightway condemns us! Men who believe themselves to be saved by their own good works generally have something harsh and evil to say against God's Divine Grace, or against His Son, or against the Divine plan of salvation through the substitutionary Sacrifice of Christ. And the very fact that they say anything against those things shows that their heart is in rebellion against God and, therefore, their own mouth condemns them!

Years ago there was as old man in Wiltshire who, according to his own statement, was 103 years of age. He had never neglected his parish church, he had brought up 11 children and had no help from the parish. And he expected that, by-and-by, he would go Home to God, for, "he had never done anything wrong in his life that he knew of." "But," said someone to him, "you are a sinner, you know." "I know I ain't," he said. "Well, but God says that you are." And what, do you think, that old man replied? He said, "God may say what He likes, but I know I ain't." So, you see, he even contradicted God, Himself, and is not that a great sin for anybody to commit? What worse sin can there be and what clearer proof of the alienation of the human heart than that a man should flatly contradict God? Well, none of you ever did that, did you? No, you have not honesty enough to do that, but you mean it all the same! Many of you mean it in your very souls. When a man does not accept salvation by

Volume 51 3Jesus Christ, if you probe his heart to its very depths, you will find that his rejection means that he does not really feel that he is guilty in the sight of God. He will not admit that he needs Divine Mercy, nor will he accept salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ. Selfrighteousness often lies concealed far down in the heart of man—but whenever he ventures to speak it out, the very way in which he talks of it condemns him!

I have heard men talk in this fashion—"Well, I am quite as good as others are. And if I am not all right at last, it will be a very bad look-out for a great many." Oh, yes, I see what you mean! Because others are not what they should be, you are content with your own condition because you

are like they! There is no fear of God before your eyes and your only hope is that as you are like others, for it will be as well with you as it will be with them! But is not that a poor hope to lean upon? Do you not know that the broad road is thronged with travelers and yet that it leads to destruction? Even if you fare as others do, it will be no comfort to you to perish as they do! There is a very ancient declaration which ought to be a warning to you—"Though hand joins in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."

"Well," says another, "I have done my best and I cannot do more than that." When you speak like that, you mean to imply that God asks of you more than He ought to ask, that He is really unjust in His dealings with you and that the great evil is not that you are a bad servant, but that He is a tyrant Master! What is that but flinging down the gauntlet to the Almighty and charging Him with injustice? Such language as that betrays the enmity of your heart against the Most High.

"Well," says another, "I pay everybody all that is due." I am glad that you do so and wish everybody else did the same, but have you paid to God all that is due to Him? There is the great flaw in your life—you pay every creditor except your God to whom you owe all that you have! Many a man who would not treat his dog badly, does not mind ill treating his God! The last one of whom many of you think is your Creator, Provider and Preserver—the God who keeps the breath of life in your nostrils! You give some sort of consideration to the meanest servant in your kitchen, but to Him who made the Heavens and the earth, to Him who sustains all things by the word of His Power, you pay no regard whatever! As this is the real meaning of your attempt at self-justification, it carries its condemnation upon its very surface!

"Still," says one, "whatever I may seem to be, I am reasonably good at heart." Ah, that is another of the sayings that I have often heard, but I have never yet been able to believe that a man could be bad in life yet good at heart. It is sometimes said of a man who dies drunk and cursing his Maker, "Ah, he was a good fellow at bottom." That is not the way that men talk in the market. If you go to buy a barrel of apples and see a lot of rotten and spoiled ones at the top of the barrel, do you believe the salesman when he says, "Ah, but the apples underneath are very good ones"? Of course you do not believe anything of the kind! You always reckon that the fruit below is worse than that at the top, for the universal practice is to put the best at the top and the poorer quality underneath. In like manner, we do not believe the man who says that he is good at bottom and good at heart, although his life is evil! No, Sir, you are even worse in heart than you ever were in life because there are many things that restrain you from revealing your naked self to these who only see your outward life! But your sin is there, down at the bottom of your heart—and if you attempt to justify yourself in the sight of God—the very statement that you make will condemn you!

Besides, so conscious are men that their own good works will not justify them before God, that I do not remember ever meeting with a person who absolutely professed to be at peace with God as the result of his own endeavors. If I were to ask any man who says that he is righteous simply because of what he has done or been, himself, "Are you prepared to die?" he would shake his head, and say, "Oh, no! I am not prepared to die." You say that you have done nothing wrong and that you are right. But suppose that tomorrow you were to be called to stand at God's Judgment Bar—would you feel comfortable at the prospect? "Oh, no!" you say. I felt sure that must be your answer. Indeed, all the religions in the world that teach the doctrine of salvation by works are at least honest enough not to pretend to ensure for any man present salvation!

Take, for instance, that gigantic form of error, the Roman Catholic system of religion. It never tells anybody that he is saved. There is not a cardinal, though he is called a prince of the church, and there is not a pope, though he is called Christ's vicar on earth, who dares to say that he is saved! They have some kind of faint hope that they may be saved at some future period, but there are none of them who dare to say that they are already saved. As to using the language of the Apostle Paul, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"—language which even boys and girls in our Sunday school can use as soon as they have believed in Jesus Christ—well, even the greatest and the wisest of them cannot say that, either while they are in full health and strength, or when they are about to die. What becomes even of their great cardinals when they die? I have seen a notice of this sort put up in their churches and probably many of you have also seen it—"Of your charity, pray for the repose of the soul of Cardinal So-andSo." So that it is evident that he has gone somewhere or other where he is not at rest! It is quite clear that he has not gone to Heaven, so all that he has done, all the "masses" that he has said, all the confessions he has made and all the penances he has undergone have done nothing for him but land him somewhere where he has not repose for his soul! But it is the glory of the Gospel of Christ that it says to the sinner, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be justified immediately. Trust in what He has done and you shall be saved, and you shall know that you are saved, and that you shall be saved forever!" This is a Gospel that is worth preaching! And I pray you, therefore, to regard it as worth hearing while I try to expound it during the few remaining minutes available for my discourse. And in order that you may do so, I urge you to put away all

Volume 51 5self-righteousness in which you have up to now trusted! Bury it! Bury it forever! It will only ruin you if you rely upon it!

II. Our second text reveals THE DIVINE JUSTIFICATION OF WHICH THE APOSTLE PAUL SPEAKS—"It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns?"

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, you know that God can justify the ungodly. We may put this Truth of God very broadly and say that God can take an unjust, unrighteous sinner and, by a wondrous process which made even the angels in Heaven to be astonished when it was revealed to them, He can take the guilt from the guilty one and cast it into the depths of the sea! And He can cover the unrighteous man with a spotless robe of righteousness so that he shall be accounted fair and lovely and whiter than the newly-fallen snow. God can do this, at once, for every soul that is willing to accept the Divine plan of salvation! Well might the Apostle say, "It is God that justifies." Oh, what a blessing it is that God is able to pardon the guilty and both to impute and impart righteousness to those who have none of their own!

Notice how this great work is done. The whole wondrous plan of salvation can be summed up in a single word—Substitution. As the first Adam stood before God as the representative and federal head of the whole human race, and as it was by his sin that our whole race fell, it became possible for God to regard our race as a whole and to find for us another Adam who would come and stand in our place and represent us as the first Adam did. So that, as in the first Adam we fell, we might be raised up by a second Adam! That second Adam is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, the Lord from Heaven! He has been here upon this earth and He has kept the Law of God in every jot and tittle and has woven a righteousness which covers the sinner from head to foot when he is enabled to put it on. And then, when the Law of God examines him, it

cannot find a flaw, or a tear—or even a faulty thread in that matchless robe which is woven from the top throughout!

In addition to this, inasmuch as we had actually sinned against the Lord, this glorious God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, suffered the terrible consequences of our sin. Oh, wondrous Truth of God! He went up to the accursed tree and freely gave Himself up to die a felon's death so that, in that death the Justice of God might be vindicated and that God might be just, and yet the Justifier of him that believes in Jesus! It is thus that God can reckon the sinner to be just because Jesus has taken his place and borne the penalty that was due for his sin!

"But," asks someone, "how is that great work accomplished? I see that Christ suffered instead of sinners and worked out a righteousness which sinners could never have worked for themselves, but how can that righteousness become theirs?" God's plan, my Friend, is that you should hide yourself in Christ. You must come to Christ and take what He has done to be yours by an act of simple faith. I cannot use a better illustration than that of the sin-offering brought to the priest under the Mosaic dispensation. When the sacrificial animal was about to be slain, the sinner came and laid his hands upon the head of the beast and confessed his sin over the appointed sin-offering. Thus his sin was put on the animal—which was then killed and consumed—and so, in type, the man's sin was put away. In a similar fashion, come, Beloved, to my Lord Jesus Christ at this very moment and, by an act of faith, put your sin where God long ago laid it and, in token of that act, say to your Lord and Savior, Himself—

"My faith does lay her hand On that dear head of Yours, While like a penitent I stand, And thus confess my sin."

If you do thus trust Christ, even though you have never done so in all your life before, it does not matter, for, if you have done so now, then your sin is laid upon Christ and He has so completely borne the penalty for it that it has ceased to be—and His righteousness is accounted yours seeing that you are a Believer in Him. When God looks at you, He see no sin in you, nor does He mark any lack of righteousness in you—for the sake of Jesus Christ, His Son, He does accept and look upon you as though you had always kept His righteous Law!

"But for whom is this great work accomplished?" someone asks—"you surely do not mean that it is for me?" I do mean that it is for you if you are a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. But if you will not trust Him, on your own head be the guilt of your soul's eternal ruin! If you will have Christ's righteousness, it is for you. "What," you say, "for such a guilty sinner as I am?" Listen, man—if you had not been guilty, God need not have provided a righteousness for you! Of course Christ's righteousness is for the guilty—for whom should it be if not for them? "Do you mean," asks one, "that in a moment I may be cleansed from all sin simply by believing in Jesus?" Yes, I do mean that! You, even you may be cleansed this very instant! "But I have not lived a good life." If you had lived a good life, you would not have needed a Savior. Christ Jesus came into the world to save, not the good, but the bad! "In due time Christ died for the ungodly." Publish that blessed Truth of God around the whole earth and let the ungodly especially hear it! Jesus Himself said, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Therefore, you sinsick souls, trust yourselves to the Christ who came on purpose to heal just such souls as you are! Only trust Him and there is immediate pardon and immediate salvation for you! "This is too good to be true," says one. Not so, for high as the Heavens are above the earth, so are God's thoughts above your

thoughts and His ways above your ways. You feel that you could not forgive like this, any who had wronged you, but God's ways are not to be measured by yours! You have often heard us praise and extol Him by singing—

"Who is a pardoning God like Thee? Or who has Grace so rich and free?"

My first text said, "If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me." But my second text as good as says, "If God justifies me, nobody can condemn me." Paul, who wrote these words and who had been a blasphemer, a persecutor and a murderer, boldly declares, "It is God that justifies," and then utters the confident challenge, "Who is he that condemns?" Are you not astonished to hear that little man from Tarsus

Volume 51 7talk in such a fashion as that? Why, there is the blood of the martyr Stephen crying out of the ground and saying, "Why, Paul, I condemn you!" Then there is the blood of all the poor men and women whom he dragged off to prison, or compelled to blaspheme the name of Christ. And those whom he put to death in every city—does not the blood of the martyrs cry out against Paul the Apostle, who was once Saul the persecutor? How does he dare to cry, "Who is he that condemns?" Yet there is no voice of blood raised against him! All is still and silent, for God has blotted out forever even that great sin which he had committed! But do not the fiends of Hell bring accusations against him? Does not the arch-fiend lift up his head and say, "Saul of Tarsus, you are a liar, for I can condemn you. You know what a self-righteous man you used to be and how you sinned against God in that way"? No, even Satan, himself, dares not accuse the Apostle, for, "it is God that justifies!" He has so effectually silenced the powers of darkness with the blood and righteousness of Christ that, like dogs which dread their master's whip, they lie down in their kennel not daring even to howl against a bloodwashed child of God!

But do you not expect the angels in Heaven, who saw Stephen die and watched Saul of Tarsus in all his cruel persecutions, to bend down from their shining thrones and say, "O Paul, it ill becomes you to ask, 'Who is he that condemns?' when all of us can condemn you"? Oh, no! They all see the splendor of the righteousness of Christ and they are all glad to take their harps and sing a new song to the praise and glory of Jesus! Paul's triumphant declaration, "It is God that justifies," seems to start them singing again, as John heard them in his island prison, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!" You may thus challenge Hell, earth and Heaven if you believe in Jesus—for if God has justified you, who is he that can condemn you?

"But," says someone, "we must feel something." Just so, but if you ever do feel aright, Christ must make you feel aright! You must not bring your feelings to Christ any more than your works—salvation by feelings is no more possible than salvation by good works! Salvation is all of Grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

"Well," says one "I am spiritually brought to a bankrupt condition, for if I turned my pockets inside out, metaphorically, I could not find a solitary farthing in them." Well, then, you are the very man to receive the Free Grace of Christ! When you have no merits, no good feelings, nothing whatever to recommend you—when at Hell's dark door you lie, then it is that salvation's joyful sound is pleasant to your ears and blessed are the ears that hear it and blessed is the heart that accepts it! Ask Christ for it and you shall have it! The Holy Spirit, Himself, will help you to ask for it aright. Ask

Him to teach you how to ask for it. Ask Christ for everything—for all your salvation, from foundation to topstone—is in Him and He will freely bestow it upon you for His own Glory!

Now I must close my discourse by reminding you that this way of finding justification by faith in Jesus Christ has commended itself to the best of men—and I hope it will commend itself to you. Cowper, in one of his later letters, says—(I will give you his words as nearly as I can remember them)—"I cannot survey the future with any joy when I look upon it from the top of my own good works. Though I have labored ever since my conversion to have a conscience void of offense toward God and men, yet my only hope in death is in the blood and righteousness of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in whom death once sheathed his sting." And when Dr. Watts, that sweet singer of Israel, was dying, he said to one who stood by his bedside, "I heard an old Divine once say that when the most learned Christian minister comes to die, he draws his greatest comfort from the most plain promises of God's Word. And so," said Dr. Watts, "do I and I bless God that they are so simple that they do not need any great understanding in order to grasp them! My hope is simply in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior." And so the good man fell asleep. If we had time and opportunity, we might multiply such testimonies almost indefinitely, for all the children of God who have lived the best conceivable lives uniformly declare that they do not trust for salvation in anything they have done, or felt, or been, or suffered—but that they live by faith upon the Son of God who loved them and gave Himself for them!

I should like to finish by telling you the way in which one of the old Puritans, Mr. Thomas Doolittle, once finished a sermon. And I pray that God will set His blessing on it. The preacher turned to one of the members of the church, sitting in the left-hand gallery and, addressing him by name, he said, "Brother So-and-So, do you repent having trusted your soul to Christ?" And the Brother answered, "No, Sir, I do not repent it, for I never knew what true joy and peace meant until I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ." Mr. Doolittle then turned to the other side of the gallery and said to Brother So-and-So, "Do you repent having trusted your soul with Christ?" And he answered, "No, Sir, I do not. I have known the Lord since I was a child and my soul's rest and confidence have been found in Him. And the more I know Him, the more I rejoice in Him." Then, looking straight before him, to a young man who had been somewhat uneasy during the sermon, the preacher said, "Young man, I do not know your name, but will you have the blood and righteousness of Christ to save you?" The young man was so abashed by this public appeal that he hid his face and said nothing. The person sitting next to him nudged him and the minister, looking straight at him, said to him, "Young man, will you answer this question? There is salvation for you in Jesus Christ if you believe in Him. Are you ready to believe in Him?"

The young man looked up and said, "Yes, Sir." "When?" asked the preacher. The young man replied, "Now, Sir." "Then," he said, "listen to the voice of God! 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.'" That young man and his father became two earnest Christian men renowned in the church in years afterwards. It might not be wise for me to exactly imitate that good man's actions. And if I especially addressed a young man, the old men might think that I did not mean them to trust in Christ—and the young women might imagine that I had passed them over. So, instead of speaking only to one person, I will

Volume 51 9put the question to everybody here. I have told you about God's way of making you just in His sight—now, are you willing to be made just in God's way? If you die unjust, you will be

lost forever. If you live unjust, you will miss all true peace and rest of heart. Are you willing to have God's righteousness? You say, "Yes." Well, faith is the accepting of what God gives. Faith is the believing what God says. Faith is the trusting to what Jesus has done. Only do this and you are saved, as surely as you are alive!

You may have come into this place unsaved and have been sitting here a lost soul—yet you may go home saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation and you may know it, too! So I say to each individual here—If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are saved, saved now and saved forever! Therefore be of good courage, you who have trusted in the Lord, and go your way rejoicing in Him and may God bless you both now and forever! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Romans 10:1-21.

In commenting once more upon this familiar Chapter, I cannot help

repeating a remark which I have made to you before—that it is very significant that this 10th Chapter should immediately follow the subject dealt with in the 9th Chapter. In the 9th Chapter we have the Doctrine of Absolute Predestination proclaimed in the sternest and boldest manner— the Doctrine that God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. Now, it is commonly thought by those who do not rightly understand Calvinism that that Doctrine has a tendency to burden the heart and dry up the springs of compassion. That it was not so in Paul's case is very clear, for this Chapter is a most affectionate one and in it the Apostle manifests a most loving spirit towards his fellow countrymen, the Jews, and the chapter also contains the widest conceivable declaration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the fact being that the grand Doctrine of Divine Predestination is by no means inconsistent with the fullest and freest preaching of the Gospel of Christ!

Verse 1. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. Paul is writing concerning the Jews—the very people who had driven him from city to city and who had again and again sought to take his life! Yet he could not forget that these men were his own countrymen and, consequently, with a consecrated patriotism, he desired beyond everything else that they might be saved.

2. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. The Jews of Paul's day were zealous, but they were zealous in ignorance. And that is just what we may say at the present time concerning a large number of our fellow countrymen—those who are ordinarily called Ritualists. "They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." None can be more zealous than they are, but a grave error is at the root of their whole system—a fatal ignorance concerning the truth of the Gospel. 3. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. Man must have a righteousness of one kind or another—and if he has not a God-given righteousness, he seeks to have one of his own making. As the spider spins her web out of her own bowels, so do sinful men try to manufacture a righteousness out of that which is within them—but this they can never do. The only righteousness which will stand the test of the Day of Judgment is that which God bestows upon Believers in His Son, Jesus Christ. Oh, that all men were willing to submit themselves to the righteousness of God!

4. For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believes. "The end of the Law" is to make a man righteous and Christ makes righteous everyone who believes in Him. The act of faith in Christ accomplishes what all the good works in the world can never accomplish!

5. For Moses describes the righteousness which is of the Law, That the man which does these things shall live by them. That is the message of the Law of God—"Do, and live." But the message of the Gospel is, "Live, and do"—a very different thing! The Law says, "Work to obtain life." The Gospel says, "You have life freely given to you in Christ Jesus—now work for Him because you live by Him."

6-9. But the righteousness which is of faith speaks on this wise, Say not in your heart, Who shall ascend into Heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above),or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what says it? The word is near you, even in your mouth, and in your heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. How simple is the Divine Plan of salvation—confess Jesus Christ believing in Him—or, in the other order, believe in Jesus Christ and then acknowledge your faith for so it is written, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved"—Baptism being the way of confessing the faith which you already possess!

10-13. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture says, Whoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. What precious promises these are, and how wide they are! "Whoever—whoever." That must include you, dear Friend, if you believe in Jesus, and call upon the name of the Lord.

14, 15. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! Here you have the whole plan of salvation! Christ is preached, sinners hear the message of the Gospel, they believe it and so they are saved. What a mass of rubbish men have interjected into this blessed

Volume 51 11 simple Plan! What counterfeits of so-called sacraments and what a mass of human doings and external paraphernalia of all sorts have they interjected! God requires none of their fripperies, fineries and ornate performances, but simply says, "Believe, and live." How different is this from the cumbrous, complicated plan by which men would destroy our souls! Cling to the old-fashioned Gospel, Beloved, and never turn away from it! There is nothing that can take the place of the simplicity of Divine Truth. God grant that throughout England and from one end of the world to the other, salvation by believing—the result of hearing the Gospel—may be proclaimed!

16. But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. That is the pity of it—that so many have heard the Gospel but have not obeyed it. This shows that the Gospel comes to us as a command because we cannot disobey where there is no order or rule. O Sinner, listen to this! When you hear the Gospel, it is not left to your own choice to have it or leave it, so that you are as free to do the one as the other! If you reject it, you are disobedient to it.

16-18. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report? So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Ah, that is the important question! If they had not heard it, they could not be condemned for disobeying it, for the sin lies in hearing and yet not believing. "Have they not heard?"

18, 19. Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and the words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? Did not the Jews hear the Gospel? Certainly they did, and they rejected it. Moses foretold it would be so—

19. First Moses says, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are not a nation and by a foolish nation I will anger you. So the poor outcast Gentiles have received Christ although Israel rejected Him!

20, 21. But Isaiah is very bold, and says, I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me. But to Israel He says, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people. God grant that we may not be disobedienta and gainsaying as Israel was but that we may all accept Christ at once as our only and all-sufficient Savior!

. Adapted from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 9,30-31 #1908 - Washed to a Greater Foulness

WASHED TO GREATER FOULNESS

NO. 1908

A SERMON DELIVERED

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"If I wash myself with snow water and make my hands never so clean; yet You will plunge me into the pit and my own clothes will abhor me."

Job 9:30-31.

I FEEL certain that I am sent on a special errand at this time. Before my mind's eye I see a soul whose awful reflections are hurrying him to despair. He refuses counsel and will not listen to direction, for dread has made him desperate. I would have a word in the ear of that worried and wearied one. Do you see the man? He has battled long against a dark temptation, but at last he is beaten. He feels that he can hold out no longer. He can scarcely take a breath—the air grows hot and stifling around him as he faces the question—what next? Accustomed as I am to look down on these crowded aisles and up at these closely-packed galleries, I feel a strange curiosity as I gaze into the mass, for I know that there is one man among all of you to whom I have a private message. I carry dispatches from the King of Kings to one who is grievously troubled and is become as a woman forsaken and despised. My Lord and Master described Himself in parable as leaving the 99 to seek for one lost sheep—I must now copy His example. You will not grudge me for this service, I am sure. I quit the throng that I may find the bewildered one and bring him safe and sound to the fold.

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

Volume 32 1From my experience, as a patient, myself, smitten down with soulsickness, and from my observation as a pastor into whose ears the woes of awakened sinners are constantly poured, I have somewhat learned to understand the imagery of Job. The sufferer is in double straits. While he is tossed about by Satan, his friends are discharging their arrows at him and the Almighty troubles him. To help such a sufferer we must be careful to distinguish between the causes of his sorrow and divide between his affliction, itself, and the further sorrows which he has brought upon himself by his unwise efforts to escape from them.

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

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

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

How is this, you ask again? Few give themselves the trouble to think about these matters at all. Ours is an age in which men's thoughts are keen upon politics and merchandize, practical science

and economic inventions, financial schemes and Home Rule and I know not what beside— but sound doctrine and sincere piety are out of vogue! Few people trouble themselves to think about their souls' everlasting welfare. Men die at the same rate as of yore, but the mortality is reckoned by a percentage and, as for the life hereafter, it is ignored! Friend, have you ever dedicated 10 minutes of your time to a consideration of your destiny? Days to your ledger; hours to your amusements; years to your commercial engagements—would it not be wise to reserve some moments for your soul's outlook beyond the grave? You have made your last will and testament for the world that is fading away, but have you laid up no treasure for the world to come? Is this consistent with your usual prudence? I would have good hope for some of you if I could make you sit alone for one hour and think of nothing but your souls, your God and the Final Judgment. Alas! Alas! As the horse rushes to the battle, so men rush to the heated competition of the hour! They cannot be persuaded to consider. Poor mortals! They concern themselves about everything that does not concern them, but they persistently neglect everything that is necessary to their eternal well-being!

We enquire once more, How is this? To natural ignorance we may attribute much of the ordinary indifference of men to their own sinfulness. They live in a benighted age. In vain you boast the enlightenment of this 19th Century—the 19th Century is not one whit more enlightened as to the depravity of human nature than the First Century! Men are as ignorant of the plague of their own hearts, today, as they were when Paul addressed them. I know that almost every man you meet with talks as if he were qualified to set up for a doctor of divinity—but is not this the confidence of ignorance? "Vain man would be wise"—or read it, if you please, "vain man is void of understanding—though man is born like a wild ass's colt." Until God the Holy Spirit takes him in hand, no spiritual light enters the man's soul. Preaching is an effective means of instructing the mind, awakening the conscience and impressing the hearts of the people—and faithful preachers are scattered up and down the country within measurable reach of most of your homes. Why, then, is the Doctrine of Human Sinfulness, or Total Depravity, so little understood and so seldom accepted as an undeniable fact?

Many persons seem startled and try to think that they misunderstand us when we say plainly that in the very best man in the world there is no virtue or Grace that can be pleasing to God unless he has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus! Let me put the Truth of God before you as plainly as I can by speaking of your body in order to describe your soul. You probably imagine that your physical constitution is sound and healthy. I grant you all that you ask on that score—yet you are but flesh and blood—like the rest of our mortal race and, therefore, you are exposed to every disease which waylays your fellow creatures! Even so, your deceitful heart is capable of as desperate crimes as the vilest of sinners ever committed. The evil propensity lurks within! It needs only the contagion of society, or the temptation of Satan to bring it out. Does not this alarm you? It ought to!

Hardly a glimmer of the humbling Truth of our natural depravity dawns on the dull apprehension of the worldly-wise, though souls taught from above know it and are appalled by it. In divers ways the discovery comes to those whom the Lord ordains to save. Sometimes a preacher sent of God lets in the dreadful light. Many men, like the false Prophet Mokanna, hide their deformity. You may remember the story. Mokanna wore a silver veil upon his forehead—should he ever remove it, the brightness of his countenance would blind the astonished world. In truth a foul disease had

cankered his brow! God's faithful servants are sent to tear off these veils and expose men to themselves. This duty demands courage. Men veil black villainy with self-flattery! Like Jezebel, they paint their eyebrows and tire their heads till they think themselves beautiful. It is ours, like Jehu, to cry, "Throw her down." What have they to do with peace who are the servants of sin? How dare they pretend to comeliness whose hearts are not right with God?

How does it come to pass, then, that the best of saints on earth are prone to account themselves the chief of sinners? Their sincerity is unquestionable. This discovery is due to the Holy Spirit! He it is who convinces men of sin. By His mysterious but most blessed agency on the hearts of men, a sense of utter ruin is worked in the chosen and this prepares them to accept the full redemption provided by the Sacrifice of the Redeemer. We cannot explain to you the mystery of the Spirit's operation. "The wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell from where it comes, and where it goes: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

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

Have I found you out, my Friend? Wandering among the motley throng, I am in quest of a soul that seeks the mercy of the Lord. Am I not upon your track? Perhaps I am, at this moment, addressing a person who has been the subject of a mysterious gloom for which he sees no reason whatever. I am right happy to have found him, for I trust I have met with a recruit for the army of the Truth of God. But why, you may enquire, do I make such a remark? I will tell you in a moment. There is a vital connection between soul-distress and sound doctrine. Sovereign Grace is dear to those who have groaned deeply because they see what grievous sinners they are. Witness Joseph Hart and John Newton, whose hymns you have often sung, or David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards, whose biographies many of you have read. You seldom hear much of God's Everlasting Covenant in these modern times, for few men feel that thorough conviction of sin which comes directly from the teaching of the Holy Spirit. In the economy of redemption, the effectual operation of the Spirit in enlightening the heart concerning its own sinfulness is sure evidence of the Father's personal love to His chosen people and of the special Atonement that the Son of God made for their transgressions—

"Never had you felt the guilt of sin, Or sweets of pardoning love, Unless your worthless names had been Enrolled to life above."

You may walk through a dark cellar without discerning with your eyes that anything noisome is concealed there. Let the shutters be thrown open! Bid the light of day stream in! You soon perceive frogs upon the cold clammy pavement, filthy cobwebs hanging on the walls in long festoons, foul vermin creeping about everywhere! Startled, alarmed, horrified, who would not wish

to flee away and find a healthier atmosphere? The rays of the sun are, however, but a faint image of that Divine Light shed by the Holy Spirit which penetrates the thickest shades of human folly and infatuation—and exposes the treachery of the inmost heart! Then the soul cries out in agony, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" When brought to feel this, we think our doom is sealed and everlasting destruction is close upon us.

But it is not so. This is the way of hope. Through death to life every saved soul must pass! Ask us not to paint the sensations, nor blame us if we usually describe that experience which is most distinct. Sharp conviction, fainting heart, struggling hope, fear that haunts, terror that appalls—an awful fight of fiercely strange emotions! This is the extreme measure of the life-change. In milder form, with one decisive pang, the true heart is born again! The Slough of Despond lies across every pilgrim's pathway. The years or hours it takes to wade through it must be left an open question. Sudden death is an occasional fact, but more frequently the saints are peacefully welcomed to the realms above. So in the Church on earth, sudden conversions happen, but, as a rule, men pass gradually into the Kingdom of God. Between the sensual and the spiritual there is a great gulf and it must be passed. Of the wind or weather in which you make the passage it is not for me to speak—the voyage may be long or short—but in some way the gulf must be traversed. Conviction of sin is of the first importance—it cannot be dispensed with. You will say, "Why?" Well, we might suggest many reasons. It will make mercy the more precious. It will excite horror of sin in the future—burnt children dread the fire. It will teach you patience, for no future trial will be so severe as this. And it will tend to keep you persevering in holiness. But be the reasons what they may, you can be sure of this, that no soul is saved without being made conscious of its own sinfulness!

II. We pass on to notice that it often happens that AWAKENED SOULS USE MANY INEFFECTUAL MEANS TO OBTAIN CLEANSING. Job describes himself as washing in snow water and making his hands never so clean. His expressions remind me of my own labor in vain. By how many experiments I tried to purify my own soul! Like all my fellows, I was always foiled in every attempt. Look at a squirrel in a cage—the poor thing is working away, trying to mount, yet he never rises one inch higher. In like case is the sinner who seeks to save himself by his own good works, or by any other means—he toils without result. It is astonishing what pains men will take in this useless drudgery! They prevent the dawn of day in their anxiety to attend matins or observe "mass!" They are austere in their fasting; they say prayers without stint and do penance to the fullest. We should be sorry to impugn their sincerity!

With what exemplary zeal many in the Anglican Church go about to establish their own righteousness! They practice ceremonies with a claim to catholicity which no Catholic will allow! Untiring is their diligence in one department or another of amateur office, they hope for a reward for doing what God never commanded! Without a Scriptural proof of being right in anything, they would gladly be righteous overmuch in everything! The labor of the foolish in spinning a righteousness of their own—that is neither accredited by the Divine Law nor by the holy Gospel—is almost incredible—they would rather give their bodies to be buried and their goods to feed the poor than submit to salvation by Grace, though it is the only possible salvation!

In seeking to obtain absolution of their sins, to establish a righteousness of their own and to secure peace of mind, men tax their ingenuity to the utmost. Job talks of washing himself with snow water.

The imagery is, no doubt, meant to be instructive. Why is snow water selected? The reason probably was, first, because it was hard to get. Far easier, generally, to procure water from the running brooks than from melted snow. Men set a high value on that which is difficult to procure. Why is it that the great majority of the so-called Christian world prefer worship conducted with gorgeous rituals and stately ceremonies? Is it not the rarity of the thing which creates a sense of value? Enter a Popish cathedral and try, if you can, to understand the services! What are all these persons doing dressed in red and white, or those other persons in more somber color? Manipulations, genuflections, prostrations, waving of censers and elevating of "hosts"—an array of symbolism which it took ages to conglomerate! What is the value of it all unless it lies in its complications and expenses?

Our Protestant friends have their milder predilections. Organs and orchestras serve them for snow water! In measured accents let me speak of music. For Psalms and spiritual songs you all know I have an ardent passion. My spirit wings its way to the very portals of Heaven in the words and tunes of our hymns. But for your instrumental melodies I have no mind when you substitute mere sound for heartfelt prayer and praise. The obvious simplicity of the Gospel is the only outward voucher I know of for its inward sincerity. Praise is none the better because of the difficulty of the music—say rather that the more simple and congregational it is, the better by far. Forms of worship which are expensive and difficult, are greatly affected by many, as snow water was thought, in Job's day, to be a bath for kings. But, after all, it is an idle fashion, likely to mislead.

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

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

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

If I "make my hands never so clean," is an expression peculiarly racy in the original. The Hebrew word has an allusion to soap or niter. Such was the ordinary and obvious method anyone would take to whiten his hands when they were grimy. Tradition tells that certain stains of blood cleave to the floor. The idea is that human blood, shed in murder, can never be scrubbed or scraped off the boards. Thus is it most certainly with the dye of sin. The blood of souls is in your skirts, is the terrible language of Jeremiah (2:34). When you think that Baptism can begin, that Confirmation can further and that other "sacraments" can complete your purification, you are mere dupes of your own folly! "Though I wash myself in snow water and make myself never so clean; yet You will plunge me into the pit and my own clothes will abhor me."

There it stands, it is the testimony of one man, but yet it is true! The Almighty attests it and all human experience affirms it. These worthless experiments to cleanse yourselves should be ended, once and for all, if you would have regard to the great Truth of the Gospel—"Without shedding of blood there is no remission." "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." God alone can remove sin and He does so by the blood of Jesus!

III. But AS SURE AS EVER QUICKENED SOULS TRY TO GET PURITY IN THE WRONG WAY, GOD WILL THRUST THEM DOWN INTO THE PIT. This is a terrible predicament. I find, on looking at the passage closely, that it means, "head over ears in the ditch." It is not merely some filthy puddle in which a man treads till he is splashed all over, it is a slough of despond into which he sinks. His eyes, his ears and his mouth are filled with pollution—and his very clothes are so foul that he utterly abhors himself. Old Master Caryl, a rare expositor of the Book of Job, says that the original can only be equaled in English by the expression—"we would not touch such an one with a pair of tongs."

Often it happens with those who try to get better by their own good works, that their conscience is awakened by the effort—and they are more conscious of sin than ever. If a chosen man strives to save himself from his sins by his own righteousness, the Lord permits him to see his own heart and he ceases from all glorying. The word here rendered, "pit," is elsewhere translated, "corruption." So in the 16th Psalm—"Neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption." Language cannot paint abasement, reproach, or ignominy in stronger terms. "YOU shall plunge me in the pit." Is it not as though God, Himself, would undertake the business of causing His people to know that by their vain ablutions they were making themselves yet more vile in His eyes? We read, in the second chapter of Jeremiah, of God's remonstrance with Judah—"Though you wash with niter and use much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me, says the Lord God. How can you say, I am not polluted?"

May we not regard this as the discipline of our Heavenly Father's love, albeit when passing through the trial we do not perceive it to be so? Thus, in the Apocalyptic Epistle to the Church at Laodicea, expostulation more severe or more tender it would be hard to imagine—"Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel you to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see." Mark the gentle words, "I counsel you," addressed to a people whose lukewarmness excited nausea! Then follows a sentence of encouragement so sweet and enchanting that it almost sounds like an

apology for the fierceness of the former censure. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and repent." A revelation of wretched sinfulness ends in a declaration of love and a visit of Grace, for the Lord goes on to say, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." Anyway, the Lord will end the conceit which is the source of the lukewarmness—He cannot permit His chosen to reMal. in self-righteous pride—His soul hates that.

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

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

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

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

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

Our lives through various scenes are drawn and vexed with petty provocations. Paltry annoyances are the bane of our peace. Some of you, dear Sisters, spend your years and your thoughts in a

narrow circle and I deeply sympathize with you in it. Without a wish to be great, or to enlarge your coast, you intensely desire to be good. To do your duty to the best of your ability is your aim—and in it you are worthy of all honor. The lot of many of you is to pass much of your time in loneliness. Your temptations are, therefore, peculiar. For many a quiet hour you have been busy with domestic employments, distracted by no acute anxiety, but cheered by much quiet meditation. At such seasons you are apt to get on good terms with yourselves. Presently the shades of evening begin to fall. Evening, of which Cowper sweetly sings—

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

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

Thus do we, in our different spheres, fly from this to that and from that to the other. Some hope to cleanse away sin by a supreme effort of selfdenial, or of miraculous faith. Men dream of being clean without the blood of Jesus—they even boast of it—and yet their sin remains. The eyes of the judgment may be deceived till we half think we are clean—but no sooner does the scale grow thin, or the light grow strong, than the conscience perceives its error and learns the lesson that no human endeavor can wash out the accursed spot! Let us not play at purification, nor vainly hope to satisfy conscience with that which renders no satisfaction to God!

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

Poor Job was smitten with sore boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. No doubt he sent for the doctor—though we are not actually told that he did so. It is likely enough that snow water was prescribed to him for a relief. His hands may not have seemed very pretty when he

used it—there may, at least, have been some connection between his physician's prescription and his poetry, when he said, "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean." Perfection in any one part of conduct would not secure cleanness for the rest. Washed hands would be a small matter if the boils remained over the rest of the body. This is another aspect of the same unsatisfactory expedient that I am wanting to point out to you. You are under bad treatment until you walk by faith in Jesus! Anything short of Grace will prove a mere mockery of your malady. Asa, King of Judah, was diseased in his feet. He sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. Asa never recovered, but the Lord restored Job to perfect health. The gratuitous advice which the Patriarch received in the time of his sickness was not worth his gratitude. Of his three friends, he said, "You are all physicians of no value." Then comes back the metaphor which I have repeated so often—"Yet shall You plunge me in the pit and my own clothes shall abhor me." After all is said and done by the wisest of men, the poor sinner is worse off than when they undertook his case! All is vanity till God comes in!

Let us not forget that the man who thus described his own case "was perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil." Such a case is a puzzle to those who are not enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Although Job was renowned for righteousness in his generation, a gleam from God's Countenance exposed the faultiness of his soul. Does this prove him to have been a hypocrite? By no means! His friends supposed him to be so, though they had no ground whatever for the suspicion—it was their rough way of solving a hard problem. If the Patriarch's integrity had not been so firm. If his refinement had not been so tender. If his piety towards God had not been so invariably accompanied by his pity for his brother men— if, in a word, his character had not been so complete—his trial and his deliverance could not have exhibited the extraordinary lesson which has interested and instructed every succeeding generation! He appears before us, at first, in the vigor of health, in the height of prosperity and in the charm of good repute. But oh, the vanity of man! At a touch of God's finger, his flesh develops a festering mass of corruption! At a glance of God's eyes, which searched him through and through, the total depravity of human nature at its best estate becomes apparent! "He abhors himself in dust and ashes." What next? Utter ruin? No, Friend, it is full redemption! IV. By such severe training THE AWAKENED ONE IS LED TO LOOK TO GOD, ALONE, FOR SALVATION and to find the salvation he looks for! This is my last point and I have no time left to enlarge upon it. What I want is that the Truth of God may flash across your mind in a moment. There sits the man who is menaced with despair because every effort to extricate himself from the tangled web of his own strange experience has left him worse than before. Did I attempt to comfort him, he would repel my kindest expressions. And why? He knows that it is God who condemns him! In a British court of justice, when the judge sums up against the prisoner, small cheer can he get from the honeyed words of his counsel. But listen—"It is God that justifies." Whom does He justify? The ungodly! He first condemns them in their own consciences and then He justifies them according to His Grace. If I receive the sentence of death in myself, it is the earnest of deliverance in my Redeemer! My Brother, has the Light of God beamed on your soul? I hope I have found you and that the Lord has visited you with His salvation.

I want you to notice a simple fact which seems to me to have escaped your observation. When the Almighty justified Job, He commended him and pronounced a high encomium on his conduct. Whatever mistakes he made about himself or his circumstances, in one matter he was clear as a bell! "He has spoken right of Me, says the Lord" (Job 42:7). Eliphaz and his friends transgressed in

this respect. Listen to me, you that follow after righteousness, you that seek it in yourselves—you are all on the wrong track! You begin below with the whole duty of man and try to work upward—you are sure to fail! You should begin up yonder, with the righteousness of God—and then you could work downward to righteousness of daily life. God give you knowledge of salvation by Grace, to the Glory of His own name and to your sanctification, for Christ's sake! Amen.

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Job 9,30-31 #3069 - Cleansing--Wrong or Right

CLEANSING—WRONG OR RIGHT?

NO. 3069

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1907.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MAY 31, 1874.

"If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands ever

so clean; yet shall You plunge me in the ditch,

and my own clothes shall abhor me."

Job 9:30-31.

[Another Sermon by Mr. Spurgeon on the same text is #1908, Volume 32—WASHED TO GREATER FOULNESS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, athttp://www.spurgeongems.org.]

WE are all, by nature and by practice, unclean in the sight of God. However excellent or virtuous we may seem before man, we have all broken God's Law, for that Law requires perfection and we have been far from it. The Law demands spotless holiness towards God and perfect rectitude towards man and, in some point or other, we have all transgressed that Law—and we have therefore become polluted before the thrice-holy Jehovah. The great question which ought to arise in the mind of every one of us is this—"How can I be cleansed before God?"

I. We are called upon to remember, first, that TO BE CLEAN IN THE SIGHT OF GOD IS WORTH EVERY POSSIBLE EFFORT.

Job speaks of washing himself with snow water and trying to make himself clean. And this he speaks of right earnestly. However far from the hot plains in which he lived, Job might have to send for snowy water— whatever quantity of soap (for in the Hebrew there is an allusion to soap in the second clause)—however much nitre and soap he might have to take in order to wash himself perfectly clean, it was worth all the expense and trouble if only it could be accomplished.

And, dear Friends, we must be clean in the sight of God. We must desire to be clean in the sight of God for, if not, we are the objects of His continual displeasure. "God is angry with the wicked every day." This is a solemn Truth of God which is far too much forgotten in the present day. Many have tried to put the thought of it right on one side and held forth only the Doctrine of the Divine

Benevolence. But while that Doctrine is blessedly true, these solemn declarations are equally true, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God." And, "He that believes not, is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." Now, if we were right-hearted towards God, this would seem to us to be a very dreadful thing. We little

know how exceedingly hateful sin is to God. [See Sermon #3068, Volume 53—

UNTOLD DEPTHS AND HEIGHTS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at

http://.] You know that there are some things which you and I sometimes see which are very disgusting and loathsome to us. I went into a railway station in Italy once, where I saw a man who had lost his arm and who by way of begging, exposed to us the stump of it and also a horrible ulcer from which he was suffering. I turned away sick at the sight and dreaded to go to that station again, for fear that I should be met inside the door of the waiting room by that horrible spectacle! But, depend upon it, no mutilation and no disease of man's body was ever so sickening to the most delicate taste as sin is sickening to God! He loves purity and, therefore, He must loathe impurity. He delights in those who are just and true and upright—and He cannot endure those who are unjust, false, or unrighteous. His holy soul abhors them as that strong expression of His in the prophecy of Zechariah proves—"My soul loathed them and their soul also abhorred Me." The sinner does not dislike God more than God dislikes him as a sinner. The sinless God cannot look with complacency upon him who is sinful—he is loathsome to the holy mind of God. So, surely, if we are right-hearted, we shall feel that anything and everything that we can do in order to get right with God and to become clean in His sight, we ought to do at once!

Let us also remember that as long as we are unclean, we are in daily danger of the fires of Hell. Do any of you know what Hell is? It is the leper colony of the universe! Just as in the olden times when the "black pest," or some other terrible epidemic ran through a town or village, they would build a house some miles away from the place and call it the pest house where they would put away all those who had the pest or plague—such is Hell, only a million times worse than any earthly pest house ever was! Hell is the pest house of the moral universe. You know that in countries where leprosy prevails, they shut up the lepers in a place by themselves, lest the terrible disease should pollute the whole district. And Hell is God's leper colony where sinners must be confined forever when they are incurable and past hope! And what are the pains of Hell? They are the natural result of sin. Sin is the mother of Hell. The pains and groans of lost spirits in Hell are simply the fully-developed flowers of which their sins were the seed. Bitter is the fruit, sour is the vintage of that vine of Sodom and Gomorrah which some men set themselves so diligently to plant—and so industriously to water. Sin bears its own sting within itself. The torments that are to come are the stings of conscience and the inevitable effects of remorse upon the soul and body of the man who will continue to be unclean in the sight of God! Lest, therefore, any of you should ever be shut up in that place of "everlasting destruction from the Presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power," I do beseech you to awaken yourselves and diligently seek to find out how you may be made clean in God's sight—

"You sinners, seek His Grace, Whose wrath you cannot bear! Fly to the shelter of His Cross, And find salvation there. So shall that curse remove, By which the Savior bled And the last awful day shall pour His blessings on your head."

In addition to the eternal loss which all who are cast into Hell must sustain, also remember that none can enter Heaven until they are pure. Those holy gates are so closely guarded by angelic watchers that no contraband of sin shall ever cross the frontiers of Heaven. The angels look up and down and through and through. The man who presents himself there—if so much as a speck, or spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing is found upon him—cannot be allowed to enter! Just think for a minute how utterly impossible it must be for the impure to enter the courts of the thrice-holy God. You sometimes see, in the streets of London, wretched creatures in whom poverty, drunkenness and debauchery have so combined that even in their outward appearance, they present a truly horrible aspect. They are so foul, filthy and loathsome that I should not dare to describe them more fully. None of us would like to come near them—our flesh creeps at the very thought of them! Now, suppose that these shoeless, ragged, filthy, diseased creatures should present themselves at the gates of Buckingham Palace on some great occasion when all the princes of the blood and the peers of the realm were gathered there? Do even the most democratic of you think that the soldiers would be too squeamish if they were to tell them that they were unfit to enter such a place and to mingle with such company? "Why, no," you say, "of course they must at least be clean, or they can never enter the royal palace." Well then, it must assuredly be so in a still more emphatic sense with regard to the palace of the King of kings! Would it be possible for any to enter there defiled with sin, foul with fornications, adulteries, thefts, murders, infidelities, blasphemies, profanities and rebellions against God? It cannot be that the pure air of Heaven should ever be breathed by them, for it is expressly declared that "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles, neither whatever works abomination or makes a lie." All who are there are absolutely perfect! And you and I, if we would be with them, must be renewed in heart and converted unto God—and washed from every stain, and spot and speck of sin. It is clearly impossible that the thrice-holy God should have unrenewed, unclean sinners immediately under His own eyes, in His own courts. It is bad enough for Him to have them, for a time, in this little planet, floating in the vast sea of space. But He could not endure to have them up there amid the splendors of eternal Glory! That cannot, must not and will not be!

Once more, every man will feel that it is worth his while to endeavor to be clean before God if he wants a quiet conscience, for a truly quiet conscience is never possessed by any man until he has been washed in the precious blood of Jesus and so made "whiter than snow." Does anyone ask, "Can that be done?" I answer in God's own words. "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." This great miracle of mercy can be worked and nobody's conscience will ever be perfectly at peace till it is accomplished. There is a way of silencing conscience without that miracle being worked,

Volume 53 3but it is like the way in which cruel tyrants sometimes silenced the martyrs. "Hold your tongue," the tyrant has said, "I will not listen to your heresy." But the brave man has still gone on speaking—he would not be silenced. And then the tyrant has cut his tongue out. I think I have known men cut out the tongue of their conscience, so that it could no longer speak. Perhaps some here have done it—torn it right out by the roots by going to the drink shop, by frequenting evil company, by taking up infidel ideas when they knew better. They knew that they could not, with a clear conscience, do what they wanted to do, so they resolved that they would tear out its tongue, so that it could no longer rebuke them!

O foolish Man, you could not have dome a worse thing for yourself than that, for he who quiets his conscience after that fashion is like one of whom I have heard who, one night, was unable to sleep because a faithful dog kept on howling under his window. He called out to it and bade it lie down, and went back to bed and tried to sleep, but still the howling continued. And at last, when the creature would not be quiet, he took his gun and shot it, in his anger. He ought to have known that the dog wanted to tell him that there were burglars who were trying to enter his house and that the faithful animal was doing its best to preserve its master's life. After the dog was dead and the man had gone to sleep again, the burglars entered his bedroom, stole everything of value that they could find and ended by staining their hands with the blood of the foolish man who had killed the poor creature that warned him of his peril! The devil is trying to destroy your soul and your conscience, like that faithful dog, gives the alarm, but you cry to it, "Lie down!" It does not lie down, however, and perhaps this very sermon is helping to wake it up, but you are determined that it shall be quiet and you will even kill it if you can! Well, if you do, you will then have sealed your own destiny by that very deed. The only proper way of quieting conscience is the method that a wise owner would have taken of quieting his dog. Supposing that man had gone downstairs and patted his dog on the head and praised it for being a good dog? Suppose that he had loosed its chain and taken it round the yard with him? Suppose, too, that he had taken that gun, with which he so foolishly killed his dog, and when, at last, he had discovered the villains who had come to rob him, he had set his dog on them, or even leveled his gun at them? That would have been far wiser than killing his dog and losing his own life! In such a fashion as that, go and lose your conscience and let your sins be destroyed— otherwise they will assuredly destroy you! The quieting of an awakened conscience can only be rightly done by getting rid of sin—and there is but one way to get rid of sin—of which I will speak before I have finished my discourse.

Thus much on the first point—to be clean in the sight of God is worth any and every effort.

II. Now secondly, ALL EFFORTS OF OUR OWN, MADE IN OUR OWN WAY, WILL CERTAINLY FAIL.

It is very curious what efforts people will make to get rid of their sins. Some try to get clean by ceremonies. Ah, Mr. Priest, is that good soap that you are bringing with your bowl of water? "Yes," he replies, "the best Roman soap, or you can have a cake from Canterbury or Oxford if you would prefer it. How beautifully white your hands will look if you only use enough of this patent soap." So you say, but if you had your eyes opened, you would see that after all your washing, they are as black as night! The soapsuds get in your eyes, Sir, and therefore you do not see the dirt that is still on the sinner's hands. That is all that ever comes of mere ceremonies—they blind, but they do not cleanse.

Another thinks that he can obtain cleansing by religious observances. His form of washing with snow water is attendance at his usual place of worship. He goes there regularly. He would never be away if he could help it! When the proper time for service comes and having done that, he asks, "Will not that take away my sin?" No, Sir, not a spot, nor even half a spot! Some have given away large sums of money with the hope of thereby cleansing themselves from sin. But all the gold in the world can never form a golden ointment with which to cleanse iniquity. There are many who have tried to get cleansing by their moralities and their charities, but their efforts have all been in vain. Mr. Legality and Mr. Civility are said to be great hands at washing Blackamoors white, but I

have very grave doubts as to whether the Blackamoors are not blacker after the washing than they were before!

Men have had the strangest notions as to how they might be cleansed from sin. Read John Bunyan's Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners— which is, as you know, a record of his own experience—and you will see some very curious ideas of his concerning the way in which he hoped to wash himself from sin. Yet, his ideas are not any more curious than those of people who are now living. The other day I read a letter from a young farm laborer, describing the way in which, at one time, he hoped to get saved. He said that in the village where he lived, there were some young men who went to the Patagonian Mission and there got what he called, "massacreated." Of course, he meant to say that they were massacred. And he further wrote, "I thought that if the Patagonian Mission would have taken me and the natives would only have killed me, I would have gone joyfully and gladly, for I heard that they were all saints who died in that way and I would willingly have gone if I could have got to Heaven by that method." Yes, and so would I, and so would most of us when we were under the burden of sin. We would not have minded being killed and eaten if we might in that way have entered into eternal life, for a man who really feels the burden of sin is willing to try all sorts of extraordinary methods of getting rid of it! Look at the methods adopted by the heathen in order, as they hope, to get rid of sin. Go to India and look at the great car of Juggernaut, and see by what cruel means the people there hope to get rid of sin! And there are many other equally useless methods which the spiritual quacks are vainly puffing as unfailing ways of getting rid of sin!

But on the authority of the Word of God, we confidently declare that all human methods of seeking the cleansing of sin which men may

Volume 53 5practice must end in failure, even as Job's did when he said, "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands ever so clean; yet shall You plunge me in the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me." Yet, if God really means to save you, He will never let you be satisfied with any human plan of salvation, but He will, to use Job's expression, plunge you in the ditch and make you feel even blacker than you did before! How will He do that?

Sometimes the Lord does this by bringing to a man's memory his old sins. "There," says the self-satisfied man, "I am getting on now—how clean I am after that last wash!" And just then he recollects some sin he committed as a boy, or some foul deed which he can never wipe completely off the tablet of his memory. "Oh!" he cries, "that dreadful past sin of mine has not gone as I vainly hoped that it had—it is still there." So he is again plunged in the ditch and all his beautiful washing counts for nothing!

At another time, the Lord permits the man to be greatly tempted. He gets up in the morning and says to himself, "Now I really feel a great deal better than I have felt for a long time. I have firmly resolved to make a man of myself and I know that my resolutions are much stronger than they used to be." So he starts out very confidently. But presently there comes to him something that is stronger than his resolutions—and over goes the boastful man, generally failing in the very thing in which he fancied himself to be strongest! He soon discovers that he was only powerful as long as he had not a powerful adversary to contend with him. That is the way in which many a man has been plunged by God in the ditch.

Sometimes God will do it in another way—by opening a boastful man's eyes to see the imperfection of his work. He thinks, "I did that piece of work well. I am sure I did and I do not see how any Christian could do it better." When any man begins to talk like that, the Lord often makes him sit down and closely examine that work of which he is so proud. And as he looks at it, he sees that it is full of flaws. It is a beautiful vase, but just try to fill it with water. Ah, it leaks! The man looks at it and says, "Well, I never thought it was as faulty as this. It seemed to me to be perfect! Yet this beautiful vase that appeared to be so fair, leaks like a sieve." The man says to himself, "That good action of mine was done with a bad motive, so it is like a leaky vessel. While I was doing it, I was as proud as Lucifer over it. So it leaks—and after I had done it, I went away and boasted about it, so the vase kept on leaking." In that way the man gets plunged into the ditch and he sees himself to be blacker than he was before he had thus washed his hands with snow water!

Very frequently men have been plunged into the ditch by being made to see the spirituality of the Law. A man says, "I have not broken the Law. I have kept all the Commandments from my youth up. I never killed anybody. No one can say that I ever did." But where he finds it written, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer," he cries, "Ah then I have been a murderer!" A man says very boldly, "I have never committed adultery! Who dares to say that I have?" But when he reads the words of Jesus, "I say unto you, that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart," then the man says, "I must admit that I am guilty, for I see that I have broken these commandments by my thoughts and looks, although I knew that I had not broken them by my actions. I did not know that the Law concerned itself so closely with looks and thoughts as well as with acts and words." But, indeed, that is the very thing with which the Law is concerned—and for which it condemns men! And when the self-satisfied man learns this solemn Truth of God, he says, "Then I am plunged in the ditch, and my own clothes abhor me, although I had washed myself quite clean."

Others are plunged in the ditch in this way—they are made to realize the supreme holiness of God. It had been the habit of a certain man to say, "I am as good as my neighbors, and better than most of them. Don't talk to me about Christian men and women—there's many a professing Christian not half as good as I am! Why, was I not kind to my neighbor when he was in distress? Did I not give a guinea to such-and-such a charity? Am I not ready at all times to stand up for the right?" So he talks. But when he gets a view of God, then, like Job, he abhors himself and repents in dust and ashes! And he says, "I thought I could compare myself with man, but I cannot compare myself with God! And as God and not man, is the standard of holiness, I am indeed plunged in the ditch. Yet I thought I had washed myself perfectly clean—that snow water and patent soap did seem to take the dirt off beautifully—but now I find that in the sight of God I am just as filthy as I can be." And when the Lord, the Holy Spirit, convinces a man of sin, the words of Job are none too strong—"My own clothes shall abhor me." You may sometimes have abhorred your clothes because they were so dirty that you were ashamed to be seen in them. But you must be dirty, indeed, when your very clothes seem ashamed to hang upon you! This is what the convicted sinner feels—that he is so foul that his very clothes seem to be ashamed of him, as if they would rather have been on anybody else's back than on the back of such a filthy sinner as he is!

"Ah," says someone, "you are exaggerating now." No, I am not exaggerating, at least as far as my own personal experience is concerned. I can well remember—though I did not then know that John Bunyan had used somewhat similar expressions—I can well remember when I was under

deep conviction of sin, wishing that I had been a frog or a toad rather than have been a human being because I felt myself to be so foul in the sight of God. I felt that I was such a great sinner that the bread I ate might justly choke me and that the air I breathed might have righteously refused to give life to the lungs of such a sinner as I was. I felt, at that time, that if God spared me, it was only because He was boundless in compassion—and if He cast me into the hottest Hell, I could never murmur against the justice of His sentence, for I felt that I deserved any punishment that He might award me. When the Holy Spirit brings sinners to feel like this, it is a proof that He is leading them on the way by which He brings them to Christ. Oh, that the Lord would make

Volume 53 7every guilty sinner here long to be clean in His sight! And also make each one feel what is certainly the truth—that all the means in a man's own power of making himself clean will turn out to be dead failures—for though he should take snow water and wash himself ever so clean, yet would he again be plunged in the ditch and his own clothes would abhor him!

III. The last point on which I have to speak is the best. It is this— THERE IS A RIGHT WAY OF GETTING CLEAN IN GOD'S SIGHT.

First, it is an effective way. He that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be made clean. He shall be cleansed from all the foulness of the past—God will wipe it right out. He shall be cleansed as to his heart and his nature. To him God repeats that ancient promise, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." "How is this to be had?" By trusting to the Divine method of cleansing the filthy, for the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses from all sin everyone who believes in Him. There are millions upon the earth now whom the blood of Jesus Christ has completely cleansed—and there are millions more now hymning His praises in Glory who have had every spot of sin taken out of them by the application of His precious blood! O sinful Souls, if you could ever have made yourselves clean, Christ would not have needed to pour out His life's blood that you might be washed in it! If the cleansing bath could have been filled with human tears, or could have been filled by means of the incantations of a so-called priest, there would have been no need for Your wounds, O Emmanuel, and no need of Your indwelling, O regenerating and sanctifying Spirit! But because we could not be cleansed by any other means, the water and the blood flowed freely from the pierced heart of Jesus, the Divine Son of God! And now the ever-blessed Spirit waits to be gracious and to change the heart and renew the nature and make us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light!

This effective way of getting cleansed is also an immediate way. We have often sung—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One! There is life at this moment for you"—

and it is true, for there is instant cleansing for anyone who looks to Jesus Christ. A sinner may have committed more sins than he could count in a million years and yet, as soon as he gives one believing look at Jesus Christ, all those sins are gone forever! You know that when a bill is paid, the receipt is written at the bottom and that puts an end to the whole debt. So, Sinner, the name of Jesus at the bottom of the whole roll of your indebtedness to God puts an end to it all! The man who thinks he has only a few sins may bring his little bill—and you who know that you have many sins may bring your big bill—but Christ's receipt avails for one as much as the other! Even if the roll of your guilt should be many miles long, it makes no difference to the efficacy of the blood of Jesus! If the list of your sins should be long enough to go right around the world— and just one

drop of the blood of Jesus should be put upon it—all that is written there would at once disappear and be gone forever! And the sinner would be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation!

Further, this effective and immediate way of cleansing is also an attainable way of cleansing. To preach to sinners a salvation which they cannot obtain would be to tantalize them. We do not so, but to every person in this Tabernacle tonight and to everyone anywhere else whom this message may reach, we have to say this, "If you will confess your sin to God and then put your trust in Jesus Christ, His Son, you shall be saved—even you, whoever you are, and whatever sin you may have committed!" Your confession is to be made, not to your fellow creature, but to Him against whom your sins were committed. Go to your home, or seek some quiet spot where you can commune with your God. Tell Him that you have sinned, and ask Him to have mercy upon you. Tell Him that Jesus died in the place of sinners—plead the merit of His precious blood and say, "Lord, I believe that You can save me and I trust in You to save me, for Jesus' sake." If you will do this, you shall be forgiven! You shall be renewed in heart, you shall be made clean!

In closing my discourse, I remind you, as I have often done before, that this cleansing is available now, at this very moment! I recollect hearing of a somewhat stingy man who once needed to hire a horse and chaise to go out for a drive. So he went to the man who let such things and asked the price. He said that the sum asked was too high—and went round to every other person in the little town who had such things to let, but found that their prices were higher still. So, at last, he went back to the first man and said to him, "I will take your horse and chaise at the price you mentioned." "No," he said, "you won't, for you have been around to everybody else to try to get them at a lower price, and I shall not let you have mine now." I was not very much surprised to hear that he was told that. Now, some of you have been to everybody else for salvation except to the Lord Jesus Christ! You have been to Rome and you have been to Oxford, and you have been to self and I hardly know where you have not been! Yet, notwithstanding that, you may come to Christ even now! He will not refuse you even now! Going to Canterbury has not saved you, but going to Calvary can. You have found no help in the city on the seven hills, but you may find immediate help on the little hill outside Jerusalem's gate—the little mound called Calvary, where the Savior shed His precious blood for all who will put their trust in Him!

I have been talking to you in a very simple, homely way, for I have been afraid lest anybody should by any possibility not know what the Gospel really is. I always think that if my net has small meshes, the big fish can get in and the little fish cannot get out, So I have put small meshes to my net and talked in a homely style with simple illustrations which all can understand. The Lord knows that I have done this out of love to your souls. I would bring you all to Jesus if I could—but I cannot do that. Oh, that the Spirit of God would do it! Why do you need so much urging to come to Christ? You are filthy with sin and here is a free bath in which you may be washed spotlessly white! Come and bathe in Jesus'

Volume 53 9blood and that will make you fairer than the lilies, and lovelier than all the glories of Solomon! If you do but wash in this Fountain, you will scarcely know yourself when you come up out of it! And if you happen to meet your old self, the next day, you will say, "Ah, Self! I don't want to be on speaking terms with you anymore. I never knew that you were so ugly! I never knew that you were so filthy! I never knew that you were so abominable till I had gotten rid of you by being made a new creature in Christ Jesus."

The Lord bless you and bring you to trust in Jesus Christ, His Son, and He shall have all the praise and glory forever and forever! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Matthew 5:13-26.

Verse 13. You are the salt of the earth. The earth would go putrid if there were no salt of Divine Grace to preserve it. So, dear Friends, if God's Grace is in you, there is a pungent savor about you which tends to preserve others from going as far into sin as otherwise they would have done. "You are the salt of the earth."

13. But if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? If the God-given Grace could be altogether taken from you. If you had no sanctifying power about you at all, what could be done with you? You would be like salt that has lost its savor.

13. It is therefore good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Mark this, then—either the saints must persevere to the end, or else the Grace of God has effectually done nothing for them. If they do not continue to be saints and to exercise a saintly influence, there is no hope for them! There cannot be two new births for the same person. If the Divine work has failed once, it will never be begun again. If they have really been saved, if they have been made the children of God and if it is possible for them to lose the Grace which they have received, they can never have it again. The Word of God is very emphatic upon that point—"If they shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance" Falling may be retrieved, but falling away can never be.

[See Sermon #75, Volume 2—FINAL PERSEVERANCE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, athttp://www.spurgeongems.org.]

There are countries where there is found salt from which the pungency has completely gone. It is an altogether useless article and if there are men who ever did possess the Grace of God, and who were truly God's people, if the Divine life could go out of them, they would be in an utterly hopeless case. Perhaps there are no powers of evil in the world greater than apostate churches—who can calculate the influence for evil that the Church of Rome exercises in the world today?

14. You the are light of the world. The Bible is not the light of the world, it is the light of the Church! But the world does not read the Bible, the world reads Christians! "You are the light of the world."

14. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. You Christians are like a city built upon a hilltop—you must be seen. As you will be seen, mind that you are worth seeing. 15. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick and it gives light unto all that are in the house. God's intent is, first, to light you. And, secondly, to put you in a conspicuous position where men can see you.

16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven. Let the light of your purity and your good works be as bright as possible, yet let not the light be to your own praise and glory, but let it be clearly seen that your good works are the result of Sovereign Grace for which all the glory must be given to "your Father which is in Heaven."

17, 18. Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till Heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all are fulfilled. See how the great Lord of the New Testament confirms the Old Testament? He has not come to set up a destructive criticism that will tear in pieces the Book of Deuteronomy, or cut out the very heart of the Psalms, or grind Ezekiel to powder between His own wheels. But Christ has come to establish yet more firmly than before all that was written aforetime and to make it stand fast as the everlasting hills.

19. Whoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven: but whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. A true man may make mistakes and so he may teach men to violate someone or other of the Divine Commandments. If he does so, he shall not perish, for he was honest in his blunder. But he shall be among the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But he who earnestly, perseveringly and conscientiously teaches all that he knows of the Divine Will, "the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven."

20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ does not teach a lower kind of morality than the Pharisees taught. They were very particular about little things— jots and tittles—but we must go further than they went! We must have more righteousness of life than they had, although they seemed to their fellow men to be excessively precise. Christ aims at perfect purity in His people and we must aim at it too. And we must really attain to more holiness than the best outward morals can produce.

21. You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill; and whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. God had said, "You shall not kill." But the remainder of the verse was the gloss of the Rabbis—a true one, yet one that very much diminishes the force of the Divine Command.

22. But I say unto you, That whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And a far higher judgment than that of men.

Volume 53 11 22. And whoever shall say to his brother, Raca. A word of very uncertain meaning, a kind of snubbing word, a word of contempt which men used to say to one another, meaning that there was nothing in them. "Whoever shall say to his brother, Raca."

22. Shall be in danger of the council: but whoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of Hell fire. Christ will not have us treat men with anger, or with contempt, which is a very evil form of hate, akin to murder, because we as good as say, "That man is nobody." That is, we make nothing of him, which is morally to kill him. We must not treat our fellow men with contempt and derision, nor indulge any angry temper against them, for anger is of the devil, but "love is of God."

23, 24. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Note that this injunction is addressed to the man who has offended his brother. Why is this? Because he is the least likely to try to make up the quarrel. It is the man who has been offended who usually exhibits the nobler spirit—the offender is almost always the last to seek a reconciliation and therefore, the Savior says to him, "If your

brother has anything against you, it is but right that you should be the first to seek reconciliation with him. Leave your gift, go away from the Prayer Meeting, turn back from the Lord's Table and go and first be reconciled to your brother."

25. Agree with your adversary quickly. Always be ready to make peace—not peace at any price—but, still, peace at any price except the sacrifice of righteousness.

25, 26. While you are on the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Verily I say unto you, You shall by no means come out from there till you have paid the uttermost farthing. And there are some debts of which we cannot pay the uttermost farthing! And there is a prison out of which no man shall come, for the uttermost farthing demanded there shall never be paid. God grant that we may, none of us, ever know what it is to be shut up in that dreadful dungeon!

. Adapted from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 36

Job 10,12 #2314 - Three Blessings of the Heavenly

THREE BLESSINGS

OF THE HEAVENLY CHARTER

NO. 2314

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 25, 1893.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JUNE 16, 1889.

"You have granted me life and favor, and Your

visitation has preserved my spirit."

Job 10:12.

IT is well, sometimes, to sit down and take a grateful review of all that God has done for us, and with us, from our first day until now. We must not be like hogs under the oak, that eat the acorns but never thank the tree, or the Lord who made it grow. We must not receive the dew and yet never think of the Heaven from which it comes. To be ungrateful is to be unmanly—to be ungrateful to God is to commit high treason against the majesty of His goodness. I think that an hour would be well spent, by any person here, in sitting quietly and going over his autobiography. Turn over the pages of your diary—if you have none written, turn over the pages of your memory—and think of all that God has done for you from the day when you hung upon your mother's breast until the present moment—

"Streams of mercy, never ceasing, Call for songs of loudest praise."

But God does not hear the songs of praise because we let the streams of mercy glide by unnoticed. Far too often, we—

"Let His mercies lie

Forgotten in unthankfulness,

And without praises die."

We do not even put a tombstone over their graves, but let them lie as dead things, uncared for, forgotten, out of mind.

If there is any time when it is unlikely for us to think of God's mercies, but when it would be especially wise for us to do so. If there is one time more unlikely than another, it is when we are in great trouble. Here is poor Job, covered with sore boils, sitting on a dunghill, scraping himself with

a bit of a broken pot. His children are dead. His property destroyed and even his wife not giving him a word of comfort—and his friends acting in a most unfriendly manner. Now it is that he talks to his God and says, "You have granted me life and favor, and Your visitation has preserved my spirit." You are very ill—think of the time when you were well. You are poor—remember when you washed your feet in milk and your steps with butter—and had more than heart could wish. Friends have forsaken you— remember when you had plenty of friends.

Volume 39 1"Oh!" you say, "that will be rubbing salt into the wound." No, no, I trust not. You will remember that you were not always unhappy, that you were not always full of pain. God has spared your life and given you many favors. If you do not feel that you can bless Him for the present moment, yet forget not to bless Him for the past. And when you once begin to do that, you will soon find that your praise will overlap the past and cover the present—if it does not even run into the future! Only begin to praise God and you will find that he who praises God for mercy will never be long without a mercy for which to praise Him! I therefore invite those of you who are sad, tonight, to think of God's past goodness and, as I trust that the larger proportion here will not be found in that condition, I urge you to lead the way in taking a happy retrospect, tonight, of all that God has done for you in Providence and Grace.

Job gives us, here, a charter with three blessings in it—"You have granted me life and favor, and Your visitation has preserved my spirit." These are choice favors! As we dwell upon them, may our hearts gratefully bless God for all that He has done for us!

I. The first blessing of this heavenly charter is LIFE—"You have granted me life."

Well, I think that we ought to thank God that we have lived at all. I know the pessimist version of the psalm of life is that, "'Tis something better not to be." Perhaps it would have been something better if that gentleman had not been—better, I should think, for his wife and family if they had not had to live with such a miserable creature! But the most of us thank God for our being, as well as for our well-being. We count it something not to be stones, or plants, or "dumb, driven cattle." We are thankful to be intelligent beings with powers of thought and capable of mental and spiritual enjoyment. Truly, O Lord, it is no small thing to be, even to be a man, for what is man? Well, with all his sin, yet as You did make him, when he had no sin, he was but a little lower than the angels and You did make him to have dominion over all the works of Your hands. You have made him immortal! You have made him a king! You have crowned him with glory and honor and if he does but know his destiny, and works it out aright, You have made him to be glorified with Yourself—You have made him to stand even higher than the angels, now that You have redeemed him, for he has tasted of a love which unfallen angels could not know!

If you choose to make your being to be your eternal curse, why, you must do it, I suppose—but not without our tears. But if you are rational beings, and use your reason reasonably, you will thank God that you live and pray that your life may always be a blessing to you.

But we also thank God that we have lived on in spite of many perils. There are some here who ought very much to thank God that they live on after the perils through which they have passed. It was something to find ourselves alive after the terrible thunderstorm of the week before last. It is something to be alive after an earthquake, or a tremendous storm at sea, or to be alive in the midst of a pestilence, or alive after a battle, to be alive after some fearful accident—to be alive, I say,

when there are so many gates to the grave—

"The rising morning can't assure That we shall end the day, For death stands ready at the door To take our lives away."

And yet, despite all these things, we are still here! Some of you, not long ago, were very ill. It was thought that you would die—you thought so yourself, you were brought very low—and yet here you are! While others have died, you are still spared. You went hard by the gates of death and seemed to look into eternity for a while, but you were allowed to pass on and you are yet among the living, to praise God, as I hope you are doing this very day!

Yes, it is God's Grace that has granted us life. I find that, in the Hebrew, it reads, "lives," as if we had several lives, as though, if we had not had many lives, we should not have had any life at this moment. But life upon life has come to us, like wave upon wave at sea and, whereas one might have washed us on the shore of death, another has carried us back to the sea of life, again, and still we live!

I am addressing some from whom our text asks for gratitude because they are alive notwithstanding constitutional weakness. Perhaps from a child you were always feeble. Oftentimes you have asked yourself, "How is it that I have lived? Strong and hearty men and women have died before me and I, who have always been ailing, find that the creaking door hangs long on its hinges." Well, do not creak more than you can help, but bless God that you are not taken off the hinges! It is really very marvelous how some live, even, to old age when every day they seem to be on the very verge of departure. We account for their continued life by this fact, that they can say with Job, "You have granted me life." Let us praise God, then, even if we can only do it with a feeble tongue, for it is something, to still live.

And I am speaking to a great many here to whom this text should commend itself because they have lived so long. I suppose that, in no other place in London, or perhaps in the world, is there so large a number of old men and women gathered together as in this Tabernacle. One is often struck with the snow that lies about this place on the heads of so many. Do not blame us for getting old! We were all young, together, and I remember that many here were introduced into the Church as young men and young women. Nearly 40 years ago they said of me, "He takes into the Church a parcel of boys and girls." Well, they have been cured of that fault, if it was a fault, long ago! And now, perhaps, some will complain that they are old! We do not complain—we are so much nearer Heaven. But when I look upon some dear friends, here, who have passed even their four-score years, who have quite run out their lease and now are living upon sufferance, as I trust they may for years to come—and when I remember what a poor tottering fabric this tent-body of ours is, I am amazed that we still live on!—

"Our life contains a thousand springs, And dies if one is gone. Strange that a harp of thousand strings Should keep in tune so long."

Yet it has kept in tune so long and we ought to bless God, tonight, those of us who are somewhere between 50 and a hundred, and others who are somewhere between 60 and 200 ought to bless God, tonight, that we have been spared so long, and say, in the language of the text, "You have granted me life and favor." You need not be frightened about that 200 that I mentioned—you will not, any of you, be likely to reach that figure! If any of us live for a century, we shall have done

exceedingly well! We may thank God if we do not live as long as that, for, while it is well to live here, it is better for us, after all, before our infirmities multiply, to be up and away to our Father's house above!

Think of this a little longer, "You have granted me life." You have thought of the perils through which you have passed and the weaknesses that you have survived. Now think, beloved Friends, of the sin which might have provoked God to make an end of such a guilty life. Am I not speaking to some here who have lived without any thought of God, their Maker? Up till this time, God has fed you and preserved you in being, and yet you have not even given Him a thought! It is an amazing thing that He should have spared your life in the midst of such wicked ingratitude. Perhaps, my Friend—I hope it is not so—but perhaps you have been worse than this, and that mouth of yours has uttered blasphemies, and the members of your body have been given over to uncleanness. If you will look back, tonight, it will be a wonder to you, that you, perhaps professedly an atheist, possibly a drunk—you may be setting an evil example to wife and children and doing evil on all sides—but you have been spared!

One seems to say, "Cut down that upas tree, it drips with poison!" But God puts away the axe and He still spares you. Did you not, this very day, imprecate a curse upon yourself, and yet the curse has not come? There was a tract that used to be given away and which did much good. It was called, "The Swearer's Prayer." If every swearer would look upon his dreadful imprecation as a prayer, for such it is, he might well wonder that God has not, long ago, blasted him as he has said, like some oak of the forest that we have seen struck by lightning, standing there with its stag's-horn branches high in the air, a monument of what Divine Judgment can do! God has granted you life, yet nothing in that life has been pleasing to Him, or good for your fellow men. Thank Him that He has not yet cut you down as a cumberer of the ground!

But even if I speak to the best man and woman here, to those who have tried to be useful and are endeavoring to be holy, yet, dear Friends, what poor failures we are, after all! There is not one of us who can boast! We have to lay our hands upon our mouths and bow ourselves into the very dust. Truly, Lord, You have let us live, although we have done so little, and done that little so faultily. We can, tonight, praise You, and each one say, "You have granted me life."

I might thus continue to show you that our preservation in life is a theme for great gratitude—"You have granted me life." But if we can say this in a higher sense, "You have granted me life," spiritual life, how much greater should our gratitude be! I could not even feel the guilt of sin, I was so dead, but You have granted me life to repent. I could not look to Jesus as my Savior and find rest in Him, but You have granted me life to believe in Him. Oh, what a mercy it is to have spiritual life! I do not like to ask you whether you have it. I do not think that that ever ought to be a matter of question with anybody. A man is either alive or dead and he must know which he is—and however faint and feeble he may be, the very feeling of faintness and feebleness is a sign of life—for the dead man does not even feel that!

If, tonight, you have only life enough with which to groan, to weep and to cry to God, thank God for it, and say, "You have granted me life." But if you have that little life, do not be satisfied with it. Pray to have life more abundantly, that you may come to joy and peace through believing, that you may have the full assurance of faith, that you may be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, that you may tread down sin and may serve the Lord in your day and generation, and bring

hundreds and thousands to Christ! Pray that it may be so and then, as each single increase of power comes to you, sing, in the words of the Patriarch, "You have granted me life." Oh, for more life! Do you feel dull and dead tonight? Cry to God to grant you life! Cry for Divine Grace and then, when it comes, gratefully say, "You have granted me life."

II. The second blessing of this heavenly charter is DIVINE FAVOR— "You have granted me life and favor."

Have you ever thought of the many favors that God has bestowed upon you, even upon some of you who, as yet, have never tasted of His Grace? What a favor it is to many to be sound in body! Dear friends are here tonight who have not seen the light of the sun for many a day. God is gracious to them in their blindness, but do you not think that we ought to praise Him for our eyesight? There are many beloved Christian friends who used to sit on this lower platform and around here, for although they were deaf, they could hear my voice in the preaching of the Gospel. But with great sorrow they have come to me, one by one, and said, "I cannot even hear with the trumpet now, I am getting so deaf." Bless God for your ears, if you still have the use of them—and take heed how you hear! Why, there is not a single faculty that God has given but what we ought to be thankful for it! When you see around you these who are crippled, those who are deprived of one limb or one sense, should you not say, "You have granted me life and favor"? They have favors, too, for which to thank God, but you have this particular favor which is denied to them. Do not fail to thank the Lord for it.

It is a great mercy to have been born of good and honest parents and not to be the inheritors of disease, as some are who are born to a life of sorrow by no fault of their own. Be grateful for your ancestry, young man, if you have sprung of good sound stock, and say, "You have granted me life and favor." Do not go and give that body to the devil, I beseech you! Do not go and plunge yourself into vice and sin if God has restrained your ancestors from evil. By His Grace, may you also be kept back and enabled to say, "You have granted me life and favor, and I cannot sin against Your favor"!

I cannot help reminding you, here, of the great favor of God in the matter of soundness of mind. There is a dear friend who has gladly heard the preaching of the Gospel, here, but now he has to be confined in an asylum, for it would be dangerous to have him at liberty. There is another and we often meet with such, who seemed as cheerful and happy as any of us, but he has now sunk into deep despondency. I have often prayed God to let me go anywhere sooner than into an asylum. It seems so dreadful to lose one's reason. Be grateful that you have your senses. Surely you must already be lunatics if you do not bless God that you are not lunatics! There must be a madness in your heart if you do not thank Him for sparing you from so terrible a trial. These favors are looked upon as very common things—a sound mind and a sound body—but if they were universal, they would still be mercies for which we ought specially to bless the name of the Lord.

I speak to many here to whom God has also given a comfortable lot in life. You work and you work pretty hard, but still, you are not starved and you are not ground to death by forced labor. There are many in this House of Prayer who ought to be very grateful for the easy circumstances in which they are found. Why am I talking about these things? Why, because I want, by stirring you up to gratitude, to bind you with cords of thankfulness to God! Will you not thank Him who has done so much as this for you? If you were suddenly brought into the deepest poverty and the most

painful sickness, and did not know where to lay your heads, you would then reproach yourselves to think that when your lives were cast in pleasant places, and you had a goodly heritage, you were not more grateful and more obedient to the God of Love.

Some here, too, some few, at any rate, have been favored with much prosperity. O self-made men, do not begin to adore yourselves because you made yourselves, for if you made yourselves, you are poor sticks, I know! I would not trust myself to make myself, I would make an awful mess of myself. No, thank God for your prosperity and devote your wealth to His service, who granted it to you. Grow not purse-proud! Be not exalted above measure among your fellow men! The more you have, the more you owe to God—therefore be humble and be devoted to Him who has treated you with so much favor.

And I may say, tonight, that in this congregation, God has given you the favor of hearing the Gospel—no mean favor, let me remind you. Multitudes, multitudes, multitudes are without it, perishing for lack of knowledge! And there are some who once heard the Gospel who are now far removed from the sound of it. Friends who once used to join in our great assembly are now far away in those parts of South America where as yet there is no Gospel teaching, or they are far away in the backwoods of America or Canada, or away in the bush in Australia, where, as yet, the Message of Mercy is not, at any rate, regularly brought to them, and they very much miss the means of Grace. Be thankful that you have the Gospel at almost every street corner and, if you are willing to hear it, you may hear it.

Still, putting all these things together, they do not come up to this last point, that many of us have received the favors of saving Grace—"You have granted me life and favor." The highest favors of all, God has given to some of us—the favor of being chosen to be His from before the foundation of the world, the favor of being redeemed from among men, the favor of being called out by His effectual Grace, the favor of being renewed in the spirit of our minds, the favor of justification whereby we are made accepted in the Beloved—the favor of full, free, irreversible pardon, whereby our sin is blotted out forever, the favor of a Throne of Grace, the favor of answered prayer, the favor of Divine Providence which makes all things work together for our good, the favor of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who is with us, and shall abide in us forever!

I cannot run over the list of God's favors to His people, for it is too long. Only praise your God, each one of you, as you say tonight, "You have granted me life and favor." Happy people, thrice-happy people, of whom this is true! If we did not praise the Lord, the stones in the street might well cry out against us.

III. The last blessing of the charter, upon which I shall be a little longer, is DIVINE VISITATION—"Your visitation has preserved my spirit." Does God ever come to man? Does He not? Yes, but it is a great wonder— "What is man, that You are mindful of him? And the son of man that You visit him?"

May I remind some of you of how much you ought to praise God for His visitation? He visited you, first, with an awakening and conviction of sin. I remember when His Spirit came to me while I was yet a child, and made me feel a heavy burden on account of my childish sins. How I wept and cried, when alone, because I had been so guilty before God! And as a youth, that feeling still pursued me wherever I went. God visited me in the night, visited me often in the morning, when I

woke up before anybody else, to read Baxter's, "Call to the Unconverted," and Alleine's, "Alarm," and suchlike books, over which I pored again and again, feeling the evil of my sin and having the sword of the Spirit piercing yet more deeply into my conscience at every page I read! I thank God for those early visitations! If any of you are having them now, quench not the Spirit of God! Be glad to know your real state as sinners while you are yet young. The visitations of God, in the form of conviction, if at first they bring us under bondage, are, nevertheless of the utmost value, for by these He preserves our spirit.

After that first experience, there came visitations of enlightenment and conversion. Can you remember when Jesus first visited you and brought you up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay? Does not your heart leap within you, even now, as you are ready to sing—

"Happy day! Happy day! When Jesus washed my sins away"?

Yes, God's visitations, by revealing Christ to your broken heart, preserved your spirit! Perhaps since then you have had visitations of another kind. You have had chastisement, or you have had affliction in the house. God's visitations are sometimes very unwelcome. We dread that He should come to afflict or chastise us and yet, in looking back upon all such experiences, I think that you can say, "Your visitation has preserved my spirit." I saw a young Sister, just before this service, and I said to her, "When did you find the Lord?" She replied, "It was when I was very ill." Yes, it is often so—God makes us ill in body that we may have time to think of Him, and turn to Him. "Your visitation has preserved my spirit." What would become of some people if they were always in good health, or if they were always prospering? Tribulation is the black dog that goes after the stray sheep and barks them back to the Good Shepherd! I thank God that there are such things as the visitations of correction and of holy discipline to preserve our spirit and bring us to Christ.

But then, dear Friends, we have had other visitations, visitations of revival and restoration. Do you not sometimes get very dull and dead? Then you are glad to go and hear a sermon, or read some godly, soul-stirring book, or meet with some Christian friend, and you say afterwards, "Well, I do not know how it is, but I seem quite different from what I was. I have made a new departure, I have started off again." I think that some of our friends have need to do that, tonight—it will not hurt any of us if we all seem to begin again, tonight, and take Jesus Christ into our heart once more, and let Him come as He came at the first, and be like a new Christ to us! Let us joy and rejoice in Him with our first love and our early delights. Lord, give us that visitation, tonight, and revive our spirits! Oh, what visitations of joy He sometimes gives us when He comes very near to us! We do not hardly know how to bear it! We cry when the vessel gets quite full, "Hold, Lord, I cannot bear more of Your joy." "Ah!" you say, "we do not know much about that experience." Do you not? Then pray the Lord to visit you often, that you may know more about it!

The best of all is when the Lord visits us and never goes away, but stays with us always, so that we walk in the light of His Countenance, and go from strength to strength, always singing, "Your visitation never ended, daily continued, preserves my spirit." You have all heard the phrase, generally used by juries at a coroner's inquest when a man has died suddenly, "Died by the visitation of God." No doubt some do thus die, but I want you to live by the visitation of God! That is a very different thing and that is the only way in which we truly can live—by God's visiting us from day to day—preserving our spirit from the dangers that surround us. Live, then, by the visitation of God!

You are sick, my Friend. Your heart is sick. Sin, like a grievous disease, is destroying you. The cancer of an evil habit is eating into your very vitals. What is to be done with you? Nothing but that Jesus Christ the Lord should come and give you a gracious visitation, come and look you in the face and feel your pulse, and lay His hand on your heart, and change it, and make you a new creature! And He will do all that if you send for Him. Doctors have a night bell, you know, and a night-tube, by which they may be called in cases of urgency. Now ring God's night bell at once, and speak up that tube of prayer, "Lord, I am sick unto death! Come and heal me. Come and heal me!" Will not somebody in these pews, now, without the use of a word, yet say in the silence of his heart, "Lord, I am sorely vexed; I am sick unto death with sin; come and heal me"? And Jesus Christ will say, "I will come and heal you." Then will you say, "Your visitation has preserved my spirit."

You know how a farm will sometimes get smothered with weeds and things seem to go all wrong. What is the matter? On enquiry, you find that the farmer has been out on the Continent, he has been away from his farm. Well, then, of course the farm goes wrong! But have him back, again, and the farmer's eye does more than his hand—his foot manures the ground wherever he stands—and things soon get on better. Now, if the farm of your nature has fallen into a bad state, you need the Husbandman back. You need the Lord Jesus to come and survey the estate and give directions as to what is to be done to it. He will soon set the whole place right! Yes, if your farm has become like a desert, bare as the palm of your hand, He can come and turn it to fertility—He can make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert like the Garden of the Lord. A visitation from the Lord Jesus Christ is what we all need when we are barren and dead.

May we expect it? Yes, He came on a visit here, once. We did not see Him when He came, but there were some who saw Him. You remember how George Herbert quaintly sings of His laying aside His azure mantle and making the sky with it? And taking off His bright rings, and hanging them up as stars?—

"He did descend, undressing all the way And when they asked what He would wear, He smiled, and said as He did come, He had new clothes a-making here below."

And poor clothes they were, when He was born of the Virgin and lived in our inferior clay! He paid us a visit, but men did not let Him lodge comfortably. There was no room for Him in the inn. It was a sorry entertainment that they gave Him, for they pierced His side before He went away, and He carried with Him the marks in His hands and feet that He had received in the house of His friends. Well, but still, having once come, and died on this earth, He knows the way—and as He cannot die again, He will come again—and now, tonight, in spirit, by His Spirit, He will come to you, if you only cry to Him, "Come." If you cry to Him, "Come," tonight, that will be only the echo of what He says, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden." He cries, "Come," catch up that word, and say, "Come." Echo His, "Come," by your own, "Come"—and you two will meet before the service is over, though we have reached the last few minutes of it. May your, "Come," and Christ's, "Come," blend in one! Come, Lord Jesus, even so, come quickly, and set Your poor servants free from the taint of sin, and from the dread of the wrath of God!

Yes, you need a visitation from Him who has already come and, beside that, He has sent His Holy Spirit to abide until He, Himself, descends from Heaven with a shout. The Holy Spirit is here in this assembly right now— plead and cry to Him for His visitation!

And if my Lord will come anywhere, tonight, it is to you who think yourselves unfit for Him to come to you! To you who would give your eyes to have Him, but scarcely dare to hope that He will ever come to you! The Lord says, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My Word." Do you not belong to that kind of people, trembling at God's Word, wishing only that you dared to hope in His mercy? Come, now, and cast yourselves on Jesus! Come, now, and trust yourselves with the great Savior who has ascended on high to give repentance and remission of sins, and who is ready to give both the repentance and the remission to every soul that is willing to have them! If you would have them, they are yours! Believe for eternal life. Believe now!

The Lord grant you such a visitation that you may be constrained to believe, for Jesus' sake! Amen and Amen.

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON.

Psalms 6:1-10; Psalms 8:1-9.

Psalms 6:1-10 : Here the Psalmist asks for a visit from God, for he is sick at heart, heavy and depressed. Be very thankful if that is not your case, but if it is, be very grateful that here is a prayer ready-made for you. Here you are taught how to cry to God and what to expect from Him. If you are very sick and sad, you are not worse off than David was. Send for David's Physician—you cannot have a better doctor than the royal Physician! He who waited on King David is prepared to wait on you.

1. O LORD, rebuke me not in Your anger. "Rebuke me. It will do me good. I need it, Lord, but not in anger! Be gentle and tender with me— 'Rebuke me not in Your anger.'"

1. Neither chasten me in Your hot displeasure. "Chasten me. It may be that the rod will be very curative to me, but let not the chastening be given in Your hot displeasure. Be not very angry with Your poor sinful servant. If You do not turn away Your rod, yet turn away Your wrath. It is a sweet prayer. Some people cry to God about their sickness. It is much better to cry to God about the cause of it—that is to say if it is a chastisement for sin, get rid of the sin—and the rod will then be removed.

2. Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed. "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak." This was a sweet reason for David to urge—"For I am weak." He could not say, "For I am worthy." He would not have dared to say that. He could not say that when he said, "Have mercy," for mercy is for the unworthy. Justice is for the good! MERCY is for those who are guilty! "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed." Plead the greatness of your disease as a reason for the remedy. Do not come with your self-righteousness—that will hinder you. Come with your sorrow and your sin, your weakness and your pain, and plead these before God. 3. My soul is also sorely vexed. That is worse than the bones being vexed. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

3. But You, O LORD, how long? There is the pith of the prayer. David is troubled because God is away from him. He has lost communion with his Lord. He has gotten out of fellowship with his God and here comes the most necessary cry of all—

4. Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for Your mercies' sake. Will not that prayer suit you who are here, tonight, you who are full of sin and are heart-broken about it, and dread the wrath to come? I put this prayer into your mouths and pray the Holy Spirit to put it into your hearts—"Oh save me for Your mercies' sake."

5. For in death there is no remembrance of You: in the grave who shall give You thanks? As much as to say, "If You let me die, You will lose one singer out of Your earthly choir. But if You will let me live, I will remember You—I will praise You; I will give You thanks." Do you feel like saying, tonight, "Lord, if You shall destroy me, You will gain nothing by it. But if You will save me, there will be one who will give You thanks forever"? I have told you, sometimes, of that old woman who said, "If the Lord saves me, He shall never hear the last of it." And you and I can also say that if He saves us, He shall never hear the last of it—we will praise Him throughout eternity for His great salvation!

6. I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. David was in a very sorry case when he wrote these words. So great was his pain, so acute his sorrow that all the sluices of his eyes were pulled up and he seemed to float his bed in tears and to be like George Herbert when he wrote—

"O who will give me tears? Come, all you springs, Dwell in my head and eyes! Come, clouds and rain— My grief has need of all the watery things, That Nature has produced! Let every vein suck up a river to supply my eyes, My weary, weeping eyes, too dry for me, Unless they get new conduits, new supplies, To bear them out and with my state agree."

7. My eyes are consumed because of grief. He had almost wept his eyes out—they grew red with his weeping, so that he could not see.

7. It waxes old because of all my enemies. His eyesight grew dim, like that of an old man. A cataract of grief had put a cataract of blindness into his eyes.

8. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity. He needs his God to come to him, so he bids God's enemies clear out. If we keep company with the wicked, we cannot invite God to our house and expect Him to come. "Depart from me," says David, "all you workers of iniquity." "You who are singing what you call a jolly song, be off with you! You who are merry with your jokes against religion, be gone far from me." 8. For the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping. "And if He has heard my tears, I do not need you to be here. I cannot associate with God's enemies, now that He has heard the voice of my weeping." Is not that a beautiful expression, "The voice of my weeping"? Why, there was no sound, was there? Yet there are songs without words and there are voices without sounds.

9. The LORD has heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer. "I thought at first that He would not take my petition; but I see He stretches out His right hand. He receives my prayer—and if He receives my prayer, I shall soon receive His answer."

10. Let all my enemies be ashamed and sorely vexed: let them return and be suddenly ashamed. Now let us read the Eighth Psalm in which David expresses great wonder that God, whom he had asked to visit him, should deign to do so. I think I see him sitting with his window open. It is night and he is feeling better—and he bids them throw open the window and he sits and looks at the stars, glad of the cool, fresh air.

Psalms 8:1. O LORD our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth! Who has set Your Glory above the heavens? They are very high, but Your Glory is higher than the heavens.

2-4. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings have You ordained strength because of Your enemies, that You might still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man, that You are mindful of Him? And the son of man, that You visit him? He, whose voice rolls the stars along, who makes those bright worlds to fly like sparks from the anvil of His Omnipotence, how can He stoop so low as to regard His fallen creature, man, who is so small, so insignificant?

5, 6. For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor. You made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet. Man is God's viceroy. He reigns over God's works in God's name. Let him not set up to be a king and try to usurp the honor of his great Lord, the Imperator, the Universal Governor!

7, 8. All sheep and oxen, yes, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatever passes through the paths of the seas. What a king, man is! Let him not be cruel to the beasts of the field; let him not be a tyrant; God did not make him for that purpose. Let his reign be generous and kind—and if the animals must suffer, yet spare them as much suffering as possible. O man, be you a generous viceroy, for you are under a most generous King who is, Himself, the happy God and who delights in the happiness of all His creatures!

9. O LORD our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth! Thus does the Psalmist finish as he began the Psalm, by praising the name of the Lord.

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Job 10,12-13 #2682 - A Song and a Solace

A SONG AND A SOLACE

NO. 2682

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 8, 1900.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MAY 1, 1881.

"You have granted me life and favor, and Your visitation has

preserved my spirit. And these things have You hid in Your

heart: I know that this is with You."

Job 10:12-13.

BEFORE I speak upon these two verses, I will read the four which precede them, that you may note the connection in which they are found. Job is in great trouble, in sore distress of soul. His heart is very heavy and his unfriendly friends are casting salt into his wounds instead of trying to heal them. In his distress, he turns to his God and appeals to Him in this fashion (beginning at the 8th verse)—"Your hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet You destroy me. Remember, I beseech You, that You have made me as the clay; and will You bring me into dust again? Have You not poured me out as milk and curdled me like cheese? You have clothed me with skin and flesh, and have fenced me with bones and sinews." Then follows our text—"You have granted me life and favor, and Your visitation has preserved my spirit. And these things have You hid in Your heart: I know that this is with You."

You see that Job is appealing to the pity of God and this is the form of his argument—"You are my Creator—be my Preserver. You have made me—do not break me. You are dealing very harshly with me, I am almost destroyed beneath the pressure of Your hands. Remember that I am Your own creature. Weak and frail as I am, I am the creation of Your hands. Therefore, despise not Your own work. Whatever I am, with the exception of my sin, You have made me what I am. 'Tis You who has brought me into my present condition—consider, then, O God, what a poor, frail thing I am and stay Your hand and do not utterly crush my spirit."

This is a wise prayer, a right and proper argument for a creature to use with the Creator. And when Job goes still further and, in the language of our text, addresses God not only as his Creator, but as his Benefactor, and mentions the great blessings that he had received from God, his argument still holds good. "Do not, Lord, change Your method of dealing with me. You have given me life,

You have shown me special fa

Volume 46 1vor, You have hitherto preserved me. Cast me not away from Your Presence. Dismiss me not from Your service, let not Your tender mercies fail, but do unto me, now, and in days to come according as You have done unto me in the days that are past."

In speaking about these two verses, I am going to use them in two senses. The first in one sense and the second in another, but both and each of them in its own true meaning, so far as I understand it. First, here is a song for bright days. "You have granted me life and favor, and Your visitation has preserved my spirit." Secondly, here is a solace for dark nights. "And these things have You hid in Your heart: I know that this is with You."

I. First, then, let us use the former part of our text as A SONG FOR BRIGHT DAYS—"You have granted me life and favor, and Your visitation has preserved my spirit."

Whatever we have received that is good, has come to us from God as a matter of pure favor—certainly we have deserved nothing at His hands but displeasure, and everything short of death and Hell is a mercy—and a thing for which to magnify the goodness of God. In this first portion of our text, there is a mention of three blessings that must never be forgotten. The great charter of God's bounty includes three notable things which He has granted to us—life, favor and His visitation which has preserved our spirit.

Now, then, you joyful ones, unite with me while we, first, bless God for granting us life. To a Christian, life is a blessing in itself. Considered alone, it is a blessing. But to the ungodly man it may turn out to be a curse, for it would have been better for that man if he had never been born. But to a godly man like Job, it is a great mercy even to have an existence. Blessed be the Lord who brought us into the world and gave breath to these lungs, and the flowing life to these veins! Blessed be God for having made us! Sometimes, as I gaze upon the world in springtime, or in the summer, it appears to me that it is a great happiness to all Nature to simply exist. Look at the lovely lily, as it stands quite still and never speaks—it seems to praise God in silence by its beauty. But a Christian should go beyond a mere flower. He ought to feel that it is a great favor to be made by God. The man who knows that his eternal future is secured by the unfailing Grace of God may forever praise the Lord who has given him life!

I find that in the Hebrew, this word, "life," is in the plural—"You have granted me lives" and, blessed be God, we who believe in Jesus have not only this natural life which we share in common with all men, but the Holy Spirit has begotten in the hearts of Believers a new life infinitely higher than mere natural life—a life which makes us akin to Christ, joint-heirs with Him of the eternal inheritance which He is keeping for us in Heaven! A Christian is lifted into quite another sphere of action—he is no longer in the carnal but in the spiritual realm and, therefore, he understands things that are hidden from carnal eyes—and he lives in the midst of a world into which the unregenerate cannot possibly come. An unconverted man cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. He cannot even see it until he is born again, regenerated by the Holy Spirit! But once he is born again, he can bless God for giving him a second life infinitely better than the first one! Our well-being is a far higher thing than simply our being! The new creation is vastly superior to the first creation, good as that was, and the life of God in the soul is infinitely above the mere ordinary life of man!

Let us praise God, then, for life, and especially for this higher life if it is ours. What a joy it is to live in this respect! You know that when a person is very sick and ill, and can scarcely turn in bed, or lift a hand— when every sense is deprived of enjoyment and every vein or nerve becomes a road for the hot feet of pain to travel over—then life is hardly to be called life. But when God graciously raises us up from sickness, we ought to bless Him for giving us life again—prolonged, restored, enjoyable life. And when the heart itself is sick—when the spirit flags and the soul is ready to burst with inward grief—then the spiritual life seems scarcely to be life. But when, through the mercy of God, the Holy Spirit comes to us and applies the pardoning blood of Jesus to our heart and conscience, and whispers peace to our troubled spirit so that we can read our title clear to mansions in the skies, then our spiritual life is life indeed! We run, we leap, we fly! We would scarcely exchange for the bliss of angels the joy which the spiritual life brings to us at such times. And we bless and magnify the Lord who has granted us this higher life, this life so blessed, so superlatively blessed that even here below it makes us anticipate and realize some of the glory of Heaven itself! Are you, my Brother, my Sister, enjoying these lives? Do you feel that it is your privilege to be one with Christ and to live because He lives? And do you really know that you have received this wondrous blessing? Oh, then, sing unto the Lord as long as you live, for it is the living, even the living in Zion who shall praise Him as we do this day! Let this be one of your songs in this bright day of your happy experience. Let the joy of your heart ring it out in the words of our text—"You have granted me life."

Next, we have to praise God for granting us favor. I am quite unable to tell you to the fullest all that is wrapped up in that word, "favor." Favor from God! It is a great word in the original, a word big with meaning, for it means the love of God. What the expression, "the love of God," fully means, we cannot tell, for Charles Wesley truly wrote—

"God only knows the love of God."

God loves immeasurably. The force and extent of true love never can be calculated—it is a passion that cannot be measured by degrees as the temperature can be recorded on the thermometer. It is something that exceeds and overflows all measurement, for a man gives all his heart when he truly loves. So is it with God—He sets no boundary to His love. When He loves a man, the great infinity of His Being flows out towards His chosen. How much God loves you, my Brother, my Sister, if you are, indeed, one of His elect and redeemed people, it would not be possible even for an angel to calculate! Bernard of Clairvaux wrote—

"The love of Jesus—what it is, None but His loved ones know"—

but I correct the poet, for even His loved ones cannot know it, except in that sense which Paul intended when he wrote to the Ephesians, "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God." We might rightly paraphrase Job's words and say, "You have granted me life and love." Oh, what wondrous words to put together, life and love! Life without God's love is death. But put God's love with it and then what a song we ought to send up to His Throne if we feel that He has given us both spiritual life and infinite love.

The word, "favor," however, means not only love, but, as we ordinarily use it, it means some special form of Divine Grace and goodness. I know that there are some people who never will admit that God favors anyone, or that He has any special love toward some more than toward others. They do not like that hymn which Dr. Watts wrote. I heard one alter the verse—

"Let those refuse to sing That never knew our God; But favorites of the heavenly King May speak their joys abroad."

The gentleman did not like the word, "favorites," so he gave out the line—

"But subjects of the heavenly King."

I let him sing it in that fashion, for I thought that very likely he was only a subject. But I sang the line correctly because I knew that I was one of the King's favorites, and I was resolved to rejoice in that fact! So I am at this moment, for I know that I have received special favor from God and that there are some who have not received such favor and mercy. If, at this hour, anyone of you is a child of God, it is because God has done more for you than He has done for others. If there is a difference between you and others, somebody made that difference—and whoever made it ought to be honored and praised for it. Did you make it yourself? Shall I put the crown on your head? Why, if you are right-hearted, you will cry, "No, no! It is God who has made me to differ from others! It is His Grace which has been given to me, to bring me out of the darkness in which others have been left."

So, whatever others may think or say, we, at any rate, believe in that special form of Grace which may be called favor—"You have granted me life and favor." The Lord has given peculiar favor unto His own chosen people and this makes them sing a song that rises above all the others! "He has not dealt so with any nation." "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy." Let them praise the Lord with thanksgiving evermore and if you, dear Friends, belong to that privileged company, praise the Lord!

By the word, "favor," is also meant Grace in all the shapes which it assumes, so Job's words might be rendered, "You have granted me life and Grace." Come, my Brothers and Sisters, if you can say this, just think over all that it means. "You have granted me the Grace and favor of Your electing love and of Your redeeming love, the Grace of effectual calling, the Grace of regeneration, the Grace of justification, the Grace of adoption, the Grace of perseverance until this day, the Grace of sanctification," (for all this is of Grace). "You have given it, You have granted it of Your free favor and granted it to me."

"I do not know whether God has granted this Grace to me," says one. Well, my dear Brother, you cannot sing while you doubt this, but if, through faith in Jesus, you know that God has given you life and Grace, sing away, sing despite all that might stop you, for this is a mercy which should forever monopolize the music of everyone who has been thus favored of God! "You have granted me life and Grace." I do not know what any other person in this place might say, but if no one else said it, I would be compelled, in the courts of the Lord's House and in the midst of His people, to say, "I bless His name for giving me life and Grace. I am altogether undeserving of such mercy, yet He has favored me with His goodness, so that I cannot do otherwise than feel overwhelmed by His Grace." I do not know whether you can all say the same, but I feel persuaded that there are scores, hundreds, yes, even thousands of you who might stand up and say, "We bless God that

though unworthy of His notice, He has granted us life and Grace."

Now let us dwell, for a minute or two, on the third blessing of this Divine grant—"and Your visitation has preserved my spirit." There is a wonderful range of meaning in those words, but Job, no doubt, first refers to the Providence of God by which He makes, as it were, a visitation of all the world, but especially of His own people. As a man who possesses a large estate, if he is wise, goes around and looks over all his cattle and his servants and his fields—and makes a visitation to see whether all is going well, for he knows that the master's eye does much—so does God visit the earth, inspect it and care for the creatures whom He has formed to live upon it. "He gives to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." The Lord keeps a watchful eye upon the whole universe. He leads out the stars, calling them all by their names, and nightly marshals their serried ranks. He counts even the sparrows, so that not one of them falls upon the ground without His knowledge. It has been the Providence of God that has preserved us up to now, so let us bless Him for this great favor.

Some of us have had very special Providential deliverances. we will not mention them, tonight, because they are too many. It has been well said, "He that watches Providence shall never be without a Providence to watch." I am sure it is so. You who have had your eyes divinely opened must have seen an act of God's gracious Providence everyday. Some will only see God's Providence in deliverance from a terrible catastrophe— such as an escape from fire, or from a railway accident, or something of that unusual and startling kind. But, indeed, the Providence of God is watching over us just as much when we sit in our home, or sleep in our beds, or go about our daily duties. People used to say of Dr. Gill, my illustrious predecessor, that they could easily find him, for he was always in his study. And someone remarked, "At any rate, he is in a safe place there—a man is out of harm's way when he is studying at home." It so happened that the Doctor was called away from his study one day when a high wind blew down a stack of chimneys—which crashed right through the house into his study—and would have surely killed him if he had been in the place where he was usually sitting! Truly, it is the Providence of God that preserves our lives as much when we are at home as if we were out on the vast deep when it is tossed with tempests.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, is it not wonderful that some of us are alive at all? Have not most of you reason to praise God for some very singular instances of his guardian care which has preserved you in being until this day? Refuse not to sing to God the song of thanksgiving which is His due! Prolonged life should beget continual gratitude and votive offerings of joyful praise should ascend unto the Most High.

Oh, but that is only the beginning of the meaning of Job's words, "Your visitation has preserved my spirit." God has visited those of us who are His people in other ways besides the watching of His Providence. Let me mention some of them. He has visited some of us with correction— and we do not like that form of visitation. We have been smitten heavily with His rod till all our bones have ached and the blows have been so severe that they have left black bruises. Or we have lost friend after friend, or we have been corrected by the scandal and the slander of wicked men, or in some way or other God has used man as the rod in His hand to chasten us. "Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Look back and see whether you cannot say to God, "Your visitation in correction has preserved my spirit." Can you not say, "Before I was

afflicted I went astray: but now I have kept Your Word"? There have been times, in the lives of some of us, when nothing but affliction could have saved us from falling into gross sin. We would have been carried away with pride, but we suffered from grievous depression of spirit and so could not afford to be proud. There have been times when we would have been exalted above measure, but the thorn in the flesh was graciously given to us, a messenger of Satan came to buffet us, and so we were preserved in the hour of temptation.

There are some whom God will yet permit to be rich, who would not have been capable of managing so much money to the Lord's honor and glory if they had not, for a while, had to live on short commons. The very thing we regret most in Providence will probably be that in which we shall rejoice most in eternity. You know, in this world, we see the wrong side of the carpet that is being woven. We are like Hannah More in the carpet factory, when she said to the workman, "I cannot see any design— there seem to be a great number of loose pieces of wool, but I cannot perceive any pattern or order." "No, Madam," said the man, "of course you cannot, because you are standing on the wrong side of the carpet. If you will come to the other side, you will then see it all." We are on the wrong side, at present, but God will take us to the other side, by-and-by, and then we shall each one say, "O my Lord, how wrongly did I judge You! How little did I understand Your dealings with me! I thought Your visitation would have crushed me, but it preserved my spirit."

There are other visitations, however, such as the visitations of consolation. Oh, how sweet those are to the soul when in trouble! You and I must have known times when our spirits have gone down below zero— when no earthly friend could comfort us and we could not think of any source of consolation for ourselves. Just then, some unnoticed promise of the Word of God has dropped into our soul with charming effect. It was, perhaps, but a sentence of half a dozen words, but they came from God, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and they were so powerfully applied to our spirit that we said, "I do not mind what burden I have to bear, for I know that Christ's Grace will be sufficient for me. I cannot tell what the Divine will may be concerning me, or however dark and dreary may be the Valley of the Shadow of Death through which I shall have to pass, but God's rod and staff are evidently with me and they will comfort me in the most trying hour and my Lord, Himself, will surely bring me through all my tribulations." Cannot some of you say that your blessed Savior, who has suffered for you and who understands all your griefs, has come and bound up your broken hearts, and given you unfailing comfort when you were in such sorrow that you feared you would have lost your reason and, perhaps, even taken your own life? But here you are, the living to praise Him, and to say, "Your visitation by way of comfort has preserved my spirit."

Once more, how sweet are the visitations of God in communion! Have you not sometimes had such communion with your Lord, during a sermon, that you have said, "My steps had well-nigh slipped, but now my Lord has come near unto me and he has made me to stand so firmly that nothing can cast me down"? Or perhaps you have gone upstairs to your room when you have been weighed down under very heavy grief and you have told it all to Jesus—whispered it all into the ear that never wearies of His people's complaints. And, after awhile, you have come down and you have felt, "Now I do not mind what happens. I can even face a frowning world, for Jesus Christ's visitation has preserved my spirit." I am also sure that many of us can say that at the Lord's Table, in the breaking of bread, our spirits have been so refreshed that we could go out into our daily callings, or back to our domestic griefs and feel, "It really does not matter now. I can

shoulder my cross, for I have seen the Crucified! I can bear my own sorrows, for I have had fellowship with Him in His sorrows. I could even die for His sake, for I have entered into fellowship with His death."

"Your visitation has preserved my spirit." I want you, my Brother, my Sister, to pray for that visitation tonight. Ask the Lord Jesus not only to pay a visit to your soul, but to come and stay with you. You have only to open the door of your heart and He will come in. That is what He said even to lukewarm Laodicea. "If any man hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." So open wide the door at once. You say, "But there is nothing within—it is only an empty house." That does not matter to Him, for He will bring with Him the provisions on which He will sup with you, and you with Him. Open the door, give Him heart-room! Say, "Come in, blessed Savior!

Why do You stand outside?" He says to you who are slow to admit Him, "My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Oh, keep not the door of your heart closed against Him any longer! At least be willing that He should enter. Pray that He may enter! Cry to Him to enter and He will surely come in to you, and you shall have such a blessed season that you shall say, "Your visitation has preserved my spirit."

I have it deeply impressed upon me—so I must say it—that there are some of you who had better get a good feast tonight, for you have a great sorrow coming. You had better enter into close fellowship with Christ tonight, for the dark clouds of trouble are gathering about you. The tempest lowers and if your ship is not prepared to weather the storm by having Christ on board, it will go ill with you. Avail yourselves of this present opportunity of a visit from Christ! Creep to the Cross! Clasp it to your heart, hide yourselves there, for no lightning flash can strike you there— that Cross will conduct the lightning of Divine wrath right away from you and you will be saved! And you will say afterwards, "I am glad that I stayed for the Communion and that I communed, for I did not merely eat bread and drink wine, I spiritually ate the flesh and drank the blood of my Lord. And I had fellowship with Him and He has made me strong to suffer or to serve." If it is so with us now, or if it has been so in the past, let us sing unto the Lord a glad song of thanksgiving for this trinity of blessing—life, favor and preserving visitation—yes, let us sing unto Him as long as we live!

II. Very briefly must I speak upon the second part of our subject, that is, A SOLACE FOR DARK NIGHTS "And these things have You hid in Your heart: I know that this is with You."

There is another interpretation of this verse, quite different from the one that I am going to give you, but I do not think that Job ever could have meant what some people think he did. I believe that when he said, "These things"—that is, life, favor and God's gracious visitation—"These things have You hid in Your heart: I know that this is with You," that he meant, first, that God remembers what He has done, and will not lose His pains. "'You have granted me life and favor,' Lord, You have not forgotten that. You have hidden that in Your heart, You remember it well. Since You have done this for me, and You remember that You have done it, therefore You will continue Your mercy to me and not lose all the Grace and goodness which You have already bestowed upon me."

Just think of that for a minute. Even if you have forgotten all that God has done for you, God has not forgotten it! If you do a kindness to a man, it is very probable that he will not remember it, but

you will. Many children forget all the kindness and love of their mother, but the mother remembers all that she did for her children in the days of their helplessness and she loves them all the more because of what she did for them. There is a little secret which I may whisper in your ear. If you want people to love you, do what you can for them, yet, possibly, you will not gain their love by that process. But if you let them do something for you, they will be sure to love you, then! When you have done much for anyone, you are especially bound to that person, so Job puts it thus, "You, Lord, have done much for me. You have all this in Your remembrance and I am persuaded that this binds You to me—Your great goodness in giving me life, and favor, and in visiting me—all this has bound You to me, and I am persuaded that You will not leave me." That is the teaching of the verse many of us delight to sing—

"His love in time past forbids me to think He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink. Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review, Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through."

If the Lord had not meant to finish His work, He would never have begun it. If He had not meant to bring us to Heaven, He would not have snatched us like brands from the burning. If He had not meant to complete His work, He would not have spent so much upon us. "Spent so much upon us?" asks one. Yes, He lavished upon His people more than all the millionaires who were ever upon the earth have possessed! He expended more than there is in Heaven with the exception of that which He spent upon them. "What is that?" you ask. He spent the life of His onlybegotten Son—and Heaven itself does not contain any other treasure that is at all comparable to the Father's equal Son! He spent the best He had upon us and do you think that, after that, He will ever leave us? No, that can never be! Though He were to take away all our property. Though He were to deprive us of every one of our children. Though He were to cover us from head to foot with sores. Though He should cause us to sit upon a dunghill and scrape ourselves with a potsherd. Though the very wife of our bosom should bid us curse God and die. Though all our friends should become miserable comforters and make us ready to curse the day on which we saw the light—yet still, God must be gracious to us, and we must trust Him! Yes, though He should slay us, yet must we trust Him! All the goodness of the past is an infallible guarantee that He will be good to us even to the end, according to that Word concerning the Lord Jesus, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." That is one meaning of the verse.

But, next, I think that the words, "And these things have You hid in Your heart: I know that this is with You," have this meaning, that God sometimes hides His favor and love in His heart, yet they are still there. At times it may be that you get no glimpse of His face, or that you see no smile upon it. When that is my experience, I love to turn to that verse in the 63rd Psalm—"Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings will I rejoice." It is all shadow, shadow, shadow— no sunshine—I cannot see my God, but the very shadow is the shadow of His wings and as you may often see the chickens cower down beneath the mother hen, and nestle there, so in the shadow of His wings will I rejoice! And you, dear Friend, may share that blessed and safe shelter. "He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings shall you trust: His truth shall be your shield and buckler."

When there is no light, you shall walk on as steadily as if seven suns were shining! When there is no comfortable assurance for you. When there is no temporal deliverance. When there is nothing for you out of the winepress or out of the barn. When there is no friend nor helper near you, when

the fig tree does not blossom, when you have no flocks, and your herds are cut off by the storm—when God's mercy seems to be clean gone, forever, and His promises all appear to fail, it is not really so—

"He hides the purpose of His Grace To make it better known."

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, therefore, O tried child of God, learn what Job, here, teaches us, that these things are still hidden in the heart of God, and that Eternal Love holds fast to the objects of its choice.

"I know that this is with You," said Job, so the last thing I want you to learn from his words is that God would have His people strong in faith to know this Truth. Job says, "I know that this is with You." I speak to many persons who say that they are Christians and who, perhaps, are Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ—and one of their clearest evidences is that they are very happy. Dear young people, I am glad you are so happy. True religion makes people happy—it is a perennial fountain of delight. But do not set too much store by your emotions of delight, because they may be taken from you—and then where will your evidences be? God's people sometimes walk in darkness and see no light. There are times when the best and brightest of saints have no joy. I will not say whether they are not to be blamed for that—it is probable that they are, in most instances, though I do not see that Job could be much blamed. I wish I were able to be a thousandth part as good as he was with a thousandth part of his pains and troubles. But it is a fact that whether rightly or wrongly, God's people are not always joyous. As Peter says, "For a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations." Whenever you get into that condition, dear young people, if you have learned to trust Christ before, trust Him still! If your religion should not, for a time, yield you any joy, cling to it all the same! Do not give it up, for if there is any time when you need faith, it is when your spirits sink and when your outward trials multiply.

You see, God does not give you faith in order that you may merely run about in the meadows with it all among the fair spring flowers. I will tell you for what purpose He gives you faith—it is that you may put on your snow-shoes, go out in the cold wintry blast and glide along over the ice and the snow. He does not give you faith that you may put it on as I remember seeing Napoleon's guard with armor in which I saw my face as well as ever I did in a mirror. The Lord does not give you faith merely that you may go on parade with it and show yourself—you are to fight with it! There is not a fragment of faith that you have which will not be dinted by the blows of the enemy and rusted through exposure to the weather. You will have difficulties, mark you, as surely as you have faith! You will have a difficulty in maintaining your faith against the assaults of the adversary, for wherever there is faith in the world, there are trials for it to encounter.

Railway men do not build bridges over rivers without an intention of sending engines and trains across them—and God does not give faith without an intention of letting it be tried. And He wants you to know, when He does try you, or permit others to try you, that He still loves you. When He leaves you for a little while in the dark, He loves you just as much as when you were in the light. A little child cries and says that her mother does not love her because she has put her to bed and gone downstairs, and left her in the dark. She will always be a baby if the mother stays there with a candle by the hour together till she gets to sleep. The mother wants her child to grow into a woman and she trains her accordingly. So is it with us. God does often humor our littleness and weakness by doing many kind things to us as we do to poor feeble little children, but He wants us to grow up

and become men and women in Christ Jesus and to be strong in the Lord.

I pray that you, my dear Brothers and Sisters, may be stalwart Christians of this sort. You see, if our faith is to depend upon our disposition—our joy or our sorrow—it will always be fluctuating up and down— and we shall be apt to think that we may be saved today and lost tomorrow. That is not the teaching of the Bible! When you are on the mountain with Christ, you are safe, but when you are at the bottom of the valley with Christ, you are just as safe! When you sit at the table with Christ, you are safe, and so are you if you should be at sea with Christ in a vessel. Only have faith in Him and say, "My God, Your will towards me to give me life, and favor, and preservation may be hidden, but it is still in Your heart, 'I know that this is with You.'"

Now I must leave these things with you. You who know and love the Lord will seek a renewal of His visitations tonight. But as for you who do not know Him, oh, how I wish that you did! Often as I come on this platform and look upon this throng of people, I would wonder why so many came if I did not know that the earnest, simple preaching of the Gospel will never fail to bring people together. But as you have come to hear the Gospel, I pray you also to receive it. Do not merely hear it, but accept it. If there were diamonds to be given away, here, and I said that I would give them to everybody who was willing to have them, I am sure that you would not be content to hear me talking about their beauty, their facets, or their particular brilliance—but you would each one cry out, "Hand me one!" "Give me one!" "Pass me down one worth a hundred thousand pounds! I will be content with that and you may leave off talking if you like!"

I will leave off talking about Christ if you will take Him as your Savior. I shall not need to extol Him when you have once accepted Him, for you will find out His excellence for yourselves. The Scripture says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Oh, that you would all taste and see for yourselves! You would know His goodness far better from that taste and sight than you can ever know it from any human language, however earnest it may be! God bless you all, for Christ's sake! Amen.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 38

Job 9,33 #661 - The Great Arbitration Case

THE GREAT ARBITRATION CASE

NO. 661

A SERMON PREACHED

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Neither is there any mediator between us,

that might lay his hand upon us both."

Job 9:33.

THE Patriarch Job, when reasoning with the Lord concerning his great

affliction, felt himself to be at a disadvantage and declined the controversy, saying, "He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him and we should come together in judgment." Yet feeling that his friends were cruelly misstating his case, he still desired to spread it before the Lord, but wished for a mediator, a middleman, to act as umpire and decide the case. In his mournful plight he sighed for an arbitrator who, while dealing justly for God, would, at the same time, deal kindly with poor flesh and blood, being able to lay his hand upon both. And, dear Friends, what Job desired to have the Lord has provided for us in the Person of His own dear Son, Jesus Christ! We cannot say with Job that there is no mediator who can lay his hand upon both of us because there is now, "one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." In Him let us rejoice, if indeed we have an interest in Him! And if we have not yet received Him, may almighty Grace bring us, even now, to accept Him as our Advocate and Friend.

There is an old quarrel between the thrice holy God and His sinful subjects, the sons of Adam. Man has sinned—he has broken God's Law in every part of it and has wantonly cast off from him the allegiance which was due to his Maker and his King. There is a suit against man which was formally instituted at Sinai and must be pleaded in the Court of King's Bench before the Judge of the quick and the dead. God is the great Plaintiff against His sinful creatures who are the defendants. If that suit is carried into court, it must go against the sinner. There is no hope whatever that at the last tremendous day any sinner will be able to stand in judgment if he shall leave the matter of his debts and obligations towards his God unsettled until that dreadful hour.

Sinner, it would be well for you to "agree with your adversary quickly, while you are in the way," for if you are once delivered up to the great Judge of all the earth there is not the slightest hope that your suit can be decided otherwise than to your eternal ruin! "Weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth," will be the doom adjudged you forever, if your case as before the living God shall ever come to be tried at the fiery Throne of absolute Justice. But the infinite Grace of God proposes an

arbitration— and I trust there are many here who are not anxious to have their suit carried into court—but are willing that the appointed Mediator should stand between them and God and lay His hand upon both and propose and carry out a plan of reconciliation! There is hope for you, bankrupt Sinner, that you may yet be at peace with God! There is a way by which your debts may yet be paid! That way is a blessed arbitration in which Jesus Christ shall stand as the Mediator!

Let me begin by describing the essentials of an arbitrator, or mediator. Then let me take you into the Arbitrator's court and show you His proceedings. And then for a little while, if there is enough time, let us dwell upon the happy success of our great Daysman.

I. First of all, let me describe what are THE ESSENTIALS OF AN UMPIRE, AN ARBITRATOR, OR A DAYSMAN. The first essential is that both parties should be agreed to accept him. Let me come to you, you Sinner against whom God has laid His suit, and put the matter to you. God has accepted Christ Jesus to be His Umpire in His dispute. He appointed Him to the office and chose Him for it before He laid the foundations of the world. He is God's Fellow, equal with the Most High and can put His hand upon the Eternal Father without fear, because He is dearly beloved of the Father's heart. He is "very God of very God," and is in no respect inferior to "God over all, blessed forever."

But He is also a man like yourself, Sinner. He once suffered, hungered, thirsted and knew the meaning of poverty and pain. No, He went farther— He was tempted as you have been—and farther still, He suffered the pangs of death as you, poor mortal man, will one day have to do! Now, what do you think? God has accepted Him—can you agree with God in this matter and agree to take Christ to be your Mediator, too? Does foolish enmity possess you, or does Grace reign and lead you to accept Emmanuel, "God With Us," as Umpire in this great dispute?

Let me say to you that you will never find another so near akin to you, so tender, so sympathetic, and with such a heart of compassion towards you! Love streamed from His eyes in life and poured from His wounds in death. He is "the express Image" of Jehovah's Person and you know that Jehovah's name is "Love." "God is Love," and Christ is Love. Sinner, has Divine Grace brought you to your senses? Will you accept Christ? Are you willing that He should take this case into His hands and arbitrate between you and God? If God accepts Him, and you accept Him, too, then He has one of the first qualifications for being a mediator.

But, in the next place, both parties must be fully agreed to leave the case entirely in the arbitrator's hands. If the arbitrator does not possess the power of settling the case, then pleading before him is only making an opportunity for wrangling—without any chance of coming to a peaceful settlement. Now God has committed "all power" into the hands of His Son. Jesus Christ is the Ambassador of God and has been invested with full ambassadorial powers. He comes commissioned by His Father and can say in all that He does towards sinners that His Father's heart is with Him. If the case is settled by Him, the Father is agreed.

Now, Sinner, does Grace move your heart to do the same? Will you agree to put your case into the hands of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man? Will you abide by His decision? Will you have it settled according to His judgment, and shall the verdict which He gives stand absolute and fast with you? If so, then Christ has another essential of an arbitrator. But if not, remember, though He may make peace for others, He will never make peace for you! Understand this—that

until the Grace of God has made you willing to trust the case in Jesus' hands, there can be no peace for you and you are willfully remaining God's enemy by refusing to accept His dear Son.

Further, let us say that to make a good arbitrator or umpire, it is essential that he be an apt person. If the case were between a king and a beggar, it would not seem exactly right that another king should be the arbitrator, nor another beggar. But if there could be found a person who combined the two—who was both prince and beggar—then such a man could be selected by both! Our Lord Jesus Christ precisely meets the case! There is a very great disparity between the Plaintiff and the defendant, for how great is the gulf which exists between the eternal God and poor fallen man? How is this to be bridged? Why by none except by One who is God and who at the same time can become man!

Now the only Being who can do this is Jesus Christ. He can put His hand on you, stooping down to all your infirmity and your sorrow—and He can put His other hand upon the Eternal Majesty—and claim to be coequal with God and co-eternal with the Father! Do you not see, then, His fitness? Surely it were the path of wisdom, Sinner, to accept Him at once as the Arbitrator in the case! See how well He understands it! I should not do to be an arbitrator in legal cases because, though I should be anxious to do justice, yet I should know nothing of the law of the case. But Christ knows your case and the law concerning it because He has lived among men and has passed through and suffered the penalties of Justice. There cannot surely be a better skilled or more judicious Mediator than our blessed Redeemer!

Yet there is one more essential of an umpire, and that is that he should be a person desirous to bring the case to a happy settlement. If you appoint a quarrelsome arbitrator he may delight to "set dogs by the ears." But if you elect one who is anxious for the good of both and wishes to make both friends, then he is just the very man, though, to be sure, he would be one man in a thousand—very precious when found—but very hard to discover. Oh that all lawsuits could be decided by such men!

In the great case which is pending between God and the sinner, the Lord Jesus Christ has a sincere anxiety both for His Father's Glory and for the sinner's welfare—that there should be peace between the two contending parties. It is the life and aim of Jesus Christ to make peace. He delights not in the death of sinners and He knows no joy greater than that of receiving prodigals to His bosom and of bringing lost sheep back again to the fold. You cannot tell how high the Savior's bosom swells with an intense desire to make to Himself a great name as a peacemaker. Never had warrior such ambition to make war and to win victories as Christ has to end war and to win the bloodless triumphs of peace! From the heights of Heaven He came leaping like a young roe down to the plains of earth. From earth He leaped into the depths of the grave. Then up again at a bound He sprang to earth and up again to Heaven.

And still He rests not, but presses on in His mighty work to ingather sinners and to reconcile them unto God—making Himself a propitiation for their sins. You see, then, Sinner, how the case is. God has evidently chosen the most fitting Arbitrator. That Arbitrator is willing to undertake the case and you may well repose all confidence in Him. But if you shall live and die without accepting Him as your Arbitrator, and the case goes against you—you will have none to blame but yourself. When the everlasting damages shall be assessed against you in your soul and body forever, you shall have to curse only your own folly for having been the cause of your ruin!

May I ask you to speak candidly? Has the Holy Spirit so turned the natural bent and current of your will that you have chosen Him because He has first chosen you? Do you feel that Christ, this day, is standing before God for you? He is God's Anointed—is He your elected? God's choice pitches upon Him—does your choice agree? Remember, where there is no will towards Christ, Christ as yet exercises no saving power. Christ saves no sinner who lives and dies unwilling. He makes unwilling sinners willing before He speaks a word of comfort to them. It is the mark of our election, as His people, that we are made willing in the day of God's power. Lay your hope where God has laid your help, namely, on Christ, mighty to save! You cannot have an Arbitrator except both sides are agreed. Do you say, "Yes, yes, with all my soul I choose Him"? Then let us proceed.

II. And now I shall need, by your leave, to TAKE YOU INTO THE COURT WHERE THE TRIAL IS GOING ON AND SHOW YOU THE LEGAL PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE GREAT DAYSMAN. "The Man, Christ Jesus," who is "God over all, blessed forever," opens His court by laying down the principles upon which He intends to deliver judgment and those principles I will now try to explain and expound.

They are two-fold. First, strict justice. And secondly, fervent love. The Arbitrator has determined that, let the case go as it may, there shall be full justice done, justice to the very extreme—whether it is for or against the defendant. He intends to take the Law in its sternest and severest aspect and to judge according to its strictest letter. He will not be guilty of partiality on either side. If the Law says that the sinner shall die, the Arbitrator declares that He will judge that the sinner shall die. And if, on the other hand, the defendant can plead and prove that he is innocent, He intends to adjudge to him the award of innocence, namely ETERNAL LIFE. If the sinner can prove that he has fairly won it, he shall have his due. Either way, whether it is in favor of the Plaintiff or of the defendant, the condition of judgment is to be strict justice.

But the Arbitrator also says that He will judge according to the second rule, that of fervent love. He loves His Father and therefore He will decide on nothing that may taint His honor or disgrace His crown. He so loves God, the Eternal One, that He will suffer Heaven and earth to pass away sooner than there shall be one blot upon the Character of the Most High. On the other hand, He so loves the poor defendant, man, that He will be willing to do anything rather than inflict penalty upon him unless Justice shall absolutely require it. He loves man with so great a love that nothing will delight Him more than to decide in his favor and He will be but too glad if He can be the means happily establishing peace between the Plaintiff and the defendant. How these principles are to meet will be seen by and by. At present He lays them down very positively. "He that rules among men must be just." An Arbitrator must be just or else He is not fit to hold the scales in any suit. On the other hand, He must be tender, for His name, as God, is Love. And His nature as Man is gentleness and mercy. Both parties should distinctly consent to these principles. How can they do otherwise? Do they not commend themselves to all of you? Let Justice and Love unite if they can.

Having thus laid down the principles of judgment, the Arbitrator next calls upon the Plaintiff to state His case. Let us listen while the great Creator speaks—may God give me Grace to reverently state it in His name—as one poor sinner stating God's case against us all. "Hear, O heavens and give ear, O earth—for the Lord has spoken—I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib—but Israel does not know, My people do not consider. Ah, sinful nation, a people filled with iniquity, a seed of

evildoers, children that are corrupters—they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward."

The Eternal God charges us, and let me confess at once, most justly and most truly charges us, with having broken all His Commandments— some of them in act, some of them in word—all of them in heart and thought and imagination! He says that we, against light and knowledge, have chosen the evil and forsaken the good! He charges that knowing what we were doing, we have turned aside from His most righteous Law and have gone astray like lost sheep, following the imaginations and devices of our own hearts. The great Plaintiff claims that inasmuch as we are His creatures we ought to have obeyed Him! That inasmuch as we owe our very lives to His daily care we ought to have rendered Him service instead of disobedience, and to have been His loyal subjects instead of turning traitors to His Throne.

All this, calmly and dispassionately, according to the great Book of the Law, is laid to our charge before the Daysman. No exaggeration of sin is brought against us. It is simply declared of us that the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint—that there is none that does good, no, not one—that we have all gone out of the way and altogether become unprofitable. This is God's case. He says, "I made this man. Curiously was he worked in the lowest parts of the earth. And all his members bear traces of My singular handiwork. I made him for My honor and he has not honored Me. I created him for My service and he has not served Me.

"Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years I have kept the breath in his nostrils. The bread he has eaten has been the daily portion of My bounty. His garments are the livery of My charity. And all this while he has neither thought of Me, his Creator and Preserver, nor done anything in My service. He has served his family, his wife and children, but his Maker he has despised. He has served his country, his neighbors, the borough in which he dwells—but I, who made him—I have had nothing from him. He has been an unprofitable servant unto Me." I think I may put the Plaintiff's case into your hands. Which of you would keep a horse if that horse should yield you no obedience? What excuse is it that though I might not use him he would carry another? No, the case is worse than this. Not only has man done nothing, but worse than nothing. Which of you would keep a dog, which, instead of fawning upon you, would bark at you—fly at you and tear you apart in his rage? Some of us have done this to God! We have perhaps cursed Him to His face. We have broken His Sabbaths, laughed at His Gospel and persecuted His saints. You would have said of such a dog, "Let it die! Why should I harbor in my house a dog that treats me thus?"

Yet, hear, O heavens! And give ear, O earth! God has borne with your ill manners and He still cries, "mercy!" He puts the lifted thunder back into the arsenal of His dread artillery. I wish I could state the case as I ought. My lips are but clay. And these words should be like fire in the sinner's soul. When I meditated upon this subject alone I felt much sympathy with God, that He should have been so ill treated. And whereas some men speak of the flames of Hell as too great a punishment for sin, it seems ten thousand marvels that we should not have been thrust down there long ago!

The Plaintiff's case having thus been stated, the defendant is called upon by the Daysman for his. And I think I hear him as he begins. First of all the trembling defendant sinner pleads—"I confess to the indictment, but I say I could not help it! I have sinned, it is true, but my nature was such that I could not well do otherwise! I must lay all the blame of it to my own heart—my heart was deceitful

and my nature was evil." The Daysman at once rules that this is no excuse whatever, but an aggravation, for inasmuch as it is conceded that the man's heart, itself, is enmity against God, this is an admission of yet greater malice and blacker rebellion!

It was only alleged against the offender in the first place that he had outwardly offended—but he acknowledges that he does it inwardly and confesses that his very heart is traitorous against God—fully set upon working the King's damage and dishonor! It is determined, therefore, by the Daysman that this excuse will not stand and He gives a case in point—a thief is brought up for stealing and he pleads that his heart was thievish, that he felt a constant inclination to steal and that therefore he could not help running off with any goods within his reach! The judge very properly answers, "Then I shall give you twice as much penalty as any other man who only fell into the fault by surprise—for according to your own confession, you are a thief through and through—what you have said is not an excuse, but an aggravation."

Then the defendant pleads in the next place that albeit he acknowledges the facts alleged against him, yet he is no worse than other offenders and that there are many in the world who have sinned more grievously than he has done. He says he has been envious and angry and worldly and covetous, and has forgotten God—but then he never was an adulterer, or a thief, or a drunkard, or a blasphemer—and he pleads that his lesser crimes may well be winked at! But the great Daysman at once turns to the Statute Book and says that as He is about to give His decision by Law, that plea is not at all tenable, for the Law Book has it— "Cursed is every man that continues not in all things that are written in the Book of the Law to do them."

The offense of one sinner does not excuse the offense of another. And the Arbitrator declares that He cannot mix up other cases with the case now in hand—that the present offender has, on his own confession, broken the Law—and that as the Law Book stands, that is the only question to be decided, for "the soul that sins, it shall die," and if the defendant has no better plea to offer, judgment must go against him. The sinner urges further that though he has offended and offended very greatly and grievously, yet he has done a great many good things. It is true he did not love God, but he always went to Chapel! It is true he did not pray, but he belonged to a singing class. It is quite correct that he did not love his neighbor as himself, but he always liked to relieve the poor.

But the Daysman, looking the sinner full in the face, tells him that this plea, also is bad, for the alleged commission of some acts of loyalty will not make compensation for avowed acts of treason. "Those things," says He, "you ought to have done, but not to have left the others undone." And He tells the sinner, with all kindness and gentleness, that straining at a gnat does not exonerate him for having swallowed a camel. And that having tithed mint and anise and cummin is no justification for having devoured a widow's house. To have forgotten God is, in itself, a great enormity. To have lived without serving Him is a crime of omission so great that whatever the sinner may have done on the contrary, stands for nothing at all—since he has even, in that case, done only what he ought to have done.

You see at once the justice of this decision. If any of you were to say to your grocer, or tailor, when they send in their bills, "Well, now, you ought not to ask for payment of that account because I did pay you another bill—you ought not to ask me to pay for that suit of clothes because I did pay you for another suit." I think the answer would be, "But in paying for what you had before, you only did what you ought to do—I still have a demand upon you for this." So all the good deeds you have

ever done are only debts discharged which were most fully due, (supposing them to be good deeds, which is very questionable), and they leave the great debt still untouched.

The defendant has no end of pleas, for the sinner has a thousand excuses. And finding that nothing else will do, he begins to appeal to the mercy of the Plaintiff and says that for the future he will do better. He confesses that he is in debt but he will run up no more bills at that shop. He acknowledges that he has offended but he vows he will not do so again. He is quite sure that the future shall be as free from fault as angels are from sin. Though it is true that he just now said his heart was bad, still, he feels inclined to think that it is not so very bad after all! He is conceited enough to think that he can, in the future, keep himself from committing sin—thereby, you see—admitting the worthlessness of his former plea on which he relied so much.

"Now," he says, "if for life I become a teetotaler, then surely I may be excused for having been a drunkard! Suppose now that I am always honest and steady and never again say one ill word—will not that exonerate me from all my wrong-doings and for having blasphemed God?" But the Daysman rules, still with kindness and gentleness, that the greatest imaginable virtue in the future will be no recompense for the sin of the past—for He finds in the Law Book no promise whatever made to that effect—but the statute runs in these words, "He will by no means spare the guilty." "Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them."

You would think that the defendant would now be fairly beaten, but he is not—he asks leave to step across the way to bring in a friend of his. He is allowed to do so and comes back with a gentleman dressed in such a strange style, that, if you had not sometimes seen the like in certain Puseyite churches, you would suppose him to have arrayed himself for the mere purpose of amusing children at a show where a merry Andrew is the presiding genius. The defendant seems to imagine that if the case is left to this gentleman in the white shirt and ribbons, he will settle it with ease. He has with him a little bottle of water by which he can turn hearts of stone into flesh—making heirs of wrath into "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven."

He has a certain portion of mystical bread and magical wine, the reception with which he can work wonderful transformation, producing flesh and blood at his Reverence's will and pleasure! In fact, this gentleman trades and gets his living by the prosecution of magic. He has occult influences streaming from his fingers, which influences he derived originally from a gentleman in lawn. And he now pretends to have ability derived from the Apostles, most probably from Judas, by marvelous manipulations—how, I cannot tell you—but by a kind of sleight of hand to settle the case! But the Daysman, with a frown, hurls a thunderbolt from His hand against the impudent impostor and bids him take himself away and not again deceive poor sinners with his vain pretensions.

He warns the defendant that the priest is an arrant knave, that whatever professions he may make of being a "successor of the Apostles," he knows nothing about Apostolic doctrine, or else he would not have intruded his sinful, silly self between men's souls and God. He bids him advise the man to dress himself like a person in his right mind who was about honest work and not as a sorcerer or priest of Baal—and give himself to preaching the Gospel—instead of propagating the superstitious inventions of Rome.

What is the poor defendant to do now? He is fairly beaten this time. He falls down on his knees, and with many tears and lamentations he cries, "I see how the case stands! I have nothing to plead, but I appeal to the mercy of the Plaintiff! I confess that I have broken His Commandments. I acknowledge that I deserve His wrath—but I have heard that He is merciful, and I plead for free and full forgiveness." And now comes another scene. The Plaintiff, seeing the sinner on his knees with his eyes full of tears, makes this reply, "I am willing at all times to deal kindly and according to loving-kindness with all My creatures. But will the Arbitrator, for a moment suggest that I should damage and ruin My own perfections of truth and holiness? "Does He suggest that I should belie My own Word? That I should imperil My own Throne? Does He recommend that I should make the purity of immaculate Justice to be suspect and should bring down the glory of My unsullied holiness because this creature has offended Me and now craves for mercy? I cannot, I will not spare the guilty—he has offended and he must die! As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. Still, this 'would rather' must not be supreme. I am gracious and would spare the sinner, but I am just, and must not unsay My own Words. I swore with an oath, 'The soul that sins shall die.' I have laid it down as a matter of firm decree, 'Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them.' This sinner is righteously cursed and he must inevitably die. And yet I love him. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I make you as Admah? How can I set you as Zeboim? And yet, how can I put you among the children? Would it not be a worse calamity that I should be unjust than that earth should lose its inhabitants? Better all men perish than that the universe should lose the Justice of God as its stay and shield."

The Arbitrator bows and says, "Even so. Justice demands that the offender should die and I would not have You unjust." What more does the Arbitrator say? He sits still and the case is in suspense. There stands the just and holy God, willing to forgive if it can be done without injury to the immutable principles of right. There sits the Arbitrator, looking with eyes of love upon the poor, weeping, trembling sinner and anxious to devise a plan to save him—but conscious that that plan must not infringe upon Divine Justice—for it were a worse cruelty to injure Divine perfections than it were to destroy the whole human race!

The Arbitrator, therefore, after pausing awhile, puts it thus—"I am anxious that these two should be brought together. I love them both—I cannot, on the one hand, recommend that My Father should stain His honor. I cannot, on the other hand, endure that this sinner should be cast eternally into Hell. I will decide the case and it shall be thus—I will pay My Father's justice all it craves. I pledge Myself that in the fullness of time I will suffer in My own proper Person all that the weeping, trembling sinner ought to have suffered. My Father, will you stand to this?" The eternal God accepts the awful sacrifice! What do you say, Sinner, what do you say? Why, I think you cannot have two opinions!

If you are sane—and may God make you sane—you will melt with amazement! You will say, "I could not have thought this! I never called in a Mediator with an expectation of this! I have sinned and He declares that He will suffer! I am guilty and He says that He will be punished for me!" Yes, Sinner and He did more than say it, for when the fullness of time came—but you know the story—the officers of justice served Him with the writ and He was taken from His knees in the garden of Gethsemane away to the court. And there He was tried and condemned. And you know how His back was scourged till the white bones stood like islands of ivory in the midst of a crimson

sea of gore!

You know how His head was crowned with thorns and His cheeks were given to those who plucked off the hair! Can you not see Him hounded through the streets of Jerusalem with the spittle of the brutal soldiery still upon His unwashed face and His wounds all unstanched and bleeding? Can you not see Him as they hurl Him down and fasten Him to the accursed tree? Then they lift the Cross and dash it down into its socket in the earth—dislocating every bone, tearing every nerve and sinew—filling His soul as full of agony as this earth is full of sin or the depths of the ocean filled with its floods? You do not know, however, what He suffered within. Hell held carnival within His heart! Every arrow of the infernal pit was discharged at Him and Heaven, itself, forsook Him!

The thunderbolts of vengeance fell upon Him and His Father hid His face from Him till He cried in His agony, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And so He suffered on and on and on, till, "It is finished," closed the scene. Here, then, is the arbitration. Christ Himself suffers. And now I have to put the query, "Have you accepted Christ?" O dear Friend, if you have, I know that God the Holy Spirit has made you accept Him! But if you have not, what shall I call you? I will not upbraid you—my heart weeps over you! How can you be so mad as to forego a compromise so blessed, an arbitration so Divine! Oh, kiss the feet of the Daysman! Love Him all your life because He has decided the case so blessedly!

III. Let us now look at THE DAYSMAN'S SUCCESS. For every soul who has received Christ, Christ has made a full Atonement which God the Father has accepted. And His success in this matter is to be rejoiced in, first of all, because the suit has been settled conclusively. We have known cases go to arbitration and yet the parties have quarreled afterwards. They have said that the arbitrator did not rule justly, or something of the kind, and so the whole point has been raised again.

But O Beloved, the case between a saved soul and God is settled once and forever! There is no more conscience of sin left in the Believer. And as for God's Book, there is not a sin recorded there against any soul that has received Christ! I know some of our Arminian Brethren rather think that the case is not settled—or they suppose that the case is settled for a time—but that it will one day come up again. Beloved, I thank God that they are mistaken! Christ has not cast His people's sins into the shallows where they may be washed up again! He has cast them into the depths of the sea where they are drowned forever! Our Scapegoat has not carried our sins to the borders of the land where they may be found again—He has taken them away into the wilderness where, if they are searched for, they shall not be found! The case is so settled that in eternity you shall never hear of it again except as a case which was gloriously decided.

Again, the case has been settled on the best principles, because, you see, neither party can possibly quarrel with the decision. The sinner cannot, for it is all mercy to him—even eternal Justice cannot—for it has had its due. If there had been any mitigation of the penalty we might yet fear that perhaps the suit might come up again. But now that everything has been paid, that cannot be! If my creditor takes from me, by a settlement in the Court of Insolvency, ten shillings in the pound, I know he will not disturb me again. But I cannot feel quite at ease about the other ten shillings. And if I am ever able, I should like to pay him. But, you see, Christ has not paid ten shillings in the pound, but He has paid every farthing—

"Justice now demands no more, He has paid the dreadful score."

For all the sins of all His people He has made such a full and satisfactory reconciliation that Divine justice were not Divine justice at all if it should ask to be paid twice for the same offense! Christ has suffered the Law's fullest and most severe penalty—and there is now no fear whatever that the case can ever be revived, by writ of error, or removal into another court—because it has been settled on the eternal and immutable principles of Justice.

Again, the case has been so settled that both parties are well content. You never hear a saved soul murmur at the Substitution of the Lord Jesus. If ever I get to see His face, I'll fall down before Him and kiss the dust beneath His feet! Oh, if ever I see the Savior who has thus delivered me from ruin, if I have a crown I will cast it at His feet and never, never wear it—it must, it shall be His! I feel like the good woman who said that if Christ ever saved her, He should never hear the last of it. And I am sure He never shall for I will praise Him as long as immortality endures for what He has done for me. I am sure that every saved sinner feels the same.

And Jehovah, on the other side, is perfectly content. He is satisfied with His dear Son. "Well done!" He says to Him. He has received Him to the Throne of Glory and made Him to sit at His right hand because He is perfectly content with the great work which He has accomplished. But, what is more and more wonderful still, both parties have gained in the suit. Did you ever hear of such a lawsuit as this before? No, never in the courts of man! The old story of the two oyster shells, you know, awarded to the plaintiff and defendant, while the oyster is eaten in court, is generally the result! But it is not so in this ease—for both the Plaintiff and the defendant have won by the arbitration!

What has God gained? Why, glory to Himself and such glory as all creation could not give Him, such glory as the ruin of sinners, though so well-deserved, could not give Him. Hark how—

"Heaven's eternal arches ring With shouts of Sovereign Grace!"

Angels, too, as well as those who have been redeemed, strike their harps which they have tuned afresh to a nobler strain, as they sing, "Worthy is the Lamb and blessed is the eternal God!" And, as for us, the poor defendants, why, what have we NOT gained? We were men before—now we are something more than Adam was! We were "a little lower than the angels" before—now we are "lifted up far above all principalities and powers." We were God's subjects once, but this arbitration has made us His children!

We were at our very best only the possessors of a paradise on earth— but now we are joint-heirs with Christ of a Paradise above the skies! Both sides have won and both sides must therefore be blessedly content with their glorious Daysman. And, to conclude—through this Daysman both parties have come to be united in the strongest, closest, dearest and fondest bond of union. This lawsuit has ended in such a way that the Plaintiff and the defendant are friends for life—no, friends through death and friends in eternity! How near God is to a pardoned sinner—

"So near, so very near to God, Nearer we cannot be. For in the Person of His Son, We are as near as He."

What a wonderful thing is that union between God and the sinner! We have all been thinking a great deal lately about the Atlantic Cable. It is a very interesting attempt to join two worlds together. That poor cable, you know, has had to be sunk into the depths of the sea in the hope of

establishing a union between the two worlds—and now we are disappointed again. But oh, what an infinitely greater wonder has been accomplished! Christ Jesus saw the two worlds divided and the great Atlantic of human guilt rolled between. He sank down deep into the woes of man till all God's waves and billows had gone over Him that He might be, as it were, the great telegraphic communication between God and the apostate race—between the Most Holy One and poor sinners!

Let me say to you, Sinner, there was no failure in the laying down of that blessed cable. It went down deep. The end was well secured and it went down deep into the depths of our sin and shame and woe. And on the other side it has gone right up to the Eternal Throne and is fastened there eternally fast by God Himself! You may work that Telegraph today and you may easily understand the art of working it, too. A sigh will work it! A tear will work it. Say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," and along the wire the message will flash and will reach God before it comes from you! It is far swifter than earthly telegraphs—yes, and there will come an answer back much sooner than you ever dreamed of!

It is promised—"Before they call I will answer and while they are yet speaking I will hear." Whoever heard of such a communication as this between man and man? But it really does exist between sinners and God, since Christ has opened up a way from the depths of our sin to the heights of His Glory. This is for you who are at a distance from Him. But He has done more for us who are saved, for He has taken us right across the Atlantic of our sin and set us down on the other side! He has taken us out of our sinful state and put us into the Father's bosom—and there we shall dwell forever in the heart of God as His own dear children!

I would to God that some might now be led to look to the Savior—that some would come with weeping and with tears to Him and say—

"Jesus, lover of my soul, Let me to Your bosom fly.

"Take my case and arbitrate for me. I accept Your Atonement. I trust in Your precious blood! Only receive me and I will rejoice in You forever with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

May the Lord bless you forevermore. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON.—Isaiah 53:1-12.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Chapter 39

Job 10,2 #283 - The Sweet Uses of Adversity

THE SWEET USES OF ADVERSITY

NO. 283

DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, NOVEMBER 13, 1859,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.

"Show me why You contend with me."

Job 10:2.

AND will God contend with man? If God is angry, can He not take away the breath of his nostrils and lay him low in the dust of earth? If the heart of the Almighty is moved unto hot displeasure, can He not speak in His anger and will not the soul of man sink into the lowest Hell? Will God contend—will He set himself in battle array against His creature? And such a creature?—the creature of an hour—a thing that is not, that is here today and gone tomorrow? Will the Almighty contend with the nothingness of man? Will the everlasting God take up the weapons of war and go out to fight against the insect of a day?

Well might we cry out to Him, "after whom is my Lord the King gone forth? After a dead dog—after a flea?" Will You hunt the partridge on the mountains with an army and will You go forth against a gnat with shield and spear? Shall the everlasting God who faints not, neither is weary, at whose reproof the pillars of Heaven's starry roof tremble and start—will He become combatant with a creature?

Yet our text said so. It speaks of God's contending with man. Ah, surely, my Brethren, it needs but little logic to understand that this not a contention of anger, but a contention of love. It needs, methinks, but a short sight for us to discover that, if God contends with man, it must be a contention of mercy. There must be a design of love in this. If He were angry He would not condescend to reason with his creature and to have a strife of words with him. Much less would He put on His buckler and lay hold on His sword, to stand up in battle and contend with such a creature as man! You will all perceive at once that there must be love even in this apparently angry word. This contention must, after all, have something to do with contentment and that this battle must be, after all, but a disguised mercy—but another shape of an embrace from the God of love. Carry this consoling reflection in your thoughts while I am preaching to you. And if any of you are saying today, "Show me why You contend with me," the very fact of God contending with you at all—the fact that He has not consumed you—that He has not smitten you to the lowest Hell, may thus, at the very outset, afford consolation and hope.

Now, I propose to address myself to the two classes of persons who are making use of this question. First, I shall speak to the tried saint. And then I shall speak to the seeking sinner, who

has been seeking peace and pardon through Christ, but who has not as yet found it, but, on the contrary, has been buffeted by the law and driven away from the Mercy Seat in despair.

I. First, then, to THE CHILD OF GOD. I have—I know I have—in this great assembly, some who have come to Job's position. They are saying, "My soul is weary of my life. I will leave my complaint upon myself. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me. Show me why You contend with me." Sometimes to question God is wicked. As the men of Bethshemesh were smitten with death when they dared to lift up the lid of the ark and look into its sacred mysteries, so is it often death to our faith to question God. It often happens that the sorest plagues come upon us on account of an impudent curiosity which longs to pry between the folded leaves of God's great council-book and find out the reason for His mysterious Providences.

But, methinks this is a question that may be asked. Inquiring here will not be merely curious—for there will be a practical affect following. Tried Saint, follow me while I seek to look into this mystery and answer your question and I pray you select one of several answers which I shall propound, which shall, to your judgment, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, seem to be the right one. You have been tried by trouble after trouble— business runs cross against you—sickness is never out of your house— while in your own person you are the continual subject of a sad depression of spirit. It seems as if God were contending with you and you are asking, "Why is this? Show me why You contend with me?"

1. My first answer on God's part, my Brother, is this—it may be that God is contending with you that He may show His own power in upholding you. God delights in His saints. And when a man delights in his child, if it is a child noted for its brightness of intellect, he delights to see it put through hard questions—because he knows that it will be able to answer them all. So God glories in His children. He loves to hear them tried, that the whole world may see that there are none like them on the face of the earth and even Satan may be compelled before he can find an accusation against them, to resort to his inexhaustible fund of lies.

Sometimes God on purpose puts His children in the midst of this world's trials. On the right, left, before, behind, they are surrounded. Within and without the battle rages. But there stands the child of God, calm amidst the bewildering cry, confident of victory. And then the Lord points joyously to His saint and He says, "See, Satan, he is more than a match for you. Weak though he is, yet through My power, he can perform all things." And sometimes God permits Satan himself to come against one of His children. And the black Fiend of Hell in dragon's wings meets a poor Christian just when he is faint and weary from stumbling in the valley of humiliation. The fight is long and terrible and, well it may be, for it is a worm combating with the dragon.

But see what that worm can do! It is trod under foot and yet it destroys the heel that treads upon it. When the Christian is cast down, he utters a cry, "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy, for though I fall yet shall I rise again." And so God points to His child and says, "See there? See what I can do? I can make flesh and blood more mighty than the most cunning spirit. I can make poor feeble foolish man, more than a match for all the craft and might of Satan."

And what will you say to this third proof that God puts us through? Sometimes God does as it were, Himself enter into the fight—oh, let us wonder to say it! God, to prove the strength of faith, sometimes Himself makes war on faith! Think not that this is a stretch of the imagination. It is plain

simple fact. Have you ever heard of the brook Jabbok and of that angel-clothed God who fought with Jacob there and permitted Jacob to prevail? What was this for? It was thus had God determined—"I will strengthen the creature so much, that I will permit it to overcome its Creator." Oh, what noble work is this, that while God is casting down His child with one hand, He should be holding him up with the other—letting a measure of omnipotence fall on him to crush him, while the like omnipotence supports him under the tremendous load. The Lord shows the world—"See what faith can do? "Well does Hart sing of faith—

"It treads on the world and on Hell. It vanquishes death and despair, And, O! let us wonder to tell, It overcomes Heaven by prayer."

This is why God contends with you—to glorify Himself, by showing to angels, to men, to devils, how he can put such strength into poor puny man—that man can contend with his Maker and become a prevailing prince like Israel, who as a prince had power of God and prevailed. This, then, may be the first reason.

2. Let me give you a second answer. Perhaps, O tried Soul, the Lord is doing this to develop your graces. There are some of your graces that would never be discovered if it were not for your trials. Do you not know that your faith never looks so grand in summer weather, as it does in winter? Have you not heard that love is too often like a glowworm that shows but little light except it is in the midst of surrounding darkness? And do you not know that hope itself is like a star—not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity and only to be discovered in the night of adversity?

Do you not understand that afflictions are often the black foils in which God does set the jewels of His children's graces, to make them shine the better. It was but a little while ago that on your knees you were saying, "Lord, I fear I have no faith—let me know that I have faith." But do you not know you were praying for trials? You cannot know that you have faith until your faith is exercised. Our trials, so to speak, are like wayfarers in a forest. When there is no intruder in the silent glades of the forest, the hare and the partridge lie. And there they rest and no eye sees them. But when the intruding footstep is heard, then you see them start and run along the green lane and you hear the whirr of the pheasant as it seeks to hide itself.

Now, our trials are intruders upon our heart's rest. Our graces start up and we discover them. They had lain in their lair, they had slept in their forms, they had rested in their nests—unless these intruding trials had startled them from their places. I remember a simple rural metaphor used by a departed Divine. He says he was never very skillful at birds' nesting in the summer time, but he could always find birds' nests in the winter. Now, it often happens that when a man has but little grace, you can scarcely see it when the leaves of his prosperity are on him. But let the winter's blast come and sweep away his withered leaves and then you discover his graces. Depend upon it, God often sends us trials that our graces may be discovered and that we may be certified of their existence.

Besides, it is not merely discovery, it is real growth that is the result of these trials. There is a little plant, small and stunted, growing under the shade of a broad spreading oak. And this little plant values the shade which covers it and greatly does it esteem the quiet rest which its noble friend affords. But a blessing is designed for this little plant. Once upon a time there comes along the woodman and with his sharp axe he fells the oak. The plant weeps and cries, "My shelter is

departed—every rough wind will blow upon me and every storm will seek to uproot me."

"No, no," says the angel of that flower, "now will the sun get at you. Now will the showers fall on you in more copious abundance than before. Now your stunted form shall spring up into loveliness and your flower, which could never have expanded itself to perfection, shall now laugh in the sunshine and men shall say, 'How greatly has that plant increased! How glorious has its beauty become through the removal of that which was its shade and its delight!' "

Don't you see, then, that God may take away your comforts and your privileges to make you a better Christian? Why, the Lord always trains His soldiers, not by letting them lie on feather beds, but by turning them out and using them in forced marches and hard service. He makes them ford through streams and swim through rivers and climb mountains and walk many a long march with heavy knapsacks of sorrow on their backs. This is the way in which He makes soldiers—not by dressing them up in fine uniforms, to swagger at the barrack gates and to be fine gentlemen in the eyes of the loungers in the park.

God knows that soldiers are only to be made in battle. They are not to be grown in peaceful times. We may grow the stuff of which soldiers are made, but warriors are really educated by the smell of powder, in the midst of whizzing bullets and roaring cannonades—not in soft and peaceful times. Well, Christian, may not this account for it all? Is not your Lord bringing out your graces and making them grow? This is the reason why He is contending with you.

3. Another reason may be found in this. It may be the Lord contends with you because you have some secret sin which is doing you sore damage. Do you remember the story of Moses? Never a man better beloved than he of the Lord his God, for he was faithful in all his house as a servant. But do you remember how the Lord met him on the way as he was going to Egypt and strove with him? And why? Because he had in his house an uncircumcised child. This child was, so long as it had not God's seal upon it, a sin in Moses. Therefore God strove with him till the thing was done.

Now, too often we have some uncircumcised thing in our house, some joy that is evil, some amusement that is sinful, some pursuit that is not agreeable to His will. And the Lord meets us often as He did Moses, of whom it is written—"The Lord met him by the way in the inn and sought to kill him"—Exodus 4:24. Now search and look, for if the consolation of God is small with you, there is some secret sin within. Put it away, lest God smite you still more sorely and vex you in His hot displeasure. Trials often discover sins—sins we should never have found out if it had not been for them.

We know that the houses in Russia are very greatly infested with rats and mice. Perhaps a stranger would scarcely notice them at first, but the time when you discover them is when the house is on fire. Then they pour out in multitudes. And so does God sometimes burn up our comforts to make our hidden sins run out. And then He enables us to knock them on the head and get rid of them. That may be the reason of your trial—to put an end to some long-fostered sin. It may be, too, that in this way God would prevent some future sin, some sin hidden from your own eyes into which you would soon fall if it were not for His troubling you by His Providence. There was a fair ship which belonged to the great Master of the seas. It was about to sail from the port of grace to the haven of glory. Before it left the shore, the great Master said, "Mariners, be brave! Captain, be bold! For not a hair of your head shall perish. I will bring you safely to your desired

haven. The angel of the winds is commissioned to take care of you on your way." The ship sailed right merrily with its streamers flying in the air. It floated along at a swift rate with a fair wind for many and many a day. But once upon a time there came a hurricane which drove them from the course, strained their mast until it bent as if it must snap in two. The sail was shred to ribbons.

The sailors were alarmed and the captain, himself, trembled. They had lost their course. "They were out of the right track," they said. And they mourned exceedingly. When the day dawned, the waves were quiet and the angel of the winds appeared. And they spoke unto him and said, "Oh angel, were you not bid to take charge of us and preserve us on our journeys?" He answered, "It was even so and I have done it. You were steering on right confidently and you knew not that a little ahead of your vessel lay a quicksand upon which she would be wrecked and swallowed up quickly. I saw that there was no way for your escape but to drive you from your course. See, I have done as it was commanded me—go on your way."

Ah, this is a parable of our Lord's dealings with us. He often drives us from our smooth course which we thought was the right track to Heaven. But there is a secret reason for it—there is a quicksand ahead that is not marked in the chart. We know nothing about it. But God sees it and He will not permit this fair vessel, which He has Himself insured, to be stranded anywhere. He will bring it safely to its desired haven.

4. I have now another reason to give, but it is one which some of you will not understand. Some however will. Beloved, you remember that it is written, that we "must bear the image of the heavenly," namely, the image of Christ. As He was in this world even so must we be. We must have fellowship with Him in His sufferings, that we may be conformable unto His death. Have you never thought that none can be like the Man of Sorrow unless they have sorrows, too? How can you be like He, who sweat as it were great drops of blood, if you do not sometimes say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death"?

Think not, O Beloved, that you can be like the thorn-crowned head and yet never feel the thorn. Can you be like your dying Lord and yet be uncrucified? Must your hands be without a nail and your feet without a wound? Can you be like He, unless, like He, you are compelled to say, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" God is chiseling you—you are but a rough block—He is making you into the image of Christ. And that sharp chisel is taking away much which prevents your being like He. Must He who is our head be marred in His visage by reason of grief and must we forever rejoice and sing? It cannot be—

"The heirs of salvation, I know from His Word, Through much tribulation must follow their Lord."

Sweet is the affliction which gives us fellowship with Christ. Blessed is the plow that plows deep furrows—if the furrows are like He. Blessed is the mouth that spits upon us, if the spittle is from the same cause as that which defiled His face. Blessed are the nails and thorns and vinegar and spear, if they but make us somewhat like He, in whose glory we shall be partakers when we shall see Him as He is. This is a matter which all cannot understand, for it is a path which no unhallowed foot has trod and no careless eye has so much as seen. But the true Believer can rejoice in it, for he has had fellowship with Christ in His sufferings.

5. To the child of God I shall give only one more reason. The Lord, it may be, contends with you, my Brothers and Sisters, to humble you. We are all too proud. The most humble of us do but

approach to the door of true humility. We are too proud, for pride, I suppose, runs in our very veins and is not to be gotten out of us any more than the marrow from our bones. We shall have many blows before we are brought down to the right mark. And it is because we are so continually getting up that God is so continually putting us down again. Besides, don't you feel, in looking back on your past troubles, that you have, after all, been best when you have had troubles?

I can truly say there is a mournfulness in joy and there is a sweet joy in sorrow. I do not know how it is, but that bitter wine of sorrow, when you once get it down gives such a warmth to the inner man as even the wine of Lebanon can scarce afford. It acts with such a tonic influence upon the whole system, that the very veins begin to thrill as the blood leaps in it. Strange influence! I am no physician, but yet I know that my sweet cup often leaves bitterness on the palate and my bitter cup always leaves a sweet flavor in the mouth. There is a sweet joy in sorrow I cannot understand. There is music in this harp with its strings all unstrung and broken. There are a few notes I hear from this mournful lute that I never get from the loud-sounding trumpet.

Softness and melody we get from the wail of sorrow, which we never get from the song of joy. Must we not account for this by the fact that in our troubles we live nearer to God? Our joy is like the wave as it dashes upon the shore—it throws us on the earth. But our sorrows are like that receding wave which sucks us back again into the great depth of the Godhead. We should have been stranded and left high and dry upon the shore if it had not been for that receding wave, that ebbing of our prosperity, which carried us back to our Father and to our God again. Blessed affliction! it has brought us to the Mercy Seat—given life to prayer. It has enkindled love—strengthened faith—brought Christ into the furnace with us and then brought us out of the furnace to live with Christ more joyously than before.

Surely, I cannot answer this question better. If I have not hit upon the right reason, search and look, my dearly Beloved. For the reason is not far off if you but look for it—the reason why He contends with you.

II. I have thus done with the saints. I shall now turn myself to address THE SEEKING SINNER who is wondering why he has found no peace and comfort. By the way—running a little apart from the subject—I heard a Brother saying the other evening in describing his experience, that before he was converted he was never sick, never had an affliction at all, but from the very hour when he became converted, he found that trials and troubles came upon him very thick. I have been thinking of that ever since and I think I have found a reason for it. When we are converted, it is the time of the singing of birds. But do you know the time of the singing of birds is the time of the pruning of vines and as sure as the time of the singing of birds is come the time of the pruning of vines is come also.

God begins to try us as soon as He begins to make our soul sing. This is not running away from the subject. I thought it was. It has just brought me to address the sinner. You have come here this morning saying to yourself, "Sir, not long ago I was awakened to a sense of my lost estate. As I was directed I went home and sought mercy in prayer. From that day till now I have never ceased to pray. But, alas, I get no comfort, Sir. I grow worse than ever I was before—I mean I grow more desponding, more sad. If you had asked me before conviction, Sir, whether the path to Heaven was easy, I should have said 'yes.' But now it seems to me to be strewn with flints. That I would not mind but, alas, methinks the gate is shut which lies at the end of the road—for I have knocked

and it has never opened. I have asked and I have not received. I have sought and I have not found. In fact, instead of getting peace I receive terror. God is contending with me. Can you tell me, Sir, why it is?" I will try to answer the question, God helping me.

1. My first answer shall be this. Perhaps, my dear Hearer, God is contending with you for awhile, because as yet you are not thoroughly awakened. Remember, Christ will not heal your wound till He has probed it to its very core. Christ is no unqualified physician, no foolish surgeon, who would close up a wound with proud flesh in it. But He will take the lances and cut and cut and cut again crossways and He will lay the sore open, expose it, look into it, make it smart. And then after that, He will close up its mouth and make it whole. Perhaps you have not as yet known your own vileness, your own lost state. Now, Christ will have you know your poverty before He will make you rich. His Holy Spirit will convince you of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come. He will strip you and though the pulling off of your own righteousness is like flaying you and tearing off the skin from your breast, yet He will do it. For He will not clothe you with the robe of His own righteousness till every rag of your own selfsufficiency is pulled away. This is why God is contending with you. You have been on your knees. Go lower, man—go lower. Fall flat on your face. You have said, "Lord, I am nothing." Go lower, man—say, "Lord, I am less than nothing and the very chief of sinners."

You have felt somewhat—go ask that you may feel more, may be yet more fully convicted of sin—may learn to hate it with a more perfect hatred and to bewail your lost estate with a wailing like that of Ramah, when Rachel wept for her children and would not be comforted because they were not. Seek to know the bottom of your case. Make it a matter of conscience to look your sins in the face and let Hell also blaze before you. Realize the fact that you deserve to be lost forever. Sit down often and take counsel with the Lord, your God, whom you have grievously offended. Think of your privileges and how you have despised them. Remember the invitations you have heard and how often you have rejected them. Get a proper sense of sin and it may be that God will cease to contend with you, because the good is all obtained which He sought to give you by this long and painful contention.

2. Another answer I will give you is this—perhaps God contends with you in order to try your earnestness. There are many Mr. Pliables, who set out on the road to Heaven for a little time and the first boggy piece of road they come to, they creep out on that side which is nearest to their own house and go back again. Now, God meets every pilgrim on the road to Heaven and contends with him. If you can hold your own and say, "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him." If you can dare to do it and be importunate with God and say, "Though He never hear me, if I perish I will pray and perish only there." Then you have got the mastery and you shall succeed.

God's Spirit is teaching you how to wrestle and agonize in prayer. I have seen a man, when he has become solemnly in earnest about his soul, pray as though he was a very Samson, with the two gates of mercy in his hand, rocking them to and fro as though he would sooner pull them up—gates and bar and all—than he would go away without obtaining a blessing. God loves to see a man mighty in prayer, intent upon getting the blessing, resolved that he will have Christ, or he will perish seeking Him. Now, be in earnest. Cry aloud! Spare not! Rise in the night-watches! Pour out your heart like water before the Lord, for He will answer you when He has heard the voice of your crying. He will hearken to your supplication and give you the desire of your heart.

3. Yet, again, another matter. "May it not be, my dear Hearers, that the reason why God contends with you and does not give you peace is, because you are harboring some sin" Now, I will not say what it is. I have known a man solemnly under conviction of sin, but the company which he kept on market-day was of such a caste, that until he was separated entirely from his companions, it was not possible he should have peace. I do not know what your peculiar besetting sin may be. It may be a love for frivolity. It may be the desire to associate with those who amuse you. It may be worse. But remember, Christ and your soul will never be one till you and your sins are two.

Your desires and longings must make a clean sweep of the devil and all his crew, or else Christ will not come and dwell with you. "Well," says one, "but I cannot be perfect." No, but you cannot find peace till you desire to be. Wherever you harbor a sin, there you harbor misery. One sin willfully indulged in and not forsaken by true repentance will destroy the soul. Sins given up are like goods cast out at sea by the mariners in days of storm. They lighten the ship and the ship will never float till you have thrown all your sins overboard. There is no hope whatever for you till you can truly say—

"Whatever consists not with Your love, O help me to resign. "The dearest idol I have known, Whatever that idol is, Help me to tear it from its throne, And worship only You."

4. Then drawing near to a conclusion let me have your most solemn attention while I give one more hint as to the reason why you have not yet found peace. My dear Hearers, perhaps it is because you do not thoroughly understand the plan of salvation. I do feel that all ministers—and here, perhaps, I am as great a sinner as any other and I condemn myself while I chastise others—we all of us do in some way or other, I fear, help to dim the luster of God's grace, as manifested in the Cross of Christ. Often am I afraid lest I should prefer Calvinism to Calvary, lest I should put the sinner's sense of need like a quickset hedge round the Cross and keep the poor sinner from getting as near as he would to the bleeding Lamb of God.

Ah, my dear Hearers, remember if you would be saved, your salvation comes wholly and entirely from Jesus Christ, the dying Son of God. View Him yonder, Sinner, sweating in the garden! See the red drops of blood as they fall from that dear face! Oh, see Him Sinner, see Him in Pilate's hall. View the streams of gore as they gush from those lacerated shoulders. See Him, Sinner, see Him on His Cross! View that head still marked with the wounds with which the thorns pierced His temples! Oh, view that face emaciated and marred! See the spittle still hanging there—the spittle of cruel mockers! See the eyes floating in tears with languid pity! Look, too, at those hands and view them as they stream like founts of blood! Oh, stand and listen while He cries, "Lama Sabachthani!" Sinner, your life is in Him that died. Your healing is in yonder wounds. Your salvation is in His destruction.

"Oh," says one, "but I cannot believe." Ah, Brother, that was once my mournful cry. But I will tell you how I came to believe. Once upon a time, I was trying to make myself believe and a voice whispered, "Vain Man, vain Man, if you would believe, come and look!" Then the Holy Spirit led me by the hand to a solitary place. And while I stood there, suddenly there appeared before me One upon His Cross. I looked up. I had then no faith. I saw His eyes suffused with tears and the blood still flowing—I saw His enemies about Him hunting Him to His grave. I marked His miseries unutterable. I heard the groaning which cannot be described. And as I looked up, He opened his eyes and said to me, "The Son of Man is come into the world to seek and to save that which was

lost." I clapped my hands and I said, "Jesus, I do believe, I must believe what You have said, I could not believe before, but the sight of You has breathed faith into my soul. I dare not doubt—it were treason, it were high treason to doubt Your power to save." Dissolved by His agonies, I fell on the ground and embraced his feet and when I fell, my sin fell also! And I rejoiced in love Divine that blots out sin and saves from death.

Oh my Friend, you will never get faith by trying to make yourself have it. Faith is the gift of Christ! Go and find it in His veins. There is a secret spot where faith is treasured up. It is in the heart of Christ—go and catch it, Sinner, as it flows from there. Go to your chamber and sit down and picture Christ in holy vision, dying on the tree and as your eyes see, your heart shall melt, your soul shall believe and you shall rise from your knees and cry, "I know whom I may believe and I am persuaded He is able to save that which I have committed to Him until that day."

And now, may the love of Christ Jesus and the grace of His Father and the fellowship of His Spirit be with you forever and ever. Amen and Amen.

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Job 11,16 #2676 - Comfort from the Future

COMFORT FROM THE FUTURE

NO. 2676

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 27, 1900.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JANUARY 30, 1881.

"You shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

Job 11:16.

JOB'S misery was extreme and it seemed as if he could never forget it. He never did forget the fact of it, but he did forget the pain of it. That he had been utterly miserable would always remain recorded upon the tablets of his memory, but the wretchedness itself would not remain. It would be so entirely removed that it should be as a thing that has been altogether forgotten. Nothing better can happen to our misery than that it should be forgotten in the sense referred to in our text, for then, evidently, it will be clean gone from us. It will be as it is when even the scent of the liquor has gone out of the cask, when even the flavor of the bitter drug lingers no longer in the medicine glass, but has altogether disappeared. So is it with the sorrow that has so effectually gone out of the mind that it is just as though it had never been there.

If anyone here is in misery of any kind—whether it is misery of physical pain, or misery of need, or misery of soul on account of sin, or the loss of the light of God's Countenance—I can only pray for you, dear Friend, that you may speedily forget your misery and only remember it as waters that pass away. The thing goes to be done—it is quite possible, and you may expect it. If you look carefully at the connection of our text and give earnest attention to the matter, I do not doubt that you will experience this blessed forgetfulness. When we are in pain of body and depression of spirit, we imagine that we never shall forget such misery as we are enduring. The sharp plowshare has gone down so deeply that we think it has made a mark in the soul that can never be erased. We seem to lie all broken in pieces, with our thoughts like a case of knives cutting into our spirit, and we say to ourselves, "We never shall forget this terrible experience." And yet, by-and-by, God turns the palm of His hand towards us and we see that it is full of mercy. We are restored to health, or lifted up from depression of spirit and we wonder that we ever made so much of our former suffering or depression. We remember it no more, except as a thing that has passed and gone, to be remembered with gratitude that we have been delivered from it, but not to be remembered so as to leave any scar upon our spirit, or to cause us any painful reflection whatever. "You shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

Volume 46 1I. I am not going to limit the application of the text to Job and his friends, for it also has a message for many of us at the present time. And I shall take it, first, WITH REFERENCE TO THE COMMON TROUBLES OF LIFE WHICH AFFECT BELIEVING MEN AND WOMEN.

These troubles of life, more or less, happen to us all. They come to one in one shape and, perhaps, he thinks that he is the only man who has any real misery. Yet they also come to others, though possibly in another form. There is certainly a cross for every shoulder to bear. Simon must not bear the cross alone and all the rest go free. There is no road to Heaven without its stones, or without its Hill Difficulty. And I think that there are few pilgrims from the City of Destruction who get to the Celestial City without passing through the Valley of Death and having to fight with giants and even with Apollyon, himself. Cowper truly wrote—

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,

Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

There is much joy in true religion. Wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her and happy is everyone that retains her." But, still, notwithstanding the joy, in addition to it there is sorrow. There is misery lurking close by the Believer's pathway and it is always ready to pounce upon him somewhere between here and Heaven. The Lord of the pilgrims was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." And His disciples must expect to fare even as their Master fared while here below—it is enough for the servant if he is as his Lord.

You, dear Friends, who are just now enduring misery, should seek to be comforted under it. Perhaps you will ask me, "Where can we get any comfort?" Well, if you cannot draw any from your present experience, seek to gather some from the past. You have been miserable before, but you have been delivered and helped. There has come to you a most substantial benefit from everything which you have been called to endure. You must be conscious that when you think of your troubles, you can say, with Hezekiah, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so will You recover me, and make me to live." Or you can say, with the Psalmist, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Your word." I believe that, very often, God sends His very choicest love tokens to us in black-edged envelopes—and many a time has it happened that the great rumbling wagons of tribulation have been those which have brought the heaviest weight of treasure to the doors of the saints! Do we ever learn much without the rod? I fear we do not. Most of us are quickest learners, I think, when we smart the most. Well, then, if affliction has been profitable in the past, let us rest assured that it will be so in the future.

Let us gather consolation, also, from the future. If, as the Apostle truly says, "No chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous," recollect how he goes on to say, "Nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." I have been trying to ring the changes on those two words, during the last few weeks, while I have been laid aside by illness—"nevertheless afterward"—"nevertheless afterward"—"nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The Apostle James tells us that "the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth and has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain." He does not complain because his corn is buried under the clods and covered with the snow. But he lives upon hope and rejoices in

the future harvest, pleading the promise, "He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." In your own case, dear Friend, if you are a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, what will happen in the future? For it is with that I would comfort you at this time. Why, this is what will happen—"You shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." How will that be?

Well, first, by the lapse of time. Time is a wonderful healer. Hearts that seem as if they must break when first the trial comes, at last grow quite used to it. Look through the veil of a few minutes. Gaze through the longer vista of a few years and that which seemed dark as tempest wears quite another aspect! Oh, if you whose hearts seem now almost ready to burst, could but project yourselves only six months ahead—if you could leap forward a year and then look back—probably even in that time you would almost have forgotten your misery!

Yes, but there is something better than the lapse of years and that is when, during a considerable time, you are left without trial. That is a sharp pain you are now enduring, but what if you should have years of health afterwards? Then you will forget your misery. That is a sad loss which you have been called to suffer—it seems to you to be a crushing disaster—but what if it should be succeeded by years of prosperity? Remember how Job forgot his misery when, in a short time, he had double as much of all that he possessed as he had before? He had back twice the amount of all his former wealth. He had, again, a smiling family around him, so he might well forget his misery. Year after year and, perhaps, even to his death—it was so as far as we know—Job was again a man who had a hedge made round about him and all that he had! And in the happiness of his later life he might well forget his former misery. Well, now, it is very likely to be so with you after you get through this present struggle. Therefore, keep your heart up, believe in God, have confidence in Him and all shall be well. There is wonderfully smooth sailing on ahead for some of you when you are once over this little stretch of broken water. If you can safely pass over this stony portion of the road, it will be good traveling for you all the way to Heaven! Remember that the horses' heads are towards home—you are journeying to your Father's House, so be of good courage, for you shall forget your misery and only remember it as waters that pass away!

And besides the lapse of time, and an interval of rest and calm, it may be—it probably is the fact with God's people—that He has in store for you some great mercies. When the Lord turns your captivity, you will be like they that dream—and you know what happens to men who dream. They wake up. Their dream is all gone, they have completely forgotten it. So will it be with your sorrow! Through God's goodness, you will seem suddenly to wake up out of a dreary dream and then you will begin to laugh and soon your mouth will be filled with laughter. You will almost despise your former depression of spirit! And when you see the abundant mercy of God toward you, all your misery shall seem like a dream that has gone, a vision of the night—unreal—that has melted into nothingness! Some of you have no idea what is reserved for you—you would not be weeping, but laughing, if you knew what God has in store for you—I mean, even here below. It is good for us not to be able to read the roll closed by the hand of God, but we may be sure that there are such blessed things in it concerning our future that each Believer may well say, "I will not be bowed down by the trials of the present, but my spirit shall rejoice in God who does for me what eye has not seen, nor ear heard and what my heart has never conceived."

Be of good courage, Brothers and Sisters, in these dark, dull times, for, perhaps, this text is God's message to your soul, "You shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." It has been so with many, many, many Believers in the past. What do you think of Joseph sold for a slave, Joseph falsely accused, Joseph shut up in prison? But when Joseph found out that all that trial was the way to make him ruler over all the land of Egypt and that he might be the means of saving other nations from famine, and blessing his father's house, I do not wonder that he called his elder son "Manasseh." What does that name mean? "Forgetfulness"—"for God said He has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." Why, sitting on the throne, feeding the nation and blessing his father and his brothers, he must have thought that the being cast into the pit, being sold to the Ishmaelites and being put into prison was not worth recollecting, except for gratitude to God that it ever happened as a means to the grand end of helping him into that position of usefulness!

And Joseph is not the only one who has had such an experience as that. Read the Scriptures through and you will find that those whom God has called and anointed to eminent service have been put, like the blades of Damascus, into the fire and drawn through the fire again and again, that in the day of battle they might strike on the northern iron and steel and yet not turn their edge! These servants of the Lord have been prepared for an immortal destiny by desperate griefs and—

"The deeper their sorrows, the louder they'll sing."

As a woman remembers no more her travail, for joy that a man is born into the world, so has it happened to the Believer in the time of his sorrow—he has forgotten it, cast it all away because of the greater joy which God has brought out of it. Jabez is the child of sorrow, but he is, therefore, more honorable than his brethren. The more stormy the sea, the sweeter the haven. The rougher the road on earth, the better the rest above. So, poor tried child of God, believe that this text is intended to be a Divine message of comfort to your heart, "You shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

Thus much on the first head.

II. I should be greatly rejoiced if, in the second place, I might speak A

CHEERING WORD TO POOR SOULS UNDER DISTRESS ON ACCOUNT OF SIN. I mean you who long to be saved, yet cannot understand how it is to come to pass, or who, understanding the plan of salvation, are somehow unable to appropriate it to yourselves. You feel as if you have your eyes bandaged and your feet fast fixed in the stocks, so that you cannot go to Christ, cannot even look to Christ and, therefore, your souls are full of sorrow. I want you, dear Friends, to especially notice what Zophar recommends to a man who has sin upon him. Read the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th verses of this chapter—"If you prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward Him; if iniquity is in your hands, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in your tabernacles. For then shall you lift up your face without spot; yes, you shall be steadfast, and shall not fear: because you shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." I recommend these words to you, also. But I have something even better to recommend to you. Does any man here say, "I cannot get peace with God. I am full of misery on account of sin?" I know all about you, Friend. I have gone that road, long ago. I have been splashed up to my very eyes in the mire of the Slough of Despond and I sometimes get a little of its mud in my eyes even now.

Well, now, I exhort you, first of all, to look to Christ and lean on Christ. Trust in His atoning Sacrifice, for there, alone, can a troubled soul find rest. If you say that, somehow, you cannot get peace, then I shall have to ask you to see whether, perhaps, sin may not be lying at the door. To use Zophar's expression, have you prepared your heart? Have you gone to Christ with your whole heart and soul? Have you sought Him with all your might? I hope you realize that repentance and faith are very bad things to play with, for such play will damn a man's soul. These are things to be earnestly used in a most solemn undertaking. "The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence" in this matter. We can neither repent nor believe with half our heart—it is our whole soul that is required if salvation is to be ours. Now, have you sought the Lord with all your heart? If you have, you will surely find Him. I am certain that you will. And then, afterwards, "you shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." There was never a man yet who, with all his heart, sought the Lord Jesus Christ, but sooner or later found Him. And if you have been long in seeking, I lay it to the fact that you have not sought with a prepared heart, a thoroughly earnest heart, or else you would have found Him.

But, perhaps, taking Zophar's next expression, you have not stretched out your hands toward the Lord, giving yourself up to Him like a man who holds up his hands to show that he surrenders. You must come and say, "My opposition is over. I now have no quarrel with God. I yield unconditionally to Him." The word may refer to one who stretches out his hands to grasp whatever may come from God within his reach. He stretches out his empty hands, asking to have them filled. He stretches out his entreating hands, pleading that God will bless him. Well now, if you have done that, you shall get a blessing.

Further, you may and you shall forget your misery, provided you fulfill one more condition mentioned by Zophar, and that is that you are not harboring any sin. "If iniquity is in your hands, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in your tabernacles." There is an old-fashioned Grace that I am never ashamed to preach, though some, who call themselves evangelists, have folded it up and put it away in the back cupboard. They never mention this old-fashioned Grace which is called repentance. Now, I learn from the Scriptures that repentance is just as necessary to salvation as faith is—and the faith that has not repentance going with it will have to be repented of one of these days. A dry-eyed faith is a faith that will save no man. Peter's message was, "Repent you, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." And our Lord's own declaration was, "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." He began His public ministry by crying, "Repent and believe the Gospel," which means just this—that if any man is living in sin, it is no use his praying, or pretending to believe until he gives up that sin. If there is any passion that you are indulging, any lust that is your master—if you are carrying on a wicked business—if you are living in willful transgression of God's Law, Christ can save you from your sins, but even Christ cannot save you in your sins. If you will have your sin, you must be lost—so stands God's decree. Christ must, by His Grace, separate you from your sin or else you will be separated from Him forever. I want this to be a very heart-searching word and, therefore, I say to any miserable man or miserable woman here—"You shall forget your misery if you give up your sin and trust in the sin-atoning Savior. Come, Friend, you shall not say that I am flattering you, for I tell you plainly that you must flee for your life from the dearest sin that now lays hold upon you."

"Oh" you say, "but how am I to do it?" Christ will help you. Trust Him to help you. But if you say, "I will trust Him to save me," and yet continue to live in sin, He will not save you. That is not the

salvation that we preach! We proclaim salvation from sin, for that is the salvation which Jesus came to bring us. You must, as Zophar said to Job, put your iniquity far away—and you must not let wickedness dwell in your tabernacles—that is to say, in your tents, in your houses. I know some men who will never get peace of conscience and rest of heart while they let their wives live as they do, and while they allow their children to live as they do. Some of you will not find mercy for yourselves while you neglect your children's highest welfare as you do. I know some men—I hope they are good men, but certainly they are not good fathers—they are so peaceful and gentle that they never like to utter a word of reproof. Their boys and girls may go where they like—I might almost say that they may go to the devil if they like—yet their father has not a word to say to them. Do you call that proper conduct for a professedly Christian? There are some parents who allow their children to do such things that God is grieved with them for their children's sakes—and they will never get peace of mind till they set their house in order. What? Is God coming to live where there is no family prayer, where there is no care for His name or His day, where there is no rebuke of open sin? It has filled me with unspeakable sorrow when I have heard of Christian parents whose boys swear and whose girls are allowed to go where, if they are not ruined, body and soul, it is little short of a miracle! Oh, do see that you let not wickedness dwell in your tabernacles, you who are the people of God, and you who wish to be His, if you would have Zophar's words to Job fulfilled in your experience, "Then shall you lift up your face without spot; yes, you shall be steadfast, and shall not fear: because you shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

III. Now let me tell you HOW SWEETLY GOD CAN MAKE A SINNER FORGET HIS MISERY.

The moment a sinner believes in Jesus Christ with true heart and repentant spirit, God makes him forget his misery, first, by giving him a full pardon. All his sin is forgiven and, therefore, he feels ready to dance for joy and he soon forgets his misery. By faith, he gets a sight of the great, pardoning Lord and of His atoning blood. He sees the Son of God suffering and dying for him on the Cross and he is overjoyed at the Revelation of such a wondrous redemption. He claps his hands and he forgets his misery.

Next, he rejoices in all the blessings that God gives with His Grace. He reads that those whom Christ has pardoned "are justified from all things," from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. He learns that they are clothed with the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness and he forgets his own nakedness while he rejoices that he is so wondrously clothed. He feeds on the Bread of Heaven and forgets his former hunger. He drinks of the Water of Life and forgets his previous pangs of thirst. He enjoys the liberty of the sons of God and he forgets the chains he used to wear as Satan's slave. He has peace with God and he forgets the trouble that was such a burden on his heart! He is so full of joy that there is no room for sorrow and if, perchance, the tear of repentance still lingers in his eyes, it is not sullen but sweet sorrow, and the tear glistens in the sunlight of God's Countenance like a diamond, or like some choice pearl that slumbers in its shell. Oh, Beloved, if you will but come to Christ and leave your sin, whatever your misery is, you shall forget it! Or, if you do remember it at all, it shall only be to remember it as the snow that has melted and vanished, or as the rain that has soaked into the earth, "as waters that pass away."

Now, dear Friends, all that I have been saying to the sinner is quite as applicable to every backsliding child of God! It may be that some of you who are here are Christians—that is, you

have trusted in Christ to save you—but you have got into a very sad state of heart. You have not half the spiritual life that you once had and, therefore, you do not glorify God as you once did. It is most grievous to think how many professing Christians live at a poor dying rate—they seem to be barely alive, or hardly that. Well, dear Brother or Sister, if you have become miserable, I am rather glad that you have! That is part of the way towards a better state of things. When a man cannot be happy in a backsliding state, he will soon seek to get out of it! The hurt is a part of the cure. Solomon says, "The blueness of a wound cleanses away evil," and the chastisement which follows sin is often for the healing of the sinner. IV. I will bring my discourse to a close with this last reflection. THIS TEXT WILL COME TRUE TO THE SICKENING, DECLINING, SOONDEPARTING BELIEVER.

Ah, dear Friend, when you first found out that the complaint from which you are suffering really was consumption, what a chill seemed to come over everything! When the physician said to you, very tenderly but very faithfully, "I fear I cannot do much for you. I can perhaps give you a little relief, but I dare not deceive you, for you have an incurable disease"—then, although you are a child of God, you endured a great deal of misery and spent many long, sleepless nights looking forward to, you scarcely knew what. Are you still in that state, my dear Sister? As you get worse and worse, do your spirits continue to sink? My dear Brother, as you gradually fade away, does the light seem to fade, too? Well, then, listen!

If you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and if you are resting alone upon Him, remember that in a very short time, "you shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." In a very, very, very short time, your suffering and sadness will all be over! I suppose the expression, "waters that pass away," signifies those rivers which are common in the East and which we meet with so abundantly in the South of France. They are rivers with very broad channels, but I have often looked in vain for a single drop of water in them. "Then," perhaps you ask, "what is the use of such rivers?" Well, at certain times, the mountain torrents come rushing down, bearing great rocks, stones and trees before them—and then, after they have surged along the riverbed for several days, they altogether disappear in the sea! Such will all the sorrows of life and the sorrows even of death soon be to you, dear Friend, and to me also. They will all have passed away and all will be over with us here. The passage to the grave may be sharp, but it must be short—

"The road may be rough, but it cannot be long,

So I'll smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

And then, you know, dear Friends, those waters that have passed away will never come back again. Water that is spilt upon the ground can never be gathered up again—and it is one of the charms of the heavenly world that our sorrows will never reach us there. No more poverty, no more cold, no more heat, no more sin, no more depression of spirits, no more pain, no more forsaking of friends, no more sorrow of any kind, for, "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." That is a very beautiful expression— "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Here, they keep clinging to us, one on one arm and the other on the other! Sorrow and sighing will come with us wherever we go and we sometimes say to them, "Now, you might go somewhere else, for we do not want you," yet they still hold fast to us. But when we get up to the golden gate, no sooner shall the eternal light flash on our eyes than we shall look in vain

for our old companions, for they will be gone! "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away" and lest there should be any trace of their mournful companionship left, we are expressly told that "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Thank God, we shall recollect our sorrows in Heaven only to praise God for the Grace that sustained us under them! We shall not remember them as a person does who has cut his finger and who still bears the scar in his flesh. We shall not recollect them as one does who has been wounded and who carries the bullet somewhere about him. In Heaven, you shall not have a trace of earth's sorrow! You shall not have, in your glorified body, or in your perfectly sanctified soul and spirit, any trace of any spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing that shall show that you ever had a pain on earth, or even that you ever committed a sin! Some diseases, you know, leave marks on our hands or faces, so that we say to our friends, "Do you see that lump? It was a time of terrible pain that brought that up, and I fear it will not go away." Ah, but in Heaven there will be no trace of anything like pain or sorrow of any sort. All sorrow and suffering shall be gone and we shall forget our misery, or only remember it as waters that have passed away, never to come back again.

This is the sum and substance of all that I have been trying to say to you—"Be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart, all you that hope in the Lord." Christians do not live on the comforts of this world—their inheritance is on the other side of Jordan. If you are like Esau and can be content with red pottage, well, you may have it, but you will lose the birthright if you do not prize it. But if you are God's true Jacob, you will gladly give up the pottage to get the promise of the future inheritance. Oh, what a blessed thing is the faith that enables the soul to postpone the present in order to obtain that blessed future! For what is the present, after all, but a fleeting show, an empty dream? But the future is eternal and incorruptible, reserved in Heaven at the right hand of God, where there are pleasures forevermore!

Now that, by God's mercy, I again find myself in your midst after a season of sore suffering, I desire to forget my miseries—and some of them have been very sharp ones. I am so glad to be here, again, to see you all, and I pray that it may be a long time before I am deprived of the great privilege of speaking to you in the name of the Lord. I bless God tonight and praise His name in the great congregation. And I ask for every Brother and Sister that, when your time of misery comes, you may be brought through it all and come out of the big end of the horn, rejoicing in the cornucopia of God's bounty and blessedness, and praising His name, as I do at this time with all my heart! Oh, may every one of you find this text to be true to you, "You shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away"! The blessing of the Lord be with you all forevermore! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Job 11:1-20.

The words we are about to read were spoken by one of Job's three

friends—or what if I call them his three tormentors? These men did not speak wisely and their argument was not altogether sound. But, for all that, in the instance before us, Zophar the Naamathite spoke that which was truthful. Although he made a great mistake in turning it against Job, yet what he said was, in the main, correct, and we may learn from it as we read it.

Remember, dear Friends, that whenever you read the words of these three men, you must take them with a good many grains of salt. They are not to be accepted as if they were God's Word, because they are not. Those three men were mistaken in many points, yet very much of what they said was weighty and valuable—and is still worthy of our careful consideration.

Verses 1-3. Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Should not the multitude of words be answered? And should a man full of talk be justified? Should your lies make men hold their peace? And when you mock, shall no man make you ashamed? This was a very bitter and cruel speech. Zophar was not using the language of friendship, or even of common courtesy. First, he charged Job with being a great talker, "a man full of talk." No doubt Job did speak well and eloquently, but to retort upon him that he was a man abundant in words was a very cruel thing, especially when he was in such a condition of distress and suffering. Yet, dear Friends, it is an evil thing to be men of tongue and not of hand. It is a dreadful thing to be men—or, for that matter, women—who are "full of talk" and, therefore, have no room for anything else. There are some people who seem to think that simply by their volubility they can carry all before them! In such a case we may say with Zophar, "Should not the multitude of words be answered? And should a man full of talk be justified?" But he went beyond these questions and charged Job with downright lying because he had pleaded his own innocence—"Should your lies make men hold their peace?" Zophar also insinuated that Job fumed and frothed, as it were, and spoke folly, which he certainly did not do, for he spoke in solemn, sober earnest if ever a man did.

4. For you have said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in Your eyes. Job did not say that. At least he did not say it in so many words. He did endeavor to prove his own innocence of the false charges that were brought against him, but he never said that he was clean in God's eyes.

5, 6. But oh that God would speak, and open His lips against you; and that He would show you the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Oh, that God would enable you, dear Friends, to see your sin and make you perceive that there is a double meaning in His Law—a deep, underlying, spiritual meaning, as well as that which is apparent on the surface, so that a man may be guilty of transgression even when he thinks it is not! Oh, that God would unveil the secrets of His wisdom so as to make you see that He is wiser than all His works, that His hidden wisdom is double that which you have been able to perceive in Nature, or in Providence, and infinitely greater than He has ever made it appear before men's eyes!

6. Know therefore that God exacts of you less than your iniquity deserves. That was a hard thing for Zophar to say to Job but, still, it was true—and it is true in the case of all of us! "He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Even when a man sits down among the ashes, robbed of all his property and bereaved of all his children—and when he has to scrape himself with a potsherd because of his many boils—even then it may be truly said to him, "God exacts of you less than your iniquity deserves."

7. Can you, by searching, find out God? Can you find out the Almighty unto perfection! What amazing questions these are! How they ought to convict those who glibly talk of God as if they could measure Him with a ruler and understood exactly what He ought to do and ought to be. We are constantly meeting with statements that such-and-such a thing, which is revealed in Scripture, cannot be true because it is inconsistent with the modern idea of the benevolence of God! Our only answer to the quibbler is, "Can you, by searching, find out God? Can you find out the

Almighty unto perfection?"

8, 9. It is as high as Heaven; what can you do? Deeper than Hell; what can you know! The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. God is incomprehensible by any finite mind—and He is Omnipotent, too.

10. If He cuts off, and shuts up, or gathers together, then who can hinder Him? If He sees fit to destroy men, or for a while to make them prisoners. Or if He pleases to gather them together and multiply them like the hosts of Heaven, who can hinder Him?

11. For He knows vain men. He sees wickedness, also. Will He not then consider it? Wickedness hidden under the veil of night, God sees as clearly as in the blaze of noon. Wickedness which never comes out of the heart, but tarries there, and does not lead into overt action, God sees. "Will He not then consider it?" Of course He will!

12. For vain man—That is just what man is by nature! The best of men are vanity—emptiness. "For vain man"—

12. Would be wise. He pretends to wisdom. He wishes to be thought wise. He likes to wear a wise man's title. "Vain man would be wise."

12. Though man is born like a wild ass's colt. As untamed, as ignorant, as willful as a wild ass's colt are we by nature. Zophar seems to think that he has sufficiently rebuked Job for pretending to be wise and for complaining that God was dealing unjustly with him. So now he begins to admonish him to repent.

13-18. If you prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward Him; if iniquity is in your hands, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in your tabernacles. For then shall you lift up your face without spot; yes, you shall be steadfast, and shall not fear: because you shall forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away: and your age shall be clearer than the noonday; you shall shine forth, you shall be as the morning. And you shall be secure, because there is hope; yes, you shall dig about you, and you shall take your rest in safety. It is a great mercy when God enables men to pursue their daily callings and to take their nightly rest in safety. And it is a still greater mercy when they feel secure, whether they live or die, because they have a good hope concerning the hereafter. It is an unspeakable blessing when sin is washed away and a man can lift up his face to God without spot, and walk in the light of Jehovah's Countenance all the day long!

19, 20. Also you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid; yes, many shall make suit unto you. But the eyes of the wicked shall fail. Carefully notice this very solemn prophecy—the eyes that have looked upon sin with pleasure—the eyes that have flashed with lascivious desire—the eyes that have dared to look towards God with defiance or derision—"the eyes of the wicked shall fail."

20. And they shall not escape. To what place could they escape from God, when He is everywhere? During the days when the Roman empire extended all over the world, people said that the whole earth was one great prison for Caesar's enemies. And the universe itself is a vast prison for those who are condemned of God! Where shall they go to avoid arrest? Where shall they flee to get beyond God's reach? They cannot escape anywhere! There is neither hole nor

corner, even in the bowels of the mountains, or in the flinty hearts of the rocks, where a sinner can hide himself from the hand of God! "They shall not escape."

20. And their hope. The last thing that ever dies, "their hope"— 20. Shall be as the giving up of the ghost. Like death itself, their hope

shall be. Then, if "their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost," what hope is there for them? Let us not have our portion with them, else we shall be as hopeless as they are!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—30, 595, 683

AND FROM "FLOWERS AND FRUITS"—14.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 41

Job 12,9-10 #326 - Everywhere and Yet Forgotten

EVERYWHERE AND YET FORGOTTEN

NO. 326

DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, JULY 29, 1860,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

"Who knows not in all these that the hand of the Lord has worked this?

In whose hand is the soul of every living thing and

the breath of all mankind."

Job 12:9-10.

THESE verses occur in Job's answer to Zophar the Naamathite. Job

had his failings but certainly he appears less faulty in this dialogue than those three men who sought to reprove him and convict him of error. Zophar the Naamathite had the very highest opinion of his own personal wisdom. He addressed Job as though he had been an inferior And all in the eleventh chapter he used language which though extremely beautiful, must have been very grating upon the ear of such a sufferer as Job. For it is a lecture full of high-flown language, abounding in poetry and noble images, but containing little solid sense and less sympathy.

Job being exceedingly irritated both with the style and with the matter of Zophar's speech, begins at once to pluck off his plumes and to pull to pieces his fine language. In biting irony Job cries from his dunghill—"No doubt but you are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you. I am not inferior to you; yes, who knows not such things as these?" You have put into flowery language things which an ordinary observer might discover. You have pointed to the Heaven above and to the depth beneath, to prove a truth which the creeping insect of the earth could tell you, and which the fishes of the sea might proclaim. Ask now the beasts and they shall teach you and the fowls of the air and they shall tell you—or speak to the earth and it shall teach you—and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto you. Who knows not in all these that the hand of the Lord has worked this?"

There is much temper here, but there is very much of good common sense. I would we had another Job to chastise the high-sounding language of modern theologians. There are starting up in our midst, men, who if they are not heretics in doctrine, are aliens in speech. They are men described by the old preachers who say, "Mark!" and there is nothing to mark and who shout, "Observe!" and there is nothing to observe, except the want of everything that is worth observing. We know ministers who cannot speak in the common language of mankind, but must needs adopt

the jargon of Carlyle, who sets language on its head and puts the last word first.

These men must make the English language a slave to the German— the glorious grand old Saxon must buckle to their heresies and conceal the depths of their falsehoods. I pray God the time may come when some man may unmask them, when all these wind-bags may be rent and all these bladders may be pricked. When if teachers have anything to tell us they will deliver themselves so that all can understand. If they cannot use plain language let their tongues go to school till they have learned it. There is something so enticing and yet so flimsy in the modern theological school that I feel constrained to warn you constantly against it—its mystery is absurdity and its depth is pompous ignorance.

There is no theology in it. It is a futile device to conceal the want of theological knowledge. A man with an education that may be complete in every department except that in which he should excel, stands up and would teach Christians that all they have learned at the feet of Paul has been a mistake. That a new theology has been discovered—that the old phrases which we have used are out of date—the old creeds broken up. Well, what shall we do to this wiseacre and his fellow sages? Serve them? Wherever you meet them or their disciples, as Job did Zophar—laugh at them, dash their language to pieces and remind them that the best things they tell us are only what the fishes of the sea, or the fowls of the air knew before them. And that their grandest discoveries are but platitudes which every child has known before, or else they are heresies that ought to be scouted from the earth.

The doctrine upon which Job spoke was this—he wished to show that the fact of the presence of God in all things was so clearly discernible that men need not borrow the eagle's wing to mount to Heaven. Nor need they enter into the heart of the Leviathan to find a chariot wherein to enter the depths of the sea. "No," said he, "no. The present Deity the beasts proclaim." The actual existence and the constant working of the Eternal God is sung by the very fowls of Heaven and the mute fishes of the sea leap up and in their joyous reaping, seem to say, "The sea is His and He made it." This doctrine I wish to bring out this morning. Or, rather, thus would I speak of it. First, the present hand of God everywhere in the universe. Secondly, our present and complete dependence upon that hand of God. And then let us learn some useful lessons from the whole subject of Divine Providence.

I. The first doctrine is THE PRESENT HAND OF GOD. 1. That there is a God you need not that I should prove—that God is

here and there and everywhere, you also firmly believe. But, alas, it is one thing to believe this truth and quite another thing to hold it in perpetual remembrance. We may write it down far more easily upon the tables of our creed than upon the tablets of our memory. In fact, this is one of the doctrines which all men are constantly forgetting. And even the righteous may often check themselves because they begin to degenerate into the fools who say in their hearts, "There is no God here." Strange is it that the name of the Lord should be written everywhere so clearly that even the blind might see it. And yet man is so doubly dark that he does not observe his God even where God is most manifest and visible. Methinks, my Brethren, this forgetfulness of God is growing upon this perverse generation.

Time was, in the old Puritan days when every shower of rain was seen to come from Heaven, when every ray of sunshine was blessed and God was thanked for having given fair weather to ingather the fruits of the harvest. Then, men talked of God as doing everything. But in our days where is our God? We have the laws of matter. Alas, alas, that names with little meaning should have destroyed our memory of the Eternal One. We talk now of phenomena and of the chain of event, as if all things happened by machinery—as if the world were a huge clock which had been wound up in eternity and continued to work without a present God. No, not only our philosophers, but even our poets rant in the same way. They sing of the works of Nature. But who is that fair goddess, Nature? Is she a heathen deity, or what? Do we not act as if we were ashamed of our God, or as if His name had become obsolete?

Go abroad wherever you may, you hear but little said concerning Him who made the heavens and who formed the earth and the sea. But everything is "nature," and the "laws of motion" and of "matter." And do not Christians often use words which would lead you to suppose that they believed in the old goddess, Luck, or rested in that equally false deity, Fortune, or trembled before the demon of Misfortune? Oh for the day when God shall be seen and little else beside! Better, my Brethren, that philosophical discoveries were lost, than that God should be concealed behind them. Better that our poets had ceased to write and that all their flaming words were buried with their ashes, than that they should serve as a cloud before the face of the Eternal Creator.

We must go back again to the remembrance of our God and especially must the true Believer make the worldling feel that the Christian has a God with him, a God about him and a God within him, one who is his constant companion and his Fiend. So act, my Brethren, that men may be compelled to say of you, "That man has a God whom he observes in all the events of his family, ascribing to His Divine hand every sickness that falls upon his child and every loss that occurs to him in his business." My Brethren, it is a doleful truth that there is nothing more easy to forget than the grand doctrine that God is everywhere at work in the midst of us all.

2. Now, let me proceed to say that though this is a truth so frequently forgotten, it is a fact of universal force. God works ever and everywhere. There is no place where God is not. You may traverse the silent valleys where the rocks enclose you on either side till you can see but a strip of the blue sky. You may be the only traveler that has passed through that glen. The bird may start up frightened and the moss may tremble beneath the first tread of man. But God was there of old, upholding yon rocky barriers, filling the flower cups with their perfume and refreshing the lonely pines with the breath of His mouth.

Or, descend if you will into the lowest depths of the sea where undisturbed the water sleeps. The very sand is motionless in eternal quiet, but the footsteps of the Lord are there, reigning within the silent palace of the sea. You may borrow the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, but God is there. Mount to the highest Heaven or dive into the deepest Hell and God is in both—hymned in everlasting song, or howled in eternal tortures. Everywhere and in every place, God dwells and is manifestly at work.

And not merely, my Friends, in every place, but in every time the Lord is present. From the beginning of the year even to the end thereof, there is God. His eyes never sleep, His hands never rest. In the silent watches of midnight when the city sleeps, God is the Watchman and when the sun wakes up and draws aside the curtains of the night, the Lord is abroad before him—on the

waters and on the snow-white summits of the mountains. And when again high noon is gained and all the world is busy with its toil and God forgotten, He is there amid the throng of men as well as in the deserts' wilds. Every place feels His footstep and every time trembles at His Presence. From everlasting to everlasting, O God, You are sensibly felt in every passing moment. The pulsing of the eternal sea of time are caused by You and there never is an instant when You have fled and left us to ourselves.

And as in every place and every time, so in every event there is God. Is the earth shaken by inward convulsions? It is God that heaves the mountains to and fro. Or, do the valleys laugh in the sunshine and do the rejoicing husbandmen carry home their harvests? God is there right manifest in the lavish bounty of His hand. The greatest political disasters are predestinated, guided and overruled by God. When an Attila scourges the earth and reddens her soil with blood, his steps are ordered, arranged and foreordained, as much as the flight of the eternal angel who shall blow the trumpet of the Gospel and proclaim the year of jubilee.

There is no event, however base and vile, however grand and good, which is not within the management of the dread Supreme. His dominion has no limit. Even the dark gulf of evil is spanned by the bridge of His wisdom. Journey onward till you seem to go where goodness is not found and grace is all eclipsed—in the thick darkness there He dwells. He makes the clouds His chariot and yokes the whirlwinds to His cart. Be of good cheer, Beloved, in every event you may behold your God. If invasion should ravage this fair island, if tyrants should set their foot on the neck of your liberties, if the streets should run with blood—God were even there supreme—His people still secure.

And if it is so, that God is in every event, permit me to remind you that God is where there is no event. When there is a lull upon the waters and all is stagnant. When political affairs are quiet, when in the lesser world of your own house and your own soul there is a dead calm, perhaps the woeful prelude of a tempest, God is there. Great God, You stand in the midst of the silent desert, where not even the hum of the bee disturbs the dread solemnity of stillness! You are far down in the cleft of the rock where creature could not live! No, in the heart of the solid adamant You have Your palace and beneath the surging of the ever-tossing sea You have a tabernacle.

In the unknown ravine, the untraversed gorge, the Lord Jehovah has His dwelling-place. He keeps yon rocks from tottering to their fall. He swells those rivers till they roll along. Let Him but remove His hand and earth's pillars totter to their fallen creation reels and the universe expires. As dies the spark struck from the steel, so dies creation if God ceases to be present there. Oh, learn then evermore, that not only in His doings but in His testing. Not only in His acting but in His standing still, God is most manifest to you if you will but see Him—if your eyes anointed with heavenly eye-salve are but open to behold your Father and your King. This, I may well say, is a Truth of God which though much forgotten is of universal force.

3. Let me proceed a little further and remind you that this is a Truth of God worthy of perpetual remembrance. Do not look at it as a mere speculation. I beseech you, do not think of a present God as a fact in which you have no interest. There is scarcely a Truth in the compass of revelation which is more instructive, profitable and consoling to the people of God than this—a present God in everything. Come, let me show you how worthy a remembrance it is. You have many mercies. Your God is in them all. Does not that thought sweeten the bread you eat? Will it not give a relish

to the water that you drink?

The air you breathe, the clothes that are on your back—God is in each of them. Go to your home, where your best pleasures dwell—your own sweet home. Be it ever so homely and when you look on your mercies say, "I see my gracious God here." Cast your eye upon the prattlers that climb your knee and remember that they are a heritage from the Lord. Look at her who is the partner of your bosom and see God's love and kindness in so good a gift. Look on all the prosperity that attends your business. Look on your growing crops and your verdant fields and see God in every mercy you receive.

I would not have the worldling's wealth, for it is a wealth that came not from God. At least so far as he is concerned it came not from a father's hand. But oh to have benefits every one of which smells of the treasury out of which it came. To look on your gold and on your silver, no, on your very pence—and see the impress of your God stamped there more clearly than the image of Caesar's own self. To sit down to your table and eat and drink and feel that every meal is a sacrament, that every robe you wear is a vestment sent from Heaven, that in all these mercies there is the hand of a covenant, promise-keeping God—why it will make you live a noble life.

It was thought by the old heathens to be the grandest thing they could say of a man that he should one day eat at the tables of the gods. My Brethren, we eat at these tables every day. At the table of my God I feast and from His cup I drink. I have nothing which I have not received from Him. The Lord has given me all that I have.

But if it is very sweet to see God in our mercies, it is most consoling to discern Him in all our trials. Say not these are evil times. No times are evil where God is, for His presence scatters all that is ill. Say not that you dwell in an evil place. There is no evil place to the man who dwells with God. Think not that evil circumstances have happened unto you. They seem to be big with evil, but those clouds shall break in blessings on your head.

Oh, if you can but look at your troubles as sent from God, it will take the sharpness from them and turn them from wasps that sting into bees that gather honey. Say, now, when your family is sick, "The Lord has placed His hand upon my wife and on my children." When your treasure vanishes away, say, "The Lord has put His hands into my coffers and emptied them." And when the ship is wrecked, say, "The Lord has my vessel on the rocks." And when the corn is spoiled and the harvest is not gathered, say, "The Lord has sent the rain from Heaven. He has done it." Join with Job the author of our text and exclaim, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away and blessed be the name of the Lord." Regard not the second causes but the first cause, not the trying creature but the supporting Creator.

If it is pleasant to see God in our trials, I add it is very seasonable to remember Him in our dangers. To be at sea when every timber creaks in the ship and when the mast is strained and then to feel, "He holds the waves in the hollow of His hand." To stand in places where the danger is present and terrific, and then to say, "My Father's shield is over me." To walk through the midst of plague and pestilence, through the valleys that are steaming with miasma and malaria and to feel that God holds our breath and that all the arrows that Death ever stored within his quiver can never find a place in our heart until Jehovah bids them—oh, these things are sweet and pleasant! A man is never in danger when he feels this.

At God's command, through Death's dominions and through Hell's domains, a man might march securely trusting in the voice which cries, "Fear not, I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God." A present God! My Brethren, I cannot suggest a theme that may make you more full of courage in times of danger and trouble. I think I need not enlarge upon this point further than to add you will find it exceedingly helpful and consoling if you can discover God in your trifles. Our life is made up of trifles and if we had a God only for the great things and not for the little things, we should be miserable, indeed. If we had a God of the temple and not a God of the tents of Jacob, where were we?

But blessed be our heavenly Father, He that wings an angel, guides a sparrow. He that rolls a world along, molds a star and marks its orbit when it trickles from its source. There is a God in the motion of a grain of dust blown by the summer's wind, as much as in the revolutions of the stupendous planet. There is a God in the sparkling of a fire-fly, as truly as in the flaming comet. Carry home, I beseech you, to your houses the thought that God is there—at your table, in your bed-chamber, in your workroom and at your counter. Recognize the doing and being of God in every little thing.

Think for a moment and you will find that there are many promises of Scripture giving the sweetest consolation in trivial matters. "He shall give His angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands." Why? Lest you fall from a precipice? Lest you dash yourself from a pinnacle? No, "Lest you dash your foot against a stone." A little danger, but a great Providence to ward us from it. And what says the Scripture also? Does it say, "The very days of your life are numbered?" It says not so, though that were true. But it says, "the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

And what says the Scripture, yet again? Does it say, "The Lord knows the eagles and not an eagle falls to the ground without your Father?" No. But, "are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." A great God in little things, I am sure, will spare you a world of vexation if you will but remember this, for it is Hence our vexations come. We often get into a bad temper about a trifle, when a great trial does not agitate us. We are angry because we have scalded ourselves with a little water or have lost a button from our clothes and yet the greatest calamity can scarcely disturb us. You smile, because it is true with all of you.

Job himself, who said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away," might have grown angry, because of some rough edge in his potsherd. Take care that you see God in little things, that your mind may be always calms and composed and that you be not foolish enough to suffer a trifle to overcome a saint of God.

II. Now, my dear Friends, having thus brought forward the doctrine of a God present everywhere, let me remind you of the second head—OUR ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE UPON A PRESENT GOD AT THIS VERY MOMENT. We are absolutely dependent upon the will and pleasure of God for our life, our comforts, our means to enjoy our comforts and especially for all spiritual blessings.

First, then, our life is entirely dependent upon God. One sees strange sights in journeying—scenes which will never be erased from the memory. It was but a few days ago, just under a tremendous rock, I saw a vast mass of broken stones and earth tossed about in wild confusion and raised in huge hillocks. My driver said to me, "That is the grave of a village." Some

years ago, there lived upon that spot a joyful and happy people. They went forth to their daily work. They ate. They drank—as men do to this day. One time they saw a great crack in the mountain that hung overhead. They heard alarming noises, but they had heard such sounds before and the old men said, "There might be something coming," but they did not know.

Suddenly, however, without further notice, the whole side of the hill was in motion and before the villager could escape from his hut, the village was buried beneath the fallen rocks. And there it lies. And neither bone of man, nor piece of the habitation of man has ever been discovered in the wreck. So thoroughly was everything crushed and buried, that nothing by the most diligent search could ever be discovered. There are many villages standing in a like position at this day.

I passed another spot, where there was a shelving mountain with its layers slanting towards the valley. A town which had been built at the foot had been entirely covered and a lake filled up by one tremendous slide from the top of the hill. Yet, there stand new houses still and men venture to live among the graves of their sires. We are apt to say, "How these people ought to look up every morning and say, 'O Lord, spare this village.' " Standing there where they might be crushed in a moment, where the slightest motion of the earth within would bring down the hill upon them, they ought to lift up their hearts to the Preserving One and say, "Oh keeper of Israel, keep us both day and night."

Ah, but my Friends, you and I are in the same position. Though no crags overhang our homesteads, though no mountain threatens to leap upon our city—yet are there a thousand gates to death. There are other agencies beside these which can hurry mortals to their tombs. You are sitting today as near to the jaws of death, as those villagers who are dwelling there. Oh that you felt it! One breath choked up and you are dead. Perhaps your life is a thousand times in danger every moment. As many times as there are ebbing and flowing of the blood, as many times as there are breathing from the lungs—so many times does your life hang in such jeopardy that it only needs your God to will it and you fall dead in your seat and are carried out a pale lifeless corpse.

There are parts of the mountain passes of the Alps of such danger to the traveler that when you traverse them in winter the muleteers muffle the bells of their beasts, lest the faintest sound should bring down an avalanche of snow and sweep you into the bottomless precipice beneath. Then, one would think, the traveler must feel that he is in God's hand. Yes, but you are in the same position now, though you see it not. Open but the eyes of your spirit and you may see the avalanche overhanging you today and the rock trembling to its fall at this very moment. Only let your soul behold the latent lightning that God conceals within His hand and you may soon see that to crush a gnat with your finger is not so easy for you, as for God to take away your life now, or whenever He pleases.

As it is with our life, my Brethren, so is it with the comforts of life. What would life be without its comfort? Much more, what would it be without its necessities! And yet how absolutely dependent are we upon God for the bread which is the staff of life! I never felt more truly the dependence of man upon his God than I did last Friday week. At the foot of the Alpine pass of the Splugen, I saw in the distances the whole road black, as if it had been spread over with heaps of black earth. As we neared it, we discovered it was a group of locusts in full march—tens of thousands of myriads of them.

As we drew nearer they divided as regularly as if they had been an army and made room for the carriage. No sooner was it passed than the ranks were filled up again and they went on in their devouring march. On we went for several miles and there was nothing to be seen except these creatures, literally covering the ground here and there in thick layers like a shower of black snow. Then I realized the language of the Prophet— "Before them was like Eden. Behind them was a desert." They had eaten up every green blade. There stood the Indian corn with just the dry stems, but every green particle was gone. In the front of their march you saw the vines beginning to ripen and the fields of grain hastening to perfection.

There stood the poor cottager at his door. The wheat that he had planted and the vines that he had tended, must all be eaten and devoured before his own eyes. The pastures were literally alive with these fiery creatures. When they first entered the field there was green pasture for the cows of the poor cottagers. Let them stop there an hour and you might take up the dust by handfuls and nothing left besides. "Ah," said my guide, "it is a sad thing for these poor people—in a month's time those creatures will be as big and as long as my finger and then they will eat up the trees. The mulberry trees with which the poor men feed their silkworms and which furnish them with a little wealth—they will devour every green thing until there is nothing left but the bare dry stem."

In armies countless as the sands of the sea and fierce to look upon, well described by the Prophet Joel, in his terrible picture of them, as "a great army of the Lord." Ah, I thought within myself, if God can thus sweep this valley and make a waste of it with these little creatures, what a mercy it is that He is a kind and gracious God, or else He might let loose the like on all the people of the earth and then nothing would stare us in the face but famine, despair and death!

Perhaps you say to me, "Ah, but we do not expect the locusts here. We shall gather our harvest joyously." Speak not too quickly. God has been teaching us during the last two months our absolute and entire dependence upon Him. Let this rain continue but a little longer, let it continue till the appointed weeks of harvest shall come and where are our people then?

You may open your shops, you citizens of London and you may imagine that the harvest in the country will little affect you. But famine stares you in the face unless God withdraws the clouds and bids the sun shine down upon us. The days shall come which we have heard our fathers speak of, when the bread was such that it could not be eaten. When it was not hard enough for one to hold in his hand. When you had a crust without and then within it was a mass of jelly—wheat swimming in water and not capable of being eaten by any except those pinched by hunger.

The like must inevitably come unless God withdraws those clouds. Let the rain continue much longer and there will scarcely be a harvest, nothing for men to feed upon. Oh, my dear Friends, we never know from year to year how dependent—how absolutely dependent we are upon God. Does not the corn spring out of the land? And does not every man, from the king to the peasant, live on bread? And if that staff fail, must not all totter to the ground with leanness on our bones and paleness on our faces? You are for that bread and for that nourishment and for all you have—as absolutely dependent upon God as a prisoner in his dungeon is dependent upon his keeper for his daily bread and water. Oh that I could make you feel this and realize the force of the fact!

Again—I said we were not simply dependent upon God for the comforts, but for the power to enjoy the comforts. It is an evil which we have seen under the sun—a man who had wealth and riches

and plenty, but who had not power to eat thereof. I have seen a man hungry and full of appetite, but no bread to eat. But I have seen a sight perhaps more sad—a man with food of the most luxurious kind—to whom taste seemed denied, to whom every mouthful was a thing of detestation. The Lord has but in His judgment to smite any of us with only nervousness—that nervousness at which the strong may laugh, but which makes the weak tremble and everything will become dark before you. He has but to affect some portion of your body and you shall see no brightness in the sum. The very fields shall lose their verdure before you. The most happy event shall only be a source of deeper gloom. You shall look on everything through a dark glass and see nothing but darkness and despair.

He has but to touch you with sickness and motion may be misery and even to lie upon a bed may be a repetition of tortures as you toss from side to aide. Worse still, the Lord has but to put His finger on your brain and you become a raving lunatic, or what may seem better, but more despicable, a driveling idiot. Oh, how little, then, has He to do to overturn your all, to pull down that mighty castle of your joys and darken the windows of your hope. You are, again, for life, for necessities, for comforts, as absolutely in the hand of God as the clay upon the wheel is in the hand of the potter.

You may rebel, but your rebellion is but the writhing of a worm. You may murmur, but your murmurs cannot affect Him. You may ask your comrades to join in league with you against the Almighty God but His purpose will stand fast and you must submit. Bound in the iron chains of destiny, you must go the way He bids you and you suffer or you must rejoice at His beck and will. Tremble, oh, Man, tremble before God, for never was creature in the hand of creature, as creature is in the hand of Creator.

Let me briefly remark, that if this is true concerning temporals, how doubly true is it with regard to spiritual things. There is no Christian grace which has in it a particle of self-existence. Faith, love, courage—are all sweet flowers—but their roots are in God. There may be streams of gratitude in your heart, but the springs thereof are in Him. Your soul may be devoted and consecrated, but the locks of your devotion will be shorn off, as was the hair of Samson, unless the eternal God preserves it. If you and I shall endure to the end, if we shall pass through the valley of death with calmness, if we shall stand before the Throne of God with confidence, if we shall enter into bliss with joy—all these things must come of God.

Let Him lock up the treasury of His Grace, or dry up the channel of His love—the noblest Christian that breathes must become the vilest of reprobates. And he who has best served his God must become the most abject minion of Hell. Oh, learn that you are absolutely dependent upon God. He can leave you and where are you? He can help you and you shall stand securely. So is it with the sinner—he is in God's hand to save him or to destroy him. He can give him up, like Pharaoh, to hardness of heart, or He can melt his heart and bow his stubborn will. He can throw the reins upon his neck and say, "Let him alone, Ephraim is given unto idols." Or He can make him willing in the day of His power, create in him a new heart and a right spirit and save him from the wrath to come.

O God, You are over all and You are all. Man is nothing before You. You have Your will. You do as You please among the angels in Heaven and among the inhabitant of this lower world. "Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen."

III. I come to my third and last point, namely, THE LESSONS FROM THIS SUBJECT. First, a few lessons to the saint and then to the sinner.

To the saint first. Child of God, see where you are. You, even you, are completely in the hand of your God, Your life, your death, your prosperity in this world, your growth in grace, your peace—all things rest upon His sovereign will. Nothing can harm you, unless He bids it. Nothing can cheer you, unless He commands it. You rest not in your own hand. Be your will ever so headstrong, be your mind ever so stubborn, either you must yield cheerfully, or else you must bend unwillingly. You are absolutely and entirely and in every respect placed at the will and disposal of Him who is your God.

And now, child of God, let me ask you this question. Are you grieved because of this? Does this doctrine trouble you? Let God lay aside His scepter. Say, are you prepared to wield it? Had you rather have followed your will than be at God's disposal? Would you rather that He should be in everything and that He should do as He wills, or that it should be left to you? Oh, I see you, you countless armies of God—I see you bow your knees at once and cry, "O Lord, we bless You that it is not so, we praise You that You have left nothing to our disposal, but that You everywhere have sway."

This is not the subject of groaning but of mirth and joy to us. We set up our banners with this watchword, "The Lord reigns." We go on our journey with this as our constant cordial, "God is here." With this as our shield, we lift up our arm against calamity. With this as our sword, we rush into the thick of the battle against sin. The Lord reigns—"Let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof." "Great God, if I could have it otherwise I would not. If I could reverse your decision and if I could erase the lines of trial and write in the place thereof the gilded lines of joy, I could not and I would not do it. If the book of my destiny were in my power today, I neither would erase a word nor insert a syllable. Be it unto me even as You will. Not my will but Yours be done."

It is easy to say this, but oh, how hard to feel it when it comes to the trial. When darkness fills the sky, when the coffin lies in the silent chamber and the precious one is sleeping in the arms of death. When the tide has swept away all we have, when beggary stares us in the face, when slander follows us at the back, still to say, "Jehovah, Your tempests are better than my sunshine and the storm which You have brewed is better to me than the brightest days if I had made them for myself." Take care, child of God, that you hold fast and firm this your confidence, which shall have great recompense of reward.

But mind one other thing, O heir of Heaven. Let your conversation be such as becomes this doctrine. Speak of what you will do and of what will happen, always in respect to the fact that man proposes but God disposes. When you hear your enemy vow something against you, smile, because your enemy is not God. And when you propose to yourself something which seems to you good and pleasant, weep over your own folly if you are too confident, for you are not God. None but God can promise so as to cheer a sensible mind. None but God can threaten so as to alarm a Christian mind.

The threats and promises of God are true, but neither the threats of man nor his promises are worth the words in which they are uttered. Oh, my dear Christian Brethren, tried as some of you

are in various and in arduous ways, I wish I could burn this Truth of God into your souls. But God the Holy Spirit must do it. I pray you stand to it that there is God in everything and I am sure as the result of it you will be driven to more constant and earnest prayer. For if there is God in everything, take everything to God. If God has done you in, take the ill to God and He will set it right.

This very season of the year suggests prayer. Prayer can reverse the winds and stay the clouds and let the infidel world see it is so. In the days of that eminent Scotch minister, Robert Blair, there had been for a long time a terrible rain, until at the time of harvest the wheat had grown an inch long after it had ripened. The people met together for prayer and that day it rained more furiously than it had done before. Yet they separated in the firm belief that God had heard their prayer. Mr. Blair said to the assembly that he was sure, though God might seem as if he mocked them, yet he was a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God still.

That night the clouds were scattered and driven away and the harvest was ingathered. Some of the wheat had been spoiled, but most of it was housed in safety. Trust your God, then. Tempt Him not by murmuring. But prove Him—not as the children of Israel did—but prove Him as Malachi exhorts us and see if He will not pour out blessings and make the earth rejoice with the harvest. At any rate, be not as they that tremble in the day of calamity. Stand still, you children of God. You wear an armor that no weapon of man can pierce. You dwell within a city, the bulwarks of which are impregnable. Let no fear invade you. Be strong and of good courage, your God is with you. He is better than all your fears. No, He shall exceed all your hopes. Set up your banners and shout aloud and rejoice in Him. God is with you, and the Lord Jehovah reigns.

In conclusion, my last word is to the sinner. You, who have not been converted and have no part or lot in present salvation, to you I say this much—Man! Man! You are in the hand of God. Whether you shall live to reach your home today or not, depends absolutely upon His will. Rich though you are, the wealth you possess can take to itself wings and fly away at His will. He can fill your body with pains so terrible that you shall long for death itself to escape from them. He can make visions flit before your eyes, both when you sleep and when you wake, that shall so scare you that you would prefer the company of the devils in Hell to solitude.

God can make you such a Hell to your own self that you would seek either knife or poison to escape from your own thoughts. And that He can do and you cannot escape. No wings can bear you above His dominion. No depth can hide you from his sway.

But now, what is the path of wisdom! Is it wise to curse God, in whose hand your breath is? Is it a rational thing to treat with indifference Him upon whom you depend for time and for eternity? Your own self-interest would dictate a wiser course. Dash not your head against the bosses of His buckler. Be not mad enough to run upon His glittering spear. What does wisdom say to you if you will but listen? It cries, "Be reconciled to God."

You cannot resist Him effectually—throw down your weapons and yield. And what does the Scripture say to you? It says, "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart." What says the Church to you? It says, "Christ has received us—the Bride says, come." What says Christ to you? "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake." "Look unto Me and be you saved all the ends of the earth." "Bow the knee and kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little."

Oh, Spirit of God, speak to the madmen and make them sane. Speak to the men that fight against God and bid them tremble at Him and yield and seek His favor. O Sinner remember what He has said, "He that being often reproved hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." Hear you, in conclusion, that sweet word of His—"Whoever will, let him come. The Spirit and the Bride say, come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whomever will, let him take the water of life freely."

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Job 13,15 #1244 - Faith's Ultimatum

FAITH'S ULTIMATUM

NO. 1244

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 18 1875,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Job 13:15.

THIS is one of the supreme sayings of Scripture. It rises, like an alpine

summit, clear above all ordinary heights of speech. It pierces the clouds and glistens in the Light of God. If I were required to quote a selection of the most sublime utterances of the human mind, I should mention this among the first—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." I think I might almost say to the man who thus spoke, what our Lord said to Simon Peter when he had declared him to be the Son of the Highest— "Flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you." Such tenacious holding, such immovable confidence, such unstaggering reliance are not products of mere nature, but rare flowers of rich Divine Grace!

The text contains a precious jewel of Grace, fitly set in the purest gold of choice speech. Happy is the man upon whose arm it can be worn as an ensign in the day of battle. It is well worthy of observation that in these words Job answered both the accusations of Satan and the charges of his friends. Though I do not know that Job was aware that the devil had said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not set a hedge about him and all that he has?" yet he answered that base suggestion in the ablest possible manner, for he did, in effect, say, "Though God should pull down my hedge and lay me bare as the wilderness, itself, yet will I cling to Him in firmest faith."

The arch-fiend had also dared to say that Job had held out under his first trials because they were not sufficiently personal. "Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has will he give for his life. But put forth Your hand, now, and touch his bones and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face." In the brave words before us, Job most effectually silences that slander by, in effect, saying, "Though my trial is no longer the slaying of my children, but of myself, yet will I trust in Him." He thus, in one sentence, replies to the two slanders of Satan and, thus, unconsciously, does Truth overthrow her enemies, defeating the secret malice of falsehood by the simplicity of sincerity.

Job's friends also had insinuated that he was a hypocrite. They inquired of him, "Who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off?" They thought themselves quite safe in inferring that Job must have been a deceiver, or he would not have been so specially punished. To this accusation Job's grand declaration of his unstaggering faith was the best answer

possible, for none but a sincere soul could thus speak. Will a hypocrite trust in God when He slays him? Will a deceiver cling to God when He is smiting him? Assuredly not! Thus were the three miserable comforters answered if they had been wise enough to see it. Our text exhibits a child of God under the most severe pressure and shows us the difference between him and a man of the world. A man of the world under the same conditions as Job would have been driven to despair and, in that desperation, would have become morosely sullen, or defiantly rebellious! Here you see what, in a child of God, takes the place of desperation. When others despair, he trusts in God. When he has nowhere else to look, he turns to his heavenly Father. And when, for a time, even in looking to God, he does not meet with conscious comfort, he waits in the patience of hope, calmly expecting aid and resolving that even if it does not come, he will cling to God with all the energy of his soul!

Here, all the man's courage comes to the front, not, as in the case of the ungodly, obstinately to rebel, but bravely to confide. The child of God is courageous, for he knows how to trust. His heart says, "My Lord, it is bad with me, now, and it is growing worse, but should the worst come to the worst, still will I cling to You and never let You go." In what better way can the Believer reveal his loyalty to his Lord? He evidently follows his Master, not in fair weather only, but in the worst and roughest days. He loves his Lord, not only when He smiles upon him, but when He frowns.

His love is not purchased by the liberality of his Lord's golden hands, for it is not destroyed by the smiting of His heavy rod. Though my Lord puts on His sternest looks. Though from fierce looks He should go to cutting words. And though from terrible words He should proceed to cruel blows which seem to beat the very life out of my soul, yes, though He take down the sword and threaten to execute me, yet is my heart steadfastly set upon one resolve, namely, to bear witness that He is infinitely good and just! I have not a word to say against Him, nor a thought to think against Him! Much less would I wander from Him! And, though He slay me, I would trust in Him!

What is my text but an Old Testament version of the New Testament, "Quis separabit?"—Who shall separate? Job does but anticipate Paul's question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Was not the same Spirit in both Job and Paul? Is He also in us? If so, we are men, indeed, and our speech is with power and this declaration, to us, is no idle boast, no foolish bravado, though it would be ridiculous, indeed, if there were not a gracious heart behind it to make it good. It is the conquering shout of an all-surrendering faith which gives up all but God. I wish that we may all have its spirit this morning, that whether we suffer Job's trial or not we may, at any rate, have Job's close adherence to the Lord, his faithful confidence in the Most High.

There are three things in the text—a terrible supposition—"though He slay me." A noble resolution, "yet will I trust in Him." And, thirdly, a secret appropriateness. This last will require a little looking into, but I hope to make it clear that there is a great appropriateness in our trusting while God is slaying us—the two things go well together, though it may not so appear at first.

I. First, then, here is A TERRIBLE SUPPOSITION—"Though He slay me." The Lord is here set forth as a slayer of His trusting servant! An idea full of terror. It is a supposition which, in some senses, cannot be tolerated for a minute—"Though He slay me." Here I am, His dear child. One whom He has loved from before the foundation of the world. One for whom He laid down His life upon the Cross. One of whom He has said, "I have engraved you upon the palms of My hands." How can He slay me? If He does so, it can only be in a minor sense. As to my best and truest life, it must be safe, for He is its Author and Guardian, and cannot be its Destroyer.

Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she could not have compassion on the son of her womb? Could she suffer a child of hers to die while she had power to keep it alive? Would she lay violent hands upon the child of her love and destroy it? God forbid! Neither will God destroy, or suffer to be destroyed, any of His own dear children! Jesus has solemnly said—"I give unto My sheep eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." The fairest children of the earth will die, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and all flesh is as decaying grass. But the feeblest child of God will live forever, for the life of God in every degree is immortality!

Time will put out the sun. The lamp of the moon will grow dim in ages yet to come, but neither time nor age shall quench a solitary spark of Heaven-born Grace and Light. Though faith is but as a grain of mustard seed, it is essentially a living thing, and it is not conceivable that God, Himself, should slay that which is quickened with His Life. Though it is imperceptible, sometimes, even to the possessor of it, and though it should raise many painful questions as to whether it is there at all, yet if it is there, God will preserve it even to the end.

Come, child of God, you must not suppose that the Lord will slay you forever! You must not allow suppositions which would dishonor your God! You may suppose what you like if it is innocent, but you must not suppose that which would blaspheme the Divine Love, or cast a slur upon God's fidelity to His promise! He may cast you aside for awhile, but He cannot cast you away forever! He may take away your goods, but not your highest good. He may allow a cloud to rest upon your reputation, a blight to fall upon your usefulness and a storm to sweep away your happiness, but His mercy is not clean gone forever—He has not in anger turned away His heart from you!

He has chastened you sorely, but He has not given you over unto death. No, you must not interpret the supposition of the text as though it said, "Though He leave me to perish, though He cast me into Hell," for that can never be! But I make bold to say that even if the devil were to whisper in your ear that the Lord would finally destroy you, it would be a glorious thing if you could bravely reply, "And if He did I would still trust Him." One old saint once used very daring and, perhaps, unjustifiable language when he said, "If ecstasy of love of God casts me into Hell, I will hold so fast by Him that He shall go there, too. I will not let Him go and Hell, itself, will be no Hell to me while He is there." Beloved, say in your soul—"Though the Lord should condemn me, I will not rebel, but confess that He is just. Though He should refuse to hear my prayers, yet He is an infinitely good and blessed God, and I will still praise Him." But, Beloved, it cannot be that God should slay or condemn a Believer, and you need not tolerate the supposition. Blessed be His name, He has not cast away the people whom He did foreknow! Neither has one soul that trusted in Him ever been forsaken!

The terrible supposition before us is inclusive of all possible ills. "Though He slay me." He means that if every form of evil up to actual death should come upon him, yet would he trust in God. Though he should lose all that he had in flock or field, in purse or portion, yet would he trust. In Job's case, away went the oxen and the asses, away went the sheep, away went the camels and away went all the servants. And each time, as the messenger came breathlessly running in, he said, "I, only, am left alone to tell you." At last the worst news of all came, for all his children were taken away at a stroke. All was gone, for his wife was as good as lost, too, since she went over to the enemy, and said, "Curse God and die."

Well says Job, "Though my troubles have left me bare of all but life. Though nothing remains to me but this dunghill and the broken potsherd with which I scrape my sores, yet will I trust in the Lord." Oh, it was bravely said! In this resolve, as we have seen, he includes not only all losses of property, but all bereavements of friends! And I should like you Christian people to look this in the face. Perhaps the Lord may suddenly take away from you the dearest object of your heart's affection—your husband or your wife—can you trust Him, then? The almost idolized children may be removed, one by one, and leave sad vacancies within your heart. O fond wife, the beloved of your soul may pass away in the prime of his manhood, the brother may be cut down as the green herb and the sister fade as a flower!

Parents, children, Brethren—any and all of these may be put far from you—and you may find yourselves as lone trees, whereas now you are surrounded by a kindred forest. You may be the last of the roses, left alone, scarcely blooming, but bowing your head amid the heavy showers of sorrow which drench you to the soul. Now, Believer, if you are in such a deplorable case as that, can you still say, "If the Lord should go even further than this, should His next arrows penetrate my own lacerated heart, even then, as I bleed to death, I will kiss His hand"? Job included in his supposition all kinds of pain. We can hardly imagine the bodily agony of Job when he was covered with boils from the soles of his feet unto his head.

None could approach him, the disease was so foul, neither could he endure to be touched. He says, "Though I have all these boils and even should they grow worse, so that the pains I now endure should become unendurable. And should I suffer the very anguish of death, itself, yet still would I put my trust in my God. Neither poverty, loneliness, nor fierce torment shall make me forsake the Lord, nor shall all put together cause me to doubt Him." What a victory of faith is this! Job, at that time, also suffered from dishonor, for those who once looked up to him with respect now despised him in their hearts. He says that those whose fathers he would have disdained to have set with the dogs of his flock, opened their mouths against him, and whereas, when he stood in the street, princes were silent in his presence to listen to his wisdom, now among the most base of mankind he had become a song and a byword.

As for his mistaken friends, he had grown so weary of them that he said, "O that you would altogether hold your peace and it would be your wisdom." Poor Job was sorely galled with the scorn poured on him at a time when he deserved both sympathy and honor, but yet his faith cries, "If I am still more despised and forgotten as a dead man out of mind, yet will I trust in You, my God." Connected with all this, the afflicted Patriarch must have felt much depression of spirit. Did he not say, "Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. For God makes my heart soft and the Almighty troubles me"?

Those of us who are subject to depression of spirit find much that is congenial in the Book of Job. His music is in tune with our own. How bitterly does he wail at times! What wondrous insight has he into the mystery of sorrow! Though his grief has never been thoroughly weighed, nor his calamities laid in the balances together, yet have his woes been considered by thousands of mourners! They have ministered a wealth of consolation to them. Job does not exclude his own despondencies from his resolves. No, he mainly intends them, for these are, in a special sense, a man's own personal slaying and he says, "Though He slay me"—though my heart should break with anguish, pierced through with despondency, yet will I put my trust in God.

I began by calling the supposition of our text a terrible one, and now I claim that I have shown it to be so, since it includes the coming upon us of all sorts of ills. Listen, yet again. This supposition goes to the extreme of possibility, if not beyond it, for it will be hard to find a case in which God has really slain any of His servants. The martyrs were slain for Him, but not by Him. To none of His children, save One, has the Lord been as Abraham was to Isaac when he unsheathed the knife to slay him. If it had been so, could we have been as the lamb beneath the sacrificial knife? The stones which slew Stephen and the sword which slew James were in the hands of cruel men, and not in the hands of God. But God, Himself, is here supposed to slay us.

Now, though He has not actually done so, we may enquire whether we could resign ourselves to Him, even if He should take life and all with His own hands. Could we lie on the altar and not struggle? Do we hate, even, our own life for love of Him? What do we say? Is our love stronger than death? God grant it may be found so! But this supposition goes further than matters ever will go. Why, then, does the Patriarch suppose such a case? I answer because only by such suppositions can he express his faith to the fullest. Remember that Psalm, "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed, and though the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea"? We are not expecting the earth to move nor the mountains to plunge into the ocean—but in order to express our confidence we declare that even such a quaking would not affect the foundation of our faith. God Himself meets His people in the same manner, by saying, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the Covenant of My peace be removed." Child of God, you may suppose what never will occur, if you like, and project your soul by that supposition into depths of woe and grief into which you will never actually come, and yet, through Divine Grace you will resolve, "If it came even to that, I would still trust in Him." Though the text supposes what will not actually occur, yet it is a just description of what often does occur as far as our conceptions go. Have you ever known what it is to be, in your own conceptions, slain by God? My heart has known it often. It is as death, itself, to feel all your religion melt away like the hoar frost of the morning when the sun has risen. All your joys in which you delighted fly away like birds when a man claps his hands.

Have you ever had to begin all over again, at the very alphabet of repentance and childlike faith—and find even that no easy work? Did you never know what it was to get your cup right full of what you thought was holy joy and sweet experience and then for the Lord to turn it, bottom upward, and let you see that it was a mixture of self-conceit and sentimentalism, with thick dregs at the bottom of pride and falsehood? Can you say with David, "I have seen an end of all perfection"? Have you ever been brought down from imaginary riches to bitter but honest poverty? Have you ever thought you were becoming so wonderfully sanctified that you could scarcely lay a split sheet of tissue paper between you and perfection—and then all of a sudden the Lord has laid

you naked and made you loathe the sight of your inborn corruptions? You have been as a cup which bubbled at the top and frothed over, and the Lord has blown off the froth and made you see the black draught of your inward vileness.

God has many ways of thus slaying, in His children, all that ought to die. Thus He kills the spiritual hypocrisy which is so common in us all. Our life seems, at times, to run all into puffballs and bloated fungi of selfglorying. We think that we are something when we are nothing! And then the Lord prunes us back to our real condition. Do you know what it is to be thus slain? Ah, my Brothers and Sisters, at times our life is a long experience of the power of death. Do you know what it is to say, "Is this prayer? Why, while I prayed, my thoughts were perplexed, distracted and wandering. Is this faith? Why, even on the most vital points my soul dares scarcely speak with confidence! Is this love?—love to Christ, which even while I exercise it accuses me on account of its lukewarmness and lack of self-denying ardor! Can this be spiritual life? Life at which I blush and over which I mourn! Life which scarcely reaches so far as feeling and when it does, soon subsides into insensibility!"

Beloved Brethren, I speak from experience! All this is a kind of slaying by which the Lord hides pride from men and keeps them from the snares of vain confidence. Has He not written, "I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal"? In these times of wounding and killing, which are very common to the experience of some of the children of God, the only thing we can do is still to trust—"Though He slay me, I will trust in Him." Trust Him though He sifts out nine-tenths of your hopes, burns up all your experiences, grinds your evidences to powder, crushes all your realized sanctities and sweeps away all your rests and refuges! Then, indeed, is the best time of all to exercise true faith!

Once more, the grim supposition of the text, if ever it were realized by anybody, was realized by our Lord Jesus. Our great covenant Head knows to the full what His members suffer. God did slay Him and, glory be to His blessed name, He trusted God while He was being slain. "It pleased the Father to bruise Him. He has put Him to grief." Yet from the lips of our dear Lord we hear no expressions of unbelief. Read the 22nd Psalm, where He says, "Our fathers trusted in You, they trusted in You and You did deliver them, but I am a worm, and no man." Hear how He pleads with God and specially listen to His dying words, where, though He says, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" yet a few minutes later He cries, "Into Your hands I commit My spirit."

What? Into the hands of a God who had forsaken Him and smitten Him? Did He commit Himself into those hands? Yes, into those very hands! And herein we must follow in His steps. Though the Lord cuts, hews, hacks, tears and grinds us to powder, yet out of the dust, the tears and the blood of the conflict we must look up to Him and say, "I still trust You." Here is the patience of the saints! Here is the glory of faith! Blessed is the man who thus becomes more than a conqueror. I say it calmly, I would sooner be able to do as Job did, than to be one of yonder seraphim who have never suffered and, consequently, have never clung to a slaying God! I count it the grandest possibility of a created being that it is able to completely yield itself up into the Creator's hands and, unwaveringly believing in the Creator's love! O, royal word of a right royal soul, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

II. Secondly, we have before us A NOBLE RESOLUTION—"Yet will I trust in Him." Job meant that he was confident that the Lord was just. And though he did not feel that the suffering he was then enduring was sent upon him for his sins, yet he never doubted the righteousness of God in so

afflicting him. His friends said, "You see, Job, you suffer more than anybody else. Therefore you must have been a hypocrite, for God will not lay upon any man more than is just." "No," said Job, "I have been upright before the Lord. And yet, on the other hand, I do not accuse the Lord of injustice, I am sure He does what is right. And I trust Him as much as ever."

There were two things to which Job stuck very firmly—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him, but I will maintain my own ways before Him"— that is, I will not admit that I have been a hypocrite, for I have been sincerely obedient to Him. Nor will I be driven to the other conclusion, that God is unjust in afflicting me. Job did not understand the Lord's reasons, but he continued to confide in His goodness. He set no terms or limits to the Lord's actions, but left all to His absolute will and was sure that whatever He might do, it must be right. Should death prevent all apparent possibility of making up to him all his losses and woes, his faith leaped over the sepulcher and saw Justice and Mercy alive in the realms beyond, making all things right in the end. O, it was grand, thus, to champion almighty goodness in the teeth of Death, itself! Now, dear Brethren, you and I, if we are resting upon God, may say, "Whatever happens, though I may not be able to understand God's dispensations to me any more than Job understood God's dispensations towards him, yet I am quite sure of this—that He will help me in my trouble and I will, therefore, cast myself upon Him—believing that as my days my strength shall be. Or if He does not aid me in my trouble with manifest help, I will still trust that He will bring me out of it, that if He seems to forsake me for a while, yet it shall be said of me as of God, "a troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last." If I should neither receive present help nor immediate deliverance, yet I am persuaded that my good is designed by my long trial and that God is making the worst things work out my everlasting benefit and His own Glory—therefore I will subunit to His will and expect, in the end, to see the lovingkindness of the Lord.

Yes, and if I should have neither present help nor deliverance, nor see any immediate good come of my affliction, yet will I repose myself upon God, for in some mysterious way or other I shall yet know that His Providence was right and good, for He cannot err! His dealings must be wise, He cannot be unkind! His actions must be tender. Though the sharp edge of death, itself, invades me, I will hold to this belief, that You, O Lord, do all things right. If down to the sepulcher my steps must go and through the gloomy valley's darkest shade my pilgrimage must wind, yet will I fear no evil, for Your rod and staff shall be my confidence! And I will be sure that He who bids me die will bid me live again—up from the grave my body shall yet rise—and in my flesh I see shall God. As for my spirit, though it pass through the death shade, it shall come forth into a brighter light and in the eternity of Glory it shall receive abundant recompense for the sorrows of the present time. This is the faith for us to hold at all times—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Why, do you think, Job was able to speak so positively about his trusting God? Was it not because he knew God? "They that know Your name will put their trust in You." If you would believe God, you must know Him! Those who are strangers to Him cannot trust Him. O, Beloved, only think what God is! Sometimes, when I am contemplating His Being and Character, I feel as if I could leap for joy! And when I touch upon the theme in the pulpit I feel as if I could talk on forever in His praise and use the grandest, sweetest, richest words in human language to tell what a blessed God my God is. What? The Lord do wrong to any of us? Impossible! The Lord be unkind to us? The supposition cannot be endured for a single moment! After once knowing Him, we feel that all the goodness and kindness of fathers, mothers, Brethren, children, husbands, wives—all put

together—is only like one single drop of sweetness compared with that ocean full of honey which is to be found in His infinite love!

Besides, we have not only His attributes to trust, but His past actions to us. Did my Lord forgive me all my sin? And after that will He ever be unkind to me? Did He lay down His life for me upon the accursed tree and can I dream that He will desert me? Have I looked into the wounds of my dying Savior and shall I ever murmur if He should multiply pains and sufferings and losses and crosses to me? God forbid! Such love as His forbids all fear! Did you ever lean on the Bridegroom's arm? Have you ever sung like the bride in the canticle, "His left hand is under my head, and His right arm does embrace me"? Did He ever stay you with dragons and comfort you with apples while your soul was sick with too much delight? And after all that, will you indulge harsh thoughts of Him? O, no! Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away, we cannot think harshly of Him who has dealt so kindly with us!

His ways must be right! Such wondrous acts of love as His have proved to us beyond all question that He is Love, essential Love and cannot, therefore, do us an ill turn. Beside this, we know the relationship in which He stands to us. It has been said that you cannot trust an enemy and it has been equally well added you cannot trust a reconciled enemy— suspicion lingers long! But our God is no reconciled enemy, though He is sometimes represented as if He were so. He has loved us with an everlasting love. His is no friendship of yesterday, no passion which began to burn a month or two ago. Long before the hills lifted up their heads, He loved us. The bands of His Fatherhood are upon us and we can well commit ourselves into His hands.

Are any of us in great trouble, this morning? Then let us trust in the Lord, now, for what else can we do? Suppose we give up trusting in Him— to whom or where should we go? If this anchor drags, what other holdfast can there be? Let us continue to trust our Lord, for He deserves it! He has never done anything that could justify our doubting Him. Has He ever been false to us? Ah, Judas, you sold your Master, but your Master never sold you! Ah, unbelieving Heart, you have wandered from Jesus, but He never wandered from you! If you do not doubt Him till you have cause for doubting Him, it will not be soon!

Let us trust our God, for this is the sweetest comfort a man can have. This side of Heaven nothing can yield the afflicted man such support under trial as when he can fall back upon the strong love of God and believe that the wisdom of God is overruling all. Nothing tends to sanctify our trials and produce good results from them, as faith in God. This is the Samson which finds honey in the lion. For a thousand reasons I would say, "Trust in the Lord at all times: you people, pour out your hearts before Him. God is a refuge for us." Say, each one of you, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!"

III. And, now, the last point is this—A SECRET APPROPRIATENESS about it all. There is a something about our Lord's slaying us which should help us to trust Him. I would sooner the Lord should slay me with troubles and trials than let me alone in my sin. What says the Scriptures? "If you are without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons, for what son is he whom the father chastens not?" I do not so much pity the children of God who have a cross to carry—I reserve my fears for those worldlings who are not in trouble as other men, neither plagued like other men. It would be very foolish for the afflicted one to say, "I am no child of God because He smites me"—there would be more reason in the sinner's saying, "I am no child of

God, for I have my portion in this life." Surely there is something in you which God loves, or else He would not be killing that which He hates. If He hates the sin in you, it is a good sign, for where do we hate sin most? Why, in those we love most! If you see a fault in a stranger, you wink your eye and say but little. But in your own dear child you are deeply grieved to observe it. Where there is true love there is a measure of jealousy and the more burning the love, the more fierce the jealousy, especially on the part of Jesus Christ. Where He sees sin in those who are very dear to Him, His fury burns not against them, but against their sin—and He will not stop until He has slain it!

His rebukes are severe, not because of lack of love, but because He loves so much. An ungodly man met me some years ago, when I was suffering, and said to me in a jeering way, "Ah, whom the Lord loves, He chastens, I see." I said, "Yes, it is His custom." "Ah," he said, "so long as I am without the chastisement I am very content to be without the love." Oh, it brought the red into my cheeks and the tears into my eyes, and I cried, "I would not change places with you for 10,000 worlds! If my God were to afflict me from head to foot I would bear it joyfully sooner than live a moment without His love." When the Lord flogs us, we love Him, and we would not leave Him though the devil should bribe us with all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. Our Father puts us, sometimes, into the black hole, and we are there crying bitterly under a sense of His wrath, but we love Him still, by His Grace. And if anybody were to find fault with Him, we would be up at once and say, "He is a good God and blessed be His name."

Note, again, that the slaying of the creature is the very condition in which Faith was born and in which she delights to display her power. We are saved by passing from death unto life. As Noah was like a dead man, out of mind, shut up in the ark and, by this burial, passed into the new world. And as in the ordinance of Baptism we are in like figure buried with Christ that we may rise with Him. So Faith took her birth in the death of the creature at the time when the new life was breathed into us. When God is slaying all that is capable of death and our new immortal life, alone, survives, Faith feels as if her birthday had come over again and brought with it her native air.

Notice again, it is at times when God is slaying us that our faith is being tested whether it is true or not. When all the winds are fair, how can you tell whether your boat would bear a storm? How much faith some of us have at times! Have you ever felt as if you could fight seven devils with one hand? There was not a devil within seven miles when you were so bold— but when the smallest fiend has drawn near—your courage has oozed out! We are like an old man whom I once knew, who said to me, "Here am I, 80 years old, and through the winter I often think I wish I had a bit of mowing or reaping to do, for I feel quite young again. But as soon as harvest comes on, and I get down my old sickle, I have not done much before I feel the old man is a very old man and had better leave that work alone."

Slaying times let us know whether our strength is real strength and whether our confidence is true confidence! And this is good, for it would be a great pity for us to be stocked with heaps of vain faith, fictitious Grace and ready-made holiness. Some of my friends talk as if they had boldness enough for a dozen people, but I am afraid if they were tried, as some of us are, they would find they had not half enough for one! This is the benefit of trial—it lets us see what is gold and what is tinsel—what is fact and what is fiction. Alas, how much religious fiction is abroad at this time! Note further, that slaying times are the most favorable for trusting God. I have been putting a little riddle

to myself. Here it is. Is it easier to trust God when you have nothing, or when you have all things?

Is it easier to say, "Though He slay me, I will trust in Him," or to say, "Though He make me alive, I will trust in Him"? Will you think it over? Shall I help you? Here is a man without a farthing in the world. His cupboard is bare, his flocks are cut off from the field and his herds from the stall. Is it hard for that man to trust in God? If you say so I will not dispute with you. But here is another man who has a bank full of gold. His meadows are covered with flocks and herds, his barns are ready to burst with corn and his trade prospers on all hands. Now, Sirs, is it easy for that man to trust God? Do you say, "Yes"? I say, "No."

I say that he has a very hard task, indeed, to live by faith, and the probabilities are that when he says, "I trust God," he is trusting his barn or his bank. All things considered, it occurs to me that it is easier to trust God in adversity than in prosperity, because whatever trust there is in adversity is real trust. But a good deal of the faith we have in prosperity is a kind of trust which you will have to take upon trust—and whether it is faith or not is a matter of serious question. Sirs, where is the room for faith when you can see, already, all that you need? A full barn has no room for faith if she is any bigger than a mouse. But in an empty barn faith has scope and liberty. When the brook Cherith is dried up, when the poor widow has nothing left but a handful of meal and a little oil, then there is room for the Prophet to exercise faith!

O, Brothers and Sisters, it is well to go into action with clear decks. In the name of God, with double-barreled guns full of strong faith you can let the world and the flesh and the devil know what faith is! But while your deck is all hampered with comforts and visible resources, faith can scarcely stir a hand or move a gun. "Though He slay me"—well, that means everything is gone—only breath enough left for me just to exist. And now, my Lord, You are All in All to me. Now can I say, "Whom have I in Heaven but You? There is none upon the earth that I desire but You."

Once more, these slaying times are very desirable occasions, because they allow the child of God to show that he is not a mercenary professor, held to Christ by a cupboard love. If God were always to prosper us the world would say, "These Christians follow their God as stray dogs follow those who give them bones, but they have no sincere love." When the Lord falls a whipping us and we love Him all the more, then they cannot say but what we are faithful! Nor can they deny the work of Grace in our souls. Oh, you that are Christians as long as it is pleasant to be Christians! You who make your love to Christ depend upon your feeling happy—what despicable beings you are!

Our Lord wants not such base disciples, but such as can say, "If I lose all I have, still I love You, O my Savior. Your sweet love is so precious that if death were threatened me I would still choose You to be my All in All." Love desires opportunities for proving her disinterestedness and such is the opportunity of the text. There are seeking souls here, this morning, and I daresay they have said, "Mr. Spurgeon has been describing great faith—we shall never get to that." I have been thinking, dear Souls, what kind of a man is most like a little child. Is it not a very old man? What kind of faith is most like new-born faith? Why, the ripest and most advanced faith! My text is very old faith—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

But the very first faith I had in Christ—I remember it well—was just like it! I thought He would destroy me. I could not see how He could do otherwise and be a just God. I thought He must strike

me down if I went to Him. He seemed to stand with a drawn sword in His hand. But I felt, "Well, if He does slay me, I had better die by His hand than remain His enemy." And I went to Him. I was like the boy who ran away from his homes and dared not return because he feared his father would flog him. He was out all night, shivering, cold and wet. He had nothing to eat all day. By the time he got to the next evening, such was his dread of being alone all through another night, that he said to himself, "I would sooner feel my father's rod than lie here." And so he went home and was received with tenderness!

So with me. I thought if I went to the Lord, I should have to smart for it, but I concluded I would rather smart than be as I was. And so I went to Him and found I was safe. O poor Souls, come to Jesus Christ in that fashion! Say—

"I can but perish if I go, I am resolved to try, For, if I stay away, I know I must forever die. But if I die with mercy sought, When I the king have tried; That were to die, delightful thought, As sinner never died."

Say, "If I go to Hell, I will trust Christ. If I am cast away forever, I will trust Christ—and that cannot be, for, "he that believes in Him is not condemned." God grant you true faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms 73:1-28.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—73 (PART 2), 689, 46 (VERS. 3).

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Job 13,15 #3265 - Faith Tried and Triumphing

FAITH TRIED AND TRIUMPHING

NO. 3265

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, AUGUST 31, 1911.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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"Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him."

Job 13:15.

THERE are some speeches which could not be made by ordinary men. As soon as you hear them, you feel that there is a ring about them which is by no means common. Certain expressions which have been heard and remembered could have been uttered only by great warriors, or by men who have navigated the vast ocean. Certain other still nobler expressions, because spiritual ones, could have been uttered only by those who have had to fight with spiritual foes, or have done business on the great waters of soul trouble. When you hear the expression, "If there are as many devils at Worms as there are tiles on the housetops, I will go there in God's name," you are quite certain the speaker is Martin Luther. No other than he could have said it! And just as certainly, I think, I would have felt if I had read tonight's text for the first time, that it was Job who said it and nobody else.

Job was a master sufferer. No man went deeper into grief than he—his children all dead, his wealth all swept away, his whole body covered with sore boils and blisters and the friends who pretended to comfort him, only accusing him of being a hypocrite, while his own wife bids him, "curse God, and die." He was brought lower than any and, therefore, being a man of faith, having overcome and triumphed by faith, it was like he to utter such a noble speech as that which our text brings before us. "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him," is not the utterance of any ordinary commonplace Believer! It is a sort of word which, we are quite sure, could only come from a triumphant Job—triumphant by victorious faith! However, I trust there are some here who could use this expression, now that another has fitted it for their lips, and I hope that all of us who have any faith at all, may have that faith so increased that yet, without boasting, we may still be able to say, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him."

I. In speaking upon this text I would note, first, THAT FAITH IS THE HABITUAL GRACE OF THE CHRISTIAN. To trust in God is his usual mode of life. He does not sometimes trust and sometimes cease to trust, but, "the just shall live by faith." Faith is not a Grace of luxury but a Grace of necessity. We must have it and if we have it not, we would not be the people of God at all! The common habit of the Christian, then, is a habit of trusting. The Christian's walk is faith and his life

is faith! Faith is to the Christian all the spiritual senses, not one, but all. The natural man has his eyes, but by faith we see Him who is invisible! The natural man has his hands and his feelings. We live not by feeling, but our faith is the hand by which we take fast hold upon eternal realities! The natural man has his ears, and they are delighted with sweet sounds, or through them the language of friendship enters his heart. Our faith is the ear through which we hear the voice of God and, sometimes, even catch stray notes from the harps of the angels! The natural man has the nostrils with which he becomes aware of sweet perfumes—and to our faith the name of Jesus is as choicest ointment poured forth! If we receive Christ as our heart's Lord, all the inlets by which we receive Him and His Grace are made of the agate of faith. Gates of carbuncle, windows of agate are true faith. The Light of God and the Love of God come into our consciousness by our faith.

Faith, too, is with the Christian his first and his last. Faith looking to Christ is the very beginning of spiritual life! We began to live at the foot of the Cross when we looked up and saw the flowing of those founts of forgiveness—the five wounds of Christ! And as faith was the first, so it will be the last. We expect to die looking for our Lord's appearing and still resting upon His finished work. And all between the alpha and the omega—all the other letters—we read them all by faith! There is no period of our life in which it is safe for us to live by feeling, not even when our enjoyments run highest. On the mountain where Christ is transfigured and where, in the midst of the Glory we shall fall asleep in amazement, we cannot live by sense! Even there we can only enjoy the Glory as faith shall continue to be in exercise. We must all the way through, from the first to the last, look out of ourselves and look above to the things which are seen, to grasp the things which are not seen, to be touched with the eternal hand and realize that which does not seem real to sense. This is the life of the Christian from the first to the last!

And I would add, as it is his first and last, so faith is the Christian's highest and his lowest. If we ever get upon the mountain summit and bask our foreheads in the sunlight of fellowship with God, we stand there only by faith! It is because our faith is strong and in active exercise that we realize the things not seen as yet, and behold the God whom mortal eyes cannot gaze upon! Our very noblest, happiest and most heavenly times are those which are the results of faith. And so in our lowest. We can only live there by faith. Have you never lain shattered and broken, crushed and destroyed, expecting something yet more terrible? And have you not felt that now in your faintness you could fall back into the Savior's arms? That now in your brokenness you could drop into His hands? That now in your abject nothingness He must be All-in-All to you, or else there will be an utter end to you? Oh, the faith that is as wings to us when we fly, becomes a lifebuoy to us when we sink! The faith which bears us up to the gates of Heaven, also lifts us up from the very gates of Hell! 'Tis our first and our last! 'Tis our highest and our lowest! It is all the senses of our spiritual nature. We must have it and always have it. We must trust in the Lord!

The matters about which the true Christian is to trust are very many, but they are chiefly these.

We trust for the pardon of our sins to our God in Christ Jesus. The only hope that any Christian has for the forgiveness of his iniquity lies in the Sacrifice presented on Calvary by the Lamb of God whom God has given for the sins of the world. If any shall ask us whether we trust that our sins are forgiven us because of our repentance, or because of a long life of active Christian service, we shall reply that we are thankful if God has given us these things, but our sole reliance is in our dear Lord and Master who was once fastened to the Cross, but now sits in power in the highest

heavens! Our trust for the pardon of sin in every degree and every respect lies in Christ, the Son of God—and there only! In this matter we can use the language of Job and say, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him," for the fact is, the more fully we are slain, the more truly we trust! When we see ourselves to be utterly dead, slain by the two edged sword of the Lord, and all hope of our own self-salvation to be a corpse—then it is more easy than ever to come and cast ourselves upon the Christ of God and rest there for all our salvation from the guilt of sin!

But in God also we trust for the purification of our spirits from all the indwelling power of sin. Some Christians do not appear to make this a matter of faith and, therefore, they do not succeed therein. You can no more conquer sin in yourself—really conquer it by your own strength— than you can remove the guilt of it by your own merits. The same Christ who is made unto us "justification" and "redemption," is also made unto us "sanctification," and we must never forget that while we wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb as to pardon, we also overcome our sins through the blood of the Lamb! The same Savior who takes away the guilt, takes away the power and the defiling power of sin. Well has Toplady put it—

"Let the water and the blood From Your riven side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure— Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

Now, the true Christian can say that he trusts in God for his effectual purification and his final perfection. He does not hope to drive out one of these Canaanites by his own arm. He does not think that he shall slay one of his corruptions in his own strength. But his eyes are unto the hills from where comes his help and he believes that the Eternal Spirit will, like refining fire, go through and through his soul till everything in him shall be burnt up except that which is of God—that which will endure the fire and be well-pleasing in Jehovah's sight!

The matters upon which we rely upon God, then, are as far as I have yet gone, the finished work of Jesus Christ and the power that there is in Christ and in the Blessed Spirit to sanctify us—spirit, soul and body.

Volume 57 3But our trust is in God in another sense, namely, first—we trust Him believing that He always must be just. It does not occur to us now that God could be unjust. In the days of our flesh we used to think, if we suffered some extreme pain, or if we passed suddenly from wealth to poverty, that God had dealt very harshly with us, but now we feel that His strokes are fewer than our crimes and lighter than our guilt. And it does not occur to us in any way to impeach the Justice of God, let Him do what He will. We feel that if He not only should slay us, but if He should cast us into Hell forever—remembering what we are in ourselves and standing on our own footing, we could not complain against Him. This is our firm confidence, that whatever our position is, God has always dealt justly with us, that He will never deal unjustly with us and we shall never have to say of any one transaction that we have with Him, "This is not according to the rule of right."

But we go a great deal further. Having believed in Christ Jesus, and having become His children, we trust, believing that God will never do anything to us but that which is full of love. We are assured that His eternal love does not only come forth, now and then, that it does not only permeate and infuse itself into a few of His actions—but that all His conduct towards His children are actuated by the motive power of love. He is always Love towards those who put their trust in Him. We are sure that He never gives us a pain more than is necessary and that He never lets us

suffer a loss more than is necessary. "Though for a season, if necessary, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations," we know and are convinced that there is a necessity for it. We trust His Justice and we trust His Goodness.

And, more, we trust His Wisdom mingled with all this. He has said that "all things work together for good to them that love God," and we believe it. We have had some bitters in our cup, but we still believe it. We may yet have a great many more, but we are assured that through the help of God's Spirit we shall still believe this—that come what may, expected or unexpected, in the ways of grief and sorrow, still that ultimate good shall come out of the whole! God's purpose of love shall not be thwarted, but rather shall be answered by every circumstance of our history. Therefore do we trust in God that He is just and cannot do us an unrighteous action! That He is loving and cannot do a cruel thing to us! That He is wise and loving and just—and will make all things work together for good!

In fine, we trust Him as a child trusts its parent, that is, for everything. There are many things about Him that we cannot understand—as there were about our parents in our childhood—but we trust Him and know that there is none like He. "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun." We trust Him in all that He does. We cannot understand Him, for His way is in the sea and His footsteps are not known. But we are sure that they are footsteps of holiness and they are ways of righteousness. We trust Him for all the past and all the present, yes, and for all the future, too—that future which sometimes looms before us in the mist—and half alarms us till we are ready to shrink back from it. We gather up the skirts of our robe, again, and though we fear as we enter into the cloud, yet are we comforted with the full conviction that He who has done so well in the past, will be with us even to life's close.

Thus have I tried to show you that the whole tenor of the Christian's life is trust—that, as in the text, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him."

II. Now the second point shall be that those of us who have learned to trust in God expect that OUR FAITH SHALL BE TRIED. The text holds the plain supposition that it shall be extremely tried. He does not say, "Though I die"—that would be a great trial. Death is not a pleasant thing. It is no child's play even to the strongest Believer. Job does not say, "Though I die," but, "Though He slays me." That is more. He does not say, "Though He permit me to be slain," but, "Though He slays me— though He should seem to be so much my enemy as to turn round and kill me! Though I may not believe His action, I will believe Him—I will believe His Infallible Word. "Even though He slays me." It is not, "Though He makes me hunger." Or, "Though He puts me in prison, though He allows me to be mocked, though He allows me to be banned from all my friends and to live a solitary and wretched life." No, it is more than that— "Though He slays me." And mark, it is not, "Though He slays my children. Though He takes away my wife. Though He removes all my dear kindred." It is more than that. "Though He slays me. Though it comes right home to myself."

Ah, Job knew what He meant, for all other things had been done except the slaying of him! His children were dead and the house in which they had met was a ruin. All he had was gone—his health had gone and he could not rest by reason of the disease which was all over him—most painful and most acute. He had nothing left on earth that was worth having. He was even friendless and he was worse than wifeless, for his wife had turned against him. Yet he says there is but one thing more that can be done—and God has kept Satan back from that. He said, "Only

you shall not take his life." But if the Lord chose to let loose the dog without even the link of a chain upon him—though He allows me now to lose my life itself—

"Though He slays me, I will trust, Praise Him even from the dust— Prove, and sing it as I prove, His eternal gracious love."

Now, the text evidently implies that faith will be tried and tried severely. Let us think a moment about this. Has it not been always the case that if any man has had a faith beyond his fellow men, it has met with trial? If you go a step beyond the ordinary rank and file, you will be shot at for that very reason! Columbus believes that there is another part of the world undiscovered—what ridicule is heaped upon him! Galileo says the world moves—he must be put into the Inquisition—the poor old man must be forced to deny what he was quite sure was the truth. It was dangerous in those days to know too much and to believe a little more

Volume 57 5than other people. And in spiritual things it is just the same. The world is against the true faith. The faith of God's elect is not a flower that men delight to admire and praise—it is a thing which, wherever they see it, they count as a speckled bird and they are sure to be against it! If you have faith in God, remember that this is not the world of faith, but the world of unbelief—and the darkness that is in the world will try to quench your Light!

But remember that true faith scorns trial and outlives it. It is not worth having if it does not. If I believe in the friendship of my friend and yet it cannot bear a little trial, it is not real friendship. Perhaps in your youth, as with most of us, there was someone exceedingly dear to you. In your boyish or girlish days you would walk with some companion and you swore inseparable friendship. Ah, how many of those friendships did you make—and they were broken? Since then, perhaps, we have thought that someone with whom we took sweet counsel could never, by any possibility, betray us—but there came a test of our friendship. We were not worth as much as we once were, or we were not as much esteemed as we used to be, or there happened to be a misunderstanding—and in a little tiff, the friendship was marred. But that faith which a man has in his fellow men that is worth having will not yield so easily. No, says the man, "If you say anything to me against my friend, I do not believe you! I think there is some other way of reading it. If you speak the truth, you do not know all about it—there is something else that would change the complexion of it. And even if you were to convict him of a fault, I would still love him, for there are many virtues in him and if he did this thing, he must have made a mistake. I will defend him."

Now, transfer this from common life to faith in God. If a man says, "I trust in God," and it is all smooth sailing, and his children are about him and he has plenty upon the table, his body in full health and he has all that heart could wish—well, we will see what sort of faith that is! It is not yet proven—will the man believe his God when God begins to take away all he loves? Will he believe Him when the wife pines away with a long and painful sickness? Will he believe Him when child after child is taken to the tomb? Will he believe Him when he sees his property taken away before his eyes? Will he believe his God when he, himself, can scarcely move hand or foot upon the bed off sickness? Will he still be able to bless the name of the Lord when he is stripped of everything? If he can, then this is faith worth having! But if he cannot, then it is not the faith that is worthy of God and it is well it does give way, for then it may drive the man to seek the true faith which would bear these tests!

You see, then Brothers and Sisters, if we have faith, we must expect to have it tried by reason of faith being an unusual thing in the world and because if it would not bear trial it would not be worth having! History tells us that the best servants of God have had their trials—and why should we expect to escape? We turn over the historical pages of this Book which are so full of instruction to us and we find that all the Lord's children have had to do battle for the preservation of their faith. There is no smooth road to Heaven! Steam rollers can be used for the earth, for our common roads, but you shall find flint stones on the road to Glory! They have never been rolled smooth and they never will be—

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

Faith must and shall be tried as surely as it is the faith of God's people! And if the best of saints have been obliged to say that through much tribulation they have inherited the Kingdom, we must not expect that God will change His rule in His treatment of us. I would not, however, encourage one thing which I have sometimes noticed, namely, the fear which comes into some Christians that they are not God's people because they have not been much tried. All the saints meet with trial. I know a dear friend who is suffering just now, who says that he was occasionally afflicted with a fear that he could not be a child of God because he was so long without a sickness or without a trial. Ah, you will have that case met quite soon enough! Do not run after trouble—remember troubles of our own seeking would not be genuine strokes of the rod. You may leave that in God's hands. Do not fret yourself there. Only when the trials do come to you, let this console you, that—

"Bastards may escape the rod, Plunged in sensual vain delight! But the true-born child of God Must not—would not, if he might!"

In our peace of soul, if God has given it to us by lot and by inheritance, some thorns and thistles must and will spring up in this present world.

Moreover, dear Brothers and Sisters, the trial is greatly for our good and greatly for God's Glory. Our faith could never grow, neither could we be sure of it, if it had not been tested. They do not send steam vessels out to sea at once. Often you see on the Clyde, vessels being tried—tried on the Gairloch—before they go out to sea. And God tries us here, before we take the great ocean of judgment—before we come to the time of death. We have our trials here and we grow by our trials. Among the best mercies we have ever received are those mercies that have come to us dressed in the somber garb of mourning which have carried treasures in both their hands. God be thanked for the fire! God be thanked for the refiner's furnace and the crucible! They have been among the best things we have inherited from His mercy!

Thus I have brought out two ideas of the text. The Christian lives by faith and he expects that faith to be tried.

III. But now the next point is the main point of the text—that A TRUE FAITH, PUT ON TRIAL, WILL CERTAINLY BEAR IT. "Though He slays me." It is an extreme expression. "Though He does His worst. Though He gives the last and uttermost stroke that can be taken, yet will I believe Him. Though He slays me."

Faith will be justified to the uttermost. It is very easy to believe the creature too much. It is a common fault. It is impossible to trust the Creator too much! To trust Him too little is one of the

most usual of sins.

Volume 57 7Faith in the creature is hardly ever warranted. Faith in the Creator can be warranted, push it as far as ever you like. You know that there is a point where faith in the creature must stop. Our dearest friends can go with us only to the Jordan's brink and then they can help us no longer. But though we go through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, God is with us and we need fear no evil. Though it actually comes to the slaying and to the death, still we may trust in Him—for He cannot—He will not fail us!

Why is it that the Believer is warranted in trusting in God to the very last extremity? The answer is because He is always the same God. If He is worth trusting one day, He is worth trusting another. He cannot change. His Character is such that if it is infinitely worthy of my confidence today, it will be just the same in the rough weather that may come tomorrow! Could He change, then my faith in Him ought to change—but if He is always the same true, faithful, loving and tender God, ruling all things by His power—there can be no reason why my faith should make a change. I ought to trust Him, who at all times is the same!

I ought to trust Him, also, to the last, because outward Providences prove nothing to us about God. We cannot read outward events correctly—they are written in hieroglyphics. The book of God is readable—it is written in human language! But the works of God are often unreadable—

"Blind unbelief is sure to err, And scan His work in vain. God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain."

We begin spelling God's works and making mischief out of them because we do not know the letters or understand the alphabet, and cannot readily know what He means. If the Lord says He loves us, do we believe it though He smites us? Do we believe that—

"Behind a frowning Providence He hides a smiling face?"

Be wise, then, and believe in the God you cannot see—not in the outward Providence which you can see—for if you could see that outward Providence aright as God sees it, you would see it to be as full of love as assuredly God's heart is to you if you are a Believer in Him! Therefore, since the outward is no sign to us, let us, when it gathers all the black it can, still believe in Him. When it shall seem most severe and deep calls unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts, let us still hope in Him, for He is the health of our countenance and our God!

Moreover, Brothers and Sisters, there is another cause why we should always trust in Him. To whom else can we go? We are shut up to this. When it comes to slaying, to cutting, to striking and to killing work, what can the soul do but fall into the Creator's arms? When it comes to dying, what words shall fit these lips so well as these—"Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." The course of the Christian's life is such that he feels it more necessary to trust every day he lives. He does not get off the line of faith—he gets more into the middle of it as he feels his weakness more. And at the last, when his weakness will be more apparent, he will need faith more than ever—and he will have it! He shall be able to say, "My flesh and my heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Ah, I ask again—To whom should we go in our trouble but unto God? All other sources are then dried up! The world mocks us, it seems to be a howling wilderness. 'Tis only from Heaven the manna can come—only from the Rock, Christ Jesus, the

living water can gush forth!

And there is one other word I will say before I leave this point—we may depend upon it, God will always justify our faith if we do trust Him. There was never one who in the long run had to say, "I was a fool to trust in God." Many have said to us, in time of trouble, "He trusted in God that He would deliver him, let Him deliver him," and they have hissed between their teeth that hideous taunt, "Where is their God now?" But God has not left the righteous to be ashamed and to be offended forever! They have had, perhaps, a blush on the cheek for a moment, for the flesh is weak, but they have not been confounded for long. Faith has come to the rescue and God has fulfilled their faith! Many a man has trusted in himself and been deceived. Many have trusted in their wealth and been disappointed. Thousands have relied on friends and have been betrayed. But blessed is the man, O Lord of Hosts, who stays Himself on You! You can go beyond your friend's line and measure—you may readily expect too much of him. You can try the temper of the dearest one you have on earth and at last feel that you have tried it too much. But you can never go beyond the line of God! Your sin will rather be in limiting the Holy One of Israel! You will never open your mouth too wide for Him! You will never ask too much at His hands! You will never expect too much! You will never believe too much! Has He not, Himself, said, "I am the Lord your God which brought you out of the land of Egypt, open your mouth wide and I will fill it"? The wider you open it, the better! The larger your expectations, the better, for according to your faith so shall it be done unto you!

Now, in closing I would observe that if we say the text, it will take a good deal of saying and, if it is true, it will need the power of God, Himself, to make it true. You can stand up tonight and say, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him." But how would it be if He took you at your word? Did you ever question yourself thus, Christian Brothers and Sisters? You have said, "Well, I hope I have a faith that will bear me safely into the Presence of God." Did you ever put yourself in the posture of a dying man and think whether you could look Death in the face? You have said, "I hope when I am weighed in the balances I shall not be found wanting." Did you ever get in the scales and try? Have you made a self-examination, an earnest praying, testing, trying of yourself? They do not send out a gun from the foundry without putting it into the proofhouse to see whether it will bear the discharge of the powder. Have you ever put yourself into the proof-house?

Volume 57 9But beware, above all things, of religious boasting! Remember that God does not care for our words—it is the heart, it is the reality and truth of what we say—not the verbiage—that commends us to Him. Many a man says very boldly, "Though God should slays me, I will trust Him," and yet when God denies him a week's work, he does not trust Him! If he had a sick child, his faith would begin to waver. A little puff of wind will alter some people's faith, for heaviest the heart is in the heavy air! O for a faith that can stand the test! Seek such faith, look to the Strong for strength in this matter and cry loudly unto Him who is the Author and the Finisher of faith, that He would strengthen it in you. Say, "Lord, I believe; help You my unbelief and bring me to this—that I can look anything in the face." And then say, "Let all the floods of earth, and all the out-flowing from Hell, and even the drenching trials that come from Heaven, itself, come upon me, yet will I stay myself on the Lord, for He will not fail me, neither will He leave me! His mercy cannot depart from His chosen. He will keep to the end those who have rested in Him.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Psalms 26:1-12.

No doubt this Psalm was written by David when his cruel persecutor, Saul, the more effectually to stab at him, spread false reports concerning his character. When the wicked can use no other weapons, they always have their quivers full of slanderous reports. Let us learn, here, that the best of men must expect to be misrepresented and to have the worst of crimes laid to their charge. Let us learn, also, from the example of David, to carry our case to the highest court at once, not to meddle with the lower courts of earth, but to go at once to the Court of King's Bench in Heaven and there plead our cause before the Eternal Throne.

Verse 1. Judge me, O LORD—As if he turned away from all other judges, bribed and false as they had proved themselves to be in his case, and put himself on trial before God. "Judge me, O Lord—

1. For I have walked in my integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide. He pleads two things. First the outward life and second the inward faith, which as it is the main-spring and source of the outer life of integrity, is also the more important of the two. Mark that as the case is between himself and his accusers, he pleads his life, for though we are justified before God by faith and not by works, yet before men we must be justified by our works, rather than by our faith. It is in vain for me to plead my faith when I am slandered. The only answer that can effectually shut the mouth of the adversary is to point to a blameless life. Hence in this case he not only brings his faith before his God, but he also brings the fruit of his faith. Note the inference which he draws from God's mercy to him in enabling him to walk uprightly and to trust Him— "therefore I shall not slide." He rests for the future upon his God! His position was slippery, his enemies were always busy trying to trip up his heels, but he says—"I shall not slide." 2. Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. This is a wonderful verse. One would hardly dare to pray it. Here are three kinds of trial. According to the etymology of the Hebrew, the first is the trial by touch—"Examine me." The next is the trial by smell—"Prove me." And the next is the trial by fire—"Try my reins and my heart." You see how anxious he is to really have the matter decided by God. "Lord, search me through and through. You know I am not a hypocrite." Now who dares to say this but that true man of God whose soul is wholly fixed upon the Lord? The reins and the heart are mentioned because those were believed to be the seat of the affections—and when the affections are right the whole man is right. The heart is the fountain from which issue streams of life and if the fountain is pure, the streams cannot be impure—hence he asks chiefly that the examination may be directed to his reins and to his heart.

3. For your loving kindness is before my eyes—Right straight before his eyes he had God's loving kindness. Some people appear to have their miseries, their sorrows, their sins before their eyes, but happy is that Believer who always has God's loving kindness before him!

Come, my Brothers and Sisters, forget for a little while the burden of your business cares—now for a little season let the sickness that is in your house be left in the hands of your God and let His loving kindness be before your eyes. Loving kindness—pull the word to pieces. Remember the ancientness of it, the constancy of it, the variety of ways in which it shows itself and the lavish bounties which it bestows upon you! Do not turn your back to God's goodness, but now, right straight before you sets the loving kindness of your God!

3. And I have walked in Your truth. By which he may mean two things. First that he endeavored to hold fast to the Truths of God both in Doctrine and in practice. Or, secondly, that by God's truthfulness in giving him the promised Grace, he had been enabled to walk uprightly.

4. I have not sat with vain persons—I never took counsel with them. They never were my choice companions.

4. Neither will I go in with dissemblers. He makes a vow for the future that all crafty, lying, and foolish men shall never have his companionship.

5. I have hated the congregation of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked. By which he does not mean that he does not associate with them in any way, for we must go out of the world if we will not have communion with sinners—but he means that he did not seek their company, found no pleasure in it and never went in it to abet them in their evil deeds.

6. I will wash my hands in innocence. Pilate did this, but alas, the water was very dirty in which he washed his hands! This was an old Jewish rite when a man was found murdered—if the people in the valley in which he was found would be free from the crime of murder, they took a heifer, slew it, and then washed their hands in water over the head of the

Volume 57 11 victim. They were then clear. So here he says—"I will wash my hands in innocence."

6. So will I compass Your altar, O LORD. He is innocent as far as men are concerned, but he still confesses that he is a sinner, for he goes to God's altar. Perfect men need no altars. It is the sinner that needs a sacrifice. So let the saint always know that though he can plead innocence against the charges of men—yet before God his hope lies in the bloodsprinkled altar of which Jesus Christ is the great High Priest!

7, 8. That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Your wondrous works. LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your House, and the place where Your honor dwells. I am sure many of us can say this, that when the Sabbath comes round, it is the best day of all the week! And that hour in the week-night when we can get to the House of God—what an inexpressible relief is that! It is to us like a green oasis in the midst of the sandy desert. There are no beauties in Nature and no changes to be perceived in traveling that I think can ever compensate for the loss of the constant means of Grace—after all, God's House is the fairest spot on earth! Zion, I will prefer you above my chief joy! If I forget you, let my right hand forget her cunning. "I have loved the habitation of Your House, and the place where Your honor dwells."

9, 10. Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men: in whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. See, he so loves God's House that he cannot bear the thought of being shut in with sinners! And this is our comfort—that if we have loved God's House on earth, we shall dwell in His House forever!

11. But as for me, I will walk in my integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me. See again, my Beloved, how in the Christian's practice, good works and faith are seen happily blended. He declares that he will walk in his integrity, but still, still note, he prays as one that is conscious of a thousand imperfections—"Redeem me and be merciful unto me." We rest on Christ, alone, but still we desire to walk in holiness with as much exactness as though our salvation depended upon our

good works!

12. My foot stands in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the LORD.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 44

Job 13,22 #1255 - How to Converse with God

HOW TO CONVERSE WITH GOD

NO. 1255

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 19, 1875,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Then call, and I will answer: or let me speak, and You answer me."

Job 13:22.

JOB might well have been driven frantic by his miserable comforters. It is wonderful that he did not express himself far more bitterly than he did. Surely Satan found better instruments for his work in those three ungenerous friends than in the marauding Sabeans, or the pitiless whirlwind. They assailed Job remorselessly and seemed to have no more hearts of compassion than so many flint stones. No wonder that he said to them many things which otherwise he would never have thought of uttering and, a few, which I dare say, he afterwards regretted.

Possibly the expression of our text is one of those passages of too forcible speech. The tormented Patriarch did what none but a man of the highest integrity could have done so intensely as he did. He made his appeal from the false judgement of man to the bar of God and begged to be forthwith summoned before the tribunal of the Judge of All, for he was sure that God would justify him. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: but I will maintain my own ways before Him. He, also, shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before Him." He was ready to appear at the Judgement Seat of God, there to be tried as to his sincerity and uprightness!

He says, "Only do not two things unto me: then will I not hide myself from You. Withdraw Your hand far from me: and let not Your dread make me afraid." He offers, in the words of our text, to come before the righteous Judge in any way which He might appoint—either he will be the defendant and God shall be the plaintiff in the suit—"Call and I will answer," or else he will take up the part of the plaintiff and the Lord shall show cause and reason for His dealings towards him, or convict him of falsehood in his pleas—"Let me speak, and You answer me." He feels so sure he has not been a hypocrite that he will answer to the All-Seeing, then and there, without fear of the result.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, we are far from condemning Job's language, but we would be quite as far from imitating it. Considering the circumstances in which Job was placed. Considering the hideous libels which were brought against him. Considering how he must have been stung when accused so wrongfully at such a time, we do not wonder that he thus spoke. Yet it may be that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips, but, at any rate, it is not for us to employ his language in the same sense, or in any measure to enter upon self-justification before God! On the contrary, let our

prayer be, "Enter not into judgement with Your servant: for in Your sight shall no man living be justified." How shall man be just with God? How can we challenge His judgement before whom the heavens are not pure and who charged His angels with folly? Unless, indeed, it is in a Gospel sense, when, covered with the righteousness of Christ, we are made bold by faith to cry, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies, who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes rather, that has risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

I am going to use the words of Job in a different sense from that in which he employed them and shall apply them to the sweet communion which we have with our Father God. We cannot use them in reference to our appearance before His Judgement Seat to be tried, but they are exactly suitable when we speak of those blessed approaches to the Mercy Seat when we draw near to God to be enriched and sanctified by sacred communion. The text brings out a thought which I wish to convey to you—"Call, and I will answer: or let me speak, and You answer me." May the Holy Spirit bless our meditation.

The three points this morning will be, two methods of secret conversation—"Call, and I will answer: or let me speak, and You answer me." Secondly, the method of combining the two, and here we shall try to show how the two modes of conversation should be united in our communion with God. And thirdly, we shall show how these two modes of fellowship are realized to the full in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our answer to God and God's answer to us.

I. First, then, here are TWO METHODS OF SACRED CONVERSATION BETWEEN GOD AND THE SOUL—sometimes the Lord calls to us and we reply, and at other times we speak to God and He graciously deigns to answer us. A missionary, some years ago, returning from South Africa, gave a description of the work which had been accomplished there through the preaching of the Gospel. Among other things, he pictured a little incident of which he had been an eye-witness. He said that one morning he saw a converted African chieftain sitting under a palm tree with his Bible open before him.

Every now and then he cast his eyes on his book and read a passage, and then he paused and looked up a little while, and his lips were seen to be in motion. Thus he continued alternately to look down on the Scriptures and to turn his eyes upward towards Heaven. The missionary passed by without disturbing the good man, but a little while after he mentioned to him what he had seen and asked him why it was that sometimes he read, and sometimes he looked up? The African replied—"I look down to the Bible and God speaks to me. And then I look up in prayer and speak to the Lord, and in this way we keep up a holy talk with each other." I would set this picture before you as being the mirror and pattern of communion with Heaven—the heart hearkening to the Voice of God— and then replying in prayer and praise.

We will begin with the first method of communion. Sometimes it is well in our conversation with God that we should wait till our heavenly Father has spoken—"Call, and I will answer." In this way the Lord communed with His servant Abraham. If you refer to those sacred interviews with which the Patriarch was honored, you will find that the record begins— "The Lord spoke unto Abraham and said." After a paragraph or two you hear Abraham speaking to the Lord and then comes the Lord's reply, and another word from the Patriarch. But the conversation generally began with the Lord Himself.

So it was with Moses. While he kept his flock in the wilderness he saw a bush which burned and was not consumed. He turned aside to gaze upon it and then the Lord spoke to him out of the bush. The Lord called first and Moses answered. Notably this was the case in the instance of the holy child, Samuel. While he lay asleep, the Lord said to him, "Samuel, Samuel," and he said, "Here I am," and yet a second and a third time the Voice of God commenced a sacred communion. No doubt the Lord had heard the voice of the child in prayer at other times, but upon this notable occasion the Lord first called Samuel, and Samuel answered, "Speak Lord, for Your servant hears."

So was it with Elijah. There was a still small Voice and the Lord said to the Prophet, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Then Elijah replied, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts, for they have thrown down Your altars and slain Your Prophets with the sword." To which complaint his great Master gave a comfortable answer. Now, as it was with these saints of old so has it been with us—the Lord our God has spoken to us by His Spirit—and our spiritual ears have listened to His words and thus our communion with Heaven has commenced. If the Lord wills to have the first word in the holy conversation which He intends to hold with His servants, God forbid that any speech of ours should interpose!

Who would not be silent to hear Jehovah speak? How does God speak to us, then, and how does He expect us to answer? He speaks to us in the written Word. This "more sure Word of testimony, whereunto you do well if you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place." He speaks to us, also, in the ministry of His Word, when things new and old which are in Holy Scripture are brought forth by His chosen servants and are applied with power to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The Lord is not dumb in the midst of His family, though, alas, some of His children appear to be dull of hearing!

Though the Urim and Thummim are no longer to be seen upon the breasts of mortal men, yet the oracle is not silent. O that we were always ready to hear the loving Voice of the Lord! The Lord's Voice has many tones, all equally Divine. Sometimes He uses the voice of awakening and then we should give earnest heed. We are dead and He quickens us. We are sluggish and need to be awakened and the Lord, therefore, cries aloud to us, "Awake you that sleep!" We are slow to draw near to Him and, therefore, He lovingly says, "Seek you My face." What a mercy it is if our heart at once answers, "Your face, Lord, will I seek."

When he awakens us to duty there is true communion in our hearts if we at once reply "Here am I, send me." Our inmost souls should reply to the Lord's call as the echo answers to the voice. I fear it is sometimes far otherwise—and then our loving Lord has His patience tried. Remember how He says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock"? He knocks because He finds that door closed which should have been wide open. Alas, even His knocks are, for a while, in vain, for we are stretched upon the bed of ease and make idle excuses for remaining there—"I have taken off my coat, how can I put it on? I have washed my feet, how can I defile them?"

Let us no longer treat Him in this ungenerous manner lest He take it amiss and leave us, for if He goes away from us we shall seek Him but find Him not. We shall call Him but He will give us no answer. If we will not arise at His call it may be He will leave us to slumber like sluggards till our poverty comes as one that travels and our need as an armed man. If our Beloved cries, "Rise up My Love, My fair One, and come away," let us not linger for an instant! If He cries "Awake, awake,

put on your strength, O Zion," let us arise in the power of His call and shade ourselves from the dust! At the first sound of Heaven's bugle in the morning, let us leave the bed of carnal ease and go forth to meet our Lord and King. Herein is communion—the Lord draws us and we run after Him! He awakens us and we wake to serve Him! He restores our soul and our hearts praise Him!

Frequently the voice of God is for our instruction. All Scripture is written for that purpose and our business is to listen to its teachings with open ears and willing heart. Well did the Psalmist say, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace unto His people." God's own command of mercy is, "Incline your ear and come unto Me, hear and your soul shall live." This is the very Gospel of God to the unsaved ones and it is an equally important message to those who have, through Grace, believed, for they, also, need to receive of His Words. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word which proceeds out of the mouth of God shall men live."

Therefore one of the saints cried out, "Your Words were found and I did eat them." And another said, "How sweet are Your Words unto my taste, yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth." God's Word is the soul's manna and the soul's Water of Life. How greatly we ought to prize each Word of Divine teaching! But, dear Brothers and Sisters, do you not think that many are very neglectful of God's instructive Voice? In the Bible we have precious doctrines, precious promises, precious precepts and, above all, a precious Christ! If a man would really live upon these choice things, he might rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But how often is the Bible left unread? And so God is not heard. He calls and we give no heed. As for the preaching of the Word, when the Holy Spirit is in it, it is the "power of God unto salvation," and the Lord is pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. But all Believers do not hear the voice of the Lord by His ministers as they should. There is much carping criticism, much coldness of heart, much glorying in man, and a great need of teachableness of spirit and thus the Word is shut out of our hearts. The Lord would gladly teach us by His servants, but our ears are dull of hearing.

Is it any wonder that those professors cannot pray who are forever grumbling that they cannot hear? God will be deaf to us if we are deaf to Him. If we will not be taught, we shall not be heard. Let us not be as the adder which is deaf to the charmer's voice. Let us be willing, yes, eager to learn. Did not our Lord Jesus say, "take My yoke upon you and learn of Me"? And is there not a rich reward for so doing in His sweet assurance, "you shall find rest unto your souls"? Search the Scriptures that no Word from the Lord may be inadvertently slighted by you! Hear the Word attentively and ponder it in your heart. Daily make this your prayer, "What I know not, teach me." "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your Law."

Let us strive against prejudice and never let us dream that we are so wise that we need learn no more. Jesus Christ would have us be teachable as little children and ready to receive, with meekness, the engrafted Word which is able to save our souls! You will have a blessed fellowship with your Lord if you will sit at His feet and receive His Words. O for His own effectual teaching! Call, O Lord, and I will answer!

The Lord also speaks to His servants with the voice of command. Those who trust Christ must also obey Him. In the day when we become the Lord's children we come under obligations to obey. Does He not, Himself, say, "If I am a father, where is My honor?" Dear Friends, we must

never have a heavy ear towards the precepts. I know some who drink in the promises as Gideon's fleece did the dew, but as for the commands, they refuse them as a man turns from wormwood. But the child of God can say, "Oh, how I love Your Law! It is my meditation all the day: I will delight myself in Your Commandments which I have loved."

The will of God is very sweet to His children. They long to have their own wills perfectly conformed to it. True Christians are not pickers and choosers of God's Word—the part which tells them how they should live in the power of the Spirit of God is as sweet to them as the other portion which tells them how they are saved by virtue of the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Dear Brothers and Sisters, if we shut our ears to what Jesus tells us, we shall never have power in prayer, nor shall we enjoy intimate communion with the Well-Beloved. "If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love," He says, "even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

If you will not hear God, you cannot expect Him to hear you! And if you will not do what He bids you, neither can you expect Him to give you what you seek at His hands. An obedient heart is necessary if there is to be any happy conversation between God and the soul! The Lord sometimes speaks to His servants in the tone of rebuke and let us never be among those who harden their necks against Him. It is not a pleasant thing to be told of our faults, but it is a most profitable thing.

Brethren, when you have erred, if you are on good terms with God, He will gently chide you. His voice will sound in your conscience, "My Child, was this right? My Child, was this as it ought to be? Is this becoming in one redeemed with precious blood?" When you open the Bible, many a text will, like a mirror, show you yourself and the spots upon your face. And Conscience, looking on, will say, "Do not so, my Son, this is not as your Lord would have it." "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not teach me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

If we do not listen to God's rebuking voice in His Word, He will probably speak in harsher tones by some addicting Providence. Perhaps He will hide from us the light of His Countenance and deny us the consolations of the Spirit. Before this is the case, it will be wise to turn our hearts unto the Lord, or if it has already come to that, let us say, "Show me why You contend with me. Make me to know my faults, my Father, and help me to purge myself from them." Brothers and Sisters, be you not as the horse, or as the mule, but pray to be made tender in spirit. Be this your prayer—

"Quick as the apple of an eye, Oh, God, my conscience make. Awake, my soul, when sin is near, And keep it still awake. Oh may the least omission pain My well instructed soul And drive me to the blood again, Which makes the wounded whole!"

Let us hear Nathan as kindly when he rebukes us as when he brings a promise, for in both cases the Prophet speaks his Master's own sure word. Let us thank the Lord for chiding us and zealously set about destroying the idols against which His anger is lifted. It is due to the Lord and it is the wisest course for ourselves.

But blessed be His name, the Lord will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger forever! Very frequently the Lord speaks to us in consolatory language. How full the Bible is of comforts! How truly has God carried out His own precept to the Prophet—"Comfort you, comfort you My

people, says your God." What more, indeed, could God have said than He has said for the consolation of His own beloved? Be not slow to hear when God is swift to cheer you. Alas, our mischief sometimes turns a deaf ear even to the sweetest note of Jehovah's love! We cannot think that all things will work together for our good. We cannot believe that the Providence which looks so evil can really be a blessing in disguise.

Blind unbelief is sure to err and it errs principally in stopping its ear against those dulcet tones of everlasting lovingkindness which ought to make our hearts leap within us for joy! Beloved, be not hard to comfort, and when God calls, be ready to answer Him, and say, "I believe You, Lord, and rejoice in Your Word, and therefore my soul shall put away her mourning and gird herself with delight." This is the way to keep up fellowship with God—to hear His consolations and to be grateful for them. And last of all upon this point, God speaks to His people, sometimes in the tones which invite to innermost communion. I cannot tell now how they sound—your ear must, itself, have heard them to know what they are.

Sometimes He calls His beloved ones to come away to the top of Amana, to ascend above the world and all its cares, and to come to the Mount of Transfiguration. "There," says He, "will I show you My loves." There the Lord seems to lay bare His heart to His child and to tell him all the heights and depths of love unsearchable. There the Lord allows him to understand his eternal union with Christ and the safety that comes of it. There the Lord reveals the mystical Covenant with all its treasures, "for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His Covenant." It is a sad thing when the Lord calls us into the secret chamber, where none may approach but men greatly beloved, and we are not prepared to enter.

That innermost heart-to-heart communion is not given to him who is unclean. God said even to Moses, "Put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground." There is no enjoying that extraordinary nearness to God with which He sometimes favors His choice ones, unless the feet have been washed in the bronze laver and the hands have been cleansed in innocence. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." He that is of clean hands and a pure heart, he shall dwell on high, but only he, for God will not draw inconsistent professors and those who are dallying with sin into close contact with Himself. "Be you clean that bear the vessels of the Lord," and especially be you clean who hope to stand in His holy place and to behold His face, for that face is only to be beheld in righteousness.

Brethren, it is clear that the voice of God speaks to us in different tones and our business, as His children, is to answer at once when He speaks to us. This is one form of holy fellowship. The second and equally common form is that we speak to God and He graciously replies to us. How should we speak to the Most High? I answer, first, we ought constantly to speak to Him in the tone of adoration. We do not, I fear, adore and reverently magnify God one hundredth as much as we should. The general frame of a Christian should be such that whenever his mind is taken off from the necessary thoughts of his calling, he should at once stand before the Throne blessing the Lord, if not in words, yet in heart.

I was watching the lilies, the other day, as they stood upon their tall stalks with flowers so fair and beautiful. They cannot sing, but they seemed to me to be offering continual hymns to God by their very existence! They had lifted themselves as near to Heaven as they could. Indeed, they would not commence to flower till they had risen as far from the earth as their nature would permit—and

then they just stood still in their beauty and showed to all around what God can do—and as they poured out their sweet perfume in silence they said by their example, "Bless the Lord as we, also, do by pouring out our very souls in sweetness."

Now, you may not be able to preach and it would not be possible to be always singing, especially in some company. But your life, your heart, your whole being should be one perpetual discourse of the lovingkindness of the Lord and your heart, even if the Lord is silent, should carry on fellowship by adoring His blessed name. Coupled with adoration, the Lord should always hear the voice of our gratitude. One of our Brethren in prayer, last Monday night, commenced somewhat in this fashion. He said, "Lord, You do so continuously bless us that we feel as if we could begin to praise You now and never leave off any more. We are half ashamed to ask for anything more because You do always give so promptly, and so bountifully." In this spirit let us live! Let us be grateful unto Him and bless His name and come into His Presence with thanksgiving! The whole life of the Christian man should be a Psalm of which the contents should be summed up in this sentence, "Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name." Now, adoration and thanksgiving, if rendered to God with a sincere heart through Jesus Christ, will be acceptable to God and we shall receive an answer of peace from Him so that we shall realize the second half of the text. "Let me speak, and You answer me." But, my Brothers and Sisters, it would not suffice for us to come before God with adoration, only, for we must remember what we are.

Great is He and, therefore, to be adored, but sinful are we and, therefore, when we come to Him there must always be confession of sin upon our lips. I never expect, until I get to Heaven, to be able to cease confessing sin every day and every time I stand before God. When I wander away from God, I may have some idea of being holy, but when I draw near to Him I always feel as Job when he said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You. Therefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes." If you would have the Lord hear, be sure you speak to Him in humble notes. You have rebelled against Him. You are a sinner by nature and though forgiven and accepted, and therefore freed from dread of wrath, you can never forget that you were a rebel—and if it had not been for Sovereign Grace you would have been so still—therefore speak with lowliness and humility before the Lord if you wish to receive an answer.

Beloved Friends, we should also speak to God with the voice of petition and this we can never cease to do, for we are always full of needs. "Give us this day our daily bread" must be our prayer as long as we are in the land where daily needs require daily supplies. We shall always need to make request for temporals and for spirituals, for ourselves and for others, too. The work of intercessory prayer must never be allowed to cease. Speak to the Lord, you that have His ear! Speak for us, His servants, who are His ambassadors to men! Speak for the Church, also! Plead for rebellious sinners and ask that unnumbered blessings may be given from above.

We should also speak to Him, sometimes, in the language of resolution. If the poor prodigal was right in saying, "I will arise and go to my father," so are Christians right in saying, "Therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live," or in saying, "As long as I live I will bless the Lord." Sometimes when a duty is set before you, very plainly, which you had, for a while, forgotten, it is very sweet to say unto the Lord, "Lord, Your servant will rejoice to do this, only help me!" Register the secret vow before the Lord, and honorably fulfill it. We should often use the language of intimate communion. "What language is that?" you ask and, again, I answer, "I cannot tell you."

There are times when we say to the blessed Bridegroom of our souls love words which the uncircumcised ear must not hear. Why, even the little that is unveiled before the world in the Book of Solomon's Song has made many a man quibble, for the carnal mind cannot understand such spiritual secrets. You know how the Church cries out concerning her Lord—"Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for His love is better than wine." There are many love passages and love words between sanctified souls and their dear Lord and Master which it were not lawful for a man to utter in a mixed assembly—it were like the casting of pearls before swine, or reading one's love letters in the public streets. Oh, you chosen, speak to your Lord! Keep nothing from Him!

He has said, "If it were not so, I would have told you." He has told you all that He has seen with the Father! Tell Him everything that is in your heart and when you speak, speak with sacred child-like confidence, telling Him everything! You will find Him answering you with familiar love and sweet will be the fellowship thus created. Thus I have shown you that there are two forms of the Believer's communion with God.

II. Let us now consider THE METHOD OF THE COMBINATION OF THE TWO. With regard to this subject I would say that they must be united. Brethren, we sometimes go to prayer and we want God to hear us, but we have not heard what God has to say. This is wrong. Suppose a person neglects the hearing of the Word of God, but is very fond of prayer? I feel certain that his prayer will soon become flat, stale and unprofitable, because no conversation can be very lively which is all on one side. The man speaks, but he does not let God speak and, therefore, he will soon find it hard to maintain the conversation.

If you are earnest in regular prayer, but do not as regularly read or hear the Scriptures, your soul gives out without taking in and is very apt to run dry. Not only thoughts and desires will flag, but even the expressions will become monotonous. If you consider how it is that your prayer appears to lack vivacity and freshness, the probable reason is that you are trying to maintain a maimed fellowship. When conversation is all onesided, do you wonder that it flags?

If I have a friend at my house, tonight, and we wish to have fellowship with each other, I must not do all the talking, but I must wait for him to answer me or to suggest new topics, as he may please. And if he is wiser than I am, there is the more reason why I should play second in the conversation and leave its guidance very much to him. It is such a condescension on God's part to speak with us that we ought eagerly to hear what He has to say. Let Him never have to complain that we turned our ears away from Him.

At the same time, we must not be silent. For to read the Scriptures, to hear sermons and never to pray would not bring fellowship with God. That would be a lame conversation! Remember how Abraham spoke with God again and again, though he felt himself to be but dust and ashes? Remember how Moses pleaded? Do you remember how David sat before the Lord and then spoke with his tongue? Above all, remember how Jesus talked with His Father as well as listened to the Voice from Heaven. Let both forms of conversation unite and all will be well.

Again, it will be well sometimes to vary the order. Dear Mr. Muller, who is a man living near to God, whose every word is like a pearl, said, the other day, "Sometimes when I go into my closet to pray, I find I cannot pray as I would. What do I do then? Why, since I cannot speak to the Lord, I beg the Lord to speak to me and therefore I open the Scriptures and read my portion. And then I find the

Lord gives me matter for prayer." Is not this a suggestion of much weight? Does it not commend itself to your spiritual judgement?

Have you not observed that when somebody calls to see you, you may not be in a fit condition to start a profitable conversation? But if your friend will lead, your mind takes fire and you have no difficulty in following him! Frequently it will be best to ask the Lord to lead the sacred conversation, or wait awhile till He does so. It is a blessed thing to wait at the posts of His door, expecting a Word of Love from His Throne. It is generally best, in communion with God, to begin with hearing His voice, because it is due to His sacred majesty that we should first hear what He has to say to us. And it will especially be best for us to do so when we feel out of order for communion. If the flesh, in its weakness, hampers the spirit, then let the Bible reading come before the praying, that the soul may be awakened thereby.

Still, there are tines when it will be better to speak to our heavenly Father at once. For instance, if a child has done wrong, it is very wise of him to run straight away to his father, before his father has said anything to him, and say, "Father, I have sinned." The prodigal had the first word and so should our penitence seek for speedy audience and pour itself out like water before the Lord. Sometimes, too, when our heart is very full of thankfulness, we should allow praise to burst forth at once. When we have received a great favor, we ought not to wait till the Giver of it speaks to us, but the moment we see Him we should at once acknowledge our indebtedness.

When the heart is full of either prayer or praise, and the Presence of Jesus is felt, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we begin addressing the Lord with all our hearts. The Lord has spoken and it is for us to reply at once. On the other hand, when for wise reasons our Lord is silent unto us, it is well to take with us words and come to Him. If you have read your Bible and have felt no visit from the Holy Spirit, or if you have heard a sermon and found no dew from the Lord attending it, then turn at once to prayer. Tell the Lord your condition and entreat Him to reveal Himself to you. Pray first and read afterwards, and you will find that your speaking with God will be replied to by His speaking to you through the Word. Take the two methods—commonsense and your own experience will guide you— and let sometimes one come first and sometimes the other.

But let there be a reality about both. Mockery in this matter is deadly sin. Do not let God's Word be before you as a mass of letterpress, but let the Book speak to your soul. Some people read the Bible through in a set time and in great haste—they might just as well never look at it at all! Can a man understand a country by merely tearing through it at a railway pace? If he desires to know the character of the soil and the condition of the people, he walks leisurely through the land and examines with care. God's Word needs digging, or its treasures will lie hidden. We must put our ear down to the heart of Scripture and hear its living throbs. Scripture often whispers, rather than thunders, and the ear must be duly trained to comprehend its language. Resolve emphatically, "I will HEAR what God the Lord shall speak." Let God speak to you and in order that He may do so, pause and meditate, and do not proceed till you grasp the meanings of the verses as far as the Spirit enables you. If you do not understand some passages, read them again and again, and remember it is good to read even those parts of Scripture which you do not understand, even as it is good for a child to hear his father's voice whether he understands all his father has to say or not. At any rate, faith finds exercise in knowing that God never speaks in vain, even though He is not understood. Hear the Word till you understand it.

While you are listening, the sense will gradually break in upon your soul, but mind that you listen with opened ears and willing heart. When you speak to God, do not let it be a dead form, for that is an insult to the Most High. If the heart is absent, it is as wicked to say a prayer as to be prayerless. If one should obtain an audience of Her Majesty and then should read a petition in which he took no interest, which was, in fact, a mere set of words, it would be an insult of the worst kind. Beware lest you thus insult the Majesty of Heaven!

III. The last thought is only meant to be dropped before you for you to enlarge upon it at your leisure—THE BLESSED REALIZATION OF THESE TWO FORMS OF COMMUNION IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST. "Call, and I will answer." Infinite majesty of God, call upon me and ask for all You can ask, and I bless You that I have an answer for You. Ask Your poor servant for all You can demand of him and he will gladly reply. Brethren do you ask in wonder—"How can we answer Him?" The answer is clear—"By bringing Jesus to remembrance!" Our Lord Jesus Christ is man's complete answer to God.

Divine Justice demands death as the penalty of sin—behold the Son of God taken down from the Cross because He was surely dead, wrapped in the cerements of the grave and laid in Joseph's tomb! God's Justice demands suffering, demands that the sinner be abandoned of God. See yonder Cross and hear the cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"! Great God, You have, in Jesus, all the suffering Your Justice can ask, even to death itself. God's holiness righteously demands a life of obedience—man cannot be right before God unless he renders perfect obedience to the Law. Behold our answer, we bring a perfect Savior's active and passive obedience and lay it down at Jehovah's feet—what more can He ask for?

He requires a perfect heart and an unblemished person, and He cannot accept less than a perfect manhood. We bring the Father His OnlyBegotten, the Son of Man, our Brother! And here is our answer—there is the perfect Man, the unfallen Head of the race. Oh, never try to reply to God with any other answer than this! Whatever He asks of you, bring Him your Savior! He cannot ask for more. You bring before Him that which fully contents Him, for He, Himself, has said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Let your answer, then, to the Justice of God, be Christ! But I said that Christ fulfilled the other purpose. He is God's answer to us. What have you to ask of God this morning? Are you so far away from Him that you enquire, "How can I be saved?" No answer comes out of the excellent Glory except Christ on the Cross—that is God's answer—believe in Him and live! By those wounds, by that bloody sweat, by that sacrificial death you must be saved! Look! Can you say unto the Lord, "I have trusted Christ, but am I secure of salvation?" No answer comes but Christ risen from the dead to die no more! Death has no more dominion over Him, and He has said, "Because I live, you shall live also." The risen Christ is the Lord's assurance of our safety for eternity!

Do you ask the Lord, "How much do You love me?" You have asked a large question, but there is a large answer for you. He gives His Son— behold what manner of love is born! Do you enquire, "Lord, what will You give me?" His Son is the answer to that question, also! Behold these lines written on His bleeding Person, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not, with Him, also freely give us all things?" Would you need more? Do you say, "What sign do You show that all these things are so?" He gives you Christ in Heaven!

Yes, if you ask, "Lord, what shall Your servant be when You have completed Your work of Grace upon me? He points you to Jesus in Glory, for you shall be like He is! If you ask what is to be your destiny in the future, He shows you Christ coming a second time without a sin-offering unto salvation! Dear Friend, you can ask nothing of your God, but what He gives you at once as a reply is Jesus. Oh what blessed talk is that when the Christian's heart says Jesus, and the Christian's God says Jesus! And how sweet it is when we come to Jesus and rest in Him and God is in Jesus and makes Him His rest forever.

Thus do Believers and their God rest together in the same Beloved One! May the Lord add His blessing to our meditation and make this kind of communion common among us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms 84:1-12; Psalms 85:1-13.

HYMN FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84 (SONG III), 95 (SONG III), 782.

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Job 13,23 #336 - Struggles of Conscience

STRUGGLES OF CONSCIENCE

NO. 336

DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, SEPTEMBER 22, 1860,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

"How many are my iniquities and sins? Make me to

know my transgression and my sin."

Job 13:23.

THERE are many persons who long to have a deeper sense of their sinfulness and then with a certain show of conscientious scruple, they make an excuse for the exercise of simple faith. That spiritual disease, which keeps sinners from Christ, assumes a different shape at different times. In Luther's day the precise evil under which men labored was this—they believed in being self-righteous—and so they supposed that they must have good works before they might trust in Christ.

In our day the evil has taken another and that a most extraordinary shape. Men have aimed at being self-righteous after quite a singular fashion. They think they must feel worse and have a deeper conviction of sin before they may trust in Christ. Many hundreds do I meet with who say they dare not come to Christ and trust Him with their souls, because they do not feel their need of Him enough.

They have not sufficient contrition for their sins. They have not repented as fully as they have rebelled. Brethren, it is the same evil, from the same old germ of self-righteousness, but it has taken another and I think a more crafty shape. Satan has wormed himself into many hearts under the garb of an angel of light and he has whispered to the sinner, "Repentance is a necessary virtue. Stop until you have repented and when you have sufficiently mortified yourself on account of sin, then you will be fit to come to Christ and qualified to trust and rely on Him."

It is with that deadly evil I want to grapple this morning. I am persuaded it is far more common than some would think. And I think I know the reason of its great commonness. In the Puritanical age, which was noted certainly for its purity of doctrine, there was also a great deal of experimental preaching and much of it was sound and healthy. But some of it was unscriptural, because it took for its standard what the Christian felt and not what the Savior said—the inference from a Believer's experience, rather than the message which goes before any belief. Those excellent men, Mr. Rogers, of Dedham, who has written some useful works and Mr. Sheppard who wrote The Sound Believer and Mr. Flavel and many others give descriptions of what a sinner must be

before he may come to Christ, which actually represent what a saint is, after he has come to Christ. These good Brethren have taken their own experience— what they felt before they came into light—as the standard of what every other man ought to feel before he may put his trust in Christ and hope for mercy.

There were some in the Puritanical times who protested against that theology and insisted that sinners were to be bid to come to Christ just as they were—with no preparation either of feeling or of doing. At the present time there are large numbers of Calvinistic ministers who are afraid to give a free invitation to sinners. They always garble Christ's invitation thus—"If you are a sensible sinner you may come." Just as if stupid sinners might not come. They say, "If you feel your need of Christ, you may come." And then they describe what that feeling or need is and give such a high description of it that their hearers say, "Well, I never felt like that," and they are afraid to venture for lack of the qualification.

Mark you, the Brethren speak truly in some respect. They describe what a sinner does feel before he comes, but they make a mistake in putting what a sinner feels, as if that were what a sinner ought to feel. What the sinner feels and what the sinner does, until he is renewed by grace, are just the very opposite of what he ought. We always get wrong when we say one Christian's experience is to be estimated by what another Christian has felt. No, Sir, my experience is to be measured by the Word of God. And what the sinner should feel is to be measured by what Christ commands him to feel and not by what another sinner has felt.

Comparing ourselves among ourselves is not wise. I believe there are hundreds and thousands who reMal. in doubt and darkness and go down to despair because there is a description given and a preparation for Christ demanded to which they cannot attain—a description indeed which is not true—because it is a description of what they feel after they have found Christ and not what they must feel before they may come to Him.

Now, then, with all my might I come this morning to break down every barrier that keeps a soul from Christ. And, as God the Holy Spirit shall help me, to dash the battering ram of the Truth of God against every wall that has been built up, whether by doctrinal truth or experimental truth, that keeps the sinner from Christ, who desires to come and to be saved by Him.

I shall attempt to address you in the following order this morning. First, a little by way of consolation. Then, a little by way of instruction. A little more upon discrimination or caution. And in the last place, a few sentences by way of exhortation. I. First, Beloved, let me speak to you who are desiring to feel more and more your sins and whose prayer is the prayer of the text, "Lord how many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me to know my transgression and my sin." Let me try to COMFORT YOU. It ought to give you much solace when you remember that the best of men have prayed this prayer before you. The better a man is, the more anxious is he to know the worst of his case. The more a man gets rid of sin and the more he lives above his daily faults and errors, the more does he cry "Search me, O God and know my heart. O try me and know my thoughts and see if there are any wicked ways in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

Bad men do not want to know their badness. It is the good man, the man who has been renewed by grace, who is anxious to discover what is his disease, that he may have it healed. Ought it not then to be some ground of comfort to you, that your prayer is not a prayer which could come from

the lips of the wicked, but a prayer which has constantly been offered by the most advanced of saints, by those who have most grown in grace?

Perhaps that is a reason why it should not be offered by you, who just now can scarcely hope to be a saint at all. Yet it should be a matter of sweet rejoicing that your prayer cannot be an evil one, because the "Amens" of God's people, even those who are the fathers in our Israel, go up to God with it. I am sure my aged Brothers and Sisters in Christ now present, can say unanimously, "That has often been my prayer, Lord let me know my iniquity and my sin; teach me how vile I am and lead me daily to Christ Jesus that my sins may be put away."

Let this reflection also comfort you—you never prayed like this years ago when you were a careless sinner. It was the last thing you would ever think of asking for. You did not want to know your guilt. No! You found pleasure in wickedness. Sin was a sweet morsel to you. You only wanted to be let alone that you might roll it under your tongue. If any told you of your evil, you would rather they let it alone. "Ah," you said, "what business is that of yours? No doubt I make some mistakes and am a little amiss, but I don't want to be told so."

Why, the last meditation you would ever have thought of entertaining would have been a meditation upon your own criminality. When conscience did speak, you said, "Lay down, Sir, be quiet!" When God's Word came home sharp to you, you tried to blunt its edge—you did not want to feel it. Now, ought it not to be some comfort that you have had such a gracious change worked in you, that you are now longing for the very feeling which at one time you could not endure? Surely, Man, the Lord must have begun a good work in you, for you would not have such wishes and desires as these unless He had put His hand to the plow and had begun to plow the barren, dry, hard soil of your heart!

Yet further, there is another reason why you should take comfort. It is very probable you do already feel your guilt and what you are asking for, you already have in measure realized. It often happens that a man has the grace which he seeks for and does not know he has it, because he makes a mistake as to what he should feel when he has the blessing. He has already got the blessing which he asks God to give him.

Let me just put it in another shape. If you are sorry because you cannot be sorry enough on account of sin, why, you are already sorry! If you grieve because you cannot grieve enough, why, you do grieve already! If it is a cause of repentance to you that your heart is very hard and that you cannot repent, why you do repent. My dear Hearer, let me assure you, for your comfort, that when you go down on your knees and say, "Lord, I groan before You, because I cannot groan. I cannot feel. Lord help me to feel," why, you do feel and you have got the repentance that you are asking for!

At least you have got the first degree of it. You have got the mustard seed of repentance in tiny grain. Let it alone, it will grow. Foster it with prayer and it will become a tree. The very grace which you are asking of God is speaking in your very prayer. It is repentance which asks God that I may repent more. It is a broken heart which asks God to break it. That is not a hard heart which says, "Lord I have a hard heart—soften my heart." It is a soft heart already. That is not a dead soul which says, "Lord I am dead—quicken me." Why, you are quickened! That man is not dumb who says, "Lord I am dumb—make me speak." Why, he speaks already! And that man who says, "Lord

I cannot feel," why, he feels already! He is a sensible sinner already—so that you are just the man that Christ calls to Him.

This experience of yours, which you think is just the opposite of what it ought to be, is just what it should be. Oh, be comforted in this respect. But sit not down in it. Be comforted enough to make you run to Jesus now—just as you are. I take you, Sinner, to be just the man the minister is always seeking after. When we say that Christ came that there might be drink given to the thirsty, you are just the man we mean—you are thirsty. "No," you say, "I don't feel that I am thirsty, I only wish I did." Why, that wish to feel thirsty is your thirst. You are exactly the man. You are far nearer the character than if you said, "I do thirst, I have the qualification." Then, I should be afraid you had not got it. But, because you think you have it not, it is all the clearer proof that you have this qualification, if indeed there is a qualification. When I say, "Come unto Christ all you that labor and are heavy laden." And you say, "Oh, I don't feel heavy laden enough," why, you are the very man the text means. And when I say, "Whoever will, let him come," and you say, "I wish I were more willing, I will to be willing," why, you are the man! It is only one of Satan's quibbles—a bit of Hell's infernal logic to drive you from Christ. Be a match for Satan now this once and say, "You lying Fiend, you tell me I do not feel my need of a Savior enough. I know I feel my need. And, inasmuch as I long to feel it, I do feel it. Christ bids me come to him and I will come—now, this morning. I will trust my soul, just as it is, in the hands of Him whose body hung upon the tree. Sink or swim, here I am resting on Him and clinging to Him as the Rock of my salvation."

Take, then, these words of comfort.

II. I must now go on to my second point and give a few words of

INSTRUCTION.

And so, my Hearer, you anxiously long to know how many are your iniquities and your sins. And your prayer is, "Lord, make me to know my transgression and my sin." Let me instruct you, then, as to how God will answer your prayers. God has more than one way of answering the same prayer. And though the ways are diverse, they are all equally useful and efficacious. It sometimes happens that God answers this prayer by allowing a man to fall into more and more gross sin. At our last Church meeting, a Brother, in giving his experience of how he was brought to God, said he could not feel his guilt, his heart was very hard—till it happened one day he was tempted to the utterance of an untruth and no sooner had he uttered it than he felt what a despicable creature he was to tell a lie to another.

So that that one sin led him to see the deceitfulness and vileness of his own heart. And from that day he never had to complain that he did not feel his guilt enough, but, on the contrary, he felt too guilty to come to Christ. I believe many a man who has been educated morally, who has been trained up in such a way that he has never fallen into gross sin, finds it very difficult to say, "Lord, I feel myself to be a sinner." He knows he is a sinner and he knows it as a matter of fact, but he cannot altogether feel it.

And I have known men who have often envied the harlot and the drunkard, because, they say, "Had I been like they, I should feel more bitterly my sin and should feel I was one of those whom Jesus came to save." It may be, though I could hope it may not be so, that God may suffer you to fall into sin. God grant it may never be so. But if you ever should, you will then have cause to say,

"Lord, I am vile. Now my eyes sees myself. I abhor myself in dust and ashes, because of this, my great sin." Or possibly, you may not actually fall into sin, but be taken to the very verge of it.

Did you ever know what it was on a sudden to be overtaken by some fiery temptation, to feel as if the strong hand of Satan had gripped you about the loins and was pulling you, you knew not where, nor why, nor how—but against your will, to the very verge of the precipice of some tremendous sin and you went on and on, till, on a sudden, just as you were about to take a dive into sin, your eyes were opened and you said, "Great God, how came I here—I, who hate this iniquity?—I, who abhor it?—and yet my feet had almost gone, my steps had well-near slipped."

Then in the recoil you say, "Great God, hold me up, for if You do not hold me up, I fall, indeed." Then you discover that there is inbred sin in your heart only lacking opportunity to spring out. That your soul is like a magazine of gunpowder, only needing the spark and there shall come a terrible catastrophe. Then you realize that you are full of sin, grim with iniquity and evil devices, and that it only wants opportunity and strong temptation to destroy you body and soul forever. It happens sometimes that this is the way God answers this prayer.

A second method by which the Lord answers this prayer is by opening the eyes of the soul. Not so much by Providence as by the mysterious agency of the Holy Spirit. Let me tell you, my Hearer, if you should ever have your eyes opened to see your guilt, you will find it to be the most awful sight you have ever beheld. I have had as much experience of this as any man among you. For five years as a child there was nothing before my eyes but my guilt. And though I do not hesitate to say that those who observed my life would not have seen any extraordinary sin, yet as I looked upon myself, there was not a day in which I did not commit such gross, such outrageous sins against God, that often and often I wished I had never been born.

I know John Bunyan's experience when he said he wished he had been a frog, or a toad, rather than a man, so guilty did he feel himself to be. You know how it is with yourselves. It is as when a housewife cleans her chamber, she looks and there is no dust. The air is clear and all her furniture is shining brightly. But there is a chink in the window shutter, a ray of light creeps in and you see the dust dancing up and down, thousands of grains, in the sunbeam. It is all over the room the same, but she cannot see it only where the sunbeam comes.

It is just so with us. God sends a ray of Divine light into the heart and then we see how vile and full of iniquity it is. I trust, my Hearer, that your prayer may not be answered as it was in my case, by terrible conviction, awful dreams, nights of misery and days of pain. Take care. You are praying a tremendous prayer when you are asking God to show you your wickedness. Better for you to modify your prayer and put it thus—"Lord, let me know enough of my iniquity to bring me to Christ. Not so much as to keep me from Him, not so much as to drive me to despair. But only enough to be divorced from all trust in myself and to be led to trust in Christ alone." Otherwise, like Moses, you may be constrained to cry out in a paroxysm of agony, "O Lord, kill me I pray you, out of hand, if I have found favor in your sight and let me not see my wretchedness."

Still, however, the practical question recurs and you ask me again, "Tell me how I can feel the need of my Savior." The first advice I give you is this—particularize your sins. Do not say "I am a sinner." It means nothing—everybody says that. But say this, "Am I a liar? Am I a thief? Am I a drunkard? Have I had unchaste thoughts? Have I committed unclean acts? Have I in my soul often

rebelled against God? Am I often angry without a cause? Have I a bad temper? Am I covetous? Do I love this world better than the world to come? Do I neglect prayer? Do I neglect the great salvation?"

Put the questions upon the separate points and you will soon convict yourself much more readily than by taking yourself in the gross as being a sinner. I have heard of a hypocritical old Monk who used to whine out, while he whipped his back as softly as he could, "Lord, I am a great sinner, as big a sinner as Judas." And when someone said, "Yes that you are—you are like Judas, a vile old hypocrite," then he would say, "No, I am not." Then he would go on again, "I am a great sinner." Someone would say, "You are a great sinner, you broke the First Commandment." And then he would say, "No, I have not."

Then when he would go on and say, "I am a great sinner," someone would say, "Yes, you have broken the Second Commandment," and he would say, "No, I have not." And the same with the third and the fourth and so on right through. So it came to pass he had kept the whole ten according to his own account and yet he went on crying he was a great sinner. The man was a hypocrite, for if he had not broken the Commandments, how could he be a sinner at all? You will find it better not to dwell on your sins in the mass, but to pen them, count them over and look at them individually, one by one.

Then let me advise you next to hear a personal ministry. Sit not where the preacher preaches to you in the plural number, but where he deals with you as a man alone, by yourself. Seek out a preacher like Rowland Hill, of whom it is said that if you sat in the back seat in the gallery, you always had a notion that Mr. Hill meant you. Or, that if you sat in the doorway where he could not see you, yet you were quite convinced he must know you were there and that he was preaching right at you. I wonder indeed, if men ever could feel their sins under some ministers— genteel ministers, intellectual, respectable, who never speak to their hearers as if they did anything wrong.

I say of these gentlemen what Hugh Latimer said of many ministers in his day, that they are more fit to dance a Morris-dance than to deal with the souls of men. I believe there are some this day more fit to deliver smart lectures and bring out pleasing things to soothe carnal minds, than to preach the Word of God to sinners. We want the like of John the Baptist back again and Boanerges. We want men like Baxter to preach—

"As though they might not preach again, As dying men to dying men."

We want men like John Berridge, who have pulled the velvet out of their mouths years ago and cannot speak fine words—men that hit hard, that draw the bow and pull the arrow to its very head and send it right home, taking deadly aim at the heart and the conscience of men, plowing deep, hitting at the private lusts and at the open sins—not generalizing, but particularizing, not preaching to men in the mass but to men in the detail—not to the mob and the crowd, but to each man separately and individually.

Grow not offended with the minister if he comes home too close to you—remember that is his duty. And if the whip goes right round you and stings you, thank God for it, be glad of it. Let me, if I sit under a ministry, sit under a man who uses the knife with me sometimes, a man who will not spare me, a man who will not flatter me. If there should be flattery anywhere, let it not be at any rate in the pulpit. He who deals with men's souls should deal with them very plainly. The pulpit is

not the place for fine words, when we have to deal with the solemnities of eternity. Take that advice, then and listen to a personal, home-smiting ministry.

Next to that, if you would know your sins, study much the Law of God. Let the twentieth chapter of Exodus be often before your eyes and take with it as a commentary, Christ's sermon and Christ's speech when he said, "He that looks on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery already with her in his heart." Understand that God's Commandments mean not only what they say in words, but that they touch the thought, the heart, the imagination. Think of that sentence of David, "Your Commandments are exceeding broad." And thus, I think, you will soon come to detect the heinousness of your sin and the blackness of your guilt.

And if you would know still more, spend a little time in contemplating the fatal end of your sin, should you die impenitent. Dare to look downward to that fire which must be your eternal doom, unless Jesus Christ saves you. Be wise, Sinner and look at the harvest which you shall surely reap if you sow tares. Sometimes let these words ring in your ears, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." Open your ears and listen to the end of this text—"Where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." Let such a passage as this be chewed over in your soul, "The wicked shall be cast into Hell with all the nations that forget God." These solemn thoughts may help you. Such books as Allaine's Alarm, Baxter's Call to the Unconverted, Doddridge's Rise and Progress may have a good effect on your mind, in helping you to see the greatness of your guilt—by making you meditate upon the greatness of its punishment.

But if you would have a better and more effectual way still, I give you one other piece of advice. Spend much of your time in thinking upon the agonies of Christ. The guilt of your sin is never so clearly seen anywhere as in the fact that it slew the Savior. Think what an evil thing that must be which cost Christ His life, in order to save you. Consider, I say, poor Soul, how black must be that vileness which could only be washed out with His precious blood! How grievous those offenses which could not be expiated unless His body were nailed to the tree, His side pierced and unless He died in fever and in thirst, crying, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"

Go to the garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives and see the Savior in His bloody sweat! Go to Pilate's hall and see Him in His shameful accusations! Go to the hall of Herod's praetorian guard and see there how the mighty men set Christ at nothing! And go then, last of all, to Calvary and see that spectacle of woe—and if these do not show you the blackness of your sin, then nothing can. If the death of Christ does not teach you your need of a Savior, then what remedy remains for a heart so hard, for a soul so blind as yours?

Thus have I given you words of instruction. Forget them not. Put them into practice. Be not hearers only, but doers of the Word.

III. And now, very briefly indeed, a few sentences by way of DISCRIMINATION.

You are longing, my Hearer, to know your great guilt and to feel your need of Jesus. Take care that you do discriminate between the work of the Spirit and the work of the devil. It is the work of the Spirit to make you feel yourself a sinner, but it never was His work to make you feel that Christ could forget you. It is the work of the Spirit to make you repent of sin—but it is not the work of the Spirit to make you despair of pardon. That is the devil's work. You know Satan always works by trying to counterfeit the work of the Spirit.

He did so in the land of Egypt. Moses stretched out his rod and turned all the waters into blood. Out came Jannes and Jambres and by their cunning and sleight of hand, they have a large piece of water brought and they turn that into blood. Then Moses fills the land with frogs—the ungracious sorcerers have a space cleared and they fill that with frogs. Thus they opposed the work of God by pretending to do the same work. So will the devil do with you. "Ah," says God the Holy Spirit, "Sinner you can not save yourself." "Ah," says Satan, "and He cannot save you, either."

"Ah," says God the Holy Spirit "you have a hard heart, only Christ can soften it." "Ah," says the devil, "but He won't soften it unless you soften it first." "Ah," says God the Spirit, "you have no qualification, you are naked and ruined and undone." "Yes," says the devil, "it is no use your trusting Christ, because you have no good in you and you cannot hope to be saved." "Ah," says God the Spirit, "you do not feel your sin. You are hard to repent, because of your hardness." "Ah," says the devil, "and because you are so hard-hearted Christ cannot save you."

Now learn to distinguish between the one and the other. When a poor penitent sometimes thinks of destroying himself, do you think that is the Spirit's work? "It is the devil's work, he was a murderer from the beginning.'" One sinner says, "I am so guilty, I am sure I can never be pardoned." Is that the Spirit's teaching—that lie? Oh, that comes from the father of lies! Take heed, whenever you read a biography like that of John Bunyan's Grace Abounding, as you read, say, "that is the Spirit's work, Lord send me that"—"that is the devil's work, Lord keep me from that."

Do not be desirous to have the devil tearing your soul to pieces, the less you have to do with him the better and if the Holy Spirit keeps Satan from you, bless Him for it. Do not wait to have the terrors and horrors that some have, but come to Christ just as you are. You do not want those terrors and horrors, they are of little use. Let me remind you of another thing. I ask you not to acquaint yourself with your sins so as to hope to know them all, because you cannot number them with man's poor arithmetic. Young, in his Night Thoughts, says, "God hides from all eyes but His own, that desperate sight—a human heart."

If you were to know only the tenth part of how bad you have been you would be driven mad. You who have been the most moral, the most excellent in character, if all the past sins of your heart could stand before you in their black colors and you could see them in their true light you would be in Hell, for indeed it is Hell to discover the sinfulness of sin. Do you mean to say that you would go down on your knees and ask God to send you to Hell, or drive you mad? Be not so foolish—say, "Lord, let me know my guilt enough to drive me to Christ. But do not gratify my curiosity by letting me know more. No, give me enough to make me feel that I must trust Christ, or else be lost and I shall be well content if You give me that, though You deny me more." Once again, my dear Hearers, listen to this next oration, for it is very important. Take care you do not try to make a righteousness out of your feelings. If you say, "I may not go to Christ till I feel my need of Him"—that is clear legality. You are on the wrong tack altogether, because Christ does not want you to feel your need in order to prepare for Him. He wants no preparation and anything which you think to be a preparation is a mistake. You are to come just as you are—today, as you are, now—not as you will be, but just now, as you now are.

I do not say to you, "Go home and seek God in prayer. I say come to Christ now at this very hour." You will never be in a better state than you are now, for you were never in a worse state and that is the fittest state in which to come to Christ. He that is very sick is just in the right state to have a

doctor. He that is filthy and begrimed is just in the right state to be washed. He that is naked is just in the right state to be clothed. That is your case. But you say, "I do not feel my need." Just so—your not feeling it proves you to have the greater need. You cannot trust your feelings, because you say, you have not any.

Why, if God were to hear your prayers and make you feel your need, you would begin to trust in your feelings and would be led to say, "I trust Christ because I feel my need." That would be saying, "I trust myself." All these things are but Popery in disguise. All this preaching to sinners that they must feel this and feel that before they trust in Jesus, is just selfrighteousness in another shape.

I know our Calvinistic Brethren will not like this sermon—I cannot help that—for I do not hesitate to say that Phariseeism is mixed with HyperCalvinism more than with any other sect in the world. And I do solemnly declare that this preaching to the prejudice and feelings of what they call sensible sinners, is nothing more than self-righteousness taking a most cunning and crafty shape, for it is telling the sinner that he must be something before he comes to Christ. Whereas the Gospel is preached not to sensible sinners, or sinners with any other qualifying adjective, but to SINNERS as sinners, to sinners just as they are. It is not to sinners as repentant sinners, but to sinners as sinners, be their state what it may and their feelings whatever they may.

Oh, Sinners, Mercy's door is flung wide open to you this morning. Let not Satan push you back by saying, "You are not fit." You are fit! That is to say, you have all the fitness Christ wants and that is none at all. Come to Him just as you are. "Oh," says one, "but you know that hymn of Hart's?—

'All the fitness He requires Is to feel your need of Him,' I cannot get that." Let me counsel you then, never to quote part of a hymn, or part of a text—quote it all—

"All the fitness he requires Is to feel your need of him; This he GIVES YOU, It is His Spirit's rising beam."

Come and ask Him to give it to you and believe He will give it you. Do believe my Master is longing to save you—trust Him, act on that belief, Sinner and you shall be saved, or else I will be lost with you. Do but believe that my Master has got a loving heart and that He is able to forgive and that He has a mighty arm and is able to deliver you. Do Him the honor now of not measuring His corn with your bushel. "For His ways are not your ways, neither are His thoughts your thoughts." "As high as the Heaven is above the earth, so high are His ways above your ways and His thoughts above your thoughts."

Today He says to you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Sinner, if you believe and are not saved, why God's Word is a lie and God is not true! And will you ever dream that to be the case? No, Sinner—close in now with the proclamation of this Gospel and say—

"I'll to the gracious King approach, Whose scepter mercy gives. Perhaps He may command my touch, And then the suppliant lives. Perhaps He will admit my plea, Perhaps will hear my prayer; But if I perish, I will pray, And perish only there."

You cannot perish trusting in Christ. Though you have no good works and no good feelings, yet if yours arms are round the Cross and if the blood is sprinkled on your brow, when the destroying angel shall pass through the world, he shall pass over you. Thus is it written—"When I see the

blood, I will pass over you"—not "when I see your feelings about the blood"—not even, "when I see your faith in the blood," but "when I see the blood. I will pass over you." Learn to discriminate between a sense of sin which would humble you and a sense of sin which would only make you proud. When you have come to say, "I have felt my sin enough and therefore I am fit to come to Christ," it is nothing but pride dressed in the garb of humility.

Let me tell you one more thing before I have done with you on this point. Anything which keeps you from Christ is sin—whatever thought you have which keeps you from trusting Christ today is a sinful thought. And every hour you continue as you are, an unbeliever in Christ, the wrath of God abides on you. Now why should you be asking for a thing which may help to keep you from Christ all the longer? You know now that you have nothing good in you. Why not trust in Christ for all? But you say, "I must first of all feel more." Poor Soul, if you were to feel more acutely, you would find it all the harder to trust Christ. I prayed to God that He would show me my guilt. I little thought how He would answer me. Why I was such a fool that I would not come to Christ unless the devil dragged me there. I said, "Christ cannot have died for me, because I have not felt miserable enough."

God heard me and, believe me, I will never pray that prayer again. For when I began to feel my guilt, then I said, "I am too wicked to be saved," and I found the very thing I had been asking for was a curse upon me and not a blessing. So, if you should feel what you ask to feel, it might be the cause of your condemnation. Be wise, therefore and listen to my Master's voice. Stay not to gather together the fuller's soap and the refiners fire, but come, and wash now in the Jordan, and be clean. Come and stop not till your heart is turned up with the plow and your soul hewn down with the axe.

Come as you are to Him now. What, man? Will you not come to Christ, when He has said, "Whomever will, let him come?" Will you not trust Him when He looks down and smiles on you and asks, "Trust Me, I will never deceive you"? What, can you not say to Him, "Master, I am very guilty, but You have said, 'Come now and let us reason together, though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool' "? Lord, this mercy is too great, but I believe it, I take You at Your word.

You have said, "Return, you backsliding children and I will forgive your iniquities." Lord, I come to You, I know not how it is that You can forgive such an one as I am, but I believe you can not lie and on that promise do I rest my soul. I know You have said, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Lord, I cannot understand how there can be power in the blood to wash away all manner of blasphemy, but You have said it and I believe it. It is Your business to make your own word true, not mine and you have said, "Whoever will, let him come." Lord, I am not worthy, but I do will to come, or if I do not will, yet I will to will, therefore will I come, just as I am. I know I have no good feeling to recommend myself to You, but then You do not want good feelings in me, You will give me all I want.

Oh my dear Hearers, I feel so glad I have such a Gospel as this to preach to you! If you have not received it, I pray God the Holy Spirit to send it home to you. It is so simple that men cannot believe it is true. If I were to bid you take off your shoes and run from here to York and you would be saved, why you would do it at once and the road to York would be thronged. But when it is nothing but the soul-quickening words, "Believe and live," it is too easy for your proud hearts to do.

If I told you to go and earn a thousand pounds and endow a Church with it and you would be saved, you would think the price very cheap. But when I say, "Trust Christ and be saved," you cannot do that—it is too simple.

Ah, madness of the human heart! Strange, strange, besotted sin—when God makes the path plain, men will not run in it for that very reason. And when he sets the door wide open, that is the very reason they will not come in. They say if the door were half open and they had to push it open, they would come in. God has made the Gospel too plain and too simple to suit proud hearts. May God soften proud hearts and make you receive the Savior.

IV. Now I come to my last point, which I have already touched upon and that is by way of EXHORTATION.

Poor Sinner, seven years ago you were saying just what you are saying now and when seven more years shall have come, you will be saying just the same. Seven years ago you said, "I would trust Christ, but I do not feel as I ought." Do you feel any better now? And when another seven years are come you will feel just as you do now. You will say, "I would come, but I do not feel fit—I do not feel my need enough."

Yes and it will keep going on forever, till you go down to the pit of Hell, saying as you go down, "I do not feel my need enough," and then the lie will be detected and you will say, "It never said in the Word of God, 'I might come to Christ when I felt my need enough,' but it said 'Whoever will, let him come.' I would not come as I was, therefore I am justly cast away." Hear me, Sinner, when I bid you come to Jesus as you are, and give you these reasons for it.

In the first place, it is a very great sin not to feel your guilt and not to mourn over it, but then it is one of the sins that Jesus Christ atoned for on the tree. When His heart was pierced, He paid the ransom price for your hard heart. Oh, Sinner, if Christ had only died that we might be forgiven of other sins except our hard hearts, we should never go to Heaven, for we have, all of us, even we who have believed, committed that great sin of being impenitent before Him. If He had not died to wash that sin away as well as every other sin, where should we be? The fact that you can not weep, nor sorrow as you would, is an addition to your guilt. But did not Christ wash you from that sin, black though it is? Come to Him— He is able to save you, even from this.

Again, come to Jesus because it is He only who can give you that heart for which you seek. If men were not to come to Christ till they feel as they should feel, they would never come at all. I will freely confess that if I had never trusted Christ until I felt I might have trusted Him, I never could have trusted Him and could not trust Him now. For there are times with me when after I have preached the Gospel as plainly as I could, I have returned to my own chamber and my heart has been dead, lumpish, lying like a log within my spirit and I have thought then, if I could not come to Christ as a sinner, I could not come anyway else.

If I found in the text one word before that word "sinners"—"Jesus Christ came into the world to save"—and then an adjective and then "sinners," I should be lost. It is just because the text says, "sinners" just as they are, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," that I can hope He came to save me. If it had said Jesus Christ came into the world to save soft-hearted sinners, I should have said, "Lord, my heart is like adamant." If it had said Jesus came into the world to save weeping sinners, I should have said, "Lord though I press my eyelids I could not force a tear.

If it had said Jesus came into the world to save sinners that felt their need of Him, I should say, "I do not feel the need of it. I know I do need you, but I do not feel it." But, Lord, You came to save sinners and I am saved. I trust You came to save me and here I am, sink or swim, I rest on You. If I perish, I will perish trusting You. And if I must be lost, in Your hands it shall be. For in my own hands I will not be in any respect, or in any degree saved. I come to that Cross and under that Cross I stand— "Your perfect righteousness is my beauty—my glorious dress."

Come, Sinner, to Christ, because He can soften yours heart and you can never soften it yourself. He is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins. Not merely the remission, but the repentance, too. He gives His Grace not merely to those who seek it, but even to those that seek it not. He gives repentance not to those who repent themselves, but to those who cannot repent. And to those who are saying, "Lord I would, but cannot feel"—"I would, but cannot weep"—I say Christ is just the Savior for you—a Christ that begins at the beginning and does not want you to begin—a Christ that shall go to the end and won't want you to finish—a Christ that does not ask you to say Alpha and then He will be the Omega—but He will be both Alpha and Omega.

Christ who is the beginning and the end, the first and the last. The plain Gospel is just this, "Look unto Me and be you saved all the ends of the earth." "But, Lord, I cannot see anything." "Look unto Me." "But, Lord, I do not feel." "Look unto Me." "But, Lord, I cannot say I feel my need." "Look unto Me, not unto yourself—all this is looking to yourself." "But, Lord, I feel sometimes that I could do anything, but a week passes and then I am hard of heart." "Look unto Me." "But Lord, I have often tried." "Try no more, look unto Me." "Oh, but Lord, You know." "Yes, I know all things, I know everything—all your iniquity and your sins, just look unto Me." "Oh, but often, Lord, when I have heard a sermon I feel impressed, yet it is like the morning cloud and the early dew. It passes away." "Look unto Me, not to your feelings or your impressions, look unto Me." "Well," say some, "but will that really save me, just looking to Christ?" My dear soul, if that does not save you, I am not saved. The only way in which I have been saved and the only Gospel I can find in the Bible, is looking to Christ. "But if I go on in sin," says one. But you cannot go on in sin. Your looking to Christ will cure you of that habit of sin.

"But if my heart remains hard?" It cannot remain hard. You will find that looking to Christ will keep you from having a hard heart. It is just as we sing in the penitential hymn of gratitude—

"Dissolved by Your mercy I fall to the ground, And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found."

You will never feel as you ought until you do not feel what you ought. You will never come to Christ until you do not feel that you can come. Come as you are. Come in all your poverty and stubbornness and hardness, just as you are now. Take Christ to be your All in All.

Sound your songs you angels! Stroke your golden harps you redeemed ones. There are sinners snatched from Hell today! There are men who have trusted Christ this morning. Though they scarcely know it, their sins are all forgiven. Their feet are on the Rock. The new song shall soon be in their mouths and their goings shall be established. Farewell, my Brothers and Sisters. Turn to God this morning. God shall keep you and you shall see His face in glory everlasting. Amen.

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Job 13,25 #3269 - A Frail Leaf

A FRAIL LEAF

NO. 3269

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1911.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Will You break a leaf driven to and fro?"

Job 13:25.

POOR Job! Who could have been brought lower than he? He had lost his possessions, his children, his health—he was covered with sore boils—and he was aggravated by the unkind speeches of his friends. In his deep distress he turns to God and finding no other plea so near at hand, he makes a plea out of his own distress. He compares himself to the weakest thing he could think of and then he says to God, the Great and the Merciful, "Will You, so glorious in power and so matchless in goodness—will You break me, who am like a poor leaf fallen from the tree, sere and dry, and driven to and fro in the wind?" Thus he draws an argument out of his own weakness. Because he is so low and insignificant and powerless, he lays hold upon the Divine strength and pleads for pity1

It is a common figure he uses, that of a leaf driven to and fro. Strong gusts of wind, it may be in the autumn when the leaves hang but lightly upon the trees, send them falling in showers around us. Quite helpless to stay their own course, fluttering in the air to and fro, like winged birds that cannot steer themselves, but are guided by every fitful blast that blows upon them, at last they sink into the mire to be trodden down and forgotten. To them Job likens himself—a helpless, hopeless, worthless, weak, despised, perishing thing—and he appeals to the awful Majesty on High and he says to the God of thunder and of lightning, "Will You put out Your power to destroy me? Will You bring forth Your dread artillery to crush such an insignificant creature as I am? With all the goodness of Your great heart—for your name is God That Is Good—will You turn Your Almighty power against me? Oh, be that far from You! Out of pity upon my utter weakness and nothingness, turn away Your hands and break not a leaf that is driven to and fro!"

The apprehension is so startling, the appeal so forcible that the argument may be employed in a great many ways. How often have the sick used it, when they have been brought to so low an ebb with physical pain that life, itself, seemed worthless? Stricken with disease, stung with smart and fretted with acute pains and pangs, they feel that if the affliction continues much longer, it were better for them to die then live! They long for the shades of death, that they might find shelter there. Turning their face to the wall, they have said, "O God, as weak as I am, will You again smite

me? Shall Your hand again fall upon me? You have laid me very low. Why do You lift up Your rod again? Break not, I beseech You, a leaf that is driven to and fro!"

Not less applicable is the plea to those who are plunged into the depths of poverty! A man is in trouble arising from destitution. Perhaps he has been long out of work. Bread is not to be found. The children are crying, hungry, starving! The habitation has been stripped of everything which might procure a little nourishment. The poor wretch, after passing through seas of trouble, finds himself no nearer a landing place than before, but—

"Sees each day new straits attend, And wonders where the scene will end."

Passing through the streets he is hardly able to keep his feet from the pavement or his skin from the cold by reason of his tattered garments. Homeless and friendless, like a leaf that is driven to and fro, he say, "O God! Will You continue this much longer? Will You not be pleased to stop Your rough wind, mitigate the sharpness of the winter, ease my adversity and give me peace?"

So, too, with those who are in trouble through bereavement. One child has been taken away and then another. The shafts of death flew twice. Then came sickness with threatening omen upon one that was still nearer and dearer. Still did not the desolation stay its gloomy portents. It seemed at length as though the widow would be bereft of her last and only child and then she cried, "O God! I am already broken. My heart is like a plowed field—cross-plowed—till my soul is ready to despair! Will You utterly break me? Will You spare me no consolations, no props for my old age? Must I be altogether driven away before the whirlwind and find no rest?"

Perhaps it is even more harassing in cases of mental distress for, after all, the sharpest pangs we feel are not those of the body, nor those of the estate, but those of the mind. When the iron enters into the soul, the rust thereof is poison. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" You may be surrounded with all the comforts of life and yet be in wretchedness more gloomy than death if the spirits are depressed. You may have no outward cause whatever for sorrow and yet if the mind is dejected, the brightest sunshine will not relieve your gloom. At such a time, you may be vexed with cares, haunted with dread and scared with thoughts which distract you. You fear that your sins are not pardoned, that your past transgressions are all brought to remembrance and that punishment is being meted out to you in full measure. The threats rise up out of God's Book and seem to lift sharp swords in their hands with which to smite you. Time is dreadful to you because you know it is hurrying you to eternity—and the thought of eternity stings as does an adder because you measure the future reckoning by the present distress. At such a time, when you are faint with longing, ready to despair and driven to the verge of madness, I can imagine your crying out, "O Lord God of Mercy, I am as a leaf that is driven to and fro—will You quite break me and utterly destroy me? Have compassion, and show Your favor to Your poor broken creature!"

Many a child of God may have used this, and if he has not used it yet, he may still use it. There are times when all our evidences get clouded and all our joys are fled. Though we may still cling to the Cross, yet it is with a desperate grasp. God brings our sins to remembrance till our bones, as David puts it, "are sorely broken by reason of our iniquity." Then it is that, all broken, we can turn to the Strong for strength and use the plea of the text, "Will You break a leaf driven to and fro?" And we shall get for our answer these comforting words, "A bruised reed He will not break, and

smoking flax He will not quench."

I. THE PLEA IS SUCH AS ARISES FROM INWARD CONSCIOUSNESS. What plea is more powerful to ourselves than that which we draw from

ourselves? A man may not be sure of anything outside him, for eyes and ears may deceive—but he is always pretty well assured of anything within him, for that which he perceives in his own consciousness he is very tenacious about. Now, in this case, Job was quite certain about his own weakness. How could he doubt that? He looked upon his poor body covered with sores. He looked upon his friends who had perplexed and vexed him so much and he felt that he was, indeed, just like a sere leaf. I trust that many of us have been brought by God the Holy Spirit into such a humble frame of mind as to feel that, in a certain sense, this is true of us. O God, if we know ourselves right, we are all like withered leaves! We once thought ourselves fresh and green—we reckoned that we were as good as others, we made a fine and verdant profession—but, lo, You have been pleased to deal with us and all the fresh verdure of what we thought to be our piety—the natural piety which we thought we possessed—has faded and withered and now we are convinced that we are altogether as an unclean thing, and that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags! No, the hope that we clung to as the leaf clings to the tree, we have had to give up. We are blown away from that. We were once upon the tree of good works—we seemed as if we had life and would always be happy there, but the winds have taken us away and we cannot hold on to our frail hope. We once thought that we could do everything—we now perceive that without Christ we can do nothing! We are cast forth as a branch separated from the vine—we are withered! What can a leaf do? What power has it to resist the wind? Just so we feel now—we can do nothing—even the sin that dwells in us, like the wind, carries us away and we are like the leaf in the wind, subject to its power.

O my Brothers and Sisters, what a great blessing it is to be made to know our own weakness! To empty the sinner of his folly, his vanity and conceit is no easy matter. Christ can easily fill him with wisdom and prudence, but to get him empty—this is the work! This is the difficulty.

Volume 57 3To make a man know that he is in himself utterly lost, ruined, and undone—this is the Spirit of God's own work! We ministers cannot make a man see that, however diligently we may point it out. Only the Spirit of God can enlighten the heart to discern it and yet, until a man does see it, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, for there are none within the pearly gates who were not once brokenhearted sinners! Who could possibly come there and sing, "Unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood," but those who once said, "Pardon my iniquity, for it is great"?

While it is a confession of weakness, it is also an acknowledgment of God's power to push that weakness to a direful conclusion. "Will You break me?" says the text—"Lord, You can do it. In one minute You could take away hope from every one of us now in this House of Prayer." Some there are who are in the house of doom, where prayer can never be answered, and where Mercy's proclamation can never be heard! God could break us. It is an easy thing for Him to destroy! And more, He is not only able, but He has the right to do it if He will, for we are such worthless creatures through our disobedience that we may say, in the words of the hymn—

"If my soul were sent to Hell, Your righteous Law approves it well."

When we feel this, then let us make a proper use of our own consciousness, not to despond and faint, but to arise and go to our Father! So we shall come to God and say, "You can destroy me. You may destroy me justly and I cannot resist You. I cannot save myself from Your vengeance, nor can I merit anything at Your hand. I am as weak as water and altogether as perishing a thing as a poor withered leaf—but will You destroy me? I plead for pity. Oh, have pity upon me! O God, let Your heart yearn towards me and show me Your great compassion! I have heard that You delight in mercy and as Ben-Hadad of old, with the rope about his neck, went in unto the king and confessed that he deserved to die, so do I confess! And as the king forgave him, even so do You with me—a guilty culprit trembling in Your Presence!—

"Show pity, Lord! O Lord, forgive! Let a repenting rebel live."

II. This is also A PLEA FULL OF PITY. Though there is weakness, yet there is also power, for weakness is, for

the most part, a prevalent plea with those who are strong and good. I trust you could not see on your road home tonight a poor fainting woman, and pass her by. You could not have brought in before your presence a half-starved child who could not drag its weary limbs along without feeling that you must give relief. The mere sight of weakness draws pity. As a certain town was being sacked, one of the rough soldiers is said to have spared a little child, because it said, "Please, Sir, don't kill me, I am so little." The rough warrior felt the urgency of the plea. You may yourselves plead thus with God. "O God, do not destroy me! I deserve it, but oh, I am so little! Turn Your power upon some greater thing and let Your heart move with compassion towards me!"

The plea gathers force when the weakness is confessed. If a man shall have done you some wrong and shall come and acknowledge it, and bow down before you and confess it, why, then, you feel that you cannot take him by the throat, but you say, "Rise, I have forgiven you!" When weakness appeals to strength for protection and confession of guilt is relied on as an argument for mercy, those who are good and strong are pretty sure to be moved with compassion.

But, best of all, going from the positive to the comparative, and from the comparative to the superlative, how a confession of weakness touches your heart when it comes from your own child. If your child has been chastised, has confessed his wrong and pleads with you, how you stay your hand! Or, if the child is sick and something is done to it which pains it, if while the operation is being performed he should look you in the face, and say, "Father, spare your child! I can bear no more!" you have already felt more than you can make him feel, forthwith your own tears blind you and you stay your hand. "Like as a father pities his children, even so the Lord pities them that fear Him." If you have faith to bring your weakness before God with the sense of a child towards Him, you surely must prevail. Come, them, you timid trembling children of your Father who is in Heaven, use this plea—"Will You break a leaf that is driven to and fro?"

III. This PLEA IS RIGHTLY ADDRESSED. It is addressed to God. As I thought it over, it seemed to me as if I

could use it with reference to each Person of the Blessed Trinity in Unity. Looking up to the great Father of our spirits, from whom every good and perfect gift comes down, it seemed to me that out of weakness I could say to Him, "Will You, whose name is Father, will You break a leaf that is driven to and fro? You are the God that made us—will You utterly destroy the earthen vessel

which You have fashioned on Your wheel? Your name is 'Preserver of Men.' Will You annihilate us and break us into shivers? Have You not revealed Yourself as delighting in mercy? Are You not the 'Lord God, merciful and gracious, passing by iniquity, transgression and sin'? Have you not said, ' Come, now, and let us reason together; though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool'? O God, the Father of Heaven, will You break a leaf that is driven to and fro?"

And then, I thought I could address myself to the blessed Son of God who is also our Brother in human flesh, and say to Him, "Will You break—O You 'faithful High Priest, touched with a feeling of our infirmities'—'bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh'—Brother of our soul, by whose stripes we are healed—will You break a leaf that is driven to and fro? No, by Your thorn-crowned head and Your bloody sweat, by Your Cross and passion, by Your wounds and by Your death cry, You cannot,

Volume 57 5will not, be unmerciful and unkind! Surely they who in confidence turn to You and lay hold upon You, shall find that Your strength shall be ready to help—for though Your arm is strong to smite—it is no less strong to save."

Again, it comes across me sweetly, "O blessed Spirit! Could You break a leaf that is driven to and fro? You are no eagle—you did descend on Christ in Jordan as a dove—your influences are soft and soothing. Your name is, 'The Comforter.' You take of the things of Christ, not to blast us, but to bless us therewith. You are not a destroying Spirit, but a quickening Spirit, not a terrifying but an enlivening Spirit—will You break a leaf that is driven to and fro?"

Yes, I address You, You Triune God, You who are so full of mercy, and love, and Grace, and truth, that those who have known You best have been compelled to say, 'Oh, how great is Your goodness which You have laid up for them that fear You! Oh, the depths of Your loving kindness!' is it possible that You can cast away a poor, broken-hearted trembler, a poor, fearing, doubting one who would gladly be saved, but who trembles lest he should be cast away?"

IV. THIS PLEA IS BACKED UP BY MANY CASES OF SUCCESS. We will not give many, for we have not time, but there is one case

which we will mention. There was a woman whose life was exceedingly sorrowful. She was an Eastern wife and her husband had been foolish enough to have a second mistress in the house. The woman of whom we speak, a holy woman, a woman of refined and delicate mind, a poetess, indeed, of no mean order—this poor woman, having no children was the constant butt of her rival, whose sneering spiteful remarks chaffed and chafed her. Her adversary, it is said, "vexed her sore to make her afraid." Though her husband was exceedingly kind to her, yet as with a sword that cut her bones did she continually go. She was a woman of a sorrowful spirit, her spirit being broken. Still, "she feared the Lord exceedingly," and she went up to God's House, and it was in God's House that she received what was to her, perhaps, the greatest blow of her life! If it was from her rival that she received the harshest word, it was from the High Priest of God that she received this hardest blow! As she stood there praying, using no vocal sound, but her lips moving, the High Priest—an easy-going soul who had brought his own family to ruin by his slackness—little knowing her grief, told her that she was drunk! Being a woman to whom the thought of such a sin was as bitter as gall, it must have smitten her as with the chill blast of death, that God's Priest had said

she was drunk! But, as you will all remember, the Lord did not break the leaf that was driven to and fro. There came to her a comfortable promise. Ere long that woman stood there to sing! The mercy of God had made the barren woman to rejoice and to be the joyful mother of children! The song of the Virgin Mary was modeled after the song of Hannah—that memorable poem in which she sang of the Lord who had filled the hungry with good things, while the rich He had sent away empty. In that case the Lord did not break the leaf that was driven to and fro!

In later years—to take an example of another kind—there was a king who had sinned desperately, slaying God's servants with both hands. But he was taken captive by a powerful monarch and thrown into prison—such an offensive prison that he was among thorns—in mental as well as in material darkness. Then, troubled in spirit, tossed to and fro, and without power to help himself, Manasseh sought the Lord and he found the Lord—he prayed unto the Lord and the Lord heard him! Out of the low dungeon He did not break the leaf that was driven to and fro!

Take a later case, in our Savior's time. The picture of those proud Pharisees hurrying into our Savior's Presence a poor fallen woman is even now in your mind's eye. Yes, Sirs, she was taken in adultery. There was no doubt of it. She was "taken in the very act," and there she stands—no, she kneels—all covered with blushes before the Man who is asked to judge her! And you remember His words? He never said a word to excuse her guilt—the Savior could not and would not condone her shame! Nor would He, on the other hand, lend Himself to crush the woman who had sinned, but He said—"Where are those, your accusers? Go and sin no more!" Let His words come unto you, poor leaf, driven to and fro! Oh, if there should be such a leaf as that driven here tonight, driven in, perhaps, by stress of weather! Men despise you—from your own sex you get faint pity—but Jesus, when you appeal to Him—will not break such a leaf that is driven to and fro!

Shall I tell another story of the woman who came behind the Master, in the press, and stole a cure by touching His garment? She thought she would receive a curse, but He said—"Be you of good cheer. Your faith has made you whole. Go in peace." It was poor faith—it was very much like unbelief, but yet it was rewarded with a rich acceptance, for He will not break a leaf that is driven to and fro!

V. Once more, my text is A FAINT PLEA WHICH INVITES FULL SUCCOR.

"Will You break a leaf that is driven to and fro?" O Job! There is much wrapped up in what you have said!

He meant this—"Instead of breaking it, You will spare it; You will gather it up, You will give it life again." It is like that text, "A bruised reed He will not break." Oh, it means more than that—it means that He will heal its bruises. "A smoking flax He will not quench." That is good, but it means more! It means that He will stoop down to it and with His soft breath He will blow that smoking flax into a flame—He will not let it go out! He will preserve its heat and make something more of it. O you who are brought to the very lowest of weakness, use that weakness in pleading with God, and He will return unto you with such a fullness of blessing that you shall receive the pardon of sin! You shall be accepted through the righteousness of Christ! You shall be dear to the heart of

Volume 57 7God! You shall be filled with His Spirit and you shall be blessed with all the fullness of God!

My Lord is such an One that if a beggar asks a penny of Him, He gives him gold! And if you ask only for the pardon of sins, He will give you all the Covenant blessings which He has been pleased so bounteously to provide for the necessities of His people! Come, poor guilty one—needy, helpless, broken and bruised—come by faith and let your weakness plead with God through Jesus Christ!

VI. WE MAY USE THIS PLEA—MANY OF US WHO HAVE LONG KNOWN THE SAVIOR.

Perhaps our faith has got to be very low. O Lord, will You destroy my little faith? I know there is sin in it. To be so unbelieving as I am is no little crime, but Lord, I thank You that I have any faith. It is weak and trembling, but it is faith of Your own giving. Oh, break not the poor leaf that is driven to and fro!

It may be your hope is not very bright. You cannot see the golden gates, though they are very near. Well, but your hope shall not be destroyed because it is clouded. You can say, "Lord, will You destroy my hope because it is dim?" No, that He will not!

Perhaps you are conscious that you have not been as useful, lately, as you once were, but you may say, "Lord, will You destroy my usefulness because I have been laid aside, or have not done what I ought to have done in Your service?" Bring your little Graces to Christ as the mothers brought their little children, and ask Him to put His hands upon them and to bless them. Bring your mustard seed to Christ and ask Him to make it grow into a tree, and He will do it! But never think that He will destroy you, or that He will destroy the works of His own hands in you!

Oh, that I could so preach as to give the comfort to you which I have felt in my own soul while musing over these words! I wish that some who feel how lost, how empty and how ruined they are, could now believe in the great and the good heart of my Lord Jesus Christ. Little do they know how glad He will be to save them. You will be glad to be saved, but He will be more glad to save you. You will be thankful to sit at the feast, but of all that come to the banquet, there is no heart as glad as the heart of the King! When the King came in to see the guests, I know there were gleams of joy in His face which were not to be found in the faces of any of the guests. He has the joy of benevolence! Perhaps you have sometimes felt a thrill of pleasure when you have done some good to your poor fellow creatures. Now, think what must be the joy of Christ, the joy of the Father and the joy of the Holy Spirit—the joy of doing good to those who do not deserve it, the joy of bestowing favors upon the wicked and the unthankful, the joy of showing that He does good because He is good—not because you are good, but because He is good! Thus the Lord God will leap over the mountains of your sins, your prejudices and the rivers of your iniquities, that He may come unto you and display the full Glory of His loving kindness and His tender mercy! Oh, that some might now for the first time be drawn to Jesus, put their trust in Him and find pardon and peace!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Psalms 130:1-8; 1 John 1:1-10; 1 John 2:1-2.

Verse 1. Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O LORD. The most eminent of God's saints have been in the depths. Why, then, should I murmur if I have to endure trials? What am I that I should be exempt from warfare? How can I expect to win the crown without first carrying a cross? David

saw the depths and so must you and I. But David learned to cry to God out of the depths. Learn, therefore, that there is no place so deep but prayer can reach from the bottom of it up to God's ear, and then God's long arm can reach to the bottom and bring us up out of the depth! "Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord." Do not say, "Out of the depths have I talked to my neighbors and sought consolation from my friends."—

"Were half the breath thus vainly spent To Heaven in supplication sent, Your cheerful song would oftener be Hear what the Lord has done for me!"

2. LORD, hear my voice: let Your ear be attentive to the voice of my supplications. Now a main part of prayer must be occupied by confession and the Psalmist proceeds, therefore—

3. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? That is to say, apart from Christ, if God exercises His Justice to its utmost severity, the best of men must fall, for the best of men, being men at the best, are sinners even at their best!

4. But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. If there were no mercy, there would be no love in any human heart—and that would be an end to religion if there were an end to forgiveness! Here let us observe that the best of men dare not stand before an absolute God—that the holiest of God's saints need to be accepted on the footing of a Mediator—to receive forgiveness of sins.

5. I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His Word do I hope. There is a waiting of expectancy. We believe that He is about to give us the mercy, and we hold out our hands for it. There is a waiting of resignation, we know not what God may do nor when He may appear, but we wait. Aaron held his peace. It is a great virtue to wait for God when we know not what He does, but to wait His own explanations and be content to go without explanations if He does not choose to give them.

6. My soul waits for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. And many a mariner has watched for the morning with an awful anxiety, for he could not know where his vessel was until the day should break! Many a weary patient tossed upon the bed of pain has waited for the morning, saying,

Volume 57 9"Would God it were morning, for then, perhaps, I might find ease." And you know that sometimes the watchers upon the castle top, who have to be guarding the ramparts against the adversary by night, watch for the morning. So does David's soul watch. Lord, if I may not have You, permit me to watch for You. Oh, there is some happiness even in waiting for an absent God! I recollect that Rutherford said, "I do not see how I can be unhappy, for if Christ will not love me, if He will but permit me to love Him, and I feel I cannot help doing that—the loving of Him will be Heaven enough for me." Waiting for God is sweet, inexpressibly delightful—

"To those who call, how kind You are, how good to those who seek! But what to those who find? Ah, this, nor tongue nor pen can show The love of Jesus, what it is, none but His loved ones know!"

Happy are they who, having waited patiently, at last behold their God!

7, 8. Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption and He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. He shall do this in a double and perfect way—He shall redeem us from the effect of all our iniquities through the atoning Sacrifice and from the presence of all iniquity by His sanctifying Spirit. They are without fault before the Throne of God! "I will purge their blood that I have not cleansed, says the Lord that dwells in Zion." May my soul have a part and lot in this precious promise!

1 John 1:1-10—Verse 1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life. The fact that Christ was really in the flesh, that He was no phantom, no shadow mocking the eyes that looked upon Him, is exceedingly important and, therefore, John—(whose style, by the way, in this Epistle is precisely like the style which he uses in his Gospel)—John begins by declaring that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who in His eternity was from the beginning, was really a substantial Man, for he says—"We have heard Him"—hearing is good evidence. "Which we have seen Him with our own eyes"—certainly eyesight is good, clear evidence. "Which we have looked upon"—this is better, still, for this imports a deliberate, careful, circumspect gaze! But still better—"which our hands have handled," for John had leaned his head on Jesus Christ's bosom and his hands had often met the real flesh and blood of the living Savior! We need have no doubt about the reality of Christ's Incarnation when we have these open eyes and hands to give us evidence!

2. (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us). That same eternal Being who is Very God of Very God, and is worthy to be called essentially Life, was made flesh and dwelt among us, and the Apostles could say—"We beheld His Glory."

3. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you— See how he does hammer this nail as if he will drive it fast! How he rings this bell that it may toll the death-knell of every doubt! 3. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us. But John, what is the value of fellowship with you—even you and your brethren—a parcel of poor fishermen? Who wants fellowship with you—hooted, despised, mocked and persecuted in every city—who wants fellowship with you?

3. And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ. What a leap from the fisherman to the Father's Throne! From the poor, despised son of Zebedee up to the King of Kings! Oh, John, we would have fellowship with you now! We will have fellowship with your scorn and spitting, that we may have fellowship with you and with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ!

4. And these things write I unto you that your joy may be full. Some Christians have joy, but there are only a few drops in the bottom of their cup. But the Scriptures were written, and more especially the Doctrine of an Incarnate God is revealed to us, that our joy may be full! Why, if you have nothing else to make you glad, the fact that Jesus has become Brother to you, arrayed in your flesh, should make your joy full!

5. This, then, is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Not a light, nor the light, though he is both, but that He is Light! Scripture uses the term, light, for knowledge, for purity, for prosperity, for happiness and for truth.

God is Light and then, in his usual style, John, who not only tells you a Truth of God but always guards it, adds—"in whom is no darkness at all."

6. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not speak the truth. Mark here, this does not mean walking in the darkness of sorrow, for there are many of God's people that walk in the darkness of doubts and fears and yet they have fellowship with God! No, they sometimes have fellowship with Christ all the better for the darkness of the path along which they walk, but the darkness here meant is the darkness of sin, the darkness of untruthfulness. If I walk in a lie, or walk in sin, and then profess to have fellowship with God, I have lied and do not speak the truth.

7. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light—Not to the same degree, but in the same manner—

7. We have fellowship, one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. So you see that when we walk the best—when we walk in the light, as He is in the light—when our fellowship is of the highest order, yet still we need daily cleansing. It does not say—mark this, O my Soul—it does not say, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleansed," but, "cleanses." If guilt returns, His power may be proved again and again—there is no fear that all my daily slips and shortcomings shall not be graciously removed by this precious blood! But there are some who think they are perfectly sanctified and have no sin—

Volume 57 11 8, 9. If we say that we have no sins, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Oh, those words, and more especially that glorious word, "all"! This must include the vilest sin that ever stained human nature, the blackest grime that ever came from the black heart of man! And now John is very careful when he strikes a blow, to hit completely. He has already smitten those who say they have no sin, and now he smites those who say they did not, at one time, have any—

10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.

1 John 2:1-2 Verse 1. My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin

not. He is anxious that they should not sin. He knows they do, and that if they say they do not, they lie. Still the Christian's objective is sinless perfection, and though he will never have it till he gets to Heaven, that is all the better because he will always, then, be pressing forward and never reckoning that he has attained it!

1, 2. And if any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And He is the Propitiation for our sins: and not for ours, only, but also for the sins of the whole world. By which is meant, not only that Jesus Christ died for Gentiles as well as Jews, and for some of all nations, but that there is that in the Atonement of Christ which might be sufficient for every creature under Heaven if God had so chosen every creature! The limitation is lying not in the value of the Atonement, itself, but in the design and intention of the Eternal God. God sent His Son to lay down His life for His sheep. We know that Christ redeemed us from among men, so that the redemption is particularly and especially for the elect. Yet at the same time the price offered was so precious—the blood was so Infinite in value—that if every man that ever lived had to be

redeemed, Christ could have done it. It is this that make us bold to preach the Gospel to every creature, since we know there is no limit in the value of the Atonement, though we also know that the design of it is only for the chosen people of God!

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 47

Job 14,14 #432 - A Vocie from the Hartley Collier

A VOICE FROM THE HARTLEY COLLIERY

NO. 432

A SERMON DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY 30, 1862,

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"If a man dies, shall he live again?"

Job 14:14.

ONCE more the Lord has spoken. Once again the voice of Providence has proclaimed, "All flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of grass." O sword of the Lord, when will you rest and be quiet? Why these repeated warnings? Why does the Lord so frequently and so terribly sound an alarm? Is it not because our drowsy spirits will not awaken to the realities of death? We fondly persuade ourselves that we are immortal, that though a thousand may fall at our side and ten thousand at our right hand, yet death shall not come near unto us.

We flatter ourselves that if we must die, yet the evil day is far away. If we are sixty, we presumptuously reckon upon another twenty years of life. And the man of eighty, tottering upon his staff, remembering that some few have survived to the close of a century, sees no reason why he should not do the same. If man cannot kill Death, he tries at least to bury him alive. And since Death will intrude himself in man's pathway, we endeavor to shut our eyes to the ghastly object. God in Providence is continually filling our path with tombs.

With kings and princes there is too much forgetfulness of the world to come. God has, therefore, spoken to them. They were but few in number—one death might be sufficient in their case. That one death of a beloved and illustrious prince will leave its mark on courts and palaces. As for the workers, they also wish to put far from them the thought of the coffin and the shroud—God has spoken to them, also. There were many— one death would not be sufficient. It was absolutely necessary that there should be many victims, or we should have disregarded the warning.

Two hundred witnesses cry to us from the pit's mouth, a solemn fellowship of preachers all using the same text, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" If God had not thus spoken by the destruction of many, we should have said, "Ah, it is a common occurrence. There are frequently such accidents as these." The rod would have failed in its effect had it smitten less severely. The awful calamity at the Hartley Colliery has, at least, had this effect, that men are talking of death in all our streets.

Oh, Father of Your people, send forth Your Holy Spirit in richer abundance, that by this solemn chastisement higher ends may be answered than merely attracting our thoughts to our latter end.

Oh, may hearts be broken, may eyes be made to weep for sin, may follies be renounced, may Christ be accepted and may spiritual life be given as the result of temporal death to the many who now sleep in their untimely graves in Earsdon Churchyard.

This text is appropriate to the occasion but God alone knows how applicable the discourse may be to some here present. Yes, to young hearts little dreaming that there is but a step between them and death. To aged persons, who as yet have not set their house in order but who must do it, for they shall die and not live. We will take the question of the text and answer it upon Scriptural grounds. "If a man dies, shall he live again?" NO!—YES!

I. We answer the question first with a "No." He shall not live again here—he shall not again mingle with his fellows and repeat the life which death has brought to a close. This is true of him with regard to himself and equally true with regard to his neighbors. Shall he live again for himself? No. Shall he live again for his household? No.

1. Dwell for a moment on the first thought. "If a man dies, shall he live again." Shall he live for himself. No. If he has lived and died a sinner, that sinful life of his shall never be repeated. Sinner, you may empty the cups of drunkenness in this world throughout a long life, but you shall never have another season to spend in intoxication! You who have broken through all the bounds of morality, you may live in this life debauched, depraved and devilish—but death shall put an end to your career of lust. Let the cup be sweet. It is the last time you shall ever drink it.

If there are any pleasures in sin, you shall never taste them again. The sweets shall be over once and for all, and at the bottom you shall find the bitter dregs which shall be gall forever. Once you shall insult high Heaven, but not twice. Once shall you have space to blaspheme—once shall you have time proudly to array yourself in self-righteousness. Once shall you have power to despise the Christ who is the Savior of men but not twice. The long-suffering of God shall wait for you through your life of provocations. But you shall not be born again into this world.

You shall not a second time defile its air with blasphemies, nor blot its beauties with impiety. You shall not live again to forget the God who has daily loaded you with mercies. You have your daily bread now. The clothes that are on your back shelter you from the cold. You go to your house and you have comforts and mercies there—but like the swine which feed beneath the oak, forgetful of the green bough which yields the acorn, or like the brute which is content to eat the grass but never thanks the sun or the cloud which nourished the pasture, so you live in this world—forgetful of the God who made you, in whom you live and move and have your being. In this life you are unthankful, but you shall have no further opportunity for this ingratitude. All your candles shall go out in eternal darkness. There shall be no more dainty meals for you, no more joyous holidays, no more quiet slumbers. Every mercy shall be taken from you. That which makes life desirable shall be removed if you die impenitent, till you shall hate your existence and count it your highest blessing if you could cease to be. You shall not live again, I say, to treat your God worse than the ox treats its owner. The ass knows his master's crib, but you know not, though you shall know, for this is the last season in which you shall play the brute.

My dear Hearers, many of you have something more than the common mercies of God. You have His Word, Sabbath after Sabbath, preached in your ears. I may say truthfully concerning you who attend this House of Prayer, that you hear one who, when he fails for want of power, fails not for

want of will to do you good. I have not shunned to warn you and to preach in all simplicity the whole counsel of God, so far as I have been taught by the Holy Spirit. If you die you shall not live again to stifle the voice of your conscience and to quench the Spirit of God. You shall have no more Sabbaths to blaspheme when this life is over.

There shall be no Church bells for you, after your knell is tolled. No affectionate voice shall beseech you in Christ's place to be reconciled to God. No warning hand shall point you to the Cross—no loving lips shall cry, "This is the way! Walk in it." You have your last warnings now, Sinners. If you reject them you shall have no more. You hear in this life your last invitations—despise them and the door shall be shut in your face forever. Christ is lifted up before your eyes, look to Him now and live. Refuse Him and there remains no more sacrifice for sin and no other life in which you may lay hold of Him—

Fixed is their everlasting state, Could man repent, it is then too late; Justice has closed mercy's door, And God's long-suffering is no more.

Here you may have a mother to weep for you—a wife to pray for you— friends who will counsel you. The blessings of a Christian country, an open Bible, and a House of Prayer—but it is your last time. Now or never. Now or never. Lost in time. Lost in eternity. Saved now, saved forever. Sinner, it is your last turn. Will you choose to be damned? Then damned you are without hope! If God saves you now, then saved you are beyond fear of perishing. But it is your last, your only opportunity. Where the tree falls there it must lie forever.

"Return, O wanderer to your home, It is madness to delay. There are no pardons in the tomb, and brief is mercy's day. Return! Return!"

Solemnly let us say it, awful as it appears—it is well that the sinner should not live again in this world. "Oh," you will say, when you are dying, "if I could but live again, I would not sin as I once did." When you are in the pit of Hell, perhaps your pride will lead you to imagine that if you could come back to earth again you would be another man. Ah, but you would not be so! Unless you had a new heart and a right spirit, if you could live again, you would live as you did before. Keep the fountain unchanged and the same streams will flow. Let the cause remain and the same effects will follow.

If the lost spirits could escape from Hell, they would sin as they did before. If they could again listen to the Gospel they would again reject it, for he that is filthy will be filthy still. The flames of Hell shall work no change in character. For they have no sanctifying influence. They punish, but they do not cleanse. Sinners, it is well that you will not live again, for if you did you would but increase your condemnation. There would be two lives of sin, of rejection of Christ, of unbelief and, if it were possible, Hell would then be no less tolerable for you than it shall be now. Oh, my poor dying Hearers, by the corpses in the dark smothering gas of Hartley Pit, I pray you be awakened, for your death hour is hastening on, and you have but today in which to find a Savior.

"Sinner beware—the axe of death is raised and aimed at you—while your Maker spares your breath, Beware, O barren tree." Every time you hear your clock tick, let it say to you, "Now or never, NOW OR NEVER, NOW OR NEVER."

In the case of the child of God, it is the same, so far as he himself is concerned. When he dies he shall not live again. No more shall he bitterly repent of sin. No more lament the plague of his own heart and tremble under a sense of deserved wrath. No more shall the godly pitman suffer for righteousness' sake, despising the sneer of his comrades. The battle is once fought—it is not to be repeated. If God has safely guided the ship across the sea, and brought it to its desired haven, it casts anchor forever—and goes not out a second time into the storm.

Like those earnest Methodist miners, we have one life of usefulness, of service, of affliction, of temptation. We have only one life in which to glorify God on earth in blessing our fellow men. One life in which faith may be tried and love made perfect. One life in which we may prove the faithfulness of God in Providence. And one life in which we may see Christ triumphant over sin in our mortal bodies. We shall not return to the scene of conflict.

Brethren, is it not a mercy for you and for me if we are in Christ, that our furnace is not to be re-lit? Oh, Brethren, it were unkind for us to wish back the dead! Ah, when we think of those Brethren, those men of God, who in the pit held Prayer Meeting when they knew that the fatal gas would soon take away their lives—though we look at their weeping widows and their sorrowing children—it were wrong to wish them back again. What would any of us who fear God think, if we were once in Heaven? Would not the very suggestion of return, though it were to the most faithful spouse and best-beloved children, be a cruelty?

What? Bring back again to battle, the victor who wears the crown? Drag back to the storm and the tempest, the mariner who has gained the strand? What? Bring me back again to pain and sorrow, to temptation and to sin? No. Blessed be You, O God, that all the wishes of friends shall not accomplish this, for we shall be far from this world of grief and sin, with God, eternally shut in.

This world is not so lovely as to tempt us away from Heaven. Here we are strangers and foreigners. Here we have no abiding city. But we seek one to come. There is one wilderness, but we bless God there are not two. There is one Jordan to be crossed, but there is not another. There is one season when we must walk by faith, and not by sight, and be fed with manna from Heaven. But blessed be God, there is not another, for after that comes the Canaan—the rest which remains for the people of God.

What man among you, immersed in the cares of business, would desire two lives? Who, that is tired today with the world's noise, and vexed with its temptations, who that has come from a bed of sickness, who that is conscious of sin—would wish to leave the haven when once it is reached? As well might a galley-slave long to return to his oar, or a captive to his dungeon! No, blessed be God, the souls which have ascended from the coal mine to glow are not to leave their starry spheres but rest in Christ forever!

2. But now we pass to the other thought under this first head. If a man dies, shall he live again?" Shall he live for others? No. The sinner shall not live to do damage to others. If there were any fathers who perished in the pit who had neglected the training of their children, they cannot live again to educate them for Christ. If there were any there—we hope there were not, and there is a hopeful sign, for I am told that there was not a single public-house within a mile of the village—but if there were there any who by their ill example taught others to sin, they shall never do it again.

If there were any there who led others astray by bold speeches against God, they have done once and for all their life's mischiefs. And so with each of us tonight. Do I speak to one here who is living a useless life—a tree planted in rich soil but bearing no fruit—a creature made by God but rendering Him no service? Do I not speak to some such tonight? I know I do. You cannot be charged with outward vice, or with positive irregularity of conduct, but still, it may be said of you, "I was hungry and you gave Me no meat. I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; naked and you clothed Me not; sick and in prison and you visited Me not." You have not done it unto one of the least of these, His Brethren, and you have not done it unto Christ. It is not necessary to do anything in order to be lost. The way to perdition is very simple. It is only a little matter of neglect. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation." Well, Sinner, this is the last life of negligence that you shall ever spend. The very last season when you shall turn upon your heel and say, "Ha! Ha! There is nothing in it!" The last time in which you shall put off the messenger by saying, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for you."

The neglect of our own souls is a most solemn mischief to others. When others see that we neglect, they take courage and neglect, too—

"One sickly sheep infests the flock, And poisons all the rest."

But there are others whose example is bad. What sorrow it is to notice men who carry the infection of sin wherever they go about them. In some of our villages and especially in our towns, we have men who are reeking dung-hills of corruption. To put them by the side of a youth for an hour would be almost as dangerous as to make that youth walk through Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. Men who, as Saul breathed out threats, breathe out lasciviousness.

Ah, do I speak to such a wretch? It is your last rebellion—your last revolt. You shall never do this again. Never again shall you lead others down to Hell and drag them to the pit with you. Remember that. And there are some who, not only by example, but by overt teaching drive others astray. We have still, in this enlightened Christian land, wretches who boast the name of "infidel lecturer"—whose business it is to pervert men's minds by hard speeches against the majesty of Heaven. Let them labor hard if they mean to subvert Jehovah's Throne, for they have little time left to do it.

Well may the enemies of the Lord of Hosts be desperately in earnest, for they have an awful work to do. And if they consider the puny strength with which they go forth to battle against the Judge of all the earth, and the brevity of the time that can be given to the struggle, well may they work and toil. This is their only time—their sure damnation draws near. Hushed shall be their high words. Cold shall be their hot and furious hearts. God shall crush them in His anger and destroy them in His hot displeasure. If a man dies, he shall not live again to scatter hemlock seed and sow sin in furrows.

I do not know what your life is, my Friend. You have stepped in here tonight. It is not often you are in a place of worship but listen, now. You know that to your family you are sometimes a terror and always an ill example. Ah, you are a co-worker with Satan now, but God shall put you where you shall do no more hurt to that fair child of yours. Where you shall not teach your boy to drink—where you shall not instill into your daughter's mind unholy thoughts.

The time shall come, masters, when you shall be taken away from those men who imitate you in your evil ways. The time shall be over with you, working-man yonder—you shall not much longer jeer at the righteous and sneer at the godly. You will find it hard work to laugh at the saints when you get into Hell. You will find, when God comes to deal with you, and your life is over, that it will be utterly impossible for you, then, to call them fools, for you will be thinking yourself the greatest fool that ever was, that you did not, like they, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Well, jeer and joke and point the finger and slander and persecute as you may—it is the last time and you shall never have another opportunity to mock the saints. O remember, it were better for you that a millstone were about your neck, and that you were cast into the depths of the sea, than that you should thus offend Christ's little ones. Well, I think we may say it is a great mercy that the sinner shall not live again in this sense. What? Bring him back again—that old drunkard of the village tap room—restore him to life?

No, no! Good men breathed more freely when he was gone. What? Bring back that vile old blasphemer who used to curse God? No, no! He vexed the righteous long enough. Let him abide in his place. What? Bring back that lewd, lascivious wretch to seduce others and lead them astray? What? Bring back that thief to train others to his evil deeds? Bring back that self-righteous man who was always speaking against the Gospel and striving to prejudice other men's minds against Gospel light? No, no! With all our love of one man, the love of many is stronger, still, and we could not wish for the temporary and seeming good of one, to permit him to go raging among others.

Natural benevolence might suggest even the loosing of a lion as a creature but a greater benevolence says, "No, let him be chained, or he will rend others." We might not wish to crush even a serpent. Let it live, it has its own sphere, and its own enjoyment. But if the serpent creeps among men, where it can bite and infuse its poison into human veins, let it die. Without compunction we say it—"It were better that one man should die for the nation, that the whole nation perish not." If a man dies, then, as far as others are concerned, he shall not live again to curse his kind.

And now, we remind you that it is the same with the saint, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" No. This is our season to pray for our fellow men and it is a season which shall never return. Mother, you shall never come back to pray for your daughters and your sons again! Ministers, this is your time to preach. We shall never have an opportunity of being God's ambassadors anymore. Oh, when I sometimes think of this, I am ashamed that I can preach with dry eyes, and that sobs do not choke my utterance. Methinks if I were lying upon my dying bed, I might often say, "O Lord, would that I could preach again and once more warn poor souls."

I think Baxter says he never came out of his pulpit without sighing, because he had played his part so ill, and yet, who preached more earnestly than he? And so, at times when we have felt the weight of souls, yet in looking back, we have thought we did not feel it as we should. And when we have stood by the corpse of one of our own hearers, we have had the reflection, "Would that I could have talked more personally and spoken more earnestly to this man!" I often feel that if God should ever permit me to say I am clear of the blood of you all, it is about as much as I can ever hope to have.

That must be Heaven to a man, to feel that God has delivered him out of his ministry—it is such an awful thing to be responsible before God for the souls of men. "If the watchman warn them not, they shall perish, but their blood will I require at the watchman's hands." And so, remember, it is with each one of you. Now is your time to rescue the fallen, to teach the ignorant, to carry the lambs in your bosom, or to restore the wandering. Now is your season for liberality to the Church, for care of the poor, for consecration to Christ's service and for devotion to His cause.

If there could be sorrow among the spirits that are crowding around the Throne of Christ, methinks it would be this—they had not labored more abundantly and were not more instant in season and out of season in doing good. If those godly pitmen over whom we mourn tonight, had not done their utmost while they were here, the deficiency could never be made up. Let me commend to you the example of some of those who were in the pit, praying and exhorting their fellow men just as they were all in the last article of death.

They were Primitive Methodists. Let their names clothe Primitive Methodism with eternal honor! I conceive that in employing poor unlettered men to preach, the plan of the Primitive Methodists is New Testament and a Scriptural policy. Such methods of usefulness we have endeavored to pursue and hope to do so yet more fully. The Primitive Methodists think that a man may preach who never went to college. That a man may preach to his fellow miners even though he cannot speak grammatically.

And hence they do not excite their ministers to labor after literary attainments but after the souls of men. And the local preachers are chosen solely and wholly for their power to speak from the heart and to make their fellow men feel. We should have done more for London if we had not been so squeamish. Real Primitive Methodism we have seen in London, in the person of Mr. Richard Weaver. And if you would put a score of the ministers who have preached in the theatres altogether, they would not have made one such a man as Richard Weaver, for real effect upon the masses.

And yet what teaching had he, and what wisdom? None—but that he feels the power of God in his own soul and speaks out of his heart, roughly and rudely—but still mightily to others. We want all our Churches to feel that they must not say, "Who is John So-and-So? He is only a cobbler. He must not preach. What is Tom So-and-So? He is only a carpenter—why should he preach?" Ah, these are the men who shook the world. These are the men whom God used to destroy old Rome. With all our getting, while we seek to get education in the ministry, we must take care that we do not despise those things that are not, which God shall make mightier than the things that are—and those base things which God has chosen to stain the pride of human glorying and to bring into contempt all the excellent of the earth.

I know that I address some working men here. Working men, oh, that you knew Christ in your own hearts as they did in the Hartley pit! You see they had no preacher down there. Do not get the notion that you want a minister in order to come to Christ. Priest-craft is a thing we hate and as you hate it, too, we are quite one in that opinion. I preach the Word but what am I more than you? If you can preach to edification, I pray you do so. Your poor Brethren in the pit, though not set apart to that work, were yet as true priests unto the living God and ministers for Christ, as any of us. So you, too. Hasten to work while it is called today. Gird up your loins and run the heavenly race, for the sun is setting never to rise again upon this land.

II. "If a man dies shall he live again?" Yes, yes, that he shall. He does not die like a dog. He shall live again. Not here, but in another and a better—or a more terrible land. The soul, we know, never dies, but when it leaves the clay it mounts to sing with angels or descends to howl with fiends. The body itself shall live again. The corpses in the pit were, some of them, swollen with foul air. Some of them could scarcely be recognized—but as the seed corn has not lost its vitality, shriveled though it is—neither have those bodies. They are now sown and they shall spring up, either to bear the image of condemnation, or of immortality and life.

Scattered to the winds of Heaven, devoured of beasts, mixed with other substances and other bodies—yet every atom of the human body has been tracked by the eye of Omniscience and shall be gathered to its proper place by the hand of Omnipotence. The Lord knows every particle of the bodies of them that are His. All men, whether they are righteous or wicked, shall certainly live again in the body, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." This much comes to all men through Christ, that all men have a resurrection. But more than that. They shall all live again in the eternal state—either forever glorified with God in Christ, blessed with the holy angels, forever shut in from all danger and alarm—or in that place appointed for banished spirits who have shut themselves out from God and now find that God has shut them out from Him. They shall live again, in weal or woe, in bliss or bane, in Heaven or in Hell.

Now you that are unconverted, think of this, I pray you, for a moment. You shall live again. Let no one tempt you to believe the contrary. Whatever they shall say and however speciously they may put it, mark this word—you shall not rot in the tomb forever. There shall not be an end of you when they shall say, "Earth to earth, dust to dust and ashes to ashes." You shall live again. And hark, Sinner, let me hold you by the hand a moment—your sins shall live again. They are not dead. You have forgotten them but God has not.

You have covered them over with the thick darkness of forgetfulness, but they are in His book and the day shall come when all the sins that you have done shall be read before the universe and published in the light of day. What do you say to this, Sinner? The sins of your youth, your secret sins—oh, Man, let that thought pierce through you like a point of steel and cut you to the very quick—your sins shall live again. And your conscience shall live. It is not often alive now. It is quiet, almost as quiet as the dead in the grave. But it shall soon awaken, the trumpet of the archangel shall break its long sleep—depend on that.

The terrors of Hell shall make you lift up your eyes which have so long been heavy with slumber. You have had an awakened conscience, but then you are still in the land of hope. You will find, however, that an awakened conscience when there is no Christ to flee to is an awful thing. Remorse of conscience has brought many a man to the knife and to the halter. Ah, careless Sinner, you dare not, tonight, sit up an hour alone and think over the past and the future. You know you dare not. But there will be no avoiding conscience hereafter—it speaks now—but it will thunder then.

It whispers now, and you may shut your ears but its thunder-claps then shall so startle you that you cannot refuse to listen. Oh, Transgressor, your conscience shall live again, and shall be your perpetual tormentor! Remember that your victims shall live again. Am I addressing any who have enticed companions into sin and conducted friends to destruction? Your dupes shall meet you in another world and charge their ruin upon you. That young lad whom you led astray from the path

of virtue shall point to you in Hell and say, "He was my tempter." That woman— let us cover up that deed—bright eyes shall sparkle upon you through the black darkness like the eyes of serpents and you shall hear the hissing voice, "You did bring me here," and you shall feel another Hell in the Hell of that other soul.

Oh, God, save us! Let the sins of our youth be covered. Oh, save us! Let the blood of Jesus be sprinkled on our conscience, for there are none of us that dare meet our conscience alone! Shelter us, Rock of Ages. Deliver us from blood-guiltiness, O God, God of my salvation! Sinner, remember your God shall live. You think Him nothing now. You shall see Him then. Your business now stops the way. The smoke of time dims your vision. The rough blasts of death shall blow all this away, and you shall see clearly revealed to yourself the frowning visage of an angry God. A God in arms, Sinner! A God in arms, and no scabbard for His sword!

A God in arms and no shelter for your soul—a God in arms and even rocks refusing to cover you! A God in arms and the hollow depths of earth denying you a refuge! Fly, soul! While it is yet time—fly, the cleft in the rock is open now. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be damned." Fly, Sinner, to the open arms of Jesus! Fly! For He casts out none that come to Him.

And then, lastly, as this is true of the sinner, so it is true of the saint. He shall live again. If in this life, only, we had hope, we were of all men the most miserable. If we knew that we must die and not live forever, our brightest joys would be quenched. And in proportion to the joy we lost would be the sorrow which followed. We shall live again. Godly wife, your Christian husband, though he perished by the fatal "damp," shall live again, and you shall sit with him before the Eternal Throne.

He finished his life with prayer amid his comrades. He shall begin anew with praise amid the cherubim. Widow, bereaved of your many children, you have lost them all—not lost, we hope, but gone before. Oh, there shall be joy when every link that was snapped shall be re-fitted. When again the circle shall be completed and all losses restored—

"Far, far removed from fear and pain, Dear Brethren we shall meet again."

That sweet hymn of the children is a blessed one after all—

"We shall meet to part no more."

Death, you can not rob us! You can not tear away a limb from Jesus' body! You can not take away a single stone from the spiritual temple. You do but transplant the flower, O Death! You do not kill it. You do but uproot it from the land of frost to flourish in the summer's clime—you do but take it from the place where it can only bud, to the place where it shall be full blown. Blessed be God for Death, sweet friend of regenerated man! Blessed be God for the grave, safe wardrobe for these poor dusty garments till we put them on afresh, glowing with angelic glory.

Thrice blessed be God for resurrection, for immortality and for the joy that shall be revealed in us. Brethren, my soul anticipates that day. Let yours do the same. One gentle sigh and we fall asleep—perhaps we die as easily as those did in the colliery. We sleep into Heaven and wake up in Christ's likeness. When we have slept our last on earth and open our eyes in Heaven, oh, what a surprise! No aching arm, no darkness of the mine! No gases, no labor and no sweat! No sin, no stain there! Brethren, is not that verse near the fact which says—

"We'll sing with rapture and surprise, His loving kindness in the skies"?

Shall we not be surprised to find ourselves in Heaven? What a new place for the poor sinner. From the coal mine to celestial spheres. From black and dusty toil to bright and heavenly bliss. Above ground once and for all, yes and above the skies, too. Oh, long-expected day, begin! When shall it come? Hasten it, Lord!—

"Come, Death, and some celestial hand, To bear our souls away!"

I have thus tried to bring forward the text. Oh that the Lord, in whose name I desire to speak, may bless it to some among you. I have now to ask you kindly to think of those who are suffering through this terrible calamity. More than four hundred widows and orphans are left bereaved and penniless—for the working man has little spare cash to provide for such contingencies. As a congregation we can do but little to alleviate so great a sorrow, let us, however, bear our part with others.

I have no doubt the wealthier ones among you have already contributed in your different connections, either through the Lord Mayor, or Mark Lane, or the Coal Market, or the Stock Exchange, or in some other way—but there are many of you who have not done so, and those who have, may like an opportunity of doing so again.

Let us do what we can tonight, that we may show our gratitude to God for having spared our lives. And as we drop our money into the box, let us offer a prayer that this solemn affliction may be blessed to all in the land and that so Christ may be glorified.

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Chapter 48

Job 14,14 #764 - Our Life-Our Work-Our Change

OUR LIFE, OUR WORK,

OUR CHANGE

NO. 764

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 4, 1867,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change comes."

Job 14:14.

JOB was well near driven to desperation by the fearful torment of his bodily pains, by the exasperating remarks of his friends, and the cutting suggestion of his wife. It is no wonder if he became somewhat impatient. Never were words of complaint more excusable than in the sad case of Job when he cried, "O that you would hide me in the grave!" Everything that could make life bearable had been taken from him and every evil which could make death desirable came upon him.

Yet, after Job had uttered those exclamations, he seems to have been half ashamed of his weakness, and girding up his loins he argues with himself, reasoning his soul into a cooler, calmer frame. Job looks his life in the face—he perceives that his warfare is severe, but he remembers it is but once—and that when once over and the victory won, there will be no more fighting! Therefore he encourages himself to put up with his present sorrows and even with future evils, be they what they may, and registers this solemn resolution—far more glorious than the resolve of Alexander to conquer the world—to conquer himself and to abide with patience, the will of God.

He fixed it steadfastly in his heart that all his appointed days, until a change should come, he would endure the Divine decree with constancy of resignation. None among us can afford to cast a stone at the Patriarch for sighing and complaining, for we should not act one half so well ourselves. We are too much at times like Jonah—we turn cowards and would gladly flee from our work when it becomes arduous or yields us no honor. If we do not seek a ship to convey us to Tarshish, we sigh for a seraph to bear us to Heaven.

This huge Nineveh has made most of us quail in times of depression. I fear that frequently we act like lineal descendants of those children of Ephraim who, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. We shrink as a bone out of joint which slips aside under pressure. We are not only like Jacob, who halted upon one thigh, but we limp upon both legs at times! We are often disinclined for conflict and pine for rest, crying, "When will the day be over? When shall we be perfectly at ease?" It is against such a spirit as this that we must struggle. And to help us in the

struggle, it seemed to me to be good to consider the text now before us. To that end may God bless it, that we may be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change comes."

We shall call your attention this morning, first, to the aspect of life which Job gives us. Secondly, to his estimate of our work. And thirdly, to his view of the future.

I. First, let us observe THE ASPECT UNDER WHICH JOB REGARDED THIS MORTAL LIFE. He calls it an "appointed time," or, as the Hebrew has it, "a warfare." Observe that Job styles our life a time. Blessed be God that this present state is not an eternity! Though its conflicts may seem long they must have an end. We are in the finite state, at present, in which all griefs have their closes and conclusions. Long as the night may last it must yield, in due season, to the light of the morning. The winter may drag its weary length along but the spring is hard upon its heels.

The tide may ebb out till nothing remains but leagues of mud, and we lament that all the bright blue deep will vanish, but it is not so—the tide must flow again for God has so decreed. Our whole life is brief, indeed. Compared with eternity, a mere span—a hand's-breadth. From the summits of eternity, how, like a flying moment, will this transient life appear! The pains of this mortal life will seem to be a mere pin's prick to us when we get into the joys never ending and overflowing! And the toils of this life will be as child's play when we reach the everlasting rest.

Let us then, my Brothers and Sisters, judge immortal judgment. Lets us not weigh our troubles in the ill-adjusted scales of this poor human life, but let us use the shekel of eternity. We are born for eternity, and although it is true we have to struggle through this one brief hour of toil and conflict, an hour with our God in Glory will make up for it all. "I reckon," said that master of heavenly arithmetic, the Apostle Paul, who was never wrong in his reckoning, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

The longest and most sorrowful life is but a "time." Whisper that simple Truth of God into the ear of the languishing sufferer! Tell this glad Truth to the son of sorrow, poor and despised! Tell it to every daughter of grief— life is but a time—it is not eternity! O Mourner, contrast your present sorrows with the griefs of lost spirits to whom there is no time—who are cast away forever—who cannot expect a termination to their bitter griefs, but who see this word written in letters of fire before their weeping eyes, "Forever! Forever! FOREVER! FOREVER!"

Job also calls our life an "appointed" time. You know who appointed your days. You did not appoint them for yourself and therefore you can have no regrets about the appointment. Neither did Satan appoint them, for the keys of Hell and of death do not hang at his waist— "An angel's arm can't cast me to the grave: Millions of angels cannot keep me there."

To the almighty God belong the issues from death. He alone can speak the irrevocable word and bid the spirit return to God who gave it. God alone can wing the shaft that shall end this mortal existence—until He puts His hand to the bow all the archers of earth and Hell shall shoot in vain.

Our pilgrimage has an appointed beginning and end. In yonder hourglass which measures your existence, the sands which trickle to the nether globe were all measured into the upper bulb by the Divine hand! There is not a sand too few, nor a grain too many. You shall find that God has appointed with exact wisdom, with profound knowledge, and with irreproachable love all the days

and the doings of your life. Remember that you will live out, but not outlive your allotted years! You will live up to the last minute and neither plague, nor pestilence, nor dangers of flood, or field, or battle can deprive you of the last second which God has measured out to you.

Beyond the boundary He appointed you shall not pass though you take great care and call in the physician—you cannot add a second of time to your determined period. Inexorable Death will make no tarrying but perform his errand promptly when the Master sends him—

"Then to the dust, Return you must Without delay."

Should not this cheer us—that the appointment of our lot has been made by a loving Father's prudence and that the days and bounds of our habitation are not left to the winds of chance or to the waves of uncertainty— but are all decreed immutably by our Father who is in Heaven? In the volume of the book our life-story is written—in that same volume where the Savior's Covenant engagements were recorded.

You will observe, also, dear Friends, that Job very wisely speaks of the "days" of our appointed time. It is a prudent thing to forbear the burden of life as a whole and learn to bear it in the parcels into which Providence has divided it. Let us live as life comes, namely, by the day. Our God does not trust us with so much life as a month at once—we live as the clock ticks—a second at a time. Is not that a wiser method of living rather than to perplex our heads by living by the month, or by the year? You have no promise for the year—the Word of Mercy runs, "As your days your strength shall be." You are not commanded to pray for supplies by the year, but, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Said a good man to me the other day who had many troubles, who has borne them manfully to my knowledge, for these 15 or 20 years, when I asked him how his patience had held out—"Ah," he said, "I said to my afflicted wife the other day when the coals came in, 'It takes several big fellows to bring in the sacks, but yet our little kitchen maid, Mary, has brought the whole ton up from the cellar into our parlor. But she has done it a scuttle-full at a time. She has as surely moved those tons of coal as ever did the wagons when they brought them in, but she has moved them little by little, and done it easily.' "

This is how to bear the troubles of life—a day's portion at a time. Wave by wave our trials come and let us breast them one by one and not attempt to buffet the whole ocean's billows at once. Let us stand as the brave old Spartan did, in the Thermopylae of the day, and fight the Persians as they come on one by one. Thus shall we keep our adversities at bay and overcome them as they advance in single file. But let us not venture into the plain amidst the innumerable hordes of Persians or we shall speedily be swallowed up and our faith and patience will be overcome.

I would gladly live by the day and work by the day and suffer by the day till all my days are over. And I see the Ancient of Days in that land where days are lost in one eternal day, and the soul swims in seas of joy forever! I must not fail to remind you of the Hebrew: "All the days of my warfare will I wait." Life is, indeed, a "warfare." And just as a man enlists in our army for a term of years, and then his service runs out and he is free, so every Believer is enlisted in the service of life to serve God till his enlistment is over and we sleep in death. Our charge and our armor we shall put off together.

Brethren, you are enlisted soldiers when you believe in Jesus. Let me remind you that you are a soldier—you will be always at war—you will never have a furlough or conclude a treaty. Like the old knights who slept in their armor, you will be attacked even in your rest. There is no part of the journey to Heaven which is secure from the enemy, and no moment, not even the sweet rest of the Lord's Day, when the clarion may not sound. Therefore prepare yourselves always for the battle. "Put on the whole armor of God," and look upon life as a continued battle.

Be surprised when you do not have to fight—be wonderstruck when the world is peaceful towards you—be astonished when your old corruptions do not rise and assault you. You must travel with your swords always drawn, and you may as well throw away the scabbard, for you will never need it. You are a soldier who must always fight, and by the light of battle you must survey the whole of your life.

Taking these thoughts together as Job's view of mortal life, what then? Why, Beloved, it is but once—as we have already said—we shall serve our God on earth in striving after His glory but once. Let us carry out the engagements of our enlistment honorably. He who enters into Her Majesty's service for a term of years, if he is an honorable man, resolves that he will act worthily so long as he is in the ranks. So let it be with us—we shall never enter upon another war—let us wage the present warfare gloriously. We carry in our hands a sword, we have but to use it in one great lifebattle, and then it shall be hung up on the wall forever.

Let us use our weapon well, that we may not have to resign it, rusty and dishonored, as a memorial of our disgrace. Let us march cheerily to the fight, since it is but once! Let us play the man and be like David's mightiest, who feared no risks, but accepted deadly odds and won and held their own against all comers. Come, Beloved, we have an appointed time and it is running out every hour! Let us rejoice to see it go. Our Captain appointed it, He commanded us to stand sentry, or to rush into the front of the battle. Since the time is appointed by our well-beloved King, let us not dishonor His appointment, but in the name of Him who gave us our commission to live and fight, let us war a good warfare, living at the highest bent of our force, and the utmost strength of our being!

And since, dear Friends, it is the Lord's war that we are engaged in, we are enlisted under the great Captain of our salvation who leads us on to sure and certain victory! Let us not be discouraged! Let not our hearts fail us! Let us quit ourselves like men and be strong, for the Lord our God is with us, and we have the Mighty One of Israel to be our Captain! Let us glorify the Grace of God while we are permitted to remain on earth to glorify it! Let us be up and at our enemies while there are enemies for us to fight!

Let us carve out victory while we have the raw material of conflict to carve. There are no battles to be fought, and no victories to be won in Heaven. So now, in this life, let us resolve, in the name and strength of God the Holy Spirit, with all our force and vigor to glorify God who has appointed us our warfare. We now leave this head to turn to the second, and may God the Holy Spirit bless us in so doing.

II. JOB'S VIEW OF OUR WORK while on earth is that we are to wait. "All the days of my appointed time will I wait." The word "wait" is very full of teaching. It contains the whole of the Christian life, if understood in all its various senses. Let us take up a few very briefly.

In the first place, the Christian life should be one of waiting—that is, setting loose of all earthly things. Many travelers are among us this morning. They are passing from one town to another, viewing many countries. But if they are only travelers, and are soon to return to their homes, they do not speculate in the various businesses of Lombard Street or Cheapside. They do not attempt to buy large estates and lay them out, and make gold and silver. They know that they are only strangers and they act as such.

They take such interest in the affairs of the country in which they are sojourning as may be becoming in those who are not citizens of it. They wish well to those among whom they sojourn and dwell, but that is all, for they are going home. Therefore they do not intend to bind themselves with anything that might make it difficult to part from our shores. They know that they are on the wing and therefore they live like strangers and sojourners.

As a Bedouin wandering across the desert, so is a Christian—a bird of passage—a voyager seeking the haven. This is not our rest, it is polluted—

"Sad thought were this to be our home!" The wisdom of the Christian is to disentangle himself as much as possible from the things of this life. He will act kindly towards the citizens of the country where he is called to dwell, and he will seek their good. Still, he will remember that he is not as they are. He is an alien among them. He may have to buy and sell in this world, but that is merely as a matter of transient convenience. He neither buys nor sells for eternity, for he has "bought the Truth," and he "sells it not."

He has received God to be His treasure—and his heart and his treasure, too, he has sent on ahead. On the other side of the river all his joys and all his treasures are to be found. Here he looks upon his earthly joys as things that are lent him—borrowed comforts. If his children die, he does not wonder—he knew that they were not immortal. If his friends are taken away, he is not astonished—he understood that they were born of women and therefore would die like the rest. If his wealth takes to itself wings, he does not marvel—he knew that it was a bird of passage and he is not astonished when, like the swallows, it flies elsewhere.

He has long ago learned that the world is founded on the floods, and therefore when it moves beneath him he understands that this is the normal state of things and he is not at all amazed, but rather wonders that the world is not all panic and confusion since it is so unsubstantial. As Samson shook the Philistine temple, so shall the Word of the Lord in the hour of final doom lay all nature prone in one common ruin! And vain is he who boasts of his possessions where all is waiting to be overturned.

Brethren, are you doing so? Some of you professors, I am afraid, are living as though this were your rest. You do not wish to go Home, do you? The nest is very comfortable. You have feathered it warmly. You have all that heart could wish. Here you would gladly abide for ages! Ah, well, may this worldliness be cast out of you and may you be seized with Homesickness—that sweet disease which every true patriot ought to have—an insatiable longing for his dear fatherland.

Have you ever heard of the Swiss soldiers in the French army who would fall sick when they heard the music of the songs which reminded them of their native mountains, with their chalets and peasants, and the cowboy's song? Ill could they rest in sunny France when their hearts were among Helvetia's rugged hills. Are there no sweet songs of Zion which remind you of that blessed

land where our best friends, our kindred dwell— where God our Savior reigns? If we are true citizens of the New Jerusalem, we shall long for that fair country, the home of the elect—

"Ah, then my spirit faints To reach the land I love, The bright inheritance of saints, Jerusalem above."

It is your duty, Christian, and your privilege, to let loose of the things of earth and say with Job, "All the days of my appointed time I will wait"— like a mere waiter—"till my change come." A second meaning of the text, however, is this—we must wait expecting to be gone—expecting daily and hourly to be summoned by our Lord. The proper and healthy estate of a Christian is to be anticipating the hour of his departure as near at hand. I have observed a great readiness to depart in many dying Believers, but the same readiness ought to characterize living Believers, also.

Our dear Friend, Mr. James Smith, whom some of you remember as preaching the word at Park Street, and afterwards at Cheltenham, when I saw him some little while before his departure, described himself thus: "You have seen a passenger that has gone to the station, taken his ticket, all his luggage brought in, all packed up, strapped, directed. And you have seen him sitting with his ticket in his hand waiting till the train comes up." That, said he, "is exactly my condition. I am ready to go as soon as my heavenly Father pleases to come for me."

And is not that how we should always live—waiting for the Lord's appearing? Mr. Whitefield used to say of his well-known order and regularity, "I like to go to bed feeling that if I were to die tonight there is not so much as a pair of my gloves out of their proper place." No Christian man ought to live without having his will made and his estate put in proper condition, in case he should die suddenly. That hint may be useful to some of you who have neglected to set your house in order. No Christian man should live expecting to live another day. You cannot reckon upon an hour! You should rather be so ready, that if you were to walk out of this tabernacle and fall down dead upon the steps it would not make any derangement in your affairs because you are equally ready for life or death.

One of our beloved Sisters this week was walking down Paternoster Row. Her mourning friends sit here but they have no cause to mourn! Sudden faintness came over her. She was taken into a shop and water was offered to her, but she could not drink. No, she was already drinking of the water of the River of Life that flows from the Throne of God and of the Lamb! In a moment she closed her eyes to the sorrows of earth and opened them to the joys of Heaven! When we visit the graves of those who have died in Christ we ought not to weep for them, or, if we weep at all it should be with the regret that we are not yet admitted to the same reward! To "die daily" is the business of Christians.

It is greatly wise to talk about our last hours, to make ourselves familiar with the grave. Our venerable forefathers had a strange habit of placing on the dressing table a death's head as a memento. More—either a real skull, or else an ornament fashioned in the form of it—to remind them of their end. Yet, so far as I can gather, they were happy men and happy women and none the less so because they familiarized themselves with death! A genuine Puritan, perhaps, never lived a day without considering the time when he should put off the garments of clay and enter into rest— and these were the happiest and holiest of people—while this thoughtless generation which banishes the thought of dying is wretched with all its hollow pretense of mirth!

I exhort you, Brothers and Sisters, wait! Wait always for the trumpet call! Live as looking for the Lord to come and take you from this mortal state, waiting for the convoy of angels to take you to the city of the blessed in the land of the hereafter! Nor is this all. Waiting means enduring with patience. We are put into this world for one appointed time of suffering and in sacred patience we must abide steadfast the heat of the furnace. The life of many Christians is a long martyrdom—they are to bear it patiently. "Here is the patience of the saints."

Many Believers go from one sickness to another, from one loss to another. But here they fulfill their life's design if through abundant Grace they learn to bear their woes without a murmur, and to wait their appointed time without repining. Serving is also another kind of waiting. The Lord Jesus gives us plain directions as to service in the parable recorded in the 17th chapter of Luke: "But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird yourself and serve me, till I have eaten and drunk; and afterwards you shall eat and drink?"

In this world we are to wait upon the Lord Jesus, running His errands, nursing His children, feeding His lambs, fighting His foes, repairing the walls of His vineyard, doing anything and everything which He may please to give us. And mark you, this is to be attended with perseverance, for Job says, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait." He would not be a servant sometimes, and then skulk home in idleness at another season, as if his term of service were ended. Every saint should say, "I will wait upon You, my God, as long as I live. So long as I have breath to draw, it shall be spent for You. So long as I have life to spend here below I will spend it and be spent in Your service."

This should be the spirit of the Christian all his days, to his last day— waiting still, like a holy man of God among the American Indians, who, when he lay dying, was observed to be teaching a poor little Indian to read his letters. He said, "What a mercy, now I am laid aside from preaching that I can teach this poor little child to read his letters! God has still something for me to do, and my prayer is that I may not live an hour after I cannot do anything for Christ." May we be in just such a state of heart!

Moreover, to close this aspect of Christian life, we should be desirous to be called Home. No Christian ought to desire to go out of the field of battle till the victory is won, nor to leave the field till the plow has gone up to the headland for the last time. But still he may desire to be at Home and must desire it because of the love which he bears his Lord. I cannot understand you if you do not sometimes sing that hymn—

"My heart is with Him on His Throne, And ill can brook delay. Each moment listening for the voice, 'Rise up, and come away.'"

Do you love your husband, Wife, if you do not really wish to see him? Do you love your home, Child, if you do not wish for the time when the school shall break up, and you shall leave for home? Oh, it is a weary world, even though our Lord makes it bearable by the sweet glimpses we get of Him through the telescope of faith when He throws the lattices aside and shows Himself. Yet these sweets only cause us to long for more! I tell you heavenly food on earth is a hunger-making thing! It makes you desire fresh supplies. You cannot sip from the waters of Divine Grace on earth

without longing to lie down at the wellhead and drink your full of glory!

Do you ever have a heart-sickness after Heaven? Do you ever feel the cords that bind you to Christ tugging at your heart strings to draw you nearer? Oh, yes! You must feel this! And if you are mixing up these longings to be with Christ, these expectations to depart, with a patient endurance of the Divine will, you have hit upon Job's true idea of life! May you not only have the idea, but carry it out practically—may all Believers do so to the praise and glory of Divine Grace.

III. Now comes JOB'S ESTIMATE OF THE FUTURE. It is expressed in this word, "Till my change come." He refers to the two great changes which he views at one glance—the change of death when we shall "shuffle off this mortal coil" and the change of resurrection when we shall put on our imperishable garments—shall be girt about with eternal gladness!

Beloved, let it be observed that in a certain sense death and resurrection are not a change to a Christian—they are not a change as to his identity. The same man who lives here will live forever! The same Believer who serves God on earth will wake up in the image of Christ to serve Him day and night in His temple—and that identity will exist not only with regard to the soul, but the body—"My eyes shall see Him and not another." These very eyes which have wept for sin shall see the King in His beauty! And these hands which here have served the Lord, shall embrace Him in His Glory!

Do not think that death will destroy the identity of the resurrection body! It will be as much the same as the full-blown flower is the same as the seed out of which it grew. There will be a mighty development but it will still be the same. It is sown a natural body, and the same it is raised a spiritual body. There will also be to the regenerate no change as to his vitality. We are quickened now by the life of Christ which is the same life that will quicken us in Heaven, the incorruptible Seed which lives and abides forever. "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life."

He has it now—the same life which he is to live in Heaven, where it will be more developed, more glorious, but still the same. There will be no difference in the Christian's object in life when he gets to Heaven. He lives to serve God here—he will live for the same end and aim there. Here holiness is his delight and it shall be his delight there. And his occupation will not change, either. He served his Master like a waiting servant during his days on earth—he will be taken up to serve Him day and night in His temple.

And the Christian will not experience a very great change as to his companions. Here on earth the excellent of the earth are all his delight. Christ Jesus his Elder Brother abides with him. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is resident within him. He communes with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The fact is, Heaven and earth to the Christian are the same house, only the one is the lower floor, and the other is the upper story! The one is so low and near the ground that sometimes the water of trouble rushes into it. And the windows of the rooms below are so dark that but a small degree of the light of Heaven ever enters them, and the view is contracted. But the other rooms upstairs have a fair view, and the sun shines always through their windows and they are furnished with a matchless skill.

But still it is the same house. Heaven is thus but a slight change in some respects, yet it is a change, and we shall see that readily enough. To the Christian it will be a change of place. He will be away from the dull and coarse materialism of this defiled, sin-stricken earth where thorns and

thistles grow, and he will arrive at the place where the inhabitants shall no more say, "I am sick"—the Paradise of God, where flowers wither not.

He will change his neighborhood. He is vexed here with the ungodly conversation of the wicked. He often finds his neighbors to be like the men of Sodom, exceedingly vile. But there angels shall be fellow citizens with him and he shall commune with the spirits of the just made perfect. No vain discourse shall vex his ears, no sin shall come before him to disgust his mind. He shall not be a stranger in a strange land, but a child at home.

There, too, will be a great change as to his outward circumstances. No sweat will need to be wiped from his brow, no tear from his eyes. There are no funeral knells to be heard in Heaven, no open graves to be filled with the dead. In Heaven there is no poverty, no proud man's scorn, no oppressor's heavy heel, no persecutor's fiery brand. But there "the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest."

Especially will it be a change to the Christian as to that which will be within him. No body of this death to hamper him. No infirmities to cramp him. No wandering thoughts to disturb his devotion. No birds to come down upon the sacrifice, needing to be driven away. As the body shall be free from the corruption which engenders death, so shall the soul be free from the corruption which engenders strife against the new law which is in the Believer's members. He shall be perfectly free from sin! There will be this change, too, that he will be delivered from that dog of Hell who once howled in his ears—as the world will be afar off, and cannot tempt—so Satan will be afar off, and cannot molest! A change, indeed, it will be, in a special manner, to some. Have you ever visited the hospital and sat by the side of the poor Christian woman who has lain upon that bed for months—her hearing almost gone, her sight failing, scarcely able to breathe, palpitations of the heart, life a protracted agony? Oh, what a change from the bed of languishing to the Throne of God! What a difference between that hospital, with its sounds of sickness and of sorrow, and yonder New Jerusalem and the shout of them that triumph, the song of them that feast! What an escape from the dying bed to the living glory—from the glazing eyes and the wasting frame, and the cold death sweat, to the glory which excels and the harps of angels, and the songs of the glorified!

What a change, too, for some of the poor—for some of you sons of penury who are here this morning—from that hard work which scarcely knows a pause. From those weary fingers and that flying needle, and that palpitating heart. From that sleep which gives but little rest because the toil begins so soon that it seems to pervade and injure the sleep itself. What an exchange from that naked room, that unfurnished table, that cup which, so far from running over, you find it difficult to fill! From all those various pains and woes that penury is heir to, to the wealth and happiness of Paradise! What a change for you, to the mansions of the blessed, and the crowns of immortality, and the company of the princes of the blood royal with whom you shall dwell forever!

And what a change, again, for the persecuted! I know how a father's angry words break your heart, and how a husband's cruel remarks grieve you. But you shall soon escape from it all. The jeer of the workshop sometimes reminds you of the cruel mocking you have often read of. What a change for you to be in sweet company where friends shall cheer and make you glad! My Brothers and Sisters, what a leap it must have been for the martyrs—right away from their stakes to their thrones! What a change for the men who rotted in dungeons till the moss grew on their eyelids—to

the immortal beauty of the fairest of the fair, midst the bright ones doubly bright! What a change! Right well, good Patriarch, did you use the term, for it is the greatest of all changes!

If you require a commentary upon this word "change," turn to the 15th chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians and read it through. We read it in your hearing just now. You will there see that all that needs to be changed will be changed. All that must be changed to make the Believer perfectly blessed will be transformed and transfigured by the Master. If you desire a glimpse of what we shall be in Heaven, remember the face of Moses when it glowed so that he covered it with a veil! Remember Stephen's face when they looked upon him and saw it looked as if it were the face of an angel! Remember our Lord transfigured till He was whiter than any fuller could make Him!

Those were transient gleams and glimpses of the Beatific Glory which shall surround every one of the blessed before long. My Brethren, perhaps to you it will be a sudden change. Last Sunday our sister sat here. This Sunday she sits there in Heaven! Others, too, have gone this week to their Home. I suppose week by week about two in this congregation die almost as regularly as I come into this pulpit. So you melt away one after the other, and you disappear—but blessed thought if, when you disappear, it is to shine forever in Heaven!

Well, let the change come suddenly. There is much to be envied in sudden death. I never could understand why it should be put in the litany, "From sudden death, good Lord deliver us." O Brothers and Sisters, sudden death may God send to us so long as we are but prepared—for then we miss the pain of sickness in the gradual breaking down of the frame! It must be desirable, a choice favor which God only gives to some of His peculiarly beloved ones—a thing to pray for—not to pray against! Well it may be sudden! There is this about it, however, that if we are in Christ, let it come suddenly—we are fully prepared.

"For you are complete in Him." "He that believes has everlasting life." "He that lives and believes in Me shall never die." Death has lost all its terror to you who are in Christ. And there is one very sweet thought to my mind, and that though a change, it is the last change. Glory be to God, there will be no more of it, once changed into the likeness of Christ! And there will be no more changes, but immortality forever!—

"Forever with the Lord."

We may well add—

"Amen! So let it be."

O you who have no hope in Jesus, death must be to you a gloomy thing, indeed! It puts out your candle and leaves you forever in the dark. But you who have a good hope through Divine Grace and have built your house upon the Rock—you may joyfully look forward to the end of your appointed days. You may wait joyfully until your change comes—blessing God that it will come in its appointed time and that when it comes it will be a change for the better to you in all respects—a change which shall never be followed by another change, a change which shall make you like your Lord forever and ever! May God give His blessing! Amen.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Chapter 49

Job 14,4 #2734 - Out of Nothing Comes Nothing

OUT OF NOTHING COMES NOTHING

NO. 2734

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 7, 1901.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 21, 1880.

"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one."

Job 14:4.

JOB considered himself to be unclean in the sight of God. Yet, if we speak the plain truth about him, we must say that he was as clean as any man who lived in that age, or, indeed, in any other! We have the witness of the Holy Spirit, in this very Book, that Job, "was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." We have also the practical confirmation by the devil of the same fact, for, when the Lord said to him, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil?" he could not deny it, but could only insinuate that there was an evil motive at the back of the Patriarch's uprightness—"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Sometimes the unwilling acknowledgment of an enemy is a stronger proof than the hearty declaration of a friend—and it was so in Job's case.

He was one of the best, truest, sincerest, cleanest men to be found throughout the whole world, yet he called himself unclean and he probably did so because, just in proportion as a man becomes really pure, he discovers his own impurity. The impure man has a very low standard of what true holiness is, and possibly he thinks that he comes nearly up to it or, if not, he tries to lower the standard down to his own level. But the man who is really pure in heart has a very high ideal of what the Truth of God is, and uprightness is, and holiness is and, because his ideal is so high, he feels that he has not yet attained to it and he thinks more of the distance between his present condition and his idea of perfection than he does of all that he has as yet attained. Such a man says, with the Apostle Paul, "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

It is always a bad sign when a man begins to think exceedingly well of himself. I had rather, a great deal, hear a man complain and cry out before God, under a deep sense of humiliation, than hear him utter a single

Volume 47 1word that reveals a spirit of complacency with his own condition. What we are in Christ is a thing to be perfectly satisfied with and rejoiced over, for, in Christ, Believers are justified and accepted. But as for what we are in our own personal character, the very best of us must still feel that there is much over which we have to mourn. However nearly we may have approached to the example of Christ, that very nearness will make us the more regret the points in which we have fallen short of a complete imitation of Him and we shall still cry out, "O wretched man that I am"—blessed to have come so far on the way of holiness, but wretched that I have not gone still further—"who shall deliver me from the present thralldom of the body of this death? Who shall perfectly emancipate me from its control, that I may live wholly unto God and be holy even as God is holy?"

Then, as Job considered himself an unclean thing, we need not wonder that he should have despaired of ever, by his own power, bringing out of himself anything that should be perfectly clean in God's sight. And we need not be surprised at his question, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" As I have already reminded you, what he brought out of himself in his daily life was clean in the eyes of men. He vindicated his character against false accusations with great earnestness and sincerity, and with considerable warmth of temper, for he felt that it was clean before men—yet he was conscious that it was not clean before God.

There are two kinds of perfection—there is a measure of cleanness in which a man may wash his hands in innocence, and say to his fellow men, "I am free from any transgression," as the Prophet Samuel fearlessly challenged all Israel to produce anyone whom he had defrauded or oppressed. "And they said, You have not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither have you taken anything of any man's hand. And he said unto them, The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand. And they answered, He is witness." That ought to be the character of every Christian—he should be white as the driven snow, aiming to always be honest and upright in all his dealings with his fellow creatures. But, Beloved, God's judgment, and yours, and mine concerning cleanness, differ very greatly. Our weights and scales are rough and coarse, though they suffice for the common purposes of the life we live here on earth. But God's scales will turn if a single hair falls upon them—the small dust of the balance will move them!

No, the metaphor is not a perfect one all round. I use it, but I make a reservation concerning it. God does not regard any sin of ours as the small dust of the balance and His judgment is right judgment. He does not find much evil where there is but little, for the great evil is there all the while! And because God is perfectly holy, He discovers what our impure eyes cannot perceive. In contrast with His absolutely perfect holiness, none of us are clean. Job's friend Bildad said, "The stars are not pure in His sight. How much less man, who is a worm?" And Eliphaz said, "Behold, He puts no trust in His servants; and His angels He charged with folly: how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moths." The purity of God is incorruptible—and when we look at ourselves, we despair of ever attaining to such perfection as His without His help!

I. Now, coming to our text, I want first to speak of SOME MATTERS OF IMPOSSIBILITY IN NATURE—the bringing of clean things out of unclean ones.

And the first matter of impossibility I will mention is that there should be born into this world a pure child, perfectly holy in nature, from impure parents. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Whatever the new-fangled teaching may say about the old-fashioned doctrine that we are shaped in iniquity, and conceived in sin, that doctrine is true! It matters not who may deny its truth, it still stands fast, for it is founded upon the rock of the Inspired Word of God. Men will never be able to gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. An unfallen Adam and Eve would have had an unfallen progeny—but fallen men and women, such as we are, will certainly have for our children those whose tendencies are towards evil. Though there is, in every child, much that is very beautiful, which a mother's eye is quick to detect, yet who that has carefully watched his own offspring can fail to have seen that temper which, sometimes early in life, becomes more terrible than it does in grown-up people?

I have seen little children turn black in the face through passion, yet, when reason comes to them, they will learn to control themselves somewhat. The tendency to evil is there all the while and, according to the disposition of the child, it displays itself sooner or later. David said, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." Certainly, a child who has never heard a lie, will often lie very terribly—and various forms of deception will be practiced by those who have had the best possible example set before them. If any of you think that you have a perfect child, you will find yourselves grievously mistaken—the time will come when you will discover that evil is lurking there as it is in you, the father, or in you, the mother—and it will only need a suitable opportunity to display itself! It will scarcely need fostering by ill companions—but even in a godly household where the atmosphere of piety abounds—sin will grow up in the child as naturally as weeds grow in a garden that is left to itself.

If you leave a plot of ground to itself, you do not find that there will come out of it vegetables fit for your table. And you will not find that a child, left to himself, will produce virtues and excellences acceptable to God. No, evil is inherent in the heart of man and, being there, in due time it comes out of him. From our very birth, we "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." It was an Apostle who said that, but it was Christ Himself who said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again." The children of God are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "Except a man is born again, (from above), he cannot see the Kingdom of God," for his nature is evil. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" and only "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

That, then, is one matter of impossibility—the birth of innocent children from fallen parents.

The next is the bringing of a pure nature out of the depraved mature of any individual. Here are we, possessed of an impure nature, but cannot we, by some means, educate impurity into purity? Our whole system is depraved, but cannot we, somehow or other, out of depravity develop excellence, love to God, consecration to His service? No, never! You may, if you like, watch a skeleton till your eyes ache, but you will never see a trace of life springing up within those ribs of death. You may look at a foul stream as it comes rolling along and you may stir it to its depths, or you may alter its channel—but as long as the source, from which the stream flows, is impure, the water that comes from it will also be impure and it will not be able to purify itself. So, human nature may pass through as many processes as you please, but as long as it remains merely human nature, and God the Holy Spirit has not transformed it and made it like the Nature of God, it will still

be an impure thing—and no clean thing can come out of it.

"But," says someone, "can we not change human nature by reading the Bible to it?" Ah, you may read the Bible to the devil as long as you like, but it will not make an angel of him! And you cannot change a sinner into a saint simply by reading Scripture to him. "Can we not preach him into a right state of heart?" asks another. You might as well hope to preach a lion into a lamb as to change the unholy into the holy without the power of God. "Oh, but," say others, "we can surely do a great deal with him by example, by repression and by encouragement." Of course you can affect him morally, but, with regard to the great spiritual matter of being clean in the sight of God—all that you can do will avail about as much as when they sought to wash the Blackamoor white! The tubs were full of hot water, soap in abundance was used, the brushes were worn out with the efforts of the scrubbers, but the black man came out as black as he went in! The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, or the leopard his spots—and out of an unclean thing, cleanness cannot come! God must work the miracle by His Grace, for of itself evil will produce only evil, and not good.

Another impossibility also follows on the heels of this one. That is, pure acts cannot come out of an impure heart. A man who is what he is by nature, unrenewed by Grace, may do a great deal that is very excellent. Some of the most beautiful of the virtues towards man will grow in unrenewed hearts. It has sometimes been asserted that only true religion can produce a beautiful character towards man, but I think it must be admitted, by all who know the facts of the case, that such a statement as that is not true. Generosity, honesty, heroism and other virtues and excellences have been displayed by men who have been unbelievers—and even by those who have disregarded God altogether! And there has often been much that we have been bound to admire in men to whom skepticism was all the religion that they had. We must say as much as that in fairness to those from whom we greatly differ—but it is quite another matter when we begin to talk about their conduct towards God—that cleanness of heart which God has a right to demand from all His creatures!

These men may be able to pay off their pence creditors, the people who are round about them, but it is a different thing when we bring them face to face with the great Creditor, their Maker to whom their enormous debt is due. As long as a man is not right in the sight of God. As long as his nature is unrenewed by Grace, nothing that he does can be pleasing to God—there is nothing in it that God can accept. He may even have an outward religiousness of a certain kind, but he presents his religion to God with such filthy hands that there are dirty marks all over it! He may even bring to God a sacrifice out of his flock, but you can see that the motive of doing it, the way of doing it, and the pride in having done it, spoil it all. He comes before God with a reverent appearance, but with a wandering heart. He sings lustily with his mouth, but his soul is not really praising and magnifying the Lord. He bows his head when others pray and he seems to be praying, too—but there is no confession of sin, there is nothing that can be acceptable with God—nor can there be until God has changed the nature of the man. That which comes out of an impure heart, however pure it may seem, is impure—it is tainted with the smell of the evil place from which it arose!

There is another impossibility over which some of us have often to groan—that is, perfect actions cannot be performed by imperfect men. I think that you who love the Lord must know what it is to grieve over things over which you have at first rejoiced. For instance, I have preached a sermon. I have been earnest in delivering the Truth of God, I have had liberty in proclaiming it and I have felt

hopeful that God would bless it. But I know what it is to get home and to lie upon my bed and think over what I omitted to say, and how I ought to have said it in a better way—the way in which I think I would say it if I could get up right then and call you all together and repeat it—and so I cry out, "Lord, I thought I had brought forth a clean thing, but I find that I have not! And I have learned that it is not possible to bring a perfectly clean thing out of that which is unclean."

However cleansed the human heart may be, by Divine Grace, yet there remains still so much of impurity about it that "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." There is about all that comes from us imperfection, infirmity, fault, flaw, much to weep over, much to deplore—and the wonder is that God accepts it at all! Yet it is no wonder when we remember that we and our service are "accepted in the Beloved," and there is enough Grace and virtue in Him to make even such poor creatures as we are, and such poor works as we present, to be fully acceptable for His dear sake.

One more phase of this difficulty and impossibility is this—"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean," in another person? If you believe in human ability, I wish you would addict yourself to the effort to convert souls. If you think that you have the power to convert a soul, choose even a little child and set to work upon it! I could pick you out some men whom I know, and some women, too, upon whom I should like you to try your wonderful sword. If they do not laugh you to scorn and turn the edge of your weapon, I am greatly mistaken! God knows how to thrust at them so that every stroke shall tell, for He has said, "I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand." But, apart from that Divine Power, who among us can convert a single soul? Who can dart faith into the unbelieving heart? Who can fetch a penitential tear out of that stolid impenitent soul? Who can beget love to Christ in that chill, indifferent heart? Ah, often have God's servants had to cry with the Reformer, "Old Adam is too strong for young Melanchthon," and they have had to go home and confess that no human being can bring a clean thing out of an unclean!

These are all matters of impossibility in nature which the text sets before us.

II. Now, in the second place, let us notice CERTAIN SUBJECTS FOR PRACTICAL CONSIDERATION FOR ALL OF US that arise out of a right contemplation of this subject. First, we see here that we are unclean by nature. Do we all know that it is so with us? Have we made this great discovery? Has the Spirit of God taught us this humbling Truth of God? Are we in the track of the footsteps of the flock? If so, we shall say, with Isaiah, "All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way." And, with David, we shall confess that we were "shapen in iniquity," and conceived in sin. It is well for us to deal with our birth sin, our original depravity, and the natural tendencies of our spirit—we do not get to the truth about ourselves till we get there. Well, now, do we all know ourselves to be naturally unclean? It is well to know that, sad as the truth is.

Then the next consideration is that we must be clean if we are to be accepted by God. We never can have fellowship with God while we remain unclean. We may have a measure of fellowship with God when He has cleansed us by the precious blood of Christ, but that fellowship will never be perfect till the last trace of sin has been removed from us. Absolutely perfect fellowship with the thrice-holy Jehovah will only come to us, above, because then we shall be absolutely clean and shall be with Him, and near Him, and like He is—and only then shall we have become akin to Him

in holiness. We must be cleansed if we are ever to be in His Presence in Glory. There is no possibility of getting to Heaven foul and stained with sin! There is no possibility of sitting among the white-robed hosts above in these rags of ours. This filthiness of ours must be put away somehow, but how can it be put away?

The fact that we cannot work this great change ourselves will not relieve us of our responsibility. When a man becomes so much a liar that he cannot speak the truth, or so dishonest that he cannot keep his hands from picking and stealing—when the very nature is defiled—it does not excuse the acts which the guilty one commits. Although we cannot cleanse our heart, the Word of God contains the plain command. "Wash you, make you clean," so that the responsibility still rests upon us, although we are totally unable to obey the injunction.

It is quite clear that we cannot, in our own strength, do this necessary work of cleansing. If any man asserts that he can purify himself, I would answer, "Yes, you may cleanse yourself from many faults, from evil speaking, lying, and slandering, from dishonesty, from drunkenness, from unchastity—all of which you ought to do—but it is not possible for you to cleanse yourself so as to be perfectly pure in God's sight." Only think a minute and you will agree with me that it must be so. When you have done all that you can with yourself, will you believe that you are fit to be in God's company, and to speak with Him? God is present with us at this moment, but none of you can conceive that, in our present condition, we are fit to have communion with Him. If you are in Christ, you are able to commune with the Most High, through Jesus the Mediator, but I am supposing that you are not in Christ, and if that is the case, you must shrink from the Presence of the perfectly holy God! And can you ever hope to make yourself fit to stand among the glorified spirits above, to walk yon golden streets and to have fellowship with those who have never sinned, or with those who, having sinned, have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb? I think that every reasonable man with any sort of conscience would start back, and say, "I cannot hope to enter there as I am, nor do I think that I can ever make myself fit to go there."

Do you not think that our wisdom lies in being driven to despair as to ourselves? I thought I heard somebody say, "This doctrine would drive men to despair." That is exactly what we wish to do, for self-despair is the doorstep of confidence in God! When you know you are helpless, you will then begin to look away from yourself, to find help somewhere else— but as long as you can do a stitch of patching and mending, you will not put down the needle and look to God alone to cover you with the robe of righteousness which the Savior has worked. When you realize that you can do nothing, but that an almighty power must be exerted on your behalf—making you look away from yourself and bringing you to think of the great God in Heaven as your only Helper—that is half the battle! So I say that to drive you to despair of yourself is the very thing we are aiming at! Therefore, would it not be wise for you to now begin to look to the Strong for strength, to the Righteous One for righteousness, to the Creating Spirit for new creation? You cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean, so do not attempt the impossible task, but go to Him who sits upon the Throne of God and who says, "Behold, I make all things new."

III. The last point I am going to deal with is THE PROVISION THAT IS MADE TO MEET THIS HUMAN IMPOSSIBILITY.

Let everyone who desires to be made pure in heart, and clean in the sight of God, remember, first, that we have to deal with an Omnipotent God. When you come to Him, trusting and resting in

Christ, and ask Him to renew a right spirit within you, you are practically expressing your conviction that what you cannot do for yourself, He can do for you. There is not any lust within you which He cannot subdue! There is not any lack or deficiency of virtue which He cannot supply!

This work is rightly called a creation—"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation." It is beautiful to think that as the Lord made the first creation, fashioning everything out of nothing, and then bringing order out of chaos, so will He come again and find nothing of good in you, and out of the chaos He will make a new order of things altogether. As when "darkness was upon the face of the deep," He came and said, "Light be," and light was, so He can come and say to you in all your darkness, "Light be," and immediately there shall be light! He finds nothing in you that can help Him, as He found nothing that could help Him to make the world, and when He had made it out of nothing, it was all chaotic, and could not help itself. He had to breathe life and light into it—it all came from Himself. So it is with you—you are just a lump of helpless matter, a wretched, wicked, condemned one—yet the Lord can come and put away your sin and He can form and fashion you after His own pattern! He can give you repentance and give you faith, and give you every Grace—and He can go on to nurture and water all those Graces till they come to perfection!

He can perfect you in likeness to Christ so that you shall be "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." If you believe in a God almighty to bless and save, you cannot doubt that He is able to do all that I have said. Look not to your own weakness, but by faith look to the Divine strength. Consider not so much, poor Soul, what you are as what God is, and think of the great new Creator, and commit your soul into His keeping, "as unto a faithful Creator," as the Apostle Peter says. That is a blessed word—a faithful Creator who will begin to do His creating work anew in such a soul as yours.

Notice, next, that there is a second provision to meet this human impossibility, namely, the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not possible for your uncleanness to be put away by anything that you can do. You must say, with Toplady—

"Not the labors of my hands Can fulfill Your Law's demands! Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow, All for sin could not atone— You must save, and You alone."

It was God Himself that did hang on Calvary's Cross! He had taken upon Himself human Nature, with all its infirmities and all its guilt, though He Himself was pure and spotless—and there He did hang in that Nature to bleed and die! No one—at least, no human tongue—can tell how great was the Atonement that Christ there made for the sin of His guilty creatures! None of us can calculate the price He paid for the redemption of His people, but we know that however great is the sin that is to be put away in order to make you clean, it can all be removed by "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." I am not able to imagine any sin that the blood of Christ could not wash away. See how red is your guilt. Mark the scarlet stain. If you were to wash your soul in the Atlantic Ocean, you might use every wave that washes all its shores and yet the crimson spots of your transgression would still remain. But plunge into the—

"Fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel's veins"—

and in an instant you are whiter than snow! Every speck, and spot, and stain of sin has gone, and gone forever—and God is thereby glorified.

What a blessing it is that, to meet our inability to put away our sin, there is provided a Redemption, an Atonement amply sufficient to remove it all forever! Think, then, not only of your sin, but of your Savior! Think not so much of your guilt as of His sufferings by which that guilt is put away! Oh, how earnestly would I press this advice upon any who are now troubled about their sin! I would almost say—Do not look at your sin except you can see the Savior, too. Remember that the sin itself shall never condemn you if you trust in Jesus Christ, for He has taken it off all who believe in Him, and has cast it into the depths of the sea, to be remembered against them no more forever. You are saved, however guilty you may have been, as soon as you rely upon the infinite merit of Christ's atoning Sacrifice—

"Not all the blood of beasts On Jewish altars slain, Could give the guilty conscience peace, Or wash away the stain! But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, Takes all our sins away— A sacrifice of nobler name, And richer blood than they."

Then you shall be able to sing with Dr. Watts— "'Twas He adorned my naked soul, And made salvation mine! Upon a poor polluted worm He makes His Graces shine. And lest the shadow of a spot Should on my soul be found, He took the robe the Savior worked, And cast it all around."

There is a third provision made to meet this great emergency. We have spoken of the Father and the Son, but we must not omit to mention the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, so often forgotten and slighted, is the great Worker in the cleansing and renewing of man's nature. That blessed Spirit has the whole power of the Godhead and wherever He works effectually, He convinces of sin, making men see the guilt and evil of it. But He also convinces them of righteousness, so that they see that there is a righteousness to be had and they learn how they may righteously obtain it. The Holy Spirit spreads Christ near, reveals Him to the heart and then He enables the sinner to see the suitability of Christ to him. The Spirit also enables the man to see that he may trust Christ. No, He goes further and enables the poor guilty soul to actually trust Him who came to save Him! One of the first proofs of His working in the heart is the production of faith there—then, when He has worked that Grace in the soul, He helps the man to pray, to overcome temptation and to engage in holy service. The Spirit helps us all the way through. He creates all that is good within us. He works in us "both to will and to do of His good pleasure." And wherever the Holy Spirit comes, He acts like the fire that consumes the dross and purifies the metal.

So, what do you think, poor unclean soul, if God the Holy Spirit were to take you in hand, could not He make you clean? Oh, if He were to come now, in all that wondrous power of His, could He not burn up the wood, and hay, and stubble of sin that is within you? There have been men who seemed to be lost to every noble thought who, nevertheless, have been lifted up to heroic effort by the power of the Spirit of God! There have been others who were sunken in vice, in ignorance, in drunkenness and every kind of crime, yet, they have been washed, cleansed, sanctified, made saints of God on earth and perfect spirits above by the power of the Holy Spirit when He has come upon them, and applied the blood of Christ to their heart and conscience! What He has done for others, He can do for you, and I do pray you not so much to look at your power to will as at the power of the Spirit of God to work in you to will! Not so much at your power to do, which is nothing, but at the power of the Spirit of God to work in you what He would have you do!

Remember what I have often told you, that the confidence of a man in himself can never be of any good to him—it is like the anchor while it is on board the ship. What is the good of it there? It only

increases the weight of the vessel as long as it is lying on the deck, or hanging over the side of the ship. You may throw it where you like—throw it down the hold, but it won't hold the vessel. Throw it into the captain's cabin, hang it on the mast—what good is it? As long as it is in the ship, it is of no service. The thing to be done with the anchor is heave it overboard. Splash! Down it goes! Listen to the clatter of the chain! Now, when the anchor gets a good grip somewhere out of sight, then it holds the ship. So, throw your hope out of yourself—get it away from yourself, do not let it rest in yourself, it will help to sink you if you do—let it go down into the unseen, let it grasp Christ, let it get a firm hold of Him and of His finished work, and of God the Omnipotent, and of the ever-blessed Spirit of God. Now your vessel will outride the storm and all will be well!

Some people who ought to be better informed, are quite ignorant of the work of the Holy Spirit. I knew a man who attended a certain church and on one occasion he heard a good Gospel sermon. I do not know who was the author of it, but the parson who preached it certainly was not. This Gospel sermon had so cut into the hearer's conscience that, when he went home, he could not rest. The next morning he went off to the clergyman and he said to him, "Sir, I am greatly troubled by what you said yesterday." "My dear fellow," replied the parson, "I never meant to say anything to give you a moment's uneasiness, I am sure. And if I did so, I am truly sorry for it." "Oh, Sir!" said the man, "but your sermon gave me dreadful uneasiness. You preached about our being born again. Tell me, Sir, what it is to be born again." "Well," said the minister, "I was educated at Cambridge, but I do not know what it is to be born again, and I do not think there is any need for you to trouble yourself at all about the matter. I wish I had never bought that sermon, or read it, for it has proved to be a troublesome sermon to two or three others beside yourself. But I will never preach it again, I will promise you that."

Ah, but our poor awakened friend could not be quieted in that fashion, for that sermon had dragged off every coverlet from him, and the bed was too short for him to stretch himself—and he did not rest until he had found a true minister of Christ who was able to point out to him the way to obtain peace with God through believing in Jesus! Then how glad he was to think that the clergyman had, even unintentionally, made him uncomfortable! How glad he was that he, though in ignorance, had taken away his first false peace, that God might come in and establish the second—the peace that does not lie in ourselves, but in Christ—the peace that is not founded upon an assumption of our own personal righteousness, but upon the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior!

All that I have been saying shows the fitness of this Gospel for sinners. This Gospel encourages the man who had given up all hope, wakes him up to a wondrous consciousness of the possibilities of his purified manhood, and sets before him the glorious prospect of making something of his immortality! When he gets to Heaven, he will not throw up his cap, and cry, "Glory be to myself! Have I not done it well?" No, no! That is how Pharisees might act if they could get to Heaven by their own works, but when God is going to save a sinner, He first puts him down in the lowest class and reads him a very humbling lesson. He makes him feel that he is nothing but sin, and that he can do nothing but sin—and then He says to him, "Look unto Me. I will work the change that needs to be worked in you." Then Christ comes in and says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last; rest in Me." and the Spirit of God says, "I will work in you a new creation, and make all things new in you." And, all along, as the work of Grace is really worked in the man, he continues to bless and to magnify the name of the Lord. Thus, that

spirit of gratitude and adoration, which is the very essence of virtue, becomes the underlying rock that supports a noble character—and all things that are of good report are created and nurtured by this glorious Gospel of the blessed God!

If there is anybody who prefers any other sort of Gospel, I am sure I do not want to rob him of it! If he can get any comfort out of it, let him keep it. But as for me, I am so weak, so sinful, so undone that I commit my soul to the God of Grace, and nothing but "Free Grace and dying love" will suffice for me! Many of us stand together upon this matter, as we have done for many a year, and I believe we shall continue to do so more and more as our age increases, and our hair gets gray, for we did not know so much about Grace when we were lads as we know now, and we keep on learning more and more of it every day that we live. What we need is Grace, Grace, GRACE, and may God grant it to every one of us! May there be in us nothing of self, but all of Grace, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—530, 51 (Version 2), 488.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 50

Job 15,11 #2099 - Concerning the Consolations of G

CONCERNING THE CONSOLATIONS OF GOD

NO. 2099

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 11, 1889,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Are the consolations of God too small for you?

Is there any secret thing with you?"

Job 15:11.

THESE are the words of Eliphaz, one of those three friends of Job who blundered dreadfully over his case. Their words are not to be despised. For they were men in the front rank of knowledge and experience. Eliphaz says, "With us are both the gray-headed and very aged men, much elder than your father." Their errors were not the superficial mistakes of fools but the profound reasoning of men of light and leading. Their utterances are, at least, equal to anything our own learned men may have to say on the same problem.

However wrong Eliphaz may have been in reference to Job—and in reference to him his remarks were grossly unjust—yet many of them are correct in themselves and may usefully be applied to our own hearts. Inasmuch as Eliphaz, in this verse, teaches no doctrine but only asks two searching questions, he cannot mislead us. In fact, he may do us good service. May God the Holy Spirit enable us to consider these questions that we may be profited by them!

The text is in the form of a question, and its sense I shall endeavor to bring out by other questions, each of which will have a practical relation to ourselves. The passage in the original has proved hard to translate. But I think that in four questions I can set forth the essence of the meanings which has been found.

If we are, indeed, Believers in the Gospel and are living near to God, our consolation should be exceedingly great. Passing through a troubled world we have need of consolations. But these are abundantly provided by our God and their influence upon us should be exceedingly great. We ought not to be unhappy. For we have joy urged upon us by the precept, "Rejoice in the Lord always." And that precept is in substance often repeated. It is both the duty and the privilege of Christians to be of good cheer. If we are not glad, even amid our trials, there is a reason for it, and we shall do well, at this time, to use the text as a candle by which to search out that reason. "Are the consolations of God too small for you? Is there any secret thing with you?"

I. Our first question follows the interpretation given by most authorities—"Do YOU REGARD THE CONSOLATIONS OF GOD AS SMALL?" Do you judge that the comforts of faith are insignificant? "Are the consolations of God too small for you?"

I would ask you, first, Do you think religion makes men unhappy? Have you poisoned your mind with that invention of the Enemy? Have you made yourself believe that godliness consists in morbid selfcondemnation, despondency, apprehension and dread? If so, permit me to warn you that there are many popular errors and that, in this case, "common fame is a common liar." Do you find in the preacher and the members of his Church any confirmation of this silly assertion? We can personally assure you that the joys of religion are by no means meager in our case. We beseech you not to let a groundless prejudice blind your eyes to the Truth of God. I will hope that, like the Bereans, you are of a noble spirit and will examine that which is told you.

Is not your verdict different from that of those who have tried godliness for themselves? Do you not know that many, for the joy they have found in the love of Christ, have renounced all sinful pleasures and utterly despised them? They were once fascinated with the world but they tasted higher joys and shook off the spell. He that drinks of the river of the Water of Life will count the streams of sin to be foul and brackish and will no more drink thereof. Many a Believer, for the joy that is set before him, has, in the service of God, encountered much ridicule, endured severe losses and borne great hardships. And he has done so with delight.

Have you not also seen, in many afflicted Christians, a peace which you yourself do not know? Have you not observed their patience under adversity? They have been poor but perfectly content. They have been sick and yet cheerful—racked with pain and yet joyous. Under the apprehension of surgical operations, have you not seen them happily resigned? Have you ever seen one of them die? How often have we heard them singing in their death throes, which have been to them, death joys! Is it not a fact which cannot be disputed, that faith in our Lord Jesus has uplifted the sorrowful and has rendered others supremely happy?

This joy has sprung entirely from their hope in Christ, their communion with God, their delight in the Truth of God revealed in Holy Scripture. Have we not among us in Christian fellowship many notable proofs that—

"It is religion which can give Sweetest pleasure while we live"?

Therefore, my questioning Friend, it behooves you to look into this matter, and not to remain under the impression that the consolations of God are small. Those whose experience asserts that the joys of religion are great are not foolish or disreputable persons—give due weight to their witness and believe that the consolations of God are precious beyond expression. Amid many pains and afflictions, I can personally assure you that it is a blessed thing to trust in the Lord.

Will you follow me as I ask you, Upon consideration, will you not amend your judgment? What are these consolations of God? The more you know of them, the more ground will you see for believing that they must be great. They are the "consolations of God." If God Himself deigns to comfort men, will He not greatly cheer them? Knowing human sorrow and stepping from the height of His Glory to comfort it, is it conceivable that He will labor in vain? Do you think that the All-Sufficient cannot provide consolation equal to the affliction? The consolations we speak of are applied by the Spirit of God. And to prove how earnestly He performs His work, He has taken the

name of "Comforter." Will the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, do you think, come to any human heart with insufficient consolations? Will He trifle with our griefs? Can it be that He does not know how to give sunlight when our day is dark with sorrow? Think not so. Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, is the substance of those consolations. He is called, "The Consolation of Israel." Can a man have Christ to be his portion and yet be poor? Can a man have Jesus for his joy and yet be weighed down with sadness? Might he not well ask, "Why are you cast down, O my Soul?" I cannot for a moment dream of a joyless Christ.

See again, my Friend, these consolations of God deal with the source of sorrow. From where came the curse but from the sin of man? Jesus has come to save His people from their sins. Those thorns and thistles which now rend our flesh are not the natural fruits of the earth as God created it. Sin sowed all these. The consolations of God deal with sin. As for the guilt which we have incurred, and the inevitable punishment, both are removed by pardon full and free. Jesus bore the guilt of sin and put it all away by His death upon the Cross. And, in consequence, sin can be blotted out.

Is not this the grandest of all consolations—the consolation of God? When we lay hold on Jesus and receive forgiveness, affliction may remain, but sin is gone forever. And therefore the affliction, itself, loses its bitterness. Sin reigning in the heart is the death of peace. But the dethronement of the usurper is provided for, and therefore, another Divine consolation. Until we get the mastery over evil, we must be uncomfortable. But the consolations of God assure us of a new heart and a right spirit—and of a power supreme and Divine—which enters the nature of the Believer and subdues, destroys and at last annihilates the propensity to sin.

Is not this a rich and rare consolation? Comfort which left us under the power of evil would be dangerous comfort. But comfort which takes away both the guilt and the power of sin is glorious, indeed. Dream not that it can be small! Remember, too, that the consolations of God reveal to us a reason for the sorrow when it is allowed to remain. There is a need that we are in heaviness. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

If suffering is a fire, the consolations of God assure us that it is a refining fire, which only consumes our dross. Do you not think that the comfortable fruits of righteousness, which are brought forth in those Believers who are exercised by trial, are the source of great comfort to the afflicted of the Lord?—

"Since all that I meet shall work for my good, The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food."

Another reflection sweetly cheers the heart of the tried one during his tribulation, namely, that he has a Comrade in it. We are not passing through the waters alone. We have a Fellow-Sufferer, of whom we read, "In all their affliction He was afflicted." Our Lord drank, long ago, of that cup we sip. He knows the sting of treachery, the stab of calumny, the spit of scorn. For He was "in all points tempted like as we are." Many of us have found this to be an eminent comfort. Do you not think it must be so? Has not many a man, at the sound of another's voice, been cheered in the darkness of the night when pursuing a dangerous way? Has not the presence of a stronger and wiser one acting as guide been quite enough to remove all dread?

If the Son of God is with us, surely there is an end of every sort of fear. Does He not use this as His own note of cheer, saying, "Fear you not, for I am with you"? Besides, "the consolations of God" lie also in the direction of compensations. You hear the rod—yes, but this is the small drawback to heavenly sonship—if drawback, indeed, it is. You have become a son of God and, "what son is there whom his Father chastens not?" You are an heir of God, joint heir with Jesus Christ. And in accepting heirship will you not cheerfully take the Cross, too, seeing it is part of the entail?

It is true that you have special sorrow. But then you have the royal nature to which that sacred sorrow is a witness. God has given to you a nature that wars against evil—therefore these tears! Would you be of the seed of the serpent and have your meat as plentiful as dust? Would you not far rather be of the seed of the woman and have your heel bruised? What is the bruising of the heel compared with the eternal dominion to which that seed is predestined? Compensations abound in every case of trouble.

You have lost your child but you believe in the resurrection. You will die yourself, it may be. But you shall rise again from the dust. You have lost your property. But you are an heir of all things in Christ Jesus. You have been persecuted. But in this you rejoice as a partaker of the sufferings of Christ. The compensations of the Covenant of Grace are so overflowing that we call our troubles "light afflictions, which are but for a moment," and they work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Besides, there is another consolation, with which I finish—not because I have completed my list but because time does not permit me to enlarge— there is the consolation that you are on your journey Home and that every moment you are coming closer to the eternal rest. When we once reach Heaven, we shall forget the trials of the way. An hour with our God will make up for a life of pain. You languish on that bed. But if you languish into immortality, you will no more remember your anguish. When your head wears the crown and your hand waves the palm, you will count it all joy that you were thought worthy to be persecuted for Christ's sake.

O Sirs, we have the best of it! Whatever trouble may come to us as Christians, so much more of joy comes with it, that we have the best of the bargain! We give up drops of poisonous delight but we dive into rivers of ineffable joy. The Christian's joy far excels the best that earth can afford. Grace is the dawn of Glory. Faith brings Heaven down to us, while love bears us up to Heaven. Celestial fruits are gathered upon earthly ground by those who look up for the manna. Let us begin the song which with sweeter voices we shall continue, world without end—"Unto Him that loved us and saved us in His own blood, be glory forever!" Still I fear there are some to whom it appears as if the joys of religion and the consolations of God were small. Let them correct their mistake. For the Truth of God is far otherwise.

II. But now a second question comes up, which will come home to many Christian people. HAVE THESE CONSOLATIONS BEEN SMALL IN THEIR EFFECT UPON YOU? Have these consolations, though great in themselves, been small in their influence upon you?

I will begin my examination by putting to one disciple this question— Have you ever very much rejoiced in God? Have you always possessed a little, and but a very little, joy? Are you one of those who is only up to the ankles in the river of Divine Grace? Why is this? Dear Friend, you are

believing upon a slender scale. You are living on a low plane. Why is it so? You hope you are saved but it is by the skin of your teeth. You hope you are a child of God but you are not very sure about it. And, consequently, you get very little joy out of it. This is mischievous. From where does it come? Is it ignorance?

Do you not know enough of the great doctrines of the Gospel and of the vast privileges of the redeemed? It may be so. We have heard of persons in Australia who walked habitually over nuggets of gold. We have heard of a bridge being built with what seemed common stones but it contained masses of golden ore. Men did not know their wealth. Is it not a pity that you should be poor in comfort and yet have all this gold of consolation at your feet? You have, lying within the leaves of your Bible, checks for millions and yet you have scarcely a penny to spend. What a pity!

Is it listlessness? Have you ever felt desirous to know the best of the Christian life? Have you ever had the sacred ambition to gain all the blessings which are provided in the Covenant of Grace? It is amazing how indifferent some people can be—they can fret when within reach of unutterable joy! I have heard of a person who walked some seven hundred miles to see Niagara Falls. When he was within seven miles, he thought he heard the roar of the cataract and he called to a man working in the fields and said, "Is that the roar of Niagara?" The man answered, "I don't know but I guess it may be. What if it is?"

With surprise, the good man said, "Do you live here?" "Born and bred here," the man answered. "And yet you don't know whether that thundering noise is from the waterfall?" "No, Stranger," said he, "I don't care what it is. I have never seen those falls. I look after my farm." No doubt there are many within hail of Heaven's choicest joys who have never cared to know them. They hope they are saved but they don't care for great joy. They use their spade and their hoe and dig their potatoes. But Niagara is nothing to them. Many look well to this life but do not arouse themselves to gain present spiritual joy.

Oh, how sad—that you should be so much a Christian that we should not wish to question that you are converted—and yet you are half-asleep and self-content! You labor under the notion that those good people who rejoice in the Lord are enthusiasts, or else you say to yourself, "It would be presumption on my part to aspire to have the same joy." What nonsense! Go in for everything that God can give you. If you are His child, nothing in His house is denied you. He says to you, "Son, you are ever with Me and all that I have is yours." Do not you, like the elder brother, complain that you have served Him all these years and yet He never gave you enough to make you merry with your friends?

But it may be, dear Friend, that you once did joy and rejoice. Well, then, is it of late that you have lost these splendid consolations and come down to feel them small with you? I suggest to you that you observe what alteration you have made of late. Is it that you have more business and have grown more worldly? You cannot get out to Prayer Meetings now, nor to week night services. "No," you say, "I cannot. And if you knew what I have to do, you would not blame me." Just so, a little while ago you had not so much to do. But you chose to load yourself with an extra burden, knowing that you would not be able to get so much spiritual food as before.

Somewhere in that line you will find the reason why your joy has declined. If anybody said to me, "The days are darker now than they used to be," I should remember that the sun is still the same.

Perhaps my Friend has not lately cleaned his windows. Or he has not drawn up his blinds. And that is why he thinks there is less light. It is very possible to be much more in the dark than you need to be. The gloom may be in the eyes rather than in the heavens. May I suggest a little looking at home, that you may see why your former blessedness is gone?

Do you reply to me that you do use the means of Grace—but the outward means fail to bring you the consolation they once did? To what means do you refer? Are you as much in prayer as ever? And is prayer less refreshing than it used to be? Do you read the Scriptures as you formerly did, with the same regularity, attention and devotion? Do you no longer draw the waters of comfort from these wells of salvation? Do you really go on hearing the Word as you once did, with the same hunger for it, and love of it, and yet do you find it unsatisfactory to you? I must again remind you that these things have not altered in themselves. For the ministry is the same to other saints, the Scriptures must be the same, and the Mercy Seat is not removed.

The fault is not in these, but in yourself. Surely, dear Friend, some evil things within you have curdled the milk of blessing and stopped the flow of joy. Search yourselves, I pray, if the consolations of God are small with you. He has not forgotten to be gracious, neither has He ceased to hear prayer and to speak to His servants through His Sacred Word. You shut the door from within. He bars it not from without. I may come near to your experience if I ask—Do you revive occasionally, and then relapse? I think I hear you say, "Oh, yes, I sometimes can clap my hands—I feel delighted while hearing the Gospel. I could shout Hallelujah, I do so rejoice. I am for a time up in the stirrups."

But you come down again just as readily. Why is this? Surely, you are in a very changeful frame and live by feeling rather than by principle. Are not the grounds of comfort always the same? If a promise is true this morning, it will be true this afternoon. And if it is a real source of comfort to you this afternoon, it ought to be a comfort to you on Monday, and all the other days of the week. If the feast does not alter, and yet it does not satisfy you as it once did, you must be ill—some fever or other disease is upon you. Haste away to the Great Physician of souls and say to Him, "Lord, search me and try me and see what evil thing there is in me and make me right, that I may again be satisfied with heavenly food." It is childish to be so changeful. Grow in Divine Grace and be rooted in faith.

Does the cause of your greater grief lie in a trial to which you do not fully submit? I think I hear you admit that you faint under your load. "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small." But He gives more Grace. Get it. Are you impatient? Do you kick against the pricks? Do you feel that you can endure no longer? Since you are impatient, do you wonder that you are unhappy? Since you walk contrary to God, do you wonder that He walks contrary to you? Do not find fault with His consolations?—Find fault with your own rebellious heart. When a child rebels against his father, it is not likely that his father's love will be a source of much comfort to him.

Dear Friend, the Lord help you to get rid of impatience and you will be rid of anguish. Take the cup and drink it and say, "Not as I will, but as You will." And an angel will appear unto you strengthening you. As it was with your Lord in a similar case, so shall it be with you. Are you alarmed at what may yet come? Do you dread the future? Well, if you will import trouble from the future, blame not the consolations of God. For He has told you that, "the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." He has never taught you to pray,

"Give me tomorrow my daily bread"—He has limited you and pegged you down to this," Give us this day our daily bread." Will you not be content to live by the day? Walking with Him who is the God of Eternity, you may leave days and years to Him. And let one day at a time be enough for you.

It may be that while you are thus without the enjoyment of Divine consolation, Satan is tempting you to look to other things for comfort. I pray you, touch not the wine cup, if this is placed before you as a means of consolation. A dark hour is often the crisis in the history of a man of God—if he can weather this storm he will have fair sailing.

Satan will now be very busy to get you to act hastily, or wickedly. It will be whispered to you, "Put your pen to that accommodation bill. Borrow, though you cannot pay. It may be wrong, but you can put it right afterwards." I pray you, do not dream of any means of help which you cannot lay before God. How often have men in offices of trust been tempted to embezzle money for just a little while, and then to put it back again! I beseech you, shake this viper off your hand into the fire, for it is a viper. Better suffer anything than do wrong. Keep in the furnace till God bids you come out of it.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, when they found themselves walking safely in the midst of the flames and saw Nebuchadnezzar standing at the mouth of the furnace, did not leap out to assail the tyrant. Not they— they stayed till they came out with honor. Brothers and Sisters, seek not consolation in policy, in trickery, in falsehood. Do not even seek it in haste. Many a man who has run before the cloud has had to slink back again. Many a man who has taken a knife to carve for himself, has cut his fingers.

Do not be tempted to think that you can find better comforts than God can give you. Look not to man—let your expectation be in God alone. If you have despised the consolations of God by setting them below your own efforts, you cannot expect that they should be sweet to your taste. Amend this and you will be happy. Your lack of comfort lies not in the consolations, themselves, but in your own heart. Pray God the Holy Spirit to revive the work of Divine Grace in your soul and that being done, either the trouble will grow lighter, or your back will be stronger to bear the burden.

III. Our third question is this—Since the consolations of God appear so small to you, HAVE YOU ANYTHING BETTER TO PUT IN THEIR PLACE?

Perhaps this is what Eliphaz meant when he said, "Is there any secret thing with you?" He seemed to say to Job, "We cannot tell you anything. You will not hear us. Have you some wonderful discovery of your own? Have you some secret cordial, some mystic support, some unknown joy? Have you discovered a balm of greater efficacy than ours, a cure-all for your sorrow?" Let me ask you a similar question. If God's Gospel fails you, what will you do?

Have you found out a new religion with brighter hopes? I do not think you have, for the prognostications of modern thought are dreary enough! Moreover, I have been informed by those who know most about it, that the theology of the future has not yet crystallized itself sufficiently to be defined. As far as I can see, it will take a century or two before its lovers have licked it into shape. For they have not yet settled what its shape is to be. While the grass is growing, the steed is starving. The new bread is baking—the arsenic is well mixed within it. But the oven is not very hot and the dough is not turned into a loaf yet.

I should advise you to keep to that bread of which your fathers ate, the bread which came down from Heaven. Personally I am not willing to make any change, even if the new bread were ready on the table. For new bread is not very digestible and the arsenic of doubt is not according to my desire. I shall keep to the old manna till I cross the Jordan and eat the old corn of the land of Canaan. Are you hopeful of finding comfort in new speculations? Is that the "secret thing"? Then you feed upon the wind.

Are you hoping to find comfort in the world? Will you be happy if you manage to get that position? If you pass that examination? If you save so much money? I beseech you, do not play the fool—there is no consolation in all this. Did you ever read a little book called, "The Mirage of Life," published by the Tract Society? It ought to convince anybody that there is no satisfaction to be found in the greatest worldly success. For it shows us millionaires, statesmen, and princes—all dissatisfied. But I need not refer to any book—observe for yourselves. The richest men have often been the most miserable, and those who have succeeded best in rising to places of honor have been worn out in the pursuit, and disgusted with the prize.

Wealth brings care, honor earns envy, position entails toil, and rank has its annoyances. One of our richest men once said, "I suppose you fancy I am happy because I am rich. Why, a dozen times in a year and more often, some fellow threatens to shoot me if I do not send him what he wants. Do you suppose that this makes me a happy man?" Believe me, the world is as barren of joy as the Sahara. Vain is the hope of finding a spring of consolation in anything beneath the moon. Seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Or, do you conclude that you are strong-minded enough to bear all the difficulties and trials of life without consolation? Well, Friend, I will not discuss the point. I have found that persons who think themselves strong in mind are generally strong in the head. Yet I would remind you that the strongest are not too strong for life's battle. There never was a wise man yet who thought he was wise. This world has enough of woe in it to test all the wisdom you are likely to possess. For my own part, I feel very diffident and would be glad of all the consolations Heaven can give me. I suspect that you are as I am and will not be able to play the man without help from God.

Do you say that what can't be cured must be endured and you will stay as you are? This is a poor resolve for a man to come to. If there is better to be had, why not seek it? Do you mean to abide in the sad state into which you have fallen? Are you content to be discontented? Have you had a child of your own? Have you seen it go wrong and get itself into trouble and then resolve not to confess it but to make itself appear a martyr and fret? You wished to put it right and cheer it into obedience. But it would not get out of the sulks. What did you do with it? I suppose, in the long run, you had to leave it to have its sulk out and you thought to yourself, "Silly child! How miserable you make yourself and all for nothing. You might be as happy as your brothers and sisters. But if you must sulk, you must."

Some Believers are of this sort. Because they had a serious loss, they must rob themselves of communion with God. Because they have endured terrible bereavement, they bereave themselves of their Lord. Because they are not well, they fret themselves into worse health. Some are only satisfied when they are in the depths of misery. I know some whose wretchedness is chronic—like polar bears they are only at home in the ice. You smile and well you may. But then you should also weep—if this is your case.

You should cry, "O Lord, put me right with Yourself! I cannot be content to be always repining and lamenting! If there are consolations to be had in You, let me have them now. I know there is no consolation anywhere else. To whom should I go? You alone have the words of eternal life! There is no secret thing with me, my God, upon which I can rely. I must have Your consolation, or I shall have no comfort!"

IV. Here comes the most practical question of all and with this I close. If it is so, that you have up to now found heavenly consolations to have small effect with you and yet have nothing better to put in their place, IS THERE NOT A CAUSE FOR YOUR FAILURE? Will you not endeavor to find it out?

Dear Friends, you that seek to be right, you that desire to be full Christians and yet cannot rejoice in God, at least not often, nor greatly—is there not some sin indulged? A child of God may go on with a sin unwittingly and that for years. And all the while that sin may be causing a dreadful leakage in his joy. You cannot be wrong in life and thought and word, without a measure of joy oozing away. Take a good look at yourself and examine your life by the light of Scripture—and if you find that you have been doing something wrong unawares, or for which you have made an unworthy excuse—away with the evil! Away with it at once! When this Achan is stoned and the accursed thing is put away, you will be surprised to find what joy, what comfort, will immediately flow into your soul.

Next, may there not have been some duty neglected? We are not saved by good works. But if any Christian omits a good work, he will find it injurious to his peace. Many Christian people never get into the clear light of full assurance because they do not obey their conscience upon every point. I pray you, never quarrel with conscience, for it will have the best of it with you—if you have a conscience. If you go contrary to conscience, there will be trouble inside the little kingdom of your soul, as sure as you are alive. "Oh but I have always been intending to do it." That makes it the greater sin that you have not done it, for evidently you knew your Lord's will.

Have you considered that any willful omission of duty is not one sin, but many? It is your duty to do it now. It is a sin that you have not done it already. It will be your duty to do it tomorrow. It will be another sin if you omit it tomorrow. How often the omission creates a new sin, I cannot tell—but as surely as you rob God of obedience, sin will rob you of comfort. If you neglect obedience to the precept, you cannot have the comfort of the promise. Get that matter seen to at once. Omitted duty is like a little stone in the sole of your shoe. It is small, and some say it is a nonessential matter—but it is just because it is so small that it can do so much mischief.

If I had a great pebble in my boot, I should be sure to get it out. But a tiny stone may remain and blister me and lame me. Get out the little stones, or they will hinder your traveling to Heaven. Again, may there not be some idol in your heart? That is a very searching suggestion. If the consolations of God are small with you, may you not have set up something in the place of God—a lover, a wife, a husband, a child, a friend— learning, honor, wealth? I need not mention the many forms taken by our idols. It is very easy to set up an image of jealousy.

A thing in itself harmless and even lovely, may grievously provoke the Lord through our heart going after it. Brother, Sister, is it so? Do you love anything as you love God? I suggest that you should at once cry—

"The dearest idol I have known, Whatever that idol is, Help me to tear it from its throne, And worship only You."

If you do not remove the idol from its throne, if God loves you, He will make your Dagon fall and be broken. If you want to lose that which is the object of your comfort and delight, love it too much. This is a sort of unwillful murder which good people can perform upon their children and their friends. Idolize and destroy. Love the creature more than the Creator, and it may be necessary that they should be taken from you altogether.

But, Beloved, if you do not enjoy the consolations of God, do you not think it is because you do not think enough of God? I am ashamed of myself that I do not live more with my God. How little time do we spend with Him! We think about His work rather than Himself. Even in the Scriptures we look more to the Words than to God speaking by the Words. We criticize a phrase when we should be drinking in the spirit of the Revelation and so be getting near to God. If we are cold, is it not because we do not sit in the sun? If we are faint, is it not because we do not feed on Him whose flesh is meat, indeed? How would a fish fare if it left the water?

How can we prosper if we leave our God, who is the element of our life? Say with David, in the Psalm we sang just now—

"Like as the hart for water brooks In thirst does pant and bray; So pants my longing soul, O God, That come to You I may."

And then you will not long be disquieted, for you will go on to sing—

"For yet I know I shall Him praise, Who graciously to me, The health is of my countenance, Yes, my own God is He."

If any of you have not the joy of the Lord which you once possessed, is it not possible that when you did have it, you grew proud? "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked." He will have to be starved a bit to bring him to his senses. Ah, I have known a child of God so happy in the Lord, so useful, and so blessed in every way, that he began to think he was something out of the ordinary. He grew very sublime. As to the poor Brethren around him, he could hardly put up with them—they were more dead than alive. They were weaklings, foolish men, mere babes and so on.

He saw a poor tried Believer looking out of one of the windows of Doubting Castle and instead of helping him out, he bullied him so much for being there at all, that the poor prisoner was more shut up than ever. Look at him! He is a fine fellow! He never had sad doubts. He never felt anxious fears. Not he! You remind me, my dear Brother, of the fat cattle mentioned in Ezekiel, of whom the Prophet says that they thrust with side and with shoulder and pushed all the diseased with their horns till they had scattered them. "Therefore, thus says the Lord God unto them, Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle."

The Lord will not have you condemn the weak and sneer at the feeble. You may yet be such yourselves. His consolations will be small with you if His people are small with you. If you do not care for the little ones who believe in Him, neither will He be quick to comfort you. Be humble. Take the lowest place. If you will lie low before the Lord, He will lift you up. But if you lift up yourself, God will throw you down.

I will close by saying that one of the worst causes of disquietude is unbelief. Have you begun to distrust? Do you really doubt your God? Then I do not wonder that the consolations of God are small with you. Here is the rule of the kingdom—"According to your faith, so be it unto you." If you doubt God, you will get but little from Him. He that wavers may not expect to receive anything of the Lord. Strong faith may have what it wills—but when your doubts master your faith, prayer cannot prevail. Few are the dainties from the King's table which come to the dish of mistrust.

What do you doubt? Do you question the Word of God? Has the Lord said more than the truth will warrant? Do you think so? Will you dare to throw such a handful of mud upon the veracity of God? His Truth is one of His crown jewels—would you take it away? Do you distrust His power? Do you think He cannot comfort you? Do you imagine that He cannot make you ride upon the high places of the earth? Do you think that He cannot put a new song into your mouth and make you rejoice in His name from morning to night? Why should you doubt His power to make you joyful in His House?

Do you doubt the Lord's wisdom? Do you think the Holy Spirit cannot meet your needs and provide comfort suitable for your distress? Surely you cannot have fallen into this base suspicion! Or, do you doubt the Lord's Presence? Do you think that He is too far off to know you and help you? He is present everywhere and He knows the way that you take. Come and trust the Lord. Come, Beloved, whether you are a saint or sinner, come to the Lord Jesus and fall down at Jehovah's feet and say, "Lord, my hope is in You. I have no comfort elsewhere. But I know Your comforts are not small. Comfort me, I pray You, in Christ Jesus."

If you would have that prayer answered, listen to these Words of the Lord Jesus—"Look unto Me and be you saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." Though the tears are in your eyes, yet turn them to Christ Crucified. Put your trust simply, immediately, wholly, and alone in Him who died for you, and you shall go your way filled with consolation.

God grant that it may be so, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Job 15,4 #2943 - Restraining Prayer

RESTRAINING PRAYER

NO. 2943

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JULY 6, 1905.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

IN THE YEAR 1863.

"You...restrain prayer before God."

Job 15:4.

THIS is one of the charges brought by Eliphaz the Temanite against Job, "Yes, you cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God." I shall not use this sentence as an accusation against those who never pray, though there may be some in this House of Prayer whose heads are unaccustomed to bow down and whose knees are unaccustomed to kneel before the Lord, their Maker. You have been fed by God's bounty, you owe all the breath in your nostrils to Him, yet you have never done homage to His name! The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib, but you know not, neither do you consider the Most High. The cattle on a thousand hills low forth their gratitude and every sheep praises God in its bleating—but these beings, worse than natural brute beasts—still continue to receive from the lavish hand of Divine Benevolence, but they return no thanks whatever to their Benefactor! Let such remember that that ground which has long been rained upon, and plowed, and sown which yet brings forth no fruit, is near unto cursing—whose end is to be burned. Prayerless souls are Christless souls, Christless souls are Graceless souls and Graceless souls shall soon be damned souls! See your peril, you that neglect altogether the blessed privilege of prayer! You are in the bonds of iniquity, you are in the gall of bitterness. God deliver you, for His name's sake!

Nor do I intend to use this text in an address to those who are in the habit of formal prayer, though there are many such. Taught from their childhood to utter certain sacred words, they have carried through youth and even up to manhood, the same practice! I will not discuss that question just now, whether the practice of teaching children a form of prayer is proper or not. I would not do it. Children should be instructed in the meaning of prayer, and their little minds should be taught to pray, but it should be rather the matter of prayer than the words of prayer that should be suggested. And I think they should be taught to use their own words and to speak to God in such phrases and terms as their own childlike capacities, assisted by a mother's love, may be able to suggest. Full many there are who, from early education, grow up habituated to some form of words which either stands in lieu of the heart's devotion, or cripples its free exercise. No doubt there may

be true prayer linked with a form, and the soul of many a saint has gone up to Heaven in some holy collect, or in the words of some beautiful liturgy, but, for all that, we are absolutely certain that tens of thousands use the mere language without heart or soul, under the impression that they are "praying."

I consider the form of prayer to be no more worthy of being called prayer than a coach may be called a horse. The horse will be better without the coach, travel much more rapidly and find himself much more at ease. He may drag the coach, it is true, and still travel well. Without the heart of prayer, the form is no prayer—it will not stir or move—it is simply a vehicle that may have wheels that might move, but it has no inner force or power within itself to propel it. Flatter not yourselves that your devotion has been acceptable to God, you that have been merely saluting the ears of the Most High with forms! They have been only mockeries when your heart has been absent. What though a parliament of bishops should have posed the words you use? What though they should be absolutely faultless, yes, what if they should even be inspired? Though you have used them a thousand times, yet you have never prayed if you consider that the repetition of the form is prayer. No! There is more than the chatter of the tongue in genuine supplication! More than the repetition of words in truly drawing near to God! Take care lest, with the form of godliness, you neglect the power and go down to Hell having a lie in your right hand, but not the Truth of God in your heart!

What I do intend, however, is to address this text to the true people of God who understand the sacred art of prayer and are prevalent therein, but who, to their own sorrow and shame, must confess that they have restrained prayer. If there is no other person in this Congregation to whom the preacher will speak personally, he feels shamefully conscious that he will have to speak very plainly to himself. We know that our prayers are heard. We are certain—it is not a question with us—that there is an efficacy in the Divine office of intercession. And yet (oh, how we should blush when we make the confession!) we must acknowledge that we do restrain or neglect prayer. Now, inasmuch as we speak to those who grieve and repent that they should have done so, we shall use but little sharpness. But we shall try to use much plainness of speech. Let us see how and in what respect we have neglected prayer.

I. Do you not think, dear Friends, that we often neglect prayer IN THE FEWNESS OF THE OCCASIONS THAT WE SET APART FOR SUPPLICATION?

From hoary tradition and modern precedents we have come to believe that the morning should be opened with the offering of prayer and that the day should be shut in with the nightly sacrifice. We do ill if we neglect those two sessions of prayer. Do you not think that often, in the morning, we rise so near to the time of labor, when duty calls us to our daily avocation, that we hurry through the familiar exercises with unseemly haste, instead of diligently seeking the Lord and earnestly calling upon His name? And even at night, when we are very weary and jaded, it is just possible that our prayer is uttered somewhere between sleeping and waking. Is not this restraining or neglecting prayer? And throughout the 365 days of the year, if we continue to pray thus, and this is all, how small an amount of true supplication will have gone up to Heaven!

I trust there are none here present who profess to be followers of Christ who do not also practice prayer in their families. We may have no positive commandment for it, but we believe that it is as much in accord with the genius and spirit of the Gospel, and that it is so commended by the

example of the saints, that the neglect thereof is a strange inconsistency! Now, how often is this family worship conducted in a slovenly manner? An inconvenient hour is fixed and a knock at the door, a ring at the bell, the call of a customer may hurry the Believer from his knees to go and attend to his worldly concerns. Of course, many excuses might be offered, but the fact would still remain that in this way we often neglect prayer!

And then, when you come up to the House of God—I hope you do not come up to this Tabernacle without prayer—yet I fear we do not all pray as we should, even when in the place dedicated to God's worship. There should always be a devout prayer lifted up to Heaven as soon as you enter the place where you would meet with God. What a preparation is often made to appear in the assembly! Some of you get here half an hour before the service commences—if there were no talking, if each one of you looked into the Bible, or if the time was spent in silent supplication—what a cloud of holy incense would go smoking up to Heaven!

I think it would be comely for you and profitable for us if as soon as the minister enters the pulpit, you engaged yourself to plead with God for him. For me, I may especially say it is desirable. I claim it at your hands above every other man. With this overwhelming congregation and with the terrible reliability of so numerous a church, and with the Word of God spoken here published within a few hours, and disseminated over the country, scattered throughout all Europe, no—to the very ends of the earth—I may well ask you to lift up your hearts in supplication that the words spoken may be those of truth and soberness, directed of the Holy Spirit and made mighty through God, like arrows shot from His own bow, to find a target in the hearts that He means to bless!

And in going home, with what earnestness should we ask the Master to let what we have heard live in our hearts! We lose very much of the effects of our Sabbaths through not pleading with God on the Saturday night for a blessing upon the day of rest, and through not also pleading at the end of the Sunday, beseeching Him to make that which we have heard abide in our memories and appear in our actions. We have restrained prayer, I fear, in the fewness of the occasions.

Indeed, Brothers and Sisters, every day of the week, and every part of the day should be an occasion for prayer. Cries such as these, "Oh, would that!" "Lord, save me!" "Help me!" "More light, Lord!" "Teach me!" "Guide me!" and a thousand such, should be constantly going up from our hearts to the Throne of God. You may enjoy a refreshing solitude, if you please, in the midst of crowded Cheapside, or contrariwise, you may have your head in the whirl of a busy crowd when you have retired to your closet. It is not so much where we are as in what state our heart is.

Volume 51 3Let the regular seasons for devotion be constantly attended to. These things ought you to have done, but let your heart be habitually in a state of prayer—you must not leave this undone. Oh, that we prayed more, that we set apart more time for it! Good Bishop Farrar had an idea in his head which he carried out. Being a man of some substance and having some 24 persons in his household, he divided the day and there was always some person engaged either in holy song or else in devout supplication through the whole of the 24 hours! There was never a moment when the censor ceased to smoke, or the altar was without its sacrifice. Happy shall it be for us when, day and night, we shall circle the Throne of God rejoicing, but till then, let us emulate the ceaseless praise of seraphs before the Throne of God, continually drawing near unto God and making supplication and thanksgiving.

II. But to proceed to a second remark, dear Friends, I think it will be very clear, upon a little reflection, that we constantly restrain or neglect prayer BY NOT HAVING OUR HEARTS IN A PROPER STATE WHEN WE COME TO ITS EXERCISE.

We rush into prayer too often. We would think it necessary, if we were to address the Queen, that our petition should be prepared. But often we dash before the Throne of God as though it were but some common house of call, without even having a thought in our minds of what we are going for. Now, just let me suggest some few things which I think should always be subjects of meditation before our season of prayer and I think if you confess that you have not thought of these things, you will also be obliged to acknowledge that you have restrained prayer.

We should, before prayer, meditate upon Him to whom it is to be addressed. Let our thoughts be directed to the living and true God. Let me remember that He is Omnipotent, then I shall ask large things. Let me remember that He is very tender and full of compassion, then I shall ask little things and be minute in my supplication. Let me remember the greatness of His Covenant, then I shall come very boldly. Let me remember, also, that His faithfulness is like the great mountains and that His promises are sure to all the seed, then I shall ask very confidently, for I shall be persuaded that He will do as He has said. Let me fill my soul with the reflection of the greatness of His majesty, then I shall be struck with awe, with the equal greatness of His love, then I shall be filled with delight! We would pray better than we do if we meditated more, before prayer, upon the God whom we address in our supplications!

Then, let me meditate also upon the way through which my prayer is offered. Let my soul behold the blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat before I venture to draw near to God. Let me go to Gethsemane and see the Savior as He prays. Let me stand in holy vision at the foot of Calvary and see His body torn, that the veil which parted my soul from all access to God might be torn, too, that I might come close to my Father, even to His feet. O dear Friends, I am sure if we thought about the way of access in prayer, we would be more mighty in it, but our neglect of so doing has led us to restrain prayer. And yet, again, ought I not, before prayer, to be duly conscious of my many sins? Oh, when I hear men pray cold, careless prayers, surely they forget that they are sinners, or else, renouncing gaudy words and flowing periods, they would smite upon their breast with the cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" They would come to the point at once, with force and fervency—"I, black, unclean, defiled, condemned by the Law, make my appeal unto You, O God!" What prostration of spirit, what zeal, what fervor, what earnestness and then, consequently, what prevalence would there be if we were duly sensible of our sin!

If we can add to this a little meditation upon what our needs are, how much better we would pray! We often fail in prayer because we come without an errand, not having thought of what our necessities are. But if we have reckoned up that we need pardon, justification, sanctification, preservation—that, besides the blessings of this life, we need that our decaying Graces should be revived, that such-and-such a temptation should be removed, and that through such-and-such a trial we should be carried and prove more than conquerors—then, coming with an errand, we would prevail before the Most High! But we bring to the altars bowls that have no bottom—and if the treasure should be put in them, it would fall through! We do not know what we need and, therefore, we ask not for what we really need. We try to lay our necessities before the Lord without having duly considered how great our necessities are. See yourself as an abject bankrupt, weak,

sick, dying—and this will make you plead. See your necessities to be deep as the ocean, broad as the expanse of Heaven—and this will make you cry. There will be no restraining of prayer, Beloved, when we have got a due sense of our soul's poverty. But because we think we are rich, increased in goods and have need of nothing, therefore it is that we restrain prayer before God.

How well it would be for us if, before prayer, we would meditate upon the past with regard to all the mercies we have had during the day. What courage that would give us to ask for more! The deliverances we have experienced through our life, how boldly should we plead to be delivered yet again! He that has been with me in six troubles will not forsake me in the seventh! Do but remember how you passed through the fires and was not burnt, and you should be confident that the flame will not kindle upon you now. Christian, remember how before, when you passed through the rivers, God was with you, and surely you may plead with Him to deliver you from the flood that now threatens to inundate you. Think of the past ages too, of what He did of old, where He brought His people out of Egypt and of all the mighty deeds which He has done—are they not written in the Book of the Wars of the Lord? Plead all these and say unto Him in your supplications—"O You that are a God that hears prayer, hear me now and send me an answer of peace!" I think, without needing to point that arrow, you can see which way I would shoot. Because we do not come to the Throne of Grace in a proper state of supplication, therefore it is that too often we restrain prayer before God.

III. Now, thirdly, it is not to be denied by a man who is conscious of his own error, that IN THE DUTY OF PRAYER, ITSELF, WE ARE TOO

Volume 51 5OFTEN STRAITENED IN OUR OWN HEART, AND SO RESTRAIN PRAYER.

Prayer has been differently divided by different authors. We might roughly say that prayer consists, first, of invocation. "Our Father, which are in Heaven." We begin by stating the title and our own apprehension of the Glory and majesty of the Person whom we address. Do you not think, dear Friends, that we fail here, and restrain prayer here? Oh, how we ought to sound forth His praises! I think, on the Sabbath, it is always the minister's special duty to bring out the titles of THE ALMIGHTY ONE, such as "King of kings, and Lord of lords!" He is not to be addressed in common terms. We should endeavor, as we search the Scripture through, to find those mighty phrases which the ancient saints were known to apply to Jehovah! And we should make His Temple ring with His Glory and make our closet full of that holy adoration with which prayer must always be linked! I think the rebuking angel might often say, "You think that the Lord is such an one as yourself, and you talk not to Him as to the God of the whole earth but, as though He were a man you address Him in slighting and unseemly terms." Let all our invocations come more deeply from our soul's reverence to the Most High and let us address Him, not in high-sounding words of fleshly homage, but still in words which set forth our awe and our reverence while they express His majesty and the Glory of His holiness.

From invocation we usually go to confession, and how often do we fail here! In your closet are you in the habit of confessing your real sins to God? Do you not find, Brothers and Sisters, a tendency to acknowledge that sin which is common to all men, but not that which is certainly peculiar to you? We are all Sauls in our way—we want the best of the cattle and the sheep. Those favorite sins, those Agag sins—it is not so easy to hew them in pieces before the Lord. The right-eye sin—happy is that Christian who has learned to pluck it out by confession. The righthand sin—he

is blessed and well taught who aims the axe at that sin and cuts it from him! But no, we say that we have sinned—we are willing to use the terms of any general confession that any church may publish! But to say, "Lord, You know that I love the world, and the things of the world! You know that I am covetous." Or to say, "Lord, You know I was envious of So-and-So, because he shone brighter than I did at such andsuch a public meeting. Lord, I was jealous of such-and-such a member of the church because I evidently saw that he was preferred before me!" And for the husband to confess before God that he has been overbearing, that he has spoken rashly to a child. For a wife to acknowledge that she has been willful, that she has had a fault—this would be letting out prayer—but the hiding of these things is restraining prayer and we shall surely come under that charge of having restrained prayer unless we make our private confessions of sin very explicit, coming to the point.

I have thought, in teaching children in the Sunday school, we should not so much talk about sin in general as the sins in which children most commonly indulge, such as little thefts, naughty tempers, disobedience to parents. These are the things that children should confess. Men in the dawn of their manhood should confess those ripening evil imaginations, those lustful things that rise in the heart, while the man in business should always make this a point—to see most to the sins which attack businessmen. I have no doubt that I might be very easily led, in my confession, to look to all the offenses I may have committed against the laws of business because I should not need to deal very harshly with myself there, for I do not have the temptations of these men. And I should not wonder if some of you merchants will find it very easy to examine ourselves according to a code that is proper to me, but not to you! Let the workman pray to God as a workman and confess the sins common to his craft. Let the trader examine himself according to his standing and let each man make his confession like the confessions of old, when everyone confessed apart—the mother apart and the daughter apart, the father apart and the son apart. Let each one thus make a clean breast of the matter and I am sure there will not be so much need to say that we have restrained prayer before God.

As to the next part of prayer, which is petition, we all fail lamentably, indeed! We have not, because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. We are ready enough to ask for deliverance from trial, but how often we forget to ask that it may be sanctified to us! We are quite ready to say, "Give us this day our daily bread." How often, however, do we fail to ask that He would give us the Bread which comes down from Heaven and enable us blessedly to feed upon His flesh and His blood? Brothers and Sisters, we come before God with little desires and the desires we get have so little fervency in them. And when we get the fervency, we so often fail to get the faith which grasps the promise and believes that God will give, that, in all these points, when we come to the matter of spreading our needs before God, we restrain prayer!

Oh, for the Luthers that can shake the gates of Heaven by supplication! Oh, for men that can lay hold upon the golden knocker of Heaven's gate and make it ring and ring again as if they meant it to be heard! Cold prayers court a denial. God hears by fire and the God that answers by fire let Him be God! But first there must be prayer in Elijah's heart—fire in Elijah's heart—before the fire will come down in answer to the prayer! Our fervency goes up to Heaven and then God's Grace, which gave us the fervency, comes down and gives us the answer.

But you know, too, that all true prayer has thanksgiving in it. "Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever." What prayer is complete without the doxology? And here, too, we restrain prayer. We do not praise, and bless, and magnify the Lord as we should. If our hearts were more full of gratitude, our expressions would be far more noble and comprehensive when we speak forth His praise. I wish I could put this so plainly that every Christian might mourn on account of his sin and mend his ways. But, indeed, it is only mine to speak—it is my Master's to open your eyes, to let you see and to set you upon the solemnly important duty of self-examination! In this respect, I am sure even the prayers that you and I have offered today may well cry out against us, and say, "You have restrained prayer."

Volume 51 7IV. Yet, again, I fear we must all join in acknowledging A SERIOUS FAULT WITH REGARD TO THE AFTER-PART OF OUR PRAYERS. When prayer is done, do you not think we very much restrain it?

For, after prayer, we often go immediately into the world. That may be absolutely necessary, but we go there and leave behind us what we ought to carry with us. When we have got into a good frame in prayer, we should consider that this is like the meat which the angel gave to Elijah that he might go on his forty day's journey in its strength. Have we felt Heavenly-minded? The moment we cross the threshold and get into the family or business, where is the Heavenly mind? Oh, to get real prayer, inwrought prayer—not the surface prayer, as though it were a sort of sacred masquerading, but to have it inside, in the warp and woof of our being—till prayer becomes a part of ourselves! Then, Brothers and Sisters, we have not restrained it! We get hot in our closets—when I say, "we," oh, how few can say as much as that!—but, still, we get hot in our closets and go out into the world, into the draughts of its temptations, without wrapping ourselves about with promises—and we catch wellnear our death of cold! Oh, to carry that heat and fervor with us!

You know that as you carry a bar of hot iron along, how soon it begins to return to its common ordinary appearance and the heat is gone. How hot, then, we ought to make ourselves in prayer, that we may burn the longer and how, all day long, we ought to keep thrusting the iron into the fire so that, when it ceases to glow, it may go into the hot embers once more and the flame may glow upon it and we may once again be brought into a vehement heat. But we are not careful enough to keep up the Grace and seek to nurture and to cherish the young child which God seems to give in the morning into our hands that we may nurse it for Him.

Old Master Dyer speaks of locking up his heart by prayer in the morning and giving Christ the key. I am afraid we do the opposite—we lock up our hearts in the morning and give the devil the key—and think that he will be honest enough not to rob us! Ah, it is in bad hands when it is trusted with him. He keeps stealing all day long the precious things that were in the safe until, at night it is quite empty and needs to be filled all over again! Would God that we put the key in Christ's hands, by looking up to Him all day!

I think, too, that after prayer, we often fail in unbelief. We do not expect God to hear us. If God were to hear some of you, you would be more surprised than with the greatest novelty that could occur! We ask blessings, but do not think of having them. When you and I were children and had a little piece of garden, we sowed some seeds one day and the next morning, before breakfast, we went to see if they were up. And the next day, seeing that no appearance of the green blade could

be discovered, we began to move the dirt to look for our seeds. Ah, we were children then! I wish we were children now with regard to our prayers. We would go out, the next morning, to see if they had begun to sprout and disturb the ground a bit to look after our prayers, for fear they should have miscarried. Do you believe God hears prayer? I saw, the other day, in a newspaper, a little sketch concerning myself in which the author, who is evidently very friendly, gives a much better description of me than I deserve. But he offers me one rather pointed rebuke. I was preaching at the time in a tent and only part of the people were covered. It began to rain just before prayer, and one petition was, "O Lord, be pleased to grant us favorable weather for this service and command the clouds that they rain not upon this assembly!" Now he thought this very preposterous. To say the least, it was rash, if not blasphemous! He admits that it did not rain a drop after the prayer, still, of course, he did not infer that God heard and answered the prayer. If I had asked for a rain of Grace, it would have been quite credible that God would send that, but when I ask Him not to send a temporal rain, that is fanaticism! To think that God meddles with the clouds at the wish of a man, or that He may answer us in temporal things is pronounced absurd! I bless God, however, that I fully believe the absurdity, preposterous as it may appear! I know that God hears prayer in temporal things! I know it by as clear a demonstration as ever any proposition in Euclid was solved. I know it by abundant facts and incidents which my own life has revealed. God does hear prayer! The majority of people do not think that He does. At least, if He does, they suppose that it is in some high, clerical, mysterious, unknown sense. As to ordinary things ever happening as the result of prayer, they account it a delusion! "The Bank of Faith!" How many have said it is a bank of nonsense and yet there are many who have been able to say, "We could write as good a book as Huntington's 'Bank of Faith,' that would be no more believed than Huntington's was, though it might be even more true."

We restrain prayer, I am sure, by not believing our God. We ask a favor, which, if granted, we attribute to "accident" rather than ascribe it to Grace, and we do not receive it. Then the next time we come, of course we cannot pray, because unbelief has cut the sinews of prayer and left us powerless before the Throne of God.

You are a professor of religion. After you have been to a party of ungodly people, can you pray? You are a merchant, and profess to be a follower of Christ. When you engage in a hazardous speculation and you know you ought not to, can you pray? Or, when you have had a heavy loss in business and repine against God and will not say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"—can you pray? Pity the man who can sin and pray, too! In a certain sense, Brooks was right when he said, "Praying will make you leave off sinning, or else sin will make you leave off praying." Of course, that is not meant in the absolute sense of the term, but as to certain sins, especially gross sins— and some of the sins to which God's people are liable, are gross sins—I am certain they cannot come before their Father's face with the confidence they had before, after having been rolling in the mire, or wandering in By-Path Meadow.

Look at your own child—he meets you in the morning with a smiling face, so pleased. He asks what he likes of you and you give it to him. Now he has been doing wrong. He knows he has and you have frowned upon

Volume 51 9him, you have chastened him. How does he come now? He may come because he is a child and with tears in his eyes because he is a penitent—but he cannot come with the power he

once had. Look at a king's favorite—as long as he feels that he is in the king's favor, he will take up your suit and plead for you. Ask him tomorrow whether he will do you a good turn and he says, "No, I am out of favor. I don't feel as if I could speak now." A Christian is not out of Covenant favor, but he may be experimentally under a cloud—he loses the Light of God's Countenance and then he feels he cannot plead—his prayers become weak and feeble.

Take heed unto yourselves and consider your ways. The path of declension is very abrupt in some parts. We may go on gradually declining in prayer till faith grows weak, love cold and patience is exhausted. We may go on for years and maintain a consistent profession, but, all of a sudden, the road which had long been descending at a gradual incline may come to a precipice and we may fall, and that when we little think of it. We may have ruined our reputation, blasted our comfort, destroyed our usefulness and we may have to go to our graves with a sword in our bones because of sin. Stop while you may, Believer! Stop and guard against the temptation. I charge you, by the trials you must meet with, by the temptations that surround you, by the corruptions that are within, by the assaults that come from Hell and by the trials that come from Heaven, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

I speak especially to the members of this church. Think of what has God worked for us! When we were a few people, what intense agony of prayer we had! We have had Prayer Meetings in Park Street that have moved our souls. Every man seemed like a crusader besieging Jerusalem, each man determined to storm the Celestial City by the might of intercession and the blessings came upon us, so that we had not room to receive them! The hallowed cloud still rests over us! The holy drops still fall! Will you now cease from intercession? At the borders of the promised land, will you turn back to the wilderness, when God is with us and the standard of a King is in the midst of our armies? Will you now fail in the day of trial? Who knows but you have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this? Who knows but that He will preserve in the land a small company of poor people who fear God intensely, hold the faith earnestly and love God vehemently—that infidelity may be driven from the high places of the earth—that Naphtali again may be a people made triumphant in the high places of the field?

God of Heaven, grant this! Oh, let us restrain prayer no longer! You that have never prayed, may you be taught to pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner," uttered from your heart, with your eyes upon the Cross! You will receive a gracious answer and you shall go on your way rejoicing, for—

"When God inclines the heart to pray, He has an ear to hear! To Him there's music in a groan, And beauty in a tear." EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

1 John 2:1-29.

1 John 2:1-4. My little children, these things I write unto you, that you

sin not. And if any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that says, I know Him, and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Holy living is the sure fruit and proof of anyone being in Christ. Where it is not manifest, the profession of being in Christ is a lie.

5. But whoever keeps His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. Note the gradation—we know Him, we are in Him—we know that we are in Him.

6. He that says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked. Abiding in Christ helps us to live as Christ lived, not, as one well observes, that we can walk on the water as Christ walked upon it, but that we can walk in our daily life even as He did because we abide in Him.

7. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you but an old commandment which you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you have heard from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which we have heard from the beginning, yet it is always fresh and new.

8-10. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shines. He that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. Love is the great and sure way of abiding in the light, abiding in Christ.

11-14. But he that hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and knows not where he goes, because that darkness has blinded his eyes. I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the Wicked One. I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the Wicked One. Having overcome him, at the first by your faith in Christ, you still go on to conquer him by abiding in Christ.

15-17. Love not the world neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever.

Volume 51 11 Everything else is transient, fleeting and soon passes away. But he that does the will of God has entered into the eternal regions and he has become one of those who abide forever. Do not be carried away, therefore, from your old firm foundation and from your eternal union to Christ.

18-20. Little children, it is the last hour and as you have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things. You are taught of God, so you know all that is necessary for the attainment of true godliness, and the accomplishment of the Divine purposes.

21-25. I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist that denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father: [but] he that acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Let that therefore abide in you, which you have

heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall reMal. in you, you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life. Not transient life, but eternal life is the great promise of the Covenant of Grace, and abiding in Christ we possess it.

26, 27. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which you have received of Him abides in you, What a wonderful declaration this is—not only that we have this holy anointing, but that we have it always!

27, 28. And you need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in Him. And now little children, abide in Him. See how the Apostle rings out this note again and again? Our Savior repeated the word, "abide," or, "remain," many times in the short parable of the Vine, and now John strikes this same silver bell over and over again—"And now, little children, abide in Him"—

28, 29. That when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone that does righteousness is born of Him.

. Adapted from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 16,20 #3373 - Man's Scorn and God's Succor

MAN'S SCORN AND GOD'S SUCCOR

NO. 3373

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1913.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, MAY 12, 1867.

"My friends scorn me; but my eyes pour out tears unto God."

Job 16:20.

WE know that Job's sorrows were recorded, not for his honor, but for our profit. We are told to consider the patience of Job and truly we might often be sustained, cheered and comforted if we would but look upon that Patriarch in the depths of his grief. We are "born to sorrow" and if our cup is not embittered with it tonight, we must not expect to be long without a taste of the gall in our mouths.

There is one particular sorrow, however, which appertains to the early days of our spiritual life, concerning which I intend to speak tonight. It is the sorrow caused by the scorning of us by our friends. This becomes a very little sorrow to us in later days, but at the first it is a "trial of cruel mocking," and a very severe one. I suppose the advanced Christian at last can even come to "rejoice in tribulations" of this sort—he counts it to be an honor—he rejoices and is exceedingly glad when men say all manner of evil against him falsely for Christ's name's sake. But at the first there is nothing, perhaps, more staggering to the young Christian than to find that his "worst foes" are they of his own household and that they who should have cherished and nurtured in him the piety which is so excellent a flower, do their cruel worst to nip it in the bud!

Without further preface, therefore, we shall try, as the Holy Spirit shall teach and help us, to speak to you upon a very common trial, "My friends scorn me." And then, yet again, meditate on a remarkable resort and exercise, "But my eyes pour out tears unto God." First, then, let us think upon—

I. A VERY COMMON TRIAL. "My friends scorn me." What is it they do? They scorn me. I shall apply

the text tonight to scorn on account of religion. It is lately, my dear young friends—I address myself particularly to you—it is lately that you have been impressed. It is lately that you have considered your ways. There has been an evident alteration in you. You have become of a serious cast of

mind. You are now a seeker—you desire salvation. For this reason your friends scorn you. Perhaps they say that you are so miserable that they cannot bear your company. Probably the remark is correct and you feel it to be so, but they do not know that this misery of yours will end in perfect joy. They do not comprehend this rough plowing of your soul, which is preparatory to the joyful harvest. They do not understand that the good Physician often uses the lancet and opens wide the wound before He comes with His downy fingers to close it and to heal it. You are miserable and you might expect them, therefore, to be the more gentle with you and to help your faith as much as possible, but instead of that, they continually tell you that your company is altogether unbearable—and so they scorn you. Meanwhile, they also insinuate that the attention which you are now paying to religious matters is with a sinister motive and design. They say that you are a hypocrite! They cannot understand that there can be such a thing as religious sincerity. To them it is all hypocrisy. They suppose that all those who seek to live godly lives in Christ Jesus are merely making a pretense with a view to some personal advantage. Do not be surprised if they insinuate that you "cant," if they mimic any tone that may be peculiar to you—if in any and every way possible they throw in your face the insinuation that you are false and hypocritical. And, perhaps, they also twit you with your faults, which are, alas, too many—and are near the surface—and so very easily visible to them.

The old proverb says, "It is easy enough to find a stick with which to beat a dog," and it is very easy for our friends with whom we live to rake up some fault of ours, to exaggerate it, and then to strike us as hard as they can with it! Very difficult, indeed, would it be for us to live so as to give them no such opportunity. Even when most careful, our very carefulness is sneered at as sanctimoniousness! And if we are particular, then we are severe, rigid, and, worst of all, "Puritanical."

So that, do what we will, we must expect to have faults laid at our door. This is hard to bear. Your friends, in this respect, scorn you. And all the while they also tell you that, make what pretences you may, it is not at all likely that any good will come out of your religion. It is, they say, an old wives' fable and a cunning story. They have never proved the power of it in their own souls—they know no better and, therefore, they tell you to eat, drink, and be merry—fools as they are to think that this poor flesh and blood ought to have the first care before the soul that is born for better things! Fools, I say, as they are, to think that it ever can be wisdom to live for this little span of time and to forget eternity, which knows no end! Yet they will tell you to live while you live, that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, to snatch the present joy. They say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die and leave the spirit-world and the land that is to be revealed to those speculative minds who may care for such things!" And so, with a hoarse laugh, they would dismiss religion from you, or persuade you, if possible, to forget it. But, my dear Friends, you cannot forget it, for if God is dealing with you! His arrows stick fast in the soul. When the Spirit of God comes to deal with a man, if all the devils in Hell and all the sinners on earth should laugh around him all day long, it would only drive the shafts deeper into his soul! He who has never felt the power of the world to come is easily driven out of his profession, but he who has once been plowed and harrowed by the mighty Plowman of Conviction can never forget it! I recollect when my sins lay heavy upon me. I would not have been ashamed to have stood up before a parliament of kings and said that I knew sin to be exceedingly sinful, and that I thought that the sentence of my condemnation had gone forth from God. Yet, as to having any Scriptural thoughts, they were

squeezed out of me by the rough hand of my conscience. I knew that sin was evil before God and that sin would destroy my soul. How could I doubt it when the hot sweat of horror stood on my brow at the thought of my past life? Doubts then soon fled to the winds! Ah, if God is so dealing with you, sore as the trial is, of being mocked by unbelieving friends, you will bear it and will come out of the ordeal none the worse! But still, meanwhile, I remind you that Job himself had to say, "My friends scorn me."

Who are these people who scorn you? They are your friends and that makes it the harder to bear. Caesar said, "Et tu Brute?"—"And you, Brutus? Do you stab?" So, too, one of our Lord's sharpest griefs was, "He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me." It is hard for a young Christian to be persecuted by the father to whose judgment he has always looked up with respect. Harder still is it for a Christian woman to find the partner of her bosom steeled against her for the Truth of God's sake. Oh, how they can get at our hearts, these husbands and these wives of ours—and if they happen to be enemies of Christ, what wounds they can make! "My friends scorn me." You would not mind if it were merely the workpeople in the shop. You could escape from them, but you cannot escape from your own family. You would not mind it if the ribald herds around you mocked and taunted you, but some of your friends are people of excellent character in all points but one! One thing they lack, but the other things they have in such a degree that you almost blush to think that they excel you—and then it is very difficult to have a jeer from such. You had hoped that they would sympathize with you, instruct you and encourage you—but the very people to whom you looked for assistance have turned against you! One thing let me say—if those who have thus scorned you are merely "friends," and are not related to you, they prove that they are not true friends—part from their company, I pray you!

But if they are those with whom Providence has united you with such bonds, that you must look upon it as being a part of the cross which you have to carry, well, then, you must take up that cross daily, even though it is a heavy and painful one, that you may follow your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ! When the three holy children were cast into the furnace, it was at least out of doors and away from their dwelling. And but for God's rescue it would have destroyed them. But to have a furnace indoors and to have it always blazing—to go home every night into that furnace and to feel each day that the coals are heaped upon you, and still to hold on

Volume 59 3and refuse to bow the knee to evil, but still remain the true servant of Jesus Christ—oh, the ordeal is terribly severe! Job said that his enemies scorned him and why should you be allowed to escape, or expect to come off better than Job? I do trust that this will be in the nature of a good thing for you. It will make you feel less dependent upon an arm of flesh. It will drive you to God and I am sure that those make the strongest Christians who have to come out most distinctly and separately from their fellows. It is the very best enjoyment. The Covenanters tell us in their lives that the happiest seasons they ever had were among the bogs, swamps, mountains and the brown heath of Scotland when Claverhouse's dragoons were after them! Then Christ seemed doubly precious to them, when the world had cast them out on the heath. Oh, there is no talk with Christ so sweet as that which He gives His people when they walk up the bleak side of the hill with Him, with the snow blowing in their teeth! Then He covers them with the mantle of His love and lets His soul out in springs of love, comfort and delight to them! Some of you who do not have persecution might almost wish to have it that you might know those dear delights, those intimate communing which Christ gives to His people in the day of battle and in the time of

torment! Your friends may scorn you, but "there is a Friend that sticks closer than a brother." Come to Him and He will not scorn you, but will be your great Comforter!

Your friends scorn you, but why do they do so? They do it you know not why. If it is on account of religion, I think I know the philosophy of it. They scorn you because you are different from them. I saw a canary light on the roof of a house opposite to a window where I was standing—and in almost a second afterwards some 30 or 40 sparrows surrounded it and began pecking away at it—and the reason was very obvious. It was of a different color from themselves. If it had been a sparrow, of their own dark, smoky, dusty hue, they would have let it alone. But here was a golden-winged stranger from the sunny isles and they must persecute it! And so, if you are a bird of paradise, you will find that word of the Prophet to be true, "My heritage is unto me as a speckled bird—the birds round about are against her." So you will find the birds round about you—the ravens, hawks and vultures—against you. You are not understood, you know. If you are a true Christian, you cannot be understood! The greatest puzzle to a worldly man is a Christian! He is moved by motives which the worldling cannot understand. He is influenced by fears and hopes to which the worldling is a total stranger. They did not know your Lord—why should they know you? They crucified the Lord of Glory, not understanding that He was God, and so "it does not yet appear" what you are, nor does the world value you at your proper worth. Do not be astonished at it—it is partly malice and partly ignorance that leads men to scorn you! If, my dear Friend, you are a thorough-going Christian, you must not expect to escape scorn! Your life is a standing protest against the lives of others! You fear God, and they do not. You cannot live as they live. You cannot talk as they talk and when they note even your silence, it becomes provoking to them! If the world could have its way, it would not have a Christian living in it. "No," the worldlings would say, "That man is a living provocation to our conscience—he thrusts thorns into our pillows and will not let us rest." I am thankful if this is the case with you. And if so, it accounts for very much of the scorning which your friends pour upon you. I will not dwell upon the subject, however. You will have to find out the reason probably in your later experience.

But now, what is the best thing for you to do if your friends scorn you? Well, do not defend yourself! Do not get bad-tempered about it. Do not answer them. The best reply is, in most cases, complete silence. Only speak when you are quite sure that it is better to speak than to hold your tongue. Never give scorn for scorning. Remember that a worldly man may resist evil if he will, but Christ says to his friends, "I say unto you, resist not evil, and when you are smitten on one check, turn the other also." I know that many of those good old non-resistance texts are looked upon as being quite out-of-date—as part of the Bible that is not to be preached. Well, when I get information from the skies that the text is to be covered over or silenced, I will say nothing about it—but as long as I find it there, I must say to you that that which men of the world call "pluck" and "fine spirit" very often comes only from the devil! Why are there fights and wars? They come from your own lusts. The Christian's only answer to the persecutor is the answer of the anvil to the blows of the hammer. He bears them, bears, bears them and breaks the hammer by bearing them! This is how the Christian Church triumphs. She has never made a good hand at carnal weapons. It was an ill-day for our Puritan sires when they took up arms. It did religion no good in this land, but I believe, threw it back for a long time. It is for the Christian Church to suffer and to suffer on in confidence and in faith, and to make the world see that the anvil will outlast a thousand sets of hammers and will triumph when they are all broken to dust! You, dear Friends, especially will find it

to be your wisest, as well as the most Christian course, to bear everything that is put upon you and to make no return except by being more kind and more generous than ever towards those who are most unkind to you!

Let me say, however, take care that you do not give any cause of offense. It is very easy for a man to make a martyr of himself when it is not his religion, but his particular way of holding it that brings on the martyrdom. Some people, really, are so ferocious in their convictions, so grim in their conscientiousness and so continually obtrusive that if they are persecuted, it is their manner that is persecuted and not the Gospel which they profess to hold! Do not give people an opportunity of opening their mouths against you, but pray God to make you very wise, so that, as in Daniel's case, they may find nothing against you, save only touching the Lord God whom you worship. And then, that being done, if you are still scorned by your friends, look upon it as coming from God's

Volume 59 5hands and that will very much soften it. Ask the Lord what is His purpose in it, what lessons He has to teach you. It may be it is to keep your pride down, or to strengthen you for some future conflicts or labors in His cause. And when you have waited upon Him for direction, rejoice and be exceedingly glad that you are permitted to suffer at all for Christ's sake and so in patience you shall possess your souls. Walk uprightly before God, live as Christ lived and, my dear Friend, the day will come when you shall have outlived all this enmity and when those who now mock you will respect you. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." At such a time, it may be some will be won by your gentleness and your holy conversation to become Christians, too, and what a joy that will be to you!

Now, I know that what I have been saying does not belong to a great many of you. But still, I must sometimes take texts which will apply to these special cases, especially as just now there are many who have been saved at the Agricultural Hall, and here, and elsewhere, and to whom the struggle for conscience' sake is quite a new thing. And a word or two by way of comfort to them I am sure you will not grudge. And now we shall turn to the second part of the sermon, and we find the Patriarch engaged in—

II. A REMARKABLE RESORT AND EXERCISE. His friends were scorning him, but he did not answer them. He had a

sharp word or two, certainly, but still, the direction of his mind and the bent of his spirit went another way. He thought of God and forgot them. Herein is wisdom. When you are perplexed with a trouble, when you are mortified by some wicked person, do not let that thing always fret you. Have you ever noticed how you may torment yourselves with some little thing if you like? There is a fly in the room and that fly may be almost as much a trouble to you as though it were an eagle if you let its buzz be always in your ears. And if you keep on thinking about that buzzing fly, you can magnify it into a big dragon with wings. But if you forget it, and go on with your writing or your needlework, the fly may buzz away 50 times as much, but it will not trouble you! It is a very blessed thing, when, having a care which you cannot get over, you take it to God in prayer and so get over it. I will tell you what I have sometimes done with some of my difficulties. I have turned them over—I have looked at them in all shapes and ways—I have considered every way of getting over them. I have been vexed, troubled and distressed for the time, and at last I have come to feel, "Well now, I cannot do anything with this. It is a hard shell—I cannot crack it. But I have frequently been enabled by Grace to deliberately take that matter and put it upon the shelf and say, "By

God's Grace I will never think about that again as long as I live—I have done the best I could with it, Lord, and if it does not get right, that is now Your business and not mine—I will be done with it forever." Sometimes you will find that the trouble will get right as soon as you leave it alone. It is just your meddling with it that makes the difficulty. You do not see that at the time, but as soon as you just get out of the way, the whole thing becomes right at once! God's wheels of Providence grind much more accurately than any of the wheels of our mental calculations. And when we are altogether out of joint, then it is that God comes in and shows us what His wisdom and power can do. Leave, then, the scorning friends, and betake yourselves to your God!

It is a very great mercy, let me say, that we may go to God when we are cast out by our friends—that if there are no other ears that will listen, God's ears will always listen—and that if in all the earth there should not remain a sympathizing heart, there is the heart of the Man, Christ Jesus, still to be appealed to! And we shall never appeal to the sympathies of the Son of God in vain. Oh, my Brothers and Sisters, when every other door is shut, the door of God's Grace is always open! Let all other ports be blocked, your vessel can always run into that one harbor which all the devils in Hell cannot close—the harbor of infinite love and unfailing care. "Trust you in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." In your darkest seasons, your very worst times—fly to your God and He will deliver you!

It seems from the text, however, that all Job could do was to pour out from his eyes a flood of tears. The word, "tears," is not in the original Hebrew, but it is put into the translation, as it is supposed to give simpler sense to our ears. His "eyes poured out," however, by which he meant that he did not so much pour out tears as his very heart, itself. As that grand old expositor, Joseph Caryl, says, "Job's heart was hot within him and the steam of his fierce trouble distilled itself in drops of tears which fell upon the ground." It was Job's inmost soul that he poured out before God. Now, there are many kinds of tears, but the best kind are those described in the text, "Tears unto God." What a capital sermon somebody might make out of that! "Tears unto God"! Tears not poured out to men, nor unto the earth, nor unto myself, but unto God! Tears put into His bottle. Libations poured at the foot of His altar. Tears wept for God—for God to see, for God to hear, for God to think upon—for God to accept. Not tears for tears' sake, but tears like those of the penitent, tears in the privacy of one's loneliness, tears only unto God! I hope, dear Friends, there are some among us who know the meaning of these tears. Some of you, I trust, are even now pouring forth the tears of repentance. Oh, those are blessed tears, tears of repentance that are tears unto God! It sometimes falls to my lot to have to talk to people about their sins. Sometimes they wish that I should do so and when I have tried to set their sins in their true light, tears have come. There have been tears because the offense has damaged the young man's character. Tears because it injured the young man's friends. Tears because a mother was grieved. Well now, when I have seen all these tears, I have been glad of them, such as they were, but they are not all the tears that we need. If you can only get one tear because the sin grieved God, it is worth a whole bottleful of the

Volume 59 7other tears! To see sin in the light of God's Countenance is to truly see it. David hit the nail on the head when he said, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight." My dear Hearer, you may be very sorry that you did wrong because it brought you into trouble. You may be very sorry, indeed, because you cannot take the position in life which you once occupied—but that is not a repentance that can serve you before God! But if you are sorry to think that you have grieved God. If, like the prodigal, you say, "Father, I have sinned against

Heaven and in Your sight"—these are tears unto God and are such as He receives!

The next kind of tears unto God are the tears of desire. I wish these were more frequent. Those are the prayers that prevail with God which are well salted with tears. I am afraid that the most of us do not pray as we should, but if we want to prevail, like Jacob, we must remember that Jacob wrestled with the Angel and then he prevailed. Weeping, which reveals the soul's wrestling, will often do what nothing else can in bringing us great benedictions.

We have all felt the power of tears over our own feelings and affections, but the power of tears over God, who shall describe it? The blood of Jesus secures all He wills, and when our tears look towards and plead the blood of Jesus, then those tears cannot be refused.

My dear Hearer, if you cannot get peace, do not cease praying until you have obtained it. If you long for your sins to be pardoned and have been praying a long time for this—it may be for weeks or months—pray again tonight and do not give up praying until you know you have prevailed with God. Can you bear to perish? Can you endure to be cast away? If you cannot, then be importunate! Lay hold upon the horns of the altar and let this be your vow, "I will not let You go, except You bless me." Then, when it comes to tears, you will get it. When it comes to your very soul being poured out before God, then shall God say unto you, "Your sins are forgiven you. Go in peace."

Once more. These tears may be tears shed on behalf of others. We would prevail for the salvation of others if we thought more of their cases when on our knees, and worked our souls more thoroughly into tempests of sacred and holy passion on their behalf. We cannot expect to see our children saved unless we can weep over them. We must not expect to see our congregations blessed unless our soul bleeds for that congregation. And when I say, "tears," I do not mean those drops from only the eyes, for some of us could not cry if our souls depended on it, and yet we may, though we let fall no watery tears, shed some of the best tears—tears dropping like sweet-smelling myrrh upon the altar of the all-seeing God! Oh, we must get to feel that we cannot let men die! We must get to feel as if we should die ourselves if they were lost! We must feel so desperately in earnest about it that we cannot sleep, nor go our way in peace unless such-and-such persons be turned unto God and find peace in Jesus! If this is our spirit, we shall have our desire and we shall see our beloved ones saved. Thus, then, it seems that Job, instead of dealing with his enemies, spent his time in dealing with his God, and as words failed him, he took himself to the more potent rhetoric of tears and so melted his way into God's heart, resting by faith upon the merits of the Redeemer who was yet to come! Do the same, my dear Friends, and God will give you the blessing you need!

But some of you say, "I would never think of weeping before God! I have no dealings with God." No, but He will have dealings with you. If you should not now repent of your sins, you shall repent some day, but that shall be when repentance is too late! Tears of repentance here on earth are signs of Divine Grace, but tears of sorrow in Hell are only signs of bitter and destroying remorse! "There shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Oh, may God the Holy Spirit convict us of sin here and now, while there is a hope of mercy, that we may fly to Jesus' wounds, be washed in His blood and be saved—for if not, rest assured that we shall be convicted of sin one day when sin can never be pardoned, but the undying worm of self-accusing shall gnaw at our consciences forever, and forever and forever! Ah, my dear Hearer, do not boast because you

cannot repent! Do not play the fool after that fashion, but rather ask God to break your heart of sin and so help you to repent! A tender conscience is such a blessing that you may well bemoan yourselves until God bestows it. Remember, however, that Jesus Christ can give a tender heart. It is one of the blessings of the Covenant of which He is the Surety. "A new heart also will I give them, and a right spirit will I put within them. I will take away the stony heart and give them a heart of flesh." Plead that Covenant promise! And if you plead it now, believing in Jesus and trusting in Him, you shall get that new heart! You shall get a heart that can weep before God and so you shall be accepted through the righteousness of Jesus and your tears and your supplications shall prevail!

I may never speak to some of you again, but oh, I should like to leave that thought with you that to suffer for Christ is honor and that to weep before the Lord is the truest pleasure! But if you have despised in your heart those that are persecuted, remember that day when Christ shall come, and all His holy angels with Him! If you laugh at Christians now, you will no longer laugh, but lament then! Your song then—or rather wail—shall be very different from the one you sing now. Oh, may you now, while yet life lasts, and the day of mercy is not over, seek Jesus, cast in your lot with His people, take up His Cross, that by-and-by you may wear His crown, suffering now—if necessary—in sharing His reproach and shame, that then you may be delighted with His Glory!

The Lord Himself grant it to everyone of you! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Psalms 22:1-22; Son_1:1-7; Son_2:1-7.

Volume 59 9Psalms 22:1-31.

Stand and look up at Christ upon the Cross and look upon these words as His. He Himself is the best exposition of this wondrous Psalm.

Verses 1, 2. My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You hear not; and in the night season, and am not silent. Gethsemane!—there is the key—a prayer unanswered at that time—"If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me." It was not possible. He must drink it. "In the night season I am not silent."

3. But You are holy, O You that inhabit the praises of Israel. No hard thoughts of God, even when He was forsaken. A forsaken Christ still clings to the Father and ascribes perfect holiness to Him.

4-6. Our fathers trusted in You: they trusted, and You did deliver them. They cried unto You, and were delivered: they trusted in You, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and not a man: a reproach of men, and despised of the people. How low did Christ descend for our sakes not only as low as man, but still lower! Never was godly man forsaken of God, and yet Jesus was—so He is lower than we are while He hangs upon the tree "a reproach of men, and despised of the people."

7, 8. All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him. Was not this just what they said at the Cross? Ah, little did they know that He saved others—Himself He could not save, because a matchless love held His hands there, as with

diamond rivets.

9, 10. But You are He that took Me out of the womb: You did make Me hope when I was upon My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from the womb: You are My God from My mother's belly. He remembers His wonderful birth. He was God's, indeed, from the very first.

11. Be not far from Me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. They have all gone. Peter and all the rest have fled. There is none to help. And there stand the Scribes and Pharisees and the great men of the nation.

12-14. Many bulls have compassed Me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset Me round. They gaped upon Me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water. All dissolved—nothing could hold together—quite spent and gone.

14. And all My bones are out of joint: My heart is like wax. He felt the inward sinking fever brought on Him by the wounds He had upon the Cross. "My heart is like wax."

14-16. It is melted in the midst of My body. My strength is dried up like a potsherd: and My tongue cleaves to My jaws: and You have brought Me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed Me. There they are—the cruel multitude—thrusting out the tongue and hooting at Him. "For dogs have compassed Me." 16. The assembly of the wicked has enclosed Me. The hind of the morning is now surrounded by the dogs. He cannot escape.

16, 17. They pierced My hands and My feet. I may count all My bones: they look and stare upon Me. Horrible, to the tender, modest soul of Jesus, were those vile stares of the ribald multitude as they gazed upon Him.

18-22. They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture. But be not You far from Me, O LORD: O My Strength, hasten You to help Me. Deliver My soul from the sword; My darling from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth: for You have heard Me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare Your name unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise You. The sun that was darkened, now shines again. The Savior's griefs are over. A calm is spread over His mind. He is about to say, "It is finished!" and His heart is comforted. We leave that passage there.

Son_1:1-17.

Now, concerning our love to Him, let us read a few verses of the Song of Solomon, first Chapter. You have been introduced to the Beloved, red with His own blood, but never so lovely as in His passion.

Verses 1, 2. The song of songs, which is Solomon's. Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth. No name. Is any name needed? What name is good enough for Him, our best Beloved? He plunges into the subject through excess of love! He forgets the name. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth."

2, 3. For Your love is better than wine. Because of the savor of Your good ointments Your name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love You. There is such a sweetness in the name. It is not like a box of ointment shut up, but like a sweet perfume that fills the room. For the

merits of Jesus are so sweet that they perfume Heaven itself! It was not on Calvary alone that that sweet ointment was known—it was known in the Seventh Heaven!

4. Draw me, we will run after You. We want to get near to Christ, but we cannot. "Draw me," we cry, "we will run after You."

4. The king has brought me into His chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in You, we will remember Your love more than wine: the upright love You. The wine shall help us to remember Him tonight when we come to His Table, but we will remember Him more than wine.

5. I am black, but comely, O you daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. A strange contrast is a Believer. He is black in himself, but he is comely in Christ. In himself he is foul as the smoke-dried tents of Kedar—but in his Lord he is as comely and rich as the curtains of Solomon!

6, 7. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun has looked upon me. My mother's children were angry with me: they made me

Volume 59 11 the keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard have I not kept. Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed, where You make Your flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions? A few verses of the next Chapter.

CHAPTER 2 Son_2:1. I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. So He is, and much more than that—

"Nature, to make His beauties known, Must mingle colors quite unknown."

So rich is He—rose and lily both in one—

"White is His soul, from blemish free, Red with the blood He shed for Me."

2. As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters. His Church stands out like a fair lily in a thorn-brake—separate and distinct—often suffering, standing where she does not wish to be, but all the lovelier by contrast. But if Christ praises His Church, she praises Him again.

3, 4. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love. So full of joy is she that she can bear it no longer. She seems ready to faint with bliss!

5-7. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am love sick. His left hand is under my head, and His right hand does embrace me. I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem—By every lovely, timid, tender, chaste thing—

7. By the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, till He please. If I have fellowship with Him—if I am near His Cross—if I am drinking in His love, oh, do not hinder me! Do not call me away! Do not break the spell, but let me go on with this blessed daydream, which is truer than reality, itself, till I see Him face to face, when the day breaks and the shadows flee away!

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 16,22 #1373 - Our Last Journey

OUR LAST JOURNEY

NO. 1373

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 9, 1877,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"When a few years are come, then I shall go the way

from where I shall not return."

Job 16:22.

THE season of the year may well remind us of our mortality. The corn, which a few weeks ago was green and vigorous, has now, for the most part, yielded to the sickle. Many flowers which adorned our gardens have exchanged their bloom for ripening seed. The year has commenced to die—its glory and prime have gone. The dews of evening are heavy and the mists linger in the morning, for the summer heat is declining. The leaves are just upon the turn and the fall of the year is close at hand. These are Creation's warnings, reminding us that the Lord has set a harvest for us and that we all fade as a leaf.

Nature has her prophets as well as Revelation and Autumn in his rugged garb is one of them. He has now come to us with this solemn message, "The harvest is passed and the summer is ended; prepare to meet your God!" In addition to the warnings of Nature, we have lately been saluted by voices from Divine Providence. Loud calls have come to us, of late, from almost every part of our Church work. Death is come up into our windows and is entered into our palaces. Death, who seldom comes into the Orphanage, has forced his cruel hand into our nest of young ones and has taken from there the widow's child.

A funeral has left our gates and little boys have gathered around a grave to see one like themselves laid in the silent earth. Death has set his axe, also, against the College and has cut down one of our growing trees, upon which there were abundant tokens of future fruitfulness. Our brother Winter had sharpened his sword for the conflict and was just about to leave us for actual service, when, in a few days his strength departed and he was not. Death has come, also, among the ministers who were once our students and were our crown of rejoicing as laborers for the Lord.

One of the ablest and best of them has put a whole town in mourning, for he has been taken Home at an early age, when he had already become foremost for usefulness. Middlesborough mourns our brother Priter with no common sorrow. Beyond all this, almost every day we have reports of this one and that one in the membership and in the congregation going home. These dying ones are God's voices to us and I should be unworthy of addressing you if I did not, first, hear them in

the silence of my own soul and then endeavor to interpret them for you.

All these things bring to my mind the language of our text, "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way from where I shall not return." Will they not have the same effect upon you? He that has ears to hear let him hear! My subject is one upon which it would be quite impossible to say anything new, since death is neither novel nor uncommon, for from the days of Abel until now it has honeycombed the earth with graves. Nor need I seek out elegancies of speech, for these would be incongruous with such a theme.

When we speak of eternal things, the less attempt we make at fluent language the better—such solemn topics are most powerful when suffered to have their own natural voice and speak for themselves. Begone all trifling thoughts! Let the mind put off all joyous apparel and wear, awhile, the shroud. Instead of rising with gaiety, let the imagination bow with solemnity, for now we have to do with the dying chamber, the grave and the Judgment Throne. The blast of the archangel's trumpet is ringing in our ears and we are to anticipate the day in which we shall receive our final sentence from the Judge of all the earth!

Solemnity, therefore, should possess our minds. Let us shut out the present world and become familiar with the world to come. Very simple and self-evident will be the considerations which I shall set before you. But if you are already moved to a solemn frame of mind, you will be prepared to derive profit from them. May God the Holy Spirit bless the Word and by its means prepare us for our last day of which the text speaks so plainly.

First, then, let us realize our inevitable journey—"I shall go the way from where I shall not return." Secondly, let us contemplate its nearness—"When a few years are come." Thirdly, let us consider our nonreturn from the journey—"From where I shall not return." And then we shall close, in the fourth place, by enquiring where we are going. We are going from where we shall not return, but to what place are we bound? Is it endless bliss or ceaseless woe?

I. First, then, let us REALIZE OUR INEVITABLE JOURNEY. I desire that these words may be earnestly taken up in a personal manner by each of us. The language is in the singular number. "I shall go the way from where I shall not return." Let us apply it, each one, to himself. The fact that all men are mortal has little power over our minds, for we always make a tacit exception and put off the evil day for ourselves. We acknowledge ourselves to be mortal, but do not expect to die just now. Even the aged look forward to a continuance of life and the consumptive dream of possible recovery.

I will not, therefore, remind you so much of the general truth, but place before you the individual, pointed, personal declaration of the text. "I." The preacher. You, each one of you looking upon the preacher now—"I shall go the way from where I shall not return." As surely as you live, you will die! It may help you to realize this fact if I ask you to accompany me, first of all, into the chamber of a dying man. As you look upon him I entreat you to remember that you, yourself, will lie there in the same condition before long.

It is sometimes my duty—and a very hard and painful task it is—to communicate to sick and dying persons the fact that it is not possible that they should recover. One beats about the bush a little, but at last you come with tenderness to the sad point and say, "Friend, do you know that there is very little hope, if any, that you can recover? In fact, it is as nearly certain as a thing can be that

you must die. Your physicians are compelled to believe that your end is near." The news is taken in different ways—sometimes it is not believed. At other times it occasions a thrill of pain which wounds your heart and cuts your soul to the quick.

In many cases it is received with calm, patient resignation, but frequently I have the tidings accepted with joy and the man of God has said, "It is a thing I have longed for! Now shall I be rid of this weary pain and see the face of Him whom my soul loves." Yet it is a solemn business. Take it how you may—solemn to those who tell the news and more solemn, still, to those who hear it. Look, then, at the poor dying man wasting away before your eyes. He must now go to his long home. He must go. No one can delay his departure. The chariot is at the door. If he could offer all the gold of the Indies he could not bribe inexorable Death. No, he may be master of a mint of treasure, but it cannot buy him an hour's life. His time is come and he must go.

His beloved wife would gladly detain him, but he must be torn from her embrace. His children weep, but he must not stay to dry their tears. A kind friend would almost make an exchange and die in his place, but there can be no proxies here. There is no discharge in this war. It is appointed unto all men once to die and die he must. The hour is come! His pulse is slow! His eyes are glazing! Look at him! Do you not feel for a man in such solemn circumstances? There must you, also, lie—and thus must you, also, depart. I ask you to place yourself in his place and try, this morning, to feel as he must feel, seeing it is absolutely certain that to such a condition you, also, must come, unless, indeed, the Lord should descend from Heaven with a shout, of which we know so little as to when it may be.

How the individuality of a man comes out in his dying hour! What an important being he becomes! You think more of that one man, while dying, than of all the thousands of the living who parade our streets. No matter who he is, he is dying and we tread softly. Poor man, he must now die and die alone. And now how important his character becomes! His life, his own life, is now being put into the balance and he is looking back upon it. It is the most important thing in the universe to him. His outward circumstances are now a small matter—his life is the Mal. consideration. Was he righteous or wicked? Did he fear God or despise Him?

Whether he was rich or poor, his rank and station are subjects of indifference. The hangings of the bed are of very small account—the man who lies there is the only concern. Whether he is now waited upon by the best physician, hired by the costliest fee, or whether he lies in the hospital tended by gentle charity, it is the man, himself, the man's soul, the man's personal character that is now seen in all its grandeur, demanding his whole thought. Whether he is a peer or peasant, king or serf, it is much the same to each man to die. Differences on the dying bed arise out of character and not out of rank. Now he has to face, for himself, the great things of eternity and cannot leave them to another. He used to hear about eternity as one of the mass, but now he has to experience it alone—by himself. Into the cold river his own feet must descend, the cool waves must chill his blood, death must close his eyes and into the unknown future he must plunge! No brother's hand can grasp his when he has quit the body. No fellow mortal can fly side by side with him through the unknown tracks. How vividly the individuality of the man comes out and the need of a personal interest in the great salvation!

How much it is to be desired that it could be made quite as plain under happier circumstances. And yet how clear it is that each one of us must believe in the Savior for himself. We must each

serve God personally and each have a good hope through Divine Grace worked in his own soul. Will men never think of this till they come to die? And now that candle burning in the sick man's chamber sheds a strange light upon his past life. Some said he was fortunate, but if he was sinful, where is his good fortune? Men said he was a poor unsuccessful muddler. But he will be worth as much, in a short time, as if he had been the most prudent and had prospered in the world—for here all men are the same—"Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked must I return there."

So must it be. In death the financial element looks contemptible and the moral and the spiritual come to be most esteemed. How did he live? What were his thoughts? What was his heart towards God? Did he repent of sin? Does he still repent? Does he believe in Jesus? Is he resting upon the finished work of Christ, or not? He, perhaps, failed to ask himself some of those questions a little while ago, but now, if he is in his sober senses, he is compelled to put his soul through its paces. How does his heart answer when cross-examined? Now he must reach down the accounts, the memoranda and the day-book of his life—and he must look to what he did and what he was—and what he is.

Ah me! How will the reckoning end? What will the sum total be? It matters little what he was before his fellow men, whose judgments are fallible. The question is, what was he before the all-searching eyes of the Most High God? Such an account you will have to render. The individuality of the man is clear—and the man's character before God. And now it is also evident that death tests all things. If you look upon this poor dying man you see that he is past the time for pretences and shams. You yourself, if you knew but little of him before, feel very concerned to know whether the religion he professed was truthful or not—whether he was really regenerate or merely dreamed that he was. If you wish to answer that question, how much more does that poor dying man want to know for himself?

Here let me tell you that very much of the comfort with which we wrap ourselves up in days of health proves to be very sorry stuff when we come to die. While you are in good health and strength, you often derive a measure of peace of mind from things which will not stand the fiery ordeal of an approaching eternity. Some of the best men that ever lived have found this out. You may know the name of Mr. Durham, the author of a famous book on Solomon's Song, one of the most earnest of Scotland's ancient preachers.

Some days before he died, he seemed to be in some perplexity about his future well-being, and said to his friend, Mr. Carstairs, "Dear Brother, for all that I have written or preached, there is but one Scripture which I can now remember or dare grip unto, now that I am hastening to the grave. It is this—'Whoever comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.' Pray tell me if I dare lay the weight of my salvation upon it." Mr. Carstairs justly replied, "Brother, you may depend upon it though you had a thousand salvations at hazard."

You see, it was a plain,, sinner's text that he rested on. Just as Dr. Guthrie wanted them to sing a bairn's hymn, so do dying saints need the plain elementary doctrines of the Gospel to rest upon. Those fine ideas and dainty notions of our nearing perfection and becoming completely sanctified, dissolve like the hoar frost in the sun when we come face to face with eternity! Those grand excitements, those high enjoyments and those deep experiences which lead us to think ourselves to be somebodies in the Church of God are of small account in dying moments! Men cannot die on

stilts! Death finds out the truth of our condition and blows away, with his cold breath, a heap of chaff which we thought to be good wheat!

Then a man has to look to the mercy of God, to the blood of the Covenant and to the promises of the Gospel—and to cling as a poor needy, guilty sinner to free, rich, Sovereign Grace, or else his spirit will utterly sink. When life is ebbing, nothing will do but the faithful saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." I have heard children of God speak in their last moments just as seeking souls speak. They come to God, again, just as they came at first—and they find in Jesus all their hope! Dying men need realities! They need a sinner's Savior! They need atonement for guilt, for only then can they pass out of the world with hope! Oh, Brothers and Sisters, follow after that which is solid and real, for nothing else will serve your turn when you come to die.

Keep your eyes on that dying man whom I have tried to picture—he is vividly before me now. He must go. There is no alternative. He cannot resist the power which now summons him to depart. Willing or unwilling, it matters not—he must go. The sheriff's officer has him in his grip and he must go. Is he prepared? Pray God he may be! But whether he is or not, it makes no difference. He must leave all and take his journey. Has he children dependent upon him and a wife who needs his support? Their necessities cannot detain him, he must go. Has he made his will, or has he left all his business affairs in a tangle? Whichever it is, he must go.

The tide which bears all before it has seized his boat and even now it drifts down the stream. That man who must go is yourself—projected only a little way further into time! Can you not realize what will certainly be the fact? Can you not already hear the ticking of the watch at your bed in the silence of your last night? Can you not anticipate that mysterious consultation of physicians, when each one admits to his colleagues his incompetence to suggest a remedy? It is clear that the hour is come—you must go. This must happen to every mortal man and woman sitting or standing in this house this morning. Will you not lay it to heart?

Now survey another scene to help you realize your departure. Look no longer on the dying, but bend over the dead. It is all over. He has breathed his last and he now lies upstairs in a darkened chamber. A loving one has stolen in and tremblingly lifted the coffin lid to gaze once more upon the dear face and say another adieu—but there can be no more of this. The friends have gathered and the mourners must go through the streets and bear him to the tomb. That funeral is yours! The corpse is borne to the grave and on the road it silently preaches to all passersby. Archbishop Leighton one morning was asked by a friend, "Have you heard a sermon?" He said, "No, but I met a sermon, for I met a dead man carried out to be buried."

Let every funeral be a discourse to you. Within a short time it will happen to each one of us that we must lie within the narrow limits of the coffin. And then will come, for us, the opened grave, the lowering of our corpse and the gathering of mourners around it. Upon your coffin lid and mine the mold shall fall—"Earth to earth, dust to dust and ashes to ashes." A green mound, a daisy or two amid the grass, a friend to bring a few fading flowers to scatter on our graves. Perhaps a head-stone, perhaps not—to this we must all come. "Here he lies" is the universal epitaph. On the lap of earth you will lie. There shall I, also, lie. Realize it—it is so near, so sure! When a few years shall come we shall be with the unnumbered throng!

Now let your realization go a little further. Can you picture the spirit of a man as it leaves the body? I confess my imagination does not enable me to picture it, myself, and certainly my words are not competent to convey to you what little I can realize in my mind. The soul finds itself rid of materialism—how will it feel when it has shaken itself loose of its shell of clay? I cannot tell. We all love this earthly house of our tabernacle and leave it with reluctance—

"For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey, This pleasing anxious being ever resigned, Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day, Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?"

But it does not matter what lingering looks we cast, our soul will have done with the body in its present fashion and it must, for a while, dwell apart from all materialism.

At once it must come before God! Its state will immediately, after death, be known to it beyond a question. In a moment it will know beyond all doubt whether it is accepted before God! And beyond all hope it will know whether it is reprobate and condemned! That knowledge will at once commence its happiness, a happiness which will be increased as ages roll on—or that knowledge will at once commence its misery, which will deepen evermore! The soul will abide in the disembodied state for a while. And then will come the clarion note of the Resurrection trumpet and the body shall rise again to be again inhabited by the soul.

What will the meeting be? What will be the sensation of the remarriage of mind with matter, of soul with body? We know not. The Resurrection is the blessed hope of the Christian, but it is a terrible dread to the ungodly. The soul shall never more return to the world's cares, nor to the world at all as the world now is, but it shall again inhabit the body and stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive the verdict from the lips of Him who is appointed Judge of all mankind! The Divine verdict is given and the soul must continue its journey. Still onward must it go—whether accepted or condemned—onward it must go.

Onward, exulting in a bliss unspeakable like to the Divine, if Christ pronounces it blessed! Onward, in a misery unutterable if Christ pronounces it "cursed." I do not know whether you are able, in imagination, to place yourself in such a condition, but in such a condition you will certainly be found before long. You will be stripped of this house of clay and so you will die, but you will live again, yes, live forever! You will live to be judged, to be justified or to be condemned! And then you will live forever in happiness or torment—and all this you will know in a short time to come. Thus I have helped you as best I could and, I fear, but poorly, to realize the inevitable journey.

II. Now, let us very briefly CONTEMPLATE ITS MEANING. Very soon we shall have to start upon our solemn and mysterious pilgrimage. If we should fulfill the entire tale of our years, the allotted period of human life is but short. The text in the Hebrew speaks of "years of number." They are so few that a child may count them. At the commencement of life, the view before us looks like an endless avenue, but as we advance along the path, the end seems very near and we perceive how short our time really is.

Middle life has but a short view, either backwards or forwards. As for some of you, upon whom age is descending, you should be well enough aware how short, for certain, your time for lingering here must be. Your lease has almost run out! Do you doubt it? What are 70 or 80 years, if we live so long? But we are further warned by the consideration that we cannot safely reckon upon the whole of that brief period, for children are carried away and young men are cut down by the scythe—and

we frequently see the maiden, before she reaches the full bloom of her years, carried off with Death as her bridegroom.

Does not the text say, "a few years"? Read it months, read it days, read it hours, read it minutes, for we cannot tell how soon we must set sail for the far-off land! In a short time we must join the great caravan and cross the desert to a land from where we shall not return. Life is so short that we have scarcely begun to live before we are called to die! Therefore, dear Brothers and Sisters, if there is anything grievous to be borne, we may well bear it cheerfully, for it cannot last long. When a few years are come we shall be gone from the thorn and the briar which now prick and wound!

Therefore, if there is any work to be done for Jesus, let us do it at once—or else we shall never do it—for when a few years are come we shall have gone from where we shall not return! Therefore, if there is salvation to be sought, let us seek it, for soon we shall be where salvation is no more proclaimed! And if worldly goods are possessed by us, let us hold them very loosely, for in a short time we must leave them! Let us lay them out for God's Glory, for our stewardship will not last long and we shall soon have to give an account! And therefore, above all things, we must realize the need of being always prepared to die. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, he who is to die next had need be ready. Who is he?

An old man who used to sell goods from house to house had an eccentric cry of his own which he was known to utter whenever he sold goods at the door. He would cry out aloud, "Who'll be the next? Who'll be the next?" One day a funeral passed just as he had given out his usual cry and, strange enough, sounded the question—"Who'll be the next?" I may ask with solemn emphasis whenever the cemetery's gates are opened and the funeral passes through, "Who will be the next? Who will be the next?"

Your hymn says, "Who will be the next to follow Jesus?" But I must ask, this morning, "Who will be the next among us to be carried to the silent tomb?" To be ready to depart is wisdom. It is the mark of the beast that it looks not beyond the present mouthful of grass which it crops from the ground—it never thinks of the butcher's knife and the shambles. Be not as the brutes which perish, but, being gifted with minds, use them to look before you! It is the mark of the fool that he never looks before he leaps but is content with present enjoyments though they leave him penniless! Be not as the fool, but be prudent and look before you and consider your latter end!

It is the mark of the worldling that he confines his thoughts within the narrow range of time. The Christian looks into the everlasting future as an immortal being should do. Be not worldlings, lest you perish with them! May God make you wise unto salvation! To be prepared to die is an immediate duty—will you neglect it? Some imagine that to be prepared to die would involve a life of perpetual gloom. If it did so, it were well to face it! When a man comes to die and finds himself prepared, even if he had endured 50 years of perpetual anguish of heart and had denied himself every worldly comfort, he would think himself well repaid to have the prospect of a blessed future!

Heaven at any price is well secured. A good hope through Grace is worth a thousand worlds. But it is a mistake to suppose that melancholy attends upon fitness to die. Why should it? To be unprepared for death and to know that it may come at any moment is a fair reason for sadness—but to have that great matter secure must surely be a source of joy! To be prepared to die is to be prepared to live! To be ready for eternity is, in the best sense, to be ready for time.

Who so fit to live on earth as the man who is fit to live in Heaven? Who has brightness of the eyes? Is it not the man who has looked within the gate of pearl and seen his place prepared among the blessed?

Who has lightness of heart? Is it not the man who is unloaded of his sin and has found mercy through the blood of Christ? Who can go to his bed and sleep in peace and wake with joy—who but the man that is reconciled to God by the death of His Son? Who has the best of this world as well as the world to come? Is it not he to whom death has now become a changed thing, a cherub that has lost its way—no longer destruction, but rather development and admission into a higher and nobler life? Since readiness for death is peace and happiness and is, above measure, necessary in prospect of the eternal state, let us see to it at once!

We are to be gone so soon—let us gird up our loins for our solemn journey. There is no time to spare! The end is drawing near. Every flying moment is hastening on our last hour. It is high time to awake out of sleep and in earnest make ready to meet the Bridegroom who is already on His way!

III. Now, thirdly, I want you to CONSIDER THE FACT THAT WE SHALL NOT RETURN—"When a few years are come, then I shall go the way from where I shall not return." To the occupations of life—to sow, reap, and mow. To the abodes of life—to the store and to the country house. To the pleasures of life—the festival and the family—we shall not return. To the engagements of the sanctuary, the communion table, the pulpit, or the pew—we shall not return. To the chamber of love, to the hearth of affection, to the walk of friendship—we shall not return. To hopes, fears, joys and pains—we shall not return. To summer's flowers and winter's snows we shall not return.

To our brothers, children, husband, or wife, we shall not return. To nothing that is done under the sun shall we return! Soul, unsaved Soul, to the land of the Gospel and the Mercy Seat you shall not return! If you die unsaved you will not be able to come back to the House of God to hear the ministry of reconciliation! You will hear no more invitations and expostulations, neither will Jesus be set before you as your hope! You will not be able to come back to the Prayer Meeting and to the earnest entreaties of a godly mother and other loving friends—nor even back to your Bible and to the opportunity of searching it that you may find eternal life!

You will not return to find space for repentance, nor a second opportunity for prayer, nor another season for believing in Jesus. It shall be said concerning you, "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still." Where the tree falls there must it lie. Once pass the barriers of life unsaved and you cannot return to a new probation. The die is cast. Beloved Christian Friends, we need not wish to return! What is there here that should either tempt us to stay in this world or induce us to return to it if we could? Still, I could suppose, in a future state, some reasons for wishing to return. I can suppose we might have it in our hearts, for instance, to wish to undo the mischief which we did in life.

If a dying man should receive mercy in his last moments, one might imagine him as desiring to return to earth to tell the glad tidings and beseech his family and friends to seek salvation. Who would not wish, for once, to plead with his children if he felt that he had neglected his duty to them? A man might wish, even if he were in the unquenchable flames, to come back to earth or to send a messenger, as the rich man did, to tell his brothers and sisters lest they should come into the place of torment. Selfishness might wish to be spared the reproaches of those we helped to

ruin. But you cannot come back or send back to undo your ill deeds!

Therefore seek to mend matters now. Avoid the doing of evil and, as for that which is already done, confess it before God and seek to administer the antidote by an earnest and godly life. You cannot come back to carry out those good resolutions which, as yet, are as unripe fruit. Young man, you mean to do good some day, do you not? You have it in your heart to lead a grand life. Well, you must do it now, for you cannot come hack to revise your conduct. It will not be possible to correct and amend it, for death stereotypes all. After death you cannot return to develop your promises into performances! Therefore resolve to do them now.

We shall not be able to come back to finish the work we have began. The half-built house will never be completed by our labor. We have many projects which are but half-developed—we had better proceed with them or they will never be completed. If we leave our ships on the stocks, we shall not be able to return to launch them. When our lives below are at an end we have reached the finis of our earthly career. Neither can we come back to rectify any mistake we have made in our lifework, or even return to look after it, in order to preserve that which was good in it.

I sometimes think if I were in Heaven I could almost wish to visit my work at the Tabernacle, to see whether it will abide the test of time and prosper when I am gone. Will you keep to the Truth of God? Will you hold to the grand old doctrines of the Gospel? Or will this Church, like so many others, go astray from the simplicity of its faith and set up gaudy services amid false doctrine? I think I should turn over in my grave if such a thing could be. God forbid it! But there will be no coming back and, therefore, we must build well, rejecting all wood, hay and stubble, using nothing but gold, silver and precious stones!

We must build quickly to get the work done, but fast as we labor we must do it surely and honestly and thoroughly, for the fire will try it when we are gone. It will be a pity that our work should suffer loss, even though we, ourselves, should be saved. We cannot return to save the burning mass, nor to rebuild the ruin, but we shall, doubtless, see and know what comes of it. "Establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, the work of our hands establish it." Therefore, dear Brother, if your hands find anything to do, do it at once with all your might. If your heart suggests anything that should be done, let it be done at once!

See to the bringing up of your children, the conversion of your neighbors, the laying out of your talents for Christ, the consecration of your substance, the propagation of the precious Truths of God which have been revealed to you. If a good work is to be done, do it! Do it, do it at once. The curfew of time is sounding. Your own vesper bell is ringing out and these are the words which I set to its music—"What you do, do quickly, for when a few years are come, you must go where you will not return." Again I say, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear!"

IV. And now, lastly, let us ENQUIRE TO WHERE WE SHALL GO? In some respects it happens alike to all, for all go upon the long journey. All go to the grave, which is the place of all living. It matters very little where our grave shall be—whether beneath a weeping willow or in the solemn deeps. The best of all, I think, that can happen to any of us is to be laid where we shall quickly mold into the common earth, that none may afterwards profane our bones. But if they do, what does it matter? We shall know nothing of it and precious in the sight of the Lord will our dust be, though it is trod under foot or blown by the winds! We shall all die and then we shall all pass into

the disembodied state.

But of what character shall my death be and where shall I spend the time of waiting? May I urge upon you to ask yourselves this question? May I press a second enquiry upon you? If at this very instant you were to leave your body, where would your soul be? You may know very readily. Where does it delight to be now? I once visited an aged Christian woman who said to me when she was near death, "Sir, I do not think that God will appoint me my portion with the ungodly, for I could never bear their company. I hope I shall be among His people, though I am very unworthy, for I never was so happy as when I was with them."

Yes, you will keep the same company forever! The sheep shall be with the sheep and the goats with the goats. Your delight prophesies your destiny. What you have chosen here shall be your portion hereafter. The scoffer, the drunk, the liar, the unchaste—they shall be your comrades in Hell if you were so here. If you love sin, you shall be steeped up to the throat in it—and it shall burn around you like liquid fire! If you have loved the wages of unrighteousness, you shall receive them in full tale, for the wages of sin is death—and Death shall rage about you and gnaw you with his undying worm. But if your delights have been with your God, you shall dwell with Him! If you have rejoiced in Christ Jesus, you shall reign with Him! And if you have loved His people, you shall abide with them forever!

Your disembodied state shall be spent either with Christ and His people or with sin and sinners. If not in Paradise with Jesus, you know where you must lie. Did not our Lord, Himself, tell us of the great gulf which cannot be passed and of the torment of those upon the other side? You may know it all before yon clock strikes again! Think of it and tremble! Then, as I have already stated, we shall all go forward in our journey towards Resurrection. We shall, every one of us, stand in the latter day upon the earth. To the righteous this is the greatest joy. "And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Oh, blessed hope! It were worthwhile to die with this in prospect! A child of God who died not long ago said to one who stood by, "I have enjoyed more, in the two hours I have been dying, than in the 50 years that I was living. It is so blessed a thing to die, for I have a clear prospect of the Resurrection!"

But, oh, to have no blessed Resurrection before you! Instead, to have the certainty of rising to shame and to everlasting contempt! To have nothing but the rising so that both body and soul may be cast into Hell till the tongue that now dares to curse will ask in vain for a drop of water to cool its burning! To know that your every limb shall be made to suffer because it yielded itself up to be an instrument of unrighteousness and of rebellion against God! Which shall your resurrection be—a blessing or a horror? God help you to decide!

Yes, may the Holy Spirit so work upon your heart and will that you may lay hold on Jesus at once and find eternal life in Him! Speedily shall come the great and terrible scene of the Judgment, when all that are on the earth and in the sea shall stand before the Great White Throne. What an assembly! These mighty gatherings in the Tabernacle and the crowds we hear of on great festival days, are but as a drop in a bucket compared with the innumerable hordes of men that shall spring up from their graves when the last trumpet sounds!

If you can think of anything, then, besides your Judge, you will cast your eyes as far as you can see, and over hill and dale you will see myriads of our race. Men have been so numerous a host

that they will cover every speck of earth! Yes, and the sea, itself, shall yield, for once, a solid basis for them to stand upon—and all shall teem like a hive when the bees swarm around it—the world shall appear black with the multitude of men! And what a sight when the Assessor shall sit upon His Throne and He shall begin to divide them as the shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. To the right! To the left! Blessed! Cursed! Come! Depart!

Oh, the terror of that voice which shall pronounce a separate sentence upon each of the two great classes into which the population of earth shall then be divided! On which side would you be if, now, instead of this poor voice saluting your ears, there should suddenly be a transformation scene and Christ should sit upon His Throne—and you and I are there to be judged before Him? And then, after the judgment comes the end, but what then? Do not flatter yourselves with the idea, you ungodly, that you shall be annihilated! You have chosen sin. You have deliberately rejected Christ and if you continue to do so you have settled your own destiny— and settled it forever! Look the danger in the face like honest men—and then escape from the wrath to come!

But if you believe in Jesus now, look your future in the face and rejoice, for your redemption draws near! See body and soul together—and both perfect—and Christ the Judge acquitting you, saying, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world." Can you conceive your overflowing joy, your ecstatic delight? The presence of angels! The fellowship of perfect saints! The sight of your Savior! Communion with your God! And all this forever and forever! Why, I think it makes me willing to use my solemn text no longer as a dirge, but as a sonnet and say right joyously, "When a few years are come, I shall go from where I shall not return, nor ever wish to return, but shall be forever with the Lord." Amen, so let it be!

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Job 17,1 #2868 'Ready-Yes! Ready!'

"READY, YES, READY!"

NO. 2868

A SERMON

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON A THURSDAY EVENING, DURING THE WINTER OF 1861-2.

"Ready to perish." "Ready to forgive." "The graves are ready for me."

Isaiah 27:13. Psalms 86:5. Job 17:1.

WHEN attempting to prepare for this service, I found it impossible to fix my mind upon any one subject. This afternoon I had to take rather a long journey to visit a friend who is sick unto death. And at his bedside I trust I have learned some lessons of encouragement and have been animated by witnessing the joy and peace which God grants to His children in their declining hours. Finding that I could not fix upon any one subject, I thought that I would have three. It may be that out of the three, there will be one intended by Divine Grace for a third of the audience, the second for another third and the other for the rest, so that there will be a portion of meat in due season for all. You know, dear Friends, that the motto of our navy is, "Ready, yes, ready!" That is something like my present subject, for I have three texts in which the word, "Ready," occurs, each time in a different connection.

I. The first text will be especially addressed to those who are under concern of soul, having been led, by the enlightening influence of the Divine Spirit, to see their state by nature and to tremble in the prospect of their deserved doom. The text which will suit their case is in 27:13—"READY TO PERISH." "They shall come which were ready to perish."

By nature, all men, whether they know it or not, are ready to perish. Human nature is, like a blind man, always in danger. No, worse than that, it is like a blind man upon the verge of a tremendous cliff, ready to take the fatal step which will lead to his destruction. The most callous and proud, the most careless and profane cannot, by their indifference or their boasting, altogether evade the apprehension that their state, by nature, is alarming and defenseless. They may try to laugh it away from their minds, but they cannot laugh away the fact. They may shut their eyes to it, but they shall no more escape, by shutting their eyes, than does the silly ostrich escape from the hunter by thrusting its head into the sand. Whether you will have it so, or not, fast young man in the dawn of your days—whether you will have it so, or not, blustering merchant in the prime of your age—whether you will have it so, or not, har

Volume 50 1dened old man in the petrified state of your moral conscience—it is so— you are ready to perish!

Your jeers cannot deliver you. Your sarcasms about eternal wrath cannot quench it. And all your contemptuous scorn and your arrogant pride cannot evade your doom—they do but hasten it. There are some persons, however, who are aware of their danger—to them I speak. They are fitly described by the Spirit of God in these words of the Prophet— "The great trumpet shall be blown and they shall come which were ready to perish." Having passed through this anguish, myself, I think I can describe, from experience, what some of you are now suffering.

You are ready to perish, in the first place, because you feel sure that you will perish. You did not think so once, but you do now. Once you could afford to put away the thought, with a laugh, as a matter which might, or might not, be true, but, anyway, it did not much concern you. But now you feel that you will be lost as surely as if it could be demonstrated to you by logic. In fact, the Divine logic of the Law of God has thundered it into your soul and you know it. You feel it to be certain that you shall, before long, be driven from the Presence of God with that terrible sentence, "Depart, you cursed." If any unbeliever should tell you that there is no wrath to come, you would reply, "There is, for I feel it is due me. My conscience tells me that I am already condemned and before long I am quite certain to drink of the wormwood and the gall of the wrath of God."

You have signed your own death warrant, you have put on the black cap and condemned yourself. Or, rather, you have pleaded guilty before your Judge—you have said, "Guilty, my Lord," and now you think you see before your eyes the scaffold and yourself ready to be executed. You feel it to be so sure that you even anticipate the Judgment Day—you dreamed of it, the other night, and you thought you heard the trumpet of the archangel opening all the graves and wakening all the dead. You have already, in imagination, stood before the bar of God! You feel your sentence to be so certain that conscience has read it over in your hearing and anticipated its terrors. You are among those who are ready to perish, so permit me to say that I am glad you have come here, for this is the very spot where God delights to display His pardoning Grace! He is ready to save those who are thus ready to perish. Those who write themselves down as lost are the special objects of our Savior's mission of mercy, for, "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

You are ready to perish, in another sense, for you feel as if your perishing was very near. You are like the dying man who gasps for breath and thinks that each gasp will be his last—his pulse is feeble, his tongue is dry with feverish heat, the clammy sweat is on his brow. The Valley of the Shadow of Death casts its gloomy shade on his pale cheeks and he feels that he will soon die. Is it not thus that some of you feel just now? You feel that you are coming near to the wrath of God. I have known the day when, as I lay down to rest, I dreaded the thought that, perhaps, I should never awake in this world, or, at mid-day I have walked in the fields and wondered that the earth did not open and swallow me up! A terrible noise was in my ears—my soul was tossed to and fro—I longed to find a refuge, but there seemed to be none, while always ringing in my ears were the words, "The wrath to come!" "The wrath to come!" "The wrath to come!"

Oh, how vividly is the wrath to come pictured before the eyes of the awakened sinner! He does not look upon it as a thing that is to come in ten, twelve, or 20 years, but as a thing that may be before long, yes, even today! He looks upon himself as ready to perish because his final overthrow

appears to be so close. I am glad if any of you are in this plight, for God does not thus alarm men unless He has purposes of mercy concerning them and designs for their good! He has made you fear you are perishing that you may have no perishing to fear! He has brought it home to you in this life that He may remove it forever from you in the life that is to come! He has made you tremble now, that you may not tremble then. He has put before you these dreadful things that, as with a fiery finger, they may point you to Christ, the only Refuge and, as with a thundering voice, they may cry to you, as the angels cried to Lot, "Escape for your life, look not behind you, neither stay you in all the plain! Escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed!"

It may be that I am also addressing some who not only realize the sureness and the nearness of their destruction, but they have begun to feel it. "Begun to feel it," asks someone, "is that possible?" Yes, that it is. When day and night God's hand is heavy upon us and our moisture is turned into the drought of summer, we begin to know something of what a sinner feels when Justice and the Law are let loose upon him. Did you ever read John Bunyan's, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners? There was a man who had, even here, foretastes of the miseries of the lost. And there are some of us who can, even now, hardly look back to the time of our conviction without a shudder. I hope there is not a creature alive who has had deeper convictions than I had, or five years of more intolerable agony than those which crushed the very life out of my youthful spirit. But this I can say—that terror of conscience, that alarm about the wrath of God, that intense hatred of past sin and yet consciousness of my inability to avoid it in the future were such combinations of thought that I can only describe them in George Herbert's words—

"My thoughts are all a case of knives Breaking my poor heart."

Oh, the tortures of the man who feels his guilt, but does not know the remedy for it! To look leprosy in the face, but not to know that it may be healed! To walk the hospital and hear that there is no physician there! To see the flame, but not to know that it can be quenched! To be in the dungeon, but never to know the rescue and deliverance! O you that are ready to perish, I sympathize with you in your present sufferings, but I do not lament them! This is the way in which God begins with those whom He intends to bless—not to the same degree in all, but yet after the same kind. He destroys our confidence in our own works and then gives us confidence in Christ's work. You know how Bunyan describes Christian as being much tumbled up and down in his mind. And when his wife and children came round about him, he could only tell them that the city in which they lived was to be destroyed—and though his easygoing neighbors told him not to believe it and not to make such a fuss about it, the truth had come home to him with too much power to be put away. Atheist might say it was all a lie and Pliable might give slight heed to it and pretend to believe it for a season, but Christian knew it to be true, so he ran to the wicket gate, and the Cross, that he might escape from the wrath to come. To the careless, these words, "Ready to perish," should sound an alarm. May God the Holy Spirit, while I preach upon the second text, enable me to blow the great trumpet of the jubilee! May the gladsome sound reach the heart of him that is ready to perish! May he know that Divine Mercy brought him here that he might find a God ready to pardon!

II. My second text is in Psalms 86:5—"READY TO FORGIVE." Does not that ring like a silver bell? The other was a doleful note, like that of St. Sepulcher's bell when it tolls the knell of a criminal about to be executed—"Ready to perish." But this rings like a marriage peal—"Ready to forgive. Ready to forgive." What does it mean when it says that God is ready to forgive?

"Ready" means, as you all know, prepared. A man is not ready to go by railway until his trunk is packed and he is about to start. A man cannot be said to be ready to emigrate till he has the means to pay his passage and the different things needed for his transit, and for his settling down when he gets to his destination. No road is ready till it is cleared. Nothing is ready, in fact, till it is prepared. Sinner, God is ready to forgive—that is, everything is prepared by which you may be forgiven! The road used to be blocked up but Jesus Christ has, with His Cross, tunneled every mountain, filled every valley and bridged every chasm so that the way of pardon is now fully prepared. There is no need for God to say, "I would pardon this sinner, but how shall My justice be honored?" Sinner, God's justice has been satisfied, the sin of all who believe, or who ever will believe, was laid upon Christ when He died upon the tree! If you believes in Him, your sin was punished upon Him and it was forever put away by the great Atonement which He offered, so that, now, the righteous God can come out of the ivory palace of His mercy, stretch out His hands of love and say, "Sinner, I am reconciled to you. Be you reconciled to Me."—

"Sprinkled now with blood, the Throne, Why beneath your burdens groan? All the wrath on Him was laid Justice owns the ransom paid."

In the case of the ancient Israelites, it was necessary that the sacrifice should be slain and be burned upon the altar. So, the Divine Victim has been slain upon Calvary. Once and for all, the Sacrifice for sin has been offered by Jesus, accepted by the Father and witnessed by the Holy Spirit. God is ready—that is to say, He is prepared—to forgive all who will believe in Jesus Christ! You think that much preparation is needed on your part, but you are greatly mistaken. All things are ready! The oxen and the fatlings are killed, the feast is spread, the servants are sent with the invitations to the banquet—all you have to do, poor Penitent, is to come and sit down and eat with thankfulness to the great Giver of the feast! The bath is filled, O black Sinner, so come and wash! The garment is woven from the top throughout, O you naked, so come and put it on! The price is paid, O you ransomed ones, so take your blood-bought liberty! All is done. "It is finished," rings from Calvary's summit! God is ready to forgive!

But the word, "ready," means something more than prepared. We sometimes use the term to indicate that a thing can be easily done. We ask, "Can you do such-and-such a thing?" "Oh, yes!" you reply, "readily." Or perhaps we remind you of a promise you have given and ask if you can carry it out. And you say, "Oh, yes! I am quite ready to fulfill my engagement." Sinner, it is an easy thing for God to forgive you! "Indeed," you say, "but you don't know where I was last night." No, and I don't want to know. But it is easy for God to pardon anybody who is not in Hell. But you ask, "How can He do it? "He speaks and it is done! He has but to say to you, "Your sins which are many, are all forgiven," and it is done! Pardon is an instantaneous work! Justification is rapid as a lightning flash. You may be black one moment and as white as alabaster the next! Guilty—absolved! Condemned—Acquitted! Lost—found! Dead— made alive! It takes the Lord no time to do this—He does it easily.

O Brothers and Sisters, if He could make a world with a word. If He could say, "Let there be light," and there was light—surely, now that Christ has offered up Himself as a bleeding Sacrifice for sin, God has but to speak and the pardon is given! As soon as He says, "I will. Be you clean," the most leprous sinner is perfectly cleansed! O Sinner, will you not offer the prayer, "Save, Lord, or I perish?" Will you not ask the Lord to forgive you? Since He can so readily forgive, will you not cry,

"Jesus, save me, or I die"? Stretch forth your hand, poor trembling woman up yonder, and touch the hem of His garment and you shall be made whole, for He is ready to forgive—that is, He can do it with ease!

Again, the word, "ready," frequently means promptly or quickly. In this sense, also, God is ready to forgive. I know that some of you imagine that you must endure months of sorrow before you can be forgiven. There is no necessity that you should wait even another hour for this great blessing! After what I have been saying concerning the experience through which others have passed, some of you may fancy that you must be for four or five years floundering about in the Slough of Despond, but there is no need for you to do that. The plan of salvation is this—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Let me give you a picture. Paul and Silas have been thrust into the inner prison at Philippi and their feet made fast in the stocks. Though they have been brutally beaten, they are singing at midnight—singing of pardon bought with blood, singing of the dying and risen Lamb of God and, as they sing— suddenly there is an earthquake. The foundations of the prison shake, the doors fly open and the jailer, fearing that his prisoners have escaped, leaps out, draws his sword and is about to kill himself! But he hears a voice crying, "Do yourself no harm! We are all here."

He calls for a light, springs in and falls tremblingly at his prisoners' feet and says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" What would some of you have said in reply to that question? "Well, you must first believe the guilt of your sin more than you do at present—you had better go home and pray about the matter." That was not Paul's answer. He said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house." And, to prove that he was saved, the Apostle baptized him and all his, straightway, and we are expressly told that they all believed. What do you say to that, you old deacons who say, as many country deacons still do, that the young converts ought to be "summered and wintered" before they are baptized? I have known scores of good old souls in the country who have said, "We must not take Mrs. So-and-So into the church. We have not had time to prove her enough." But the Apostle knew that as they had believed, they were fit to be baptized because they were pardoned—

"The moment a sinner believes, And trusts in His crucified God, His pardon at once He receives, Redemption in full through His blood."

If the Lord wills, you may be pardoned this very moment. Jehovah needs not months and years in which to write out the charter of your forgiveness and put the great seal of Heaven to it. He can speak the word and swifter than the lightning flash, the message shall come to you, "Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven." And you shall say, "I'm forgiven—

"'A monument of Grace A sinner saved by blood! The streams of love I trace Up to the Fountain, God And in His sacred bosom see Eternal thoughts of love to me.'"

The word, "ready," is also frequently used to signify cheerfulness. When a person says to you, "Will you give me your help?" you say, "Oh, certainly, with readiness!" That means with cheerfulness. The Lord loves a cheerful giver and I am sure that He is, Himself, a cheerful Giver. You do not know, poor Soul, how glad God is when He forgives a soul. The angels sang when God made the world, but we do not read that He sang. Yet, in the last chapter of the prophecy of Zephaniah, we read, "The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice

over you with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over you with singing." Only think of it—the Triune God singing! What a thought—the Deity bursting out into song! And what is this about? It is over His pardoned people, His blood-bought chosen ones! O Soul, you think, perhaps, that God will be hard to be entreated and that He will give His mercy grudgingly! But the mercy of the Lord is as free as the air we breathe. When the sun shines, it shines freely, otherwise it were not the sun. And when God forgives, He forgives freely, else He were not God! Never did water leap from the crystal fountain with half such freeness and generous liberality as Grace flows from the heart of God! He gives forth love, joy, peace and pardon—and He gives them as a king gives to a king! You cannot empty His treasury, for it is inexhaustible. He is not enriched by withholding, nor is He impoverished by bestowing!

Soul, you do libel Him when you think that He is unwilling to forgive you. I once had, as you now have, that hard thought of my loving Lord, that He would not forgive me. I thought He might, perhaps, do so one day, yet I could hardly think so well of Him as to believe that He would. I came to His feet very timidly and said, "Surely, He will spurn me." I supposed that He would say to me, "Get you gone, you dog of a sinner, for you have doubted My love." But it was not so. Ah, you should see with what a smile He received the prodigal, with what fond tenderness He clasped him to His breast, with what glad eyes He led him to His house and with what a radiant Countenance He set him by His side, at the head of the table, and said, "Let us eat, and be merry: for this My son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost, and is found."

I would that I could write upon every heart here and engrave upon every memory those sweet words, "Ready to forgive." Are there any of you who do not want to be forgiven? The day will come when you will want this blessing. Sailor, are you in this building? Within a little while you may be out upon the lonely sea, the waves may have swallowed up your vessel and you may be clinging to just an oar. When the waters surge around you, how gladly you will remember that God is ready to forgive— but how much better it would be to trust your soul to Him now! Some, whom I am now addressing, will probably die this week. I am not making a rash assertion—my statement is based upon the statistics of mortality. O Soul, you say that it is nothing to you now, but when you are in the article of death—and that may be before another Sabbath's sun shall rise—how might this note ring like music in your dying ears, "Ready to forgive"!

Am I speaking to some abandoned woman who thinks that she will destroy herself? See you do it not, for God is ready to forgive! Am I addressing some man who is cast out of society as a reprobate for whom nobody cares? Soul, give not up hope, for God is ready to forgive! Though your father has shut the door against you and your mother and sister shun you because of your vices and sins, yet God is ready to forgive you if you will repent and turn from your iniquity! Turn you, turn you—'tis a brother's voice that entreats you to turn! By the love with which He pardoned me. By the mercy which made Him pass by my innumerable transgressions, I beg you to turn, no, more, linking my arm in yours, I say to you, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord and let us say unto Him, 'Receive us graciously, and love us freely, so will we render unto You the calves of our lips.'" Ready to perish are you, but ready to forgive is He! Blessed be His holy name! III. My third text is intended as a hammer to drive home the last nail. This sentence, in Job 17:1, is most solemnly true of each one of us—THE GRAVES ARE READY FOR ME.

About three years ago I gazed into the eternal world. It then pleased God to stretch me upon a bed of the most agonizing pain and my life hung in jeopardy, not merely every hour, but every moment. Eternal realities were vivid enough before my eyes, but it pleased God, for some purpose which is known to Him, to spare my life and I went to spend a little season, that I might fully recover, with a beloved friend who seemed, then, far more likely to live than I was. This day, it is his turn to lie upon the borders of the grave and mine to stand by his bedside. The grave then seemed ready for me—it now seems ready for him. As I stood talking to him this afternoon, he said with greater force than Addison, "See how a Christian can die." When I asked him about his worldly goods and possessions, he said that he had been content to leave them all, some time ago. "And what about your wife and your little ones?" I asked. And he replied, "I have left them all with God." "And how about eternal things?" I enquired. "Oh," said he, "you know that God's love is everlasting and His Grace is unchanging, so why should we fear?"

He had no doubt about his acceptance in the Beloved, or about the power of Christ to carry him through his dying moments. When I said, "The battle's fought, the victory's won forever," I saw his eyes sparkle as though he heard the melodious voice of the great Captain of our salvation saying to him, "Well done! Enter into your rest." I never saw a bride at her marriage look more happy than this man upon the eve of death. I never saw a saint more peaceful, when retiring at eventide, than he was when about to undress himself that he might stand before his God. "Ah," he exclaimed, "remember what you said to me, 'Sudden death, sudden glory!'" and his eyes sparkled again at the prospect of soon beholding his Lord—

"One gentle sigh, the fetter breaks"—

and you are gone, O earth, and my soul is in Heaven! One gasp and you have melted, O shadowy Time, and I have come to you, you welcome substance of Eternity! Blessed be God that the graves are ready for us! Christian, does the idea of a long life charm you? Do you want to reMal. long in this prison? Would you cling to these rags of mortality, to this vile body, whose breath is corrupt, whose face is so often marred with weeping and upon whose eyelids hangs the shadow of death? Would you long to creep up and down this dunghill world, like some poor worm that always leaves a slimy track behind it? Or would you not rather—

"Stretch your wings, O Soul, and fly Straight to yonder world of joy"?

Were we wise, we would—

"Long for evening, to undress, That we might rest with God."

"The graves are ready for me." Young men and young women, and all of you who are here, can you look upon the grave which is ready for you with as much complacency as my friend did this afternoon? O Death, you do not need to furbish up your darts, or whet your scythe! You are always ready to slaughter the sons of men. O Eternity, your gates need not to be unlocked and thrown back on their hinges with long and tedious toil, for they are always open! O world to come, you do not need long intervals to make yourself ready to receive the pilgrims who have finished their journey! You are an inn whose doors are always open—you are whose gates are never closed! Our grave is ready for us. The tree is grown that shall make our coffin—perhaps the fabric that shall make our winding sheet is already woven and they, who will carry us to our last home, are ready and waiting for us!

"The graves are ready for us." Are we ready for the graves? Are we prepared to die—prepared to rise again—prepared to be judged—prepared to plead the blood and righteousness of Christ as our ground of acceptance before the eternal Throne of God? What is your answer, my Hearer? Do you reply, in the words I quoted at the beginning of my discourse, "Ready, yes, ready!"? Did you say Death, that I was wanted? Here I am, for you did call me! Did you say, O Heaven, that you need to receive another blood-bought one? "Ready, yes, ready!" O Christian, always keep your houses in such good order that you will always be "Ready, yes, ready!" Always keep your heart in such a state, your soul so near to Christ and your faith so fully fixed on Him, that, if you should drop dead in the street, or some Providence should take away your life, you would be able to cheerfully say, "Ready, yes, ready! Ready for you, O Death! Ready to triumph over you and to pluck away your sting! Ready for you, O Grave, for where is now your victory? Ready for you, O Heaven, for, with your wedding garment on, we are ready, yes, ready!" The Lord make us ready, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Matthew 8:1-27.

Verse 1, 2. When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And, behold, there came a leper. You see that particular mention is made of this one special case and, in any congregation, while it may be recorded that so many people came together, the special case that will be noted by the recording angel will be that of anyone who comes to Christ with his own personal distresses and who thereby obtains relief from them—"Behold, there came a leper."

2, 3. And worshipped Him, saying, Lord if you will, you can make me clean. And Jesus put forth His hand and touched him, saying, I will; be you clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. His faith was not as strong as it might have been. There was an, "if," in it, but still, it was genuine faith and our loving Lord fixed His eye upon the faith rather than upon the flaw that was in it. And if He sees in you, dear Friend, even a trembling faith, He will rejoice in it and bless you because of it. He will not withhold His blessing because you are not as strong in faith as you should be. Probably you would have a greater blessing if you had greater faith, but even little faith gets great blessings from Christ! The leper said to Him, "If you will, you can make me clean." So Christ answered to the faith that he did possess, "and touched him, saying, I will; be you clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

4-7. And Jesus said unto him, See you tell no man; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto Him a centurion beseeching Him, and saying, Lord, my servant lies at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus said unto him, I will come and heal him. He had not asked Christ to "come and heal him." He wished his servant to be healed, but he considered that it was too great an honor for Christ to come to him. I am not sure, but I think that this man's judgment is correct—that for Christ to come to a man is better than for healing to come to him. Indeed, Brothers and Sisters, all the gifts of Christ fall far short of Himself! If He will but come and abide with us, that means more than all else that He can bestow upon us.

8, 9. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof: but only speak the word and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having

soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does it. From his own power over his soldiers and servants, he argued that Christ must have at least equal power over all the forces of Nature and, as a centurion did not need to go and do everything himself, but gave his orders to his servant and he did it, so, surely, there could be no need for the great Commander, to whom he was speaking, to honor the sick man with His own personal Presence. He had simply to utter the command and it would be obeyed, and the centurion's servant would be healed. Do you think this is an ingenious argument? It is so, certainly, but it is also a very plain and very forcible one. I have read or heard many ingenious arguments for unbelief and I have often wished that half the ingenuity thus vainly spent could be exercised in discovering reasons for believing—so I am pleased to notice that this commander of a hundred Roman soldiers did but argue from his own position—and so worked in his mind still greater confidence in Christ's power to heal his sick servant. Is there not something about yourself, from which, if you would look at it in the right light, you might gather arguments concerning the power of the Lord Jesus Christ?

10. When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel. "Not in Israel"—where the Light of God and the knowledge were, there was not such faith as this centurion possessed! This Roman soldier, rough by training and experience, who was more familiar with stern fighting men than with those who could instruct him concerning Christ—had more faith than Jesus had so far found "in Israel."

11, 12. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is a strange thing, yet it is continually happening, despite its strangeness, that the persons who are placed in such positions of privilege, that you naturally expect that they would become Believers, remain unbelievers, while others, who are placed at a terrible disadvantage, nevertheless often come right out from sin and right away from ignorance and become believers in Christ! Oh, that none of us who sit under the sound of the Gospel from Sabbath to Sabbath, might be sad illustrations of this Truth of God, while others, unaccustomed to listen to the Word, may be happy instances of the way in which the Lord still takes strangers and adopts them into His family!

13. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go your way; and as you have believed, so be it done unto you. And his servant was healed in the same hour. Jesus will treat all alike according to this rule—"As you have believed, so be it done unto you." If you can believe great things of Him, you shall receive great things from Him. If you think Him good, great and mighty, you shall find Him to be so. If you can conceive greater things of Him than anyone else has ever done, you shall find Him equal to all your conceptions and your greatest faith shall be surpassed! It is a Law of His Kingdom, from which Christ never swerves—"According to your faith, be it unto you."

14, 15. And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick of a fever, and He touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose and ministered unto them. That was, perhaps, the most remarkable thing of all, for, when a fever is cured, it usually leaves great weakness behind it. Persons recovered of fever cannot immediately leave their bed and begin at once to attend to household matters! But Peter's wife's mother did this. Learn, therefore, that the Lord Jesus can not only take away from us the disease of sin, but all the effects of it as

well! He can make the man who has been worn out in the service of Satan, to become young again in the service of the Lord. And when it seems as if we never, even if converted, could be of any use to Him, He can take away the consequences of evil habits and make us into bright and sanctified Believers. What is there that is impossible to Him? In the olden time, kings claimed to have the power of healing with a touch. That was a superstition. But this King can do it—all glory to His blessed name! May He lay His gracious hand upon many of you, for, if it could heal before it was pierced, much more can it now heal every sin-stricken soul it touches!

16-18. When the evening was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils: and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the Prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave commandment to depart unto the other side. For He neither loved nor courted popularity, but did His utmost to shun it. It followed Him like His shadow but He always went before it. He never followed it, or sought after it—"When Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave commandment to depart unto the other side."

19. And a certain scribe came and said unto Him, Master, I will follow You wherever You go. How bold he is with his boasting! But Jesus knows that the fastest professors are often just as fast deserters, so He tests him before He takes him into the band of His followers.

20. And Jesus said unto him, The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. Christ means—"Can you follow the Son of Man when there is no reward except Himself—not even a place for your head to rest upon, or a home wherein you may find comfort? Can you cleave to Him when the lone mountainside shall be the place where He spends whole nights in prayer while the dews falls heavily upon Him? Can you follow Him then?" This is a test of love which makes many to be "found wanting."

21, 22. And another of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow Me; and let the dead bury their dead. It must be Christ, first, and father afterwards. We pay no disrespect to our dearest relatives and friends when we put them after Christ—that is their proper place. To put them before Christ— to prefer the creature to the Creator—is to be traitors to the King of kings. Whoever may come next, Christ must be first.

23-26. And when He was entered into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but He was asleep. And His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And He said unto them, Why are you fearful, O you of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds; and the sea; and there was a great calm. Probably no calm is so profound as that which follows the tempest of the soul which Jesus stills by His peace-speaking word. The calm of Nature, the calm of long-continued prosperity, the calm of an easy temper—these are all deceitful and are apt to be broken by sudden and furious tempests. But, after the soul has been rent to its foundations—after the awful groundswell and the Atlantic billows of deep temptation—when Jesus gives peace, there is "a great calm."

27. And the men marvelled, saying, What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him? We have often marvelled in the same way, but we know that it is not any "manner of

Man" alone, but it was He who was truly Man, who was also "very God of very God," the God-Man, the Man Christ Jesus, the Mediator between God and men!

. Adapted from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 55

Job 17,9 #1361 - The Final Perseverance of the Sai

THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE

OF THE SAINTS

NO. 1361

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 24, 1877,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The righteous, also, shall hold on his way."

Job 17:9.

THE man who is righteous before God has a way of his own. It is not the way of the flesh, nor the way of the world. It is a way marked out for him by the Divine command in which he walks by faith. It is the King's highway of holiness—the unclean shall not pass over it—only the ransomed of the Lord shall walk there and these shall find it a path of separation from the world. Once entered upon the way of life, the pilgrim must persevere in it or perish, for thus says the Lord, "If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." Perseverance in the path of faith and holiness is a necessity of the Christian, for only, "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved." It is in vain to spring up quickly like the seed that was sown upon the rock and then, by-and-by, to wither when the sun is up. That would but prove that such a plant has no root in itself.

But "the trees of the Lord are full of sap" and they abide and continue and bring forth fruit, even in old age, to show that the Lord is upright. There is a great difference between nominal Christianity and real Christianity and this is generally seen in the failure of the one and the continuance of the other. Now, the declaration of the text is that the truly righteous man shall hold on his way—he shall not go back, he shall not leap the hedges and wander to the right hand or the left—he shall not lie down in idleness, neither shall he faint and cease to go upon his journey. He "shall hold on his way." It will frequently be very difficult for him to do so, but he will have such resolution, such power of inward Grace given him, that he will "hold on his way" with stern determination, as though he held on by his teeth, resolving never to let go.

Perhaps he may not always travel with equal speed. It is not said that he shall hold on his pace, but he shall hold on his way. There are times when we run and are not weary and at other times, when we walk, we are thankful that we do not faint. Yes, and there are periods when we are glad to go on all fours and creep upward with pain. But still we prove that "the righteous shall hold on his way." Under all difficulties the face of the man whom God has justified is steadfastly set towards Jerusalem—nor will he turn aside till his eyes shall see the King in His beauty. This is a great wonder! It is a marvel that any man should be a Christian at all, and a greater wonder that he should continue so!

Consider the weakness of the flesh, the strength of inward corruption, the fury of Satanic temptations, the seductions of wealth and the pride of life, the world and the fashions thereof—all these things are against us and yet behold, "greater is He that is for us than all they that are against us!" Defying sin, Satan, death and Hell, the righteous holds on his way. I take our text as accurately setting forth the doctrine of the Final Perseverance of the Saints. "The righteous shall hold on his way."

Years ago, when there was an earnest and even bitter controversy between Calvinists and Arminians, it was the habit of each side to caricature the other. Very much of the argument was not directed against the real sentiment of the opposite party, but against what had been imputed to them. They made a man of straw and then they burned him, which is a pretty easy thing to do! But I trust we have left these things behind. The glorious Truth of the Final Perseverance of the Saints has survived controversy and, in some form or other, is the cherished belief of the children of God. Take care, however, to be clear as to what it is. The Scripture does not teach that a man will reach his journey's end without continuing to travel along the road. It is not true that one act of faith is all—that nothing is needed of daily faith, prayer and watchfulness. Our doctrine is the very opposite, namely, that the righteous shall hold on his way! Or, in other words, shall continue in faith, in repentance, in prayer and under the influence of the Grace of God.

We do not believe in salvation by a physical force which treats a man as a dead log and carries him, whether he wills it or not, towards Heaven. No, "He holds on." He is personally active about the matter and plods on up hill and down dale till he reaches his journey's end. We never thought, nor even dreamed, that merely because a man supposes that he once entered on this way he may, therefore, conclude that he is certain of salvation, even if he leaves the way immediately. No, but we say that he who truly receives the Holy Spirit, so that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall not go back, but persevere in the way of faith.

It is written, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved," and this he cannot be if he were left to go back and delight in sin as he did before! And, therefore, he shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Though the Believer, to his grief, will commit many a sin, still, the tenor of his life will be holiness to the Lord and he will hold on in the way of obedience. We detest the doctrine that a man who has once believed in Jesus will be saved even if he altogether forsakes the path of obedience. We deny that such a turning aside is possible to the true Believer and, therefore, the idea imputed to us is clearly an invention of the adversary. No, Beloved, a man, if he is, indeed, a Believer in Christ, will not live after the will of the flesh!

When he does fall into sin, it will be his grief and misery—and he will never rest till he is cleansed from guilt. But I will say this of the Believer, that if he could live as he would like to live, he would live a perfect life. If you ask him if, after believing, he may live as he wishes, he will reply, "Would God I could live as I wish, for I desire to live altogether without sin! I would be perfect, even as my Father in Heaven is perfect." The doctrine is not the licentious idea that a Believer may live in sin, but that he cannot and will not do so! This is the doctrine and we, first, will prove it. Secondly, in the Puritanical sense of the word, we will briefly improve it by drawing two spiritual lessons from it.

I. LET US PROVE THE DOCTRINE. Please follow me with your Bibles open. You, dear Friends, have, most of you, received as a matter of faith the Doctrines of Grace and, therefore, to you the doctrine of Final Perseverance cannot require any proving, because it follows from all the other

doctrines. We believe that God has an elect people whom He has chosen unto eternal life and that Truth of God necessarily involves the perseverance in Grace. We believe in special redemption and this secures the salvation and consequent perseverance of the redeemed.

We believe in effectual calling, which is bound up with justification—a justification which ensures glorification. The Doctrines of Grace are like a chain—if you believe in one of them you must believe the next, for each one involves the rest—therefore I say that you who accept any of the doctrines of Grace must receive this, also, as involved in them. But I am about to try to prove this to those who do not believe the Doctrines of Grace. I would not argue in a circle and prove one thing which you doubt by another thing which you doubt, but, "to the Law and to the Testimony," to the actual Words of Scripture we shall refer the matter.

Before we advance to the argument, it will be well to remark that those who reject the doctrine frequently tell us that there are many cautions in the Word of God against apostatizing and that those cautions can have no meaning if it is true that the righteous shall hold on his way. But what if those cautions are the means, in the hand of God, of keeping His people from wandering? What if they are used to excite a holy fear in the minds of His children and so become the means of preventing the evil which they denounce? I would also remind you that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which contains the most solemn warnings against apostasy, the Apostle always takes care to add words which show that he did not believe that those whom he warned would actually apostatize.

Turn to Hebrews 6:9. He has been telling these Hebrews that if those who had been once enlightened should fall away, it would be impossible to renew them again into repentance and he adds, "But, Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." In the 10th chapter he gives an equally earnest warning, declaring that those who should do despite to the Spirit of Grace are worthy of worse punishment than those who despised Moses' Law, but he closes the chapter with these words, "Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draws back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Thus he shows what the consequences of apostasy would be, but he is convinced that they will not choose to incur such a fearful doom.

Again, objectors sometimes mention instances of apostasy which are mentioned in the Word of God, but on looking into them it will be discovered that these are cases of persons who did but profess to know Christ, but were not really possessors of the Divine Life. John, in His first Epistle, 2:19, fully describes these apostates—"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." The same is true of that memorable passage in John, where our Savior speaks of branches of the vine which are cut off and cast into the fire—these are described as branches in Christ that bear no fruit! Are those real Christians? How can they be so if they bear no fruit? "By their fruits you shall know them." The branch which bears fruit is purged, but it is never cut off! Those which bear no fruit are not figures of true Christians, but they fitly represent mere professors. Our Lord, in Matthew 7:22, tells us concerning many who will say in that day "Lord, Lord," that He will reply, "I never knew you." Not, "I have forgotten you," but, "I never knew you"—they were never really His disciples.

But now to the argument itself. First, we argue the Perseverance of the Saints most distinctly from the nature of the life which is imparted at regeneration. What does Peter say concerning this life? In 1 Peter 1:23 he speaks of the people of God as "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever." The new life which is planted in us, when we are born again, is not like the fruit of our first birth, for that is subject to mortality. No, it is a Divine principle which cannot die nor be corrupt and, if it is so, then he who possesses it must live forever! He must, indeed, be evermore with the Spirit of God—regeneration has made him so!

In 1 John 3:9 we have the same thought in another form. "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin, for His seed remains in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God." That is to say, the bent of the Christian's life is not towards sin. It would not be a fair description of his life that he lives in sin—on the contrary, he fights and contends against sin because he has an inner principle which cannot sin. The new life sins not—it is born of God and cannot transgress—and though the old nature wars against it, yet does the new life so prevail in the Christian that he is kept from living in sin. Our Savior, in His simple teaching of the Gospel to the Samaritan woman, said to her (John 4:13), "Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Now, if our Savior taught this to a sinful and ignorant woman at His first interview with her, I take it that this doctrine is not to be reserved for the inner circle of full-grown saints, but to be preached among the common people and to be held up as a most blessed privilege! If you receive the Grace which Jesus imparts to your souls, it shall be like the good part which Mary chose—it shall not be taken away from you! It shall abide in you, not as the water in a cistern, but as a living fountain springing up unto everlasting life.

We all know that the life given in the new birth is intimately connected with faith. Now, faith is, in itself, a conquering principle. In the First Epistle of John, which is a great treasury of argument (1 John 5:4) we are told, "Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" See, then, that which is born of God in us, namely, the new life, is a conquering principle—there is no hint given that it can ever be defeated! And faith, which is its outward sign, is, also, in itself, triumphant forevermore! Therefore, because God has implanted such a wondrous life in us in bringing us out of darkness into His marvelous light, He has begotten us, again, unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And because the eternal and ever-blessed Spirit has come to dwell in us, we conclude that the Divine Life within us shall never die. "The righteous shall hold on his way."

The second argument to which I shall call your attention shall be drawn from our Lord's own express declarations. Here we shall look to the Gospel of John, again, and in that blessed third of John, where our Lord was explaining the Gospel in the simplest possible style to Nicodemus, we find Him laying great stress upon the fact that the life received by faith in Himself is eternal. Look at that precious verse, the fourteenth—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Do men, therefore, believe in Him and yet perish? Do they believe in Him and receive a

spiritual life which comes to an end? It cannot be, for, "God gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish." But he would perish if he did not persevere to the end and, therefore, he must persevere to the end!

The Believer has eternal life—how then can he die so as to cease to be a Believer? If he does not abide in Christ, he evidently does not have eternal life—therefore he shall abide in Christ, even to the end. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To this, some reply that a man may have everlasting life and lose it. To which we answer, the words cannot mean that! Such a statement is a self-evident contradiction! If the life is lost, the man is dead! How, then, did he have everlasting life? It is clear that he had a life which lasted only for a while—he certainly did not have everlasting life, for if he had it, he must live forever! "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life" (John 3:36).

The saints in Heaven have eternal life and no one expects them to perish! Their life is eternal—and eternal life is eternal life—whether the person possessing it dwells on earth or in Heaven! I need not read all the passages in which the same Truth of God is taught but further on, inJohn 6:47, our Lord told the Jews, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes on Me has everlasting life." Not temporary life, but, "everlasting life." And in the 51st verse He said, "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven. If any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever." Then comes that famous declaration of the Lord Jesus Christ, which, if there were no other at all, would be quite sufficient to prove our point— John 10:28—"And I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone" (the word, "man," is not in the original) "pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand."

What can He mean but this, that He has grasped His people and that He means to hold them securely in His mighty hand?—

"Where is the power can reach us there,

Or what can pluck us from there?" Over and above the hand of Jesus which was pierced comes the hand of the Omnipotent Father as a sort of second grasp. "My Father, which gave them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." Surely this must show that the saints are secure from anything and everything which would destroy them and, consequently, safe from total apostasy. Another passage speaks to the same effect—it is to be found in Matthew 24:24, where the Lord Jesus has been speaking of the false prophets that should deceive many. "There shall arise false christs and false prophets, and they shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, to deceive the very elect."

This shows that it is impossible for the elect to be deceived by them. Of Christ's sheep it is said, "A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers," but by Divine instinct they know the voice of the Good Shepherd and they follow Him. Thus has our Savior declared, as plainly as words possibly can express, that those who are His people possess eternal life within themselves and shall not perish but shall enter into everlasting happiness. "The righteous shall hold on his way."

A very blessed argument for the safety of the Believer is found in our Lord's intercession. You need not turn to the passage, for you know it well, which shows the connection between the living intercession of Christ and the perseverance of His people—"Therefore, also, He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Our Lord Jesus is not dead! He has risen! He has gone up into Glory and now, before the eternal Throne, He pleads the merit of His perfect work! And as He pleads there for all His people whose names are written on His heart—as the names of Israel were written on the jeweled breastplate of the high priest—His intercession saves His people even to the uttermost!

If you would like an illustration of it you must turn to the case of Peter which is recorded in Luke 22:31 where our Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not; and when you are restored, strengthen your brethren." The intercession of Christ does not save His people from being tried, or tempted, or tossed up and down like wheat in a sieve. It does not save them, even, from a measure of sin and sorrow. But it does save them from total apostasy. Peter was kept and though he denied his Master, yet it was an exception to the great rule of his life. By Grace he did hold on his way, because not only then, but many a time beside, though he sinned, he had an Advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous!

If you desire to know how Jesus pleads, read at your leisure at home that wonderful 17th of John—the Lord's prayer. What a prayer it is! "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name; those that You gave Me I have kept and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Judas was lost, but he was only given to Christ as an Apostle and not as one of His sheep. He had a temporary faith and maintained a temporary profession—he never had eternal life or he would have lived on. Those groans and cries of the Savior which accompanied His pleas in Gethsemane were heard in Heaven and answered. "Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me." The Lord keeps them by His Word and Spirit—and will keep them!

If the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane were answered, how much more that which now goes up from the eternal Throne itself!—

"With cries and tears He offered up His humble suit below. But with authority He asks, Enthroned in Glory, now. For all that come to God by Him,

Salvation He demands. Points to their names upon His breast, And spreads His wounded hands."

Ah, if my Lord Jesus pleads for me, I cannot be afraid of earth or Hell! That living, intercessory Voice has power to keep the saints and so has the living Lord Himself, for He has said—"Because I live you shall live also" (John 14:19).

Now for a fourth argument. We gather sure confidence of the perseverance of the saints from the Character and work of Christ. I will say little about that, for I trust my Lord is so well known to you that He needs no word of commendation from me to you. But if you know Him, you will say what the Apostle does in 2 Timothy 1:12— "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." He did not say, "I know in whom I have believed," as most people quote it, but, "I know whom I have believed." He knew

Jesus! He knew His heart and His faithfulness! He knew His Atonement and its power! He knew His intercession and its might and he committed his soul to Jesus by an act of faith—and he felt secure.

My Lord is so excellent in all things that I need give you but one glimpse of His Character and you will see what He was when He dwelt here among men. At the commencement of John 13:1-38 we read, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." If He had not loved His disciples to the end when here, we might conclude that He was changeable now as then—but if He loved His chosen to the end while yet in His humiliation below—it brings us the sweet and blessed confidence that now that He is in Heaven He will love to the end all those who confide in Him. Fifthly, we infer the perseverance of the saints from the tenor of the Covenant of Grace.

Would you like to read it for yourselves? If so, turn to the Old Testament, Jeremiah 32:1-44, and there you will find the Covenant of Grace set forth at some length. We shall only be able to read the 40th verse: "And I will make an Everlasting Covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me." He will not depart from them and they shall not depart from Him—what can be a greater assurance of their perseverance even to the end?

Now that this is the Covenant of Grace under which we live is clear from the Epistle to the Hebrews, for the Apostle, in the 8th chapter, quotes that passage to this very end. The question runs thus—"Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt because they continued not in My Covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord. For this is the Covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put My Laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people."

The old Covenant had an "if" in it, and so it suffered shipwreck. It was—"If you will be obedient, then you shall be blessed" and, therefore, there came a failure on man's part and the whole Covenant ended in disaster. It was the Covenant of Works and under it we were in bondage until we were delivered from it and introduced to the Covenant of Grace, which has no "if" in it, but runs upon the strain of promise. It is, "I will," and, "you shall," all the way through. "I will be your God and you shall be My people." Glory be to God, this Covenant will never pass away, for see how the Lord declares its enduring character in the book of Isaiah (54:10)— "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the Covenant of My peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you."

And again in Isaiah 55:3 : "I will make an Everlasting Covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." The idea of falling utterly away from Grace is a relic of the old legal spirit. It is a going away from Grace to come under Law, again, and I charge you who have once been emancipated slaves and have had the fetters of legal bondage struck from off your hands, never consent to wear those bonds again! Christ has saved you, if, indeed, you are believers in Him. He has not saved you for a week, or a month, or a quarter, or a year, or 20 years, but He has given you eternal life and you shall never perish—neither shall any pluck you out of His hands. Rejoice in this blessed Covenant of Grace!

The sixth most forcible argument is drawn from the faithfulness of God. Look at Romans 11:29. What does the Apostle say there, speaking by the Holy Spirit? "For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable," which means that He does not give life and pardon to a man and call him by Grace and afterwards repent of what He has done and withdraw the good things which He has bestowed. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent." When He puts forth His hands to save, He does not withdraw them till the work is accomplished. His Word is, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent" (1 Samuel 15:29).

The Apostle would have us ground our confidence of perseverance upon the confirmation which Divine faithfulness is sure to bestow upon us. He says in 1 Corinthians 1:8, "Who shall, also, confirm you unto the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." And again he speaks to the same effect in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, "Faithful is He that calls you, who, also, will do it." It was of old the will of God to save the people whom He gave to Jesus and from this He has never turned, for our Lord said, "And this is the Father's will which has sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39). Thus you see from these passages, and there are numbers of others, that God's faithfulness secures the preservation of His people and, "the righteous shall hold on his way."

The seventh and last argument shall be drawn from what has already been done in us. I shall do little more than quote the Scriptures and leave them to sink into your minds. A blessed passage is that in 31:3—"The Lord has appeared of old unto me, saying, yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you." If He did not mean that His love should be everlasting, He would never have drawn us at all! But because that love is everlasting, therefore with loving kindness has He drawn us. The Apostle argues this in a very elaborate manner in Romans 5:9-10—"Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

I cannot stop to show how every word of this passage is emphatic, but it is—if God reconciled us when we were enemies, He certainly will save us, now we are His friends. And if our Lord Jesus has reconciled us by His death, much more will He save us by His life, so that we may be certain He will not leave nor forsake those whom He has called. Do you need me to bring to your minds that golden chapter, the 8th of Romans, the noblest of all language that was ever written by human pen? "Whom He did foreknow, He, also, did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He, also, called; and whom He called, them He, also, justified; and whom He justified, them He, also, glorified."

There is no break in the chain between Justification and Glory! And no supposable breakage can occur, for the Apostle puts that out of all possibility, by saying, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who, also, makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Then he heaps on all the things that might be supposed to separate, and says, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any

other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In the same manner the Apostle writes in Php_1:6—"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." I cannot stay to mention the many other Scriptures in which what has been done is made an argument that the work shall be completed, but it is after the manner of the Lord to go through with whatever He undertakes. "He will give Grace and glory," and perfect that which concerns us. One marvelous privilege which has been bestowed upon us is of peculiar significance—we are one with Christ by close, vital, spiritual union. We are taught of the Spirit that we enjoy a marriage union with Christ Jesus our Lord—shall that union be dissolved? We are married to Him! Has He ever given a bill of divorce? There has never been a case where the heavenly Bridegroom divorced from His heart a chosen soul to whom He has been united in the bonds of Grace! Listen to these words from the prophecy of Hosea 2:19-20—"And I will betroth you unto Me forever; yes, I will betroth you unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth you unto Me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord." This marvelous union is set forth by the figure of the head and the body—we are members of the body of Christ. Do the members of His body rot away? Is Christ amputated? Is He fitted with new limbs as old ones are lost?

No, being members of this body, we shall not be divided from Him. "He that is joined unto the Lord," says the Apostle, "is one spirit," and if we are made one spirit with Christ, that mysterious union does not allow for the supposition, even, of a separation! The Lord has worked another great work upon us, for He has sealed us by the Holy Spirit. The possession of the Holy Spirit is the Divine seal which sooner or later is set upon all the chosen. There are many passages in which that seal is spoken of and is described as being an earnest, an earnest of the inheritance. But how can it be an earnest if after receiving it, we do not attain the purchased possession? Think over the words of the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22— "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

To the same effect the Holy Spirit speaks in Ephesians 1:13-14—"In whom you, also, trusted, after that you heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel of your salvation, in whom, also, after that you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." Beloved, we feel certain that if the Spirit of God dwells in us, He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead will keep our souls and will, also, quicken our mortal bodies and present us complete before the Glory of His face at the last.

Therefore we sum up the argument with the confident expression of the Apostle when he said (2 Timothy 4:18), "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen."

II. Now, how shall we IMPROVE THE DOCTRINE OF THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS PRACTICALLY? The first improvement is for encouragement to the man who is on the road to Heaven. "The righteous shall hold on his way." If I had to take a very long journey, say from London to John o' Groats, with my poor tottering limbs to carry me, and such a weight to carry, too, I might begin to despair and, indeed, the very first day's walking would knock me out. But if I had a Divine assurance unmistakably saying, "You will hold on your way and you will get to

your journey's end," I feel that I would brace myself up to achieve the task.

One might hardly undertake a difficult journey if he did not believe that he would finish it. But the sweet assurance that we shall reach our home makes us pluck up courage. The weather is wet, rainy, blusterous—but we must keep on, for the end is sure. The road is very rough and runs up hill and down dale. We pant for breath and our limbs are aching—but as we shall get to our journey's end, we push on. We are ready to creep into some cottage and lie down to die of weariness, saying, "I shall never accomplish my task." But the confidence which we have received sets us on our feet and off we go again! To the right-hearted man the assurance of success is the best stimulus for labor.

If it is so, that I shall overcome the world, that I shall conquer sin, that I shall not be an apostate, that I shall not give up my faith, that I shall not fling away my shield, that I shall come home a conqueror—then will I play the man and fight like hero! This is one of the reasons why British troops have so often won the fight, because the drummer boys did not know how to beat a retreat and the rank and file did not believe in the possibility of defeat! They were beaten oftentimes by the French, so the French tell us, but they would not believe it and, therefore, would not run away! They felt like winning and so they stood like solid rocks amidst the dread artillery of the foe till victory was declared on their side.

Brothers and Sisters, we shall do the same if we realize that we are preserved in Christ Jesus—kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation! Every true Believer shall be a conqueror and, therefore, the reason for warring a good warfare. There is laid up for us in Heaven a crown of life that fades not. The crown is laid up for us and not for chance comers. The crown reserved for me is such that no one else can wear it! And if it is so, then will I battle and strive to the end, till the last enemy is overcome and death, itself, is dead.

Another improvement is this—what an encouragement this is to sinners who desire salvation. It should lead them to come and receive it with grateful delight. Those who deny this doctrine offer sinners a poor two penny-halfpenny salvation not worth having—and it is no marvel that they turn away from it. As the Pope gave England to the Spanish king—if he could get it—so do they proffer Christ's salvation if a man will deserve it by his own faithfulness. According to some, eternal life is given to you, but then it may not be eternal! You may fall from it. It may last only for a time.

When I was but a child I used to trouble myself because I saw some of my young companions who were a little older than myself, when they became apprentices and came to London, become vicious. I have heard their mother's laments and seen their tears. I have heard their fathers expressing bitterest sorrow over the boys whom I knew in my class to be quite as good as ever I had been—and it used to strike me with horror that perhaps I might sin as they had done! They became Sabbath-breakers—in one case there was a theft from the till to go into Sunday pleasuring. I dreaded the very thought!

I desired to maintain an unsullied character and when I heard that if I gave my heart to Christ, He would keep me, that was the very thing which won me! It seemed to be a celestial life assurance for my character, that if I would really trust Christ with myself, He would save me from the errors of youth, preserve me amid the temptations of manhood and keep me to the end. I was charmed with the thought that if I was made righteous by believing in Christ Jesus I should hold on my way by

the power of the Holy Spirit.

That which charmed me in my boyhood is even more attractive to me in middle life! I am happy to preach to you a sure and everlasting salvation! I feel that I have something to bring before you, this morning, which is worthy of every sinner's eager acceptance. I have neither an, "if," nor a, "but," with which to dilute the pure Gospel of my message! Here it is—"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." I dropped a piece of ice upon the floor yesterday and I said to one who was in the room, "Is not that a diamond?" "Ah," he said, "you would not leave it on the floor, I guarantee you, if it were a diamond of that size."

Now I have a diamond here—eternal life, everlasting life! I pray you will be in haste to take it up at once, to be saved now, to be saved in living, to be saved in dying, to be saved in rising again, forever and ever, by the eternal power and infinite love of God! Is not this worth having? Grasp at it, poor Soul! You may have it if you but believe in Jesus Christ, or, in other words, trust your soul with Him. Deposit your eternal destiny in this Divine bank—then you can say—"I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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Chapter 56

Job 17,9 #749 - The Righteous Holding On His Way

THE RIGHTEOUS HOLDING

ON HIS WAY

NO. 749

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 12, 1867,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The righteous also shall hold on his way."

Job 17:9.

WE are thrice happy in having a goodly number of young beginners in our midst. Our springtide is cheered and beautified with many blossoms of hopeful converts. They have just begun to go on pilgrimage and would be as happy as the birds of the air were it not that some of them are grievously afflicted with the fear that they shall not hold out to the end. This is one of their daily torments, that, after all, they shall be false to Christ— that the Grace of God will fail them, or that they will fail to depend upon it—that having begun well they shall by-and-by be hindered and shall not obey the truth.

Now, perhaps a little plain conversation upon that subject may help to relieve them of their fears. Ignorance about Divine Truth is not bliss and is not the friend to bliss—"the soul without knowledge is not good." The more we know concerning the doctrines of the Gospel the better for our comfort if by faith we are able to receive them. Many and many a doubt and fear now oppressing the people of God might be driven like chaff before the wind if they were but better established in the Truths of God relating to the points under their consideration. If they did but know more fully what God has revealed they would tremble less at what Satan suggests.

It is, therefore, with the view of very simply talking about this matter of holding on the way of the heavenly pilgrimage that I have taken this text this morning. May God the Holy Spirit bless it to us. First, we intend to say, this morning, that the Believer must hold on his way—it is necessary that he should do so. Secondly, it is exceedingly difficult for him to do so—the perseverance of the saints is surrounded with enormous perils. Yet, thirdly, this perseverance is guaranteed by Divine promise. But, fourthly, it is only guaranteed to certain persons whose character is described in the text as being "the righteous." These shall hold on their way.

I. First, then, it is absolutely essential to final salvation that we should be PARTICIPATORS IN FINAL PERSEVERANCE. It has been said by some that he who once believes is therefore saved. I shall not deny the truth of that statement—but it is an unguarded mode of speech—and does not place the truth in the most Scriptural form. I would infinitely prefer to assert, that, "He who truly

believes, shall by Divine Grace continue to do so, and therefore shall be saved." It is not true that, supposing a man did once believe and then became altogether an unbeliever, he should be saved. If that were possible, that the Believer should altogether fall from the Grace of God and become in all respects changed into an unbeliever, he would be damned. On this point the Word of God is very clear and decided—read the 24th verse of the 18th chapter of Ezekiel: "But when the righteous turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die."

If it were possible for one who had entered upon the way of righteousness—truly entered upon it—to turn from it, utterly and totally, the consequences must be his final destruction, for Paul tells us, "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4-6). That is not the point we raise at all in the discussion of final perseverance. We do not admit the possibility of total apostasy in the case of the real Believer in Jesus, but believe that he will hold on his way and so be saved, but only saved by being enabled to hold on his way.

We hold that in order to ultimate salvation it is absolutely indispensable that everyone who is a Believer should continue to be a Believer—that he who is made by Grace to be holy, should continue to be holy—that he in whom the Divine life is placed, should never lose that Divine life. It is the keeping of that life which we believe ultimately ends in perfection and everlasting bliss.

1. The necessity of final perseverance is very clear if you look at the representation of the Believer in the Word of God. He is frequently compared to a traveler. And no traveler reaches his journey's end merely by starting upon the road. If it should be a journey of seven weeks' length, if he shall sit down after journeying six weeks, he certainly will not reach the goal of his desires. It is necessary, if I would reach a certain city, that I should go every mile of the road. One mile would not take me there, nor if the city were a 100 miles distant, would 99 miles bring me to its streets. I must journey all the length if I would reach the desired place.

Frequently, in the New Testament, the Christian is compared to a runner—he runs in a race for a great prize. But it is not by merely starting. It is not by making a great spurt. It is not by distancing your rival for a little time and then pulling up to take a breath, or sauntering to either side of the road, that you will win the race! We must never stop till we have passed the finish line. There must be no loitering throughout the whole of the Christian career, but onward, like the Roman charioteer, with glowing wheels, we must fly more and more rapidly till we actually obtain the crown.

The Christian is, sometimes, compared by the Apostle Paul, who somewhat delights to quote from the ancient games, to the Grecian wrestler or boxer. But it is of little use for the champion to give the foe one blow or one fall—he must continue in the combat until his adversary is beaten. Our spiritual foes will not be vanquished until we enter where the conquerors receive their crowns, and therefore we must continue in a fighting attitude. It is in vain for us to talk of what we have done or are doing just now—he that continues to the end, the same shall be saved—and none but he.

The Believer is commonly compared to a warrior. He is engaged in a great battle, a holy war. Like Joshua, he has to drive out the Canaanites that have chariots of iron, before be can fully take possession of his inheritance. But it is not the winning of one battle that makes a man a conqueror! No, though he should devastate one province of his enemy's territories, yet, if he should be driven out by-and-by, he is beaten in the campaign and it will yield him but small consolation to win a single battle, or even a dozen battles, if the campaign, as a whole, should end in his defeat.

It is not commencing as though the whole world were to be cleared by one display of fire and sword, but continuing, going from strength to strength, from victory to victory, that makes the man the conqueror of his foe. The Christian is also called a disciple or scholar. And who does not know that the boy, by going to school for a day or two does not, therefore, become wise? If the lad should give himself most diligently to his grammar for six months, yet he will never become a linguist unless he shall continue perseveringly in his classic studies.

The great mathematicians of our times did not acquire their science in a single year—they pressed forward with aching brow. They burnt the midnight oil and tortured their brains. They were not satisfied to rest, for they could never have become masters of their art if they had lingered on the road. The Believer is also called a builder, and you know of whom it was said, "This man began to build, but was not able to finish!" The digging out of the foundation is most important, and the building up of stone upon stone is to be carried on with diligence—but though the man should half finish the walls, or even complete them—yet if he does not roof in the structure, he becomes a laughing stock to every passer-by.

A good beginning, it is said, is more than half. But a good ending is more than the whole. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning. In every aspect of the Christian, continuance in faith and well-doing is essential to his safety—without a perpetual perseverance his profession is of no value. We will look at one more illustration and see this most clearly. Take that simple metaphor of wheat—of what value is the corn in the blade or even in the ear? What man can live upon the green blade or the half-formed ear?

The joyous shout of the reaper is only evoked by the full corn in the ear, and you, young Believer, you, growing Christian, must press forward and ripen into the perfection of your Christian manhood, for it is only then that the shout of "Hallelujah," and "Glory to God," shall be fully heard. Take the Christian in any way in which God describes him, and he is one in whose ear is whispered the words, "Forward! Onward!" He is not one who can say, "I have attained." In a certain sense it is true he is saved, but as to his ultimate salvation—his perfection before the Throne of God can only be worked in him by the continual, sustained, and abiding work of the Holy Spirit.

2. But the fact that final perseverance is absolutely necessary is also clear if you, for a moment, take into consideration the nature of the case and suppose that the man did not persevere. Imagine a man who started with sincere simple faith in Christ, and with a new heart, and a right spirit. Imagine him to have gone back to the world—can you suppose that he will enter Heaven? He has deserted good for evil. He has shut his eyes to the light and gone back to the darkness from which he professed to have escaped. He has, not ignorantly, but knowingly and deliberately quenched within his soul the spark of heavenly flame.

He knew that the road led to Hell, and he turned from it. He knew that the other path led to Heaven, and he ran in it—but after awhile he tired, he fainted, and he deliberately set his face Hell-ward and gave up eternal life, pawning and throwing it away like Esau for a mess of pottage! Do you think it could be said otherwise of him than it was of that selfsame profane Esau, that he found no place for repentance, though he sought, sought it diligently and with tears? For this man, you see, has denied the Lord that bought him! He said he rested on Christ and depended on His precious blood. But he deliberately denies the faith, deliberately returns either to the beggarly elements of his own self-righteousness to rest under the Law, or else to plunge again into open sin, and follow the devices of his flesh.

What shall be said of this man, but that his last end shall be worse than the first? Enter Heaven? How can it be? It is the place of the perfect, and this man, so far from being perfect, does not even press towards it! He has turned aside from perfection, he has given up everything which constituted him a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light! He has, after being illuminated, gone back to darkness—after being quickened, has gone back to the tomb! What remains for him? Take the case into consideration, and you will see at once the impossibility of a non-persevering Christian entering into Heaven.

3. Thirdly, I must strengthen that consideration by reminding you that we have very express declarations in Scripture about professors, and about Believers, too, if such could be, who do not persevere. Do you not recollect the Savior's words, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"? (Luke 9:62). Do you not remember that terrible sentence about the salt, "Salt is good: but if the salt has lost his savor, with what shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out"? To the same effect is that fearful warning, "Remember Lot's wife!" She came out of the city of destruction, but she looked back, and became a pillar of salt as an everlasting warning to us against so much as the thought and look of apostasy.

Then comes in that warning where we are told concerning some, that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, and that word of Paul, "For the earth which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it, and brings forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God: but that which bears thorns and briars is rejected, and is near unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

And that of Peter, in his second Epistle, and second chapter: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

Supposing a man, then, to have been washed in the blood of Jesus, to be quickened of the Spirit of God—supposing him to have gone back and to have entirely and totally lost all Divine Grace. He would be the hopeless man, beyond the reach of mercy, damned while yet living, a living Hell even in the midst of this world! O Beloved, how necessary, then, is it that the Christian should persevere and hold on even to the end!

4. I would have you observe the form of many of the promises, and as we have little time this morning, I ask you to read the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation. There are some very choice promises made to the seven Churches, and they are all put in this shape, "To him that overcomes will I give," and so on. Not to him that begins the fight. Not to him that buckles on his harness. Not to him that proclaims war, but "to him that overcomes will I give." The promises are reserved for such, and you know how, in contradistinction to such promises, it is written, "If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him."

Brethren, before I leave this subject this morning, there is something which I wish to press upon your minds. It is not very pleasant, but it is necessary for us to hear it. Let me remind you of some whom you yourselves have known who did appear to be among the most gracious and excellent of the earth. Those who are at this moment so far cast off as to have become entirely forgetful even of the outward forms of religion, and have gone aside, by fearful sins, we fear, into perdition!

That, mark you, has happened in some cases after many years of profession—the vessel has been wrecked at the harbor's mouth! The fire of religious excitement burned all day, at least, so they said (we do not search hearts), and it went out at night, just when it was most required, when the chamber, the chill, cold chamber, most needed the genial flame. Doubtless John was right when he said, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us."

What a dreadful thing, not to persevere, and yet to have had the name of a Christian! When a man goes up a ladder, if he shall fall at the first step, that is bad. But if he shall fall when he has nearly reached the top, what a falling is there! God save us from it! If ever I prayed in my life, I think I did this morning when we were singing those words, "Let us not fall! Let us not fall!" Oh, to fall backward into perdition is the worst way of falling into Hell! Christian, it is not with you that you may persevere or not—it is not an optional blessing—you must persevere or else all you have ever known and felt will be good for nothing. You must hold on your way if you are ultimately to be saved.

Let me here say, and I leave the point, that I do not assert that a Christian must daily make progress in Divine Grace. He ought to do so. He should do so—but even if he should not do so, he will not be cast away for that. Neither do I assert that a Christian should always be conscious that he is in the way, for many of the best of God's saints are tormented with many doubts and fears. Nor do I say that every departure from the way of God is inevitably fatal—far from it, for many have departed for a season— and have been brought back and restored as penitent backsliders.

Christian went down By-path meadow, and yet returned to the right road. That is a very different case from Demas, who forsook the way to dig in the silver mine and perished in it. The general current of the soul, however, must be onward—the general current and tendency of the Believer must be in the way of Truth—both as to his heart and his life. And if it is not so, whatever boasts he may make about his faith—whatever experiences he may think he has had—if he does not hold out to the end, there is no salvation, no Heaven, no bliss for him.

II. Secondly, it is possible that I may plunge thoughtful minds into deeper gloom, still, while I remind you that while final perseverance is necessary, IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. The way itself renders it so. The way to Heaven is no smooth-shaven lawn, no well-rolled gravel path—it is

a rough road, up-hill, down dale, across rivers and over mountains. He that would get to Heaven must have the spirit of Hannibal, who, when he led his troops over the Alps, said, "I will either find a way, or I will make one." You will need all the fortitude that Divine Grace, itself, can give you in order to reach, along such a road, the city of your desire.

Moreover, the road is long. It is a life-long road. To keep near to God by the space of a week is not the easiest thing conceivable. To deny one's passions, to overcome one's evil desires for the space of a month might be difficult, but this is for life—we shall not be able to lay down this charge till we lay down our bodies! Here we stand upon our watchtower, not by day alone, though the hot noontide might make us faint, but until the evening star arises, and onward through the dark night till the gleams of morning come! And so, day after day, from the first childhood of our spiritual existence until we have matured into a ripe old age, it is watching, watching continually, and laboring and pressing forward.

My Brothers and Sisters, I do not know how it is with some of you, but I feel this and must confess it, that in the early part of our Christian career there is a freshness and a novelty about everything which enables us to travel readily. But after awhile—there is no monotony, it is true, except in ourselves—but it begins to be heavy work to hold on in the ways of the Lord. It ought not to be so, but, alas, it is so! And we have to cry to the Strong for strength that we may be renewed, or else the length of the way would wear us out.

Besides that, the road is so contrary to fallen nature! It is a way of faith. If it were a way of sight, one might walk in it easily, but it is a way of faith from the beginning to the end! "The just live by faith"—not a way of sensible comforts, not always a way of joyful experiences—but frequently a path of deep tribulation, solemn heart-searching, bitterness, and of gall. It is a way outside the camp where none can sympathize with you. It is a way of scourging and of flagellation even from the hand of the great Father Himself who hides Himself from us for a season. It is a way so contrary to flesh and blood that he who holds out in it has received power from on High, and has the Holy Spirit within him!

God Himself must dwell in a persevering Christian's heart! The Hebrew word for hold on in the text is very expressive. It signifies to hold with strength, to hold toughly, to hold as with the teeth, resolving never to let go, but ever to go on. Beloved, we must hold on with tooth and nail! If we cannot run, we must walk. If we cannot walk, we must clamber on hands and knees up the hill. And if we cannot even do this, we must stand fast! All Christians who have had any experience of Divine life will say that from the way itself it is no easy thing to continue in it.

Then, take into consideration, in the next place, as to our difficulties, our flesh—that heavy load which we have to take along this weary way. We have constitutional sins, any one of which, if left unwatched for a little season, would cause us to make shipwreck of our faith! Some of us are constitutionally idle, we would scarcely do anything unless the solemn obligation of duty compelled us. Others are constitutionally angry—quick tempered—and for them to become like little children (which they must do if they would be saved) is no easy task.

Some, I know, are naturally desponding. Their eyes have always a blue tinge, everything looks blue as they look abroad, and it is not so easy for them to trust in the Lord and do good, waiting patiently for the Lord's appearing. These natural infirmities and weaknesses of ours render it hard

to drag our flesh along the road to Heaven. Besides this, who does not know that he bears a cage of unclean birds within himself? If my passions were all naturally on God's side, and would, without Grace, run towards Heaven, then there might be no difficulty in holding on the way. But, alas, the whole of our nature, when let alone, strains and tugs to go back to the land of Egypt!

And sometimes it seems as if our baser passions would get the victory and compel us to wear, once more, the galling yoke, and to fret under the fierce bondage of the Pharaoh of Hell. It must not be, it shall not be! But, O God, save me from that evil man, myself. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul said so, and we have often had to say it. And when living nearest to God, we have had to groan most over indwelling sin! Besides our flesh, however, my Brothers and Sisters, we are all conscious of other foes in our way to Heaven. For instance, there is the world. Can you mix with it and obtain from it any quickening in the spiritual life?

You are compelled to mix in it. Your business calls you. Common society demands of you that you should, in some measure, mix with the world, for if you are not to speak to sinners, you must go out of the world altogether. But is it not hard work, after a week, perhaps, of toil with ungodly, blaspheming workmen, to come up to the House of God with the mind quite calm? To be in business with its worries, and its cares, and in the world with its customs, and its maxims, and still to be a child of God is not easy!

Ah, you must be a child of God, indeed, to remain true in such a world as this! Sometimes the world persecutes the Christian. And it is not always the easiest thing to fight with old Giant Grim and keep the middle of the way and overcome him. Then there is that Vanity Fair, and he is a man, indeed, who can turn a deaf ear to all that crying, "Buy, buy, buy!" Worst of all there is Madam Bubble with her sweet speech, and her words softer than butter, while inwardly they are drawn swords. You know how Mr. Standfast had to take to his knees before he could get rid of that old witch when she offered him all sorts of delights, having caught him just in the frame for it, when he said he was as poor as an owlet, and weary and faint. Then it was she offered him all that is fleshly and pleasant—only tears and prayers got him out of that difficulty. "The righteous shall hold on his way." O God, You have said it, but if You had not said so, we should have declared that in such a world as this it would be impossible for a Christian, through a life of trial, to maintain his integrity!

Then there is the devil. We put him last, for he is the most terrible foe. When he stretches his feet across the middle of the way and swears that he will spill our souls and we shall go no farther. When he brings the past up and tells us of our unfaithfulness. When he insinuates that there is no hereafter, that there is no Heaven, and that our faith is all a foolish invention, and an old wives' fable. And then when he holds out present enjoyment and present gain and tells us that if we do not get these we shall have nothing—and hisses out the accusation that we are hypocrites, and I know not what—ah, then, unless we carry the true Jerusalem blade of the Word of God, and have the Grace of God to nerve our arm while we wield that sword of the Spirit, we shall not be "more than conquerors," but die on the road!

It is difficult for us to persevere for awhile, but it is difficult in the extreme to do so to the end. To get to Heaven is no child's work. He that gets there will have to fight for every inch of the road. And when he gets there, oh, how he will clap his hands as he looks back upon the danger! How he will shout with them that triumph when he once finds himself emancipated from 10,000 dangers, and

"with God eternally shut in."

III. Thirdly, and, I trust, most comforting to our souls, the PERSEVERANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN IS GUARANTEED. Would you prefer to hear one or two of the passages of Scripture read which guarantee the perseverance of Believers? I have little time this morning, but here is one, the 32nd chapter of Jeremiah 40:1-16 th verse: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me."

There is a double blessing—God will not depart from His people—His people shall not depart from Him. Thus doubly are they kept by Divine Grace. Our Savior's words in the sixth chapter of John, at the 39th and 40th verses, are sweetly to the same import: "This is the Father's which has sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

You know that memorable passage a little farther on—the 10th chapter of John, 28th and 29th verses: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." If more were needed, you might turn to that inexpressibly precious passage in the eighth chapter of Romans, where, towards the close, the Apostle, having challenged Heaven, and earth, and Hell, to condemn the Believer, says, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The beloved Apostle John, to quote from him once more, has told us in the 19th verse of the second chapter of his first Epistle, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things."

These are just a handful of texts, and a mere handful from a vast mass. So clear is the doctrine of the Final Perseverance of the Saints that I venture to assert boldly that if the Bible does not teach it, it does not teach anything at all! If that is not a clear doctrine of Revelation, then neither is the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, nor, indeed, any doctrine, and the Bible must be a mere wax nose, to be molded according to our will.

But, Beloved, there are these considerations which make the perseverance of the Christian certain to us. Unless the Christian shall persevere, the eternal purpose of God will be defeated! For from the beginning God has chosen His people unto holiness, to be set apart for His service, to be purified by His Grace that they may be presented at last without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. If Believers do not persevere, we have shown that they must perish as other apostates do! Therefore, since the purpose of God for the sanctification and safety of His chosen cannot be frustrated, and the design of the Most High stands fast, we believe that the righteous shall hold on his way.

In addition to this, the work of Jesus Christ would be of no use unless the blood-washed held on their way. The Lord Jesus has redeemed His people from among men! But, if, though they have been redeemed, they should not persevere unto the end they would perish—then it would follow that Christ shed His blood in vain! Then He bought those whom He will never have! He suffered for the sins of men who afterwards have to suffer for their own sins—which always seems to us to be a supposition filled with blasphemous impossibility—that Christ should be a Surety for men's sins, and be punished in their place, and yet those men should be punished for the sins which were laid upon their Scapegoat! Such must be emphatically the case, Brethren, unless those who are redeemed by blood persevere to the end. Jesus has evidently taken their sins, and taken them in vain and suffered for them in vain. He has been their Substitute, and yet these men perish! Moreover, through the righteousness of Christ, Believers are justified—they are declared to be no longer under the Law. But if they do not persevere in holiness, they perish! How can he perish who is justified? How shall he be condemned who is not under the Law, and consequently has no Law which can condemn him? The thing becomes impossible! We are involved in a mesh of difficulties, a labyrinth from which we cannot escape if we suppose it to be possible for a saint to finally fall from Grace.

Moreover, all true Believers are one with Christ. They are married to Him. Shall Christ lose His spouse? They are members of His body—they are declared to be parts of Himself! And shall Christ be dismembered? Shall He be a dislocated, disjointed, broken-up humanity? No! The Church is His fullness—the fullness of Him that fills all in all. If Jesus saves not His Church, He is not a perfect Christ—He is a maimed and wounded Savior! My Brothers and Sisters, the Lord Jesus Christ has gone to Heaven as our Representative—He represents every Believer. Does He represent those who shall ultimately be cast into Hell? Has He gone to prepare a place for Believers? Yes! Then they shall have the place prepared for them, for otherwise the places will be prepared, but the people will not come.

Has he not said that He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him? How, then, shall it be possible for those who have come to God by Him to perish, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them? Paul uses an overwhelming argument which I cannot this morning open up in full, but it has a triple power about it. "If," said he, "when we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." If when we were enemies, without a thought towards God, He reconciled us, much more will He save us now that we are His children!

If we were reconciled, much more shall we be saved, which is by far the least difficult work of the two! And if the death of Christ sufficed to reconcile us, what shall not the life of the Glorious, Immortal Savior do? Surely if the death has done so much, the life shall do yet more, and it shall be true as it is written, "Because I live, you shall live also." Further, my Brethren, as we have spoken of the Father and of the Son, there is the Holy Spirit's work to be taken into consideration. He dwells in us! Shall He be expelled? It is written that we are the temples of the Holy Spirit— shall the temples of the Holy Spirit become like the temples of Jove or of Saturn? Shall they be given up to the moles and the bats, degraded and defiled? God forbid!

He that dwells there will drive out the foe and maintain a shrine for Himself in purity. The Holy Spirit has begun to sanctify us. Will He begin and not conclude? Shall the Holy Spirit be defeated

by the devil and the flesh? Shall the banner of the devil be hung in Satan's hall because he has overcome the elect? Beloved, God gave the victory to Satan for a moment in the garden of Eden, but with the determination to win it from him. And He has bound captivity captive, and there shall be none of the spoils of the elect left in the hands of the enemy. God shall be conqueror all through the campaign—and at the last the Spirit shall not be defeated in a single heart where He came to dwell!

Let us rejoice, then, that when we consider the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it does seem impossible that the righteous should be lost. They must, therefore, hold on their way. Beloved, let us fall back upon this Truth of God in our times of worst discouragement. And if any say, "This is not a practical truth, but calculated to lull us into slumber," let us prove, by our activity, that they err, not knowing the Truth of God. I can never conceive that it dispirits the soldier, when he is fighting, to tell him that he must win the victory!

This is what Cromwell's ironsides said when they saw the great general riding along the ranks, "'Tis he!" they said, "'tis he!" They felt the victory was sure where Cromwell was, and like thunderbolts they dashed upon their enemies until, as thin clouds before the tempest, the foemen flew apace. The certainty of victory gives strength to the arm that wields the sword. To say to the Christian you shall persevere till you get to the journey's end—will that make him sit down on the next mile-stone? No! He will climb the mountain, wiping the sweat from his brow! And as he looks upon the plain he will descend with surer and more cautious footsteps, because he knows he shall reach the journey's end.

God will speed the ship over the waves into the desired haven—will the conviction of that on the part of the captain make him neglect the vessel? Yes, if he is a fool! But if he is a man in his wits, the very certainty that he shall cross the deep will only strengthen him in time of storm to do what he would not have dreamt of doing if he had been afraid the vessel would be cast away. Brothers and Sisters, let this doctrine impel us to a holy ardency of watchfulness, and may the Lord bless us and enable us to persevere to the end.

IV. Lastly, PERSEVERANCE IS GUARANTEED, BUT NOT TO EVERYBODY. There are some here who are not believers in Christ. A text rose up last night out of the Bible and struck me very painfully. I was afraid, as I read it, that some of you would persevere to the end and would go to Hell, for I read these words, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." I wondered whether Christ would say that of some of you. I am afraid for you. You have been warned. You have heard the Gospel. You have been entreated to wash in the Fountain but you will not come. You have put off many and many a stroke of conscience, and said, "Go your way. When I have a more convenient season I will send for you."

Now, mind, mind lest Christ should say, "Let him alone. He is unjust, let him be unjust still. He is prayerless, let him be prayerless still. He never feels the Word, let him be unfeeling still. He is a tearless, Christless soul—he shall be so forever." God forbid it! Do not any of you who are in that case go home and talk about the comfortable doctrine I have preached! If it is nothing to you, you are like the poor shivering outcast in the street who sees Christmas festivities through the window in which he has no share.

Go home, and God break your heart over this! May God cause you to mourn that there is no gracious perseverance for you, because you have no Grace to persevere in! And that if you persevere in the road you are now in, it will only be to keep to the road of destruction that will at last end in the dreadful terminus of Hell-fire. There are, on the other hand, some of you who have made a profession of faith. It may be these hands baptized you in the name of the Lord Jesus, in this pool beneath. Ah, well, Christ has not said that you shall all persevere. Perhaps you made a profession merely to please parents, or friends, or to do what seemed to be a custom with others.

Perhaps you never had a deep sense of sin. Perhaps you never did rest in Christ. I pray God that you may not persevere, but may repent and begin anew! Do not say, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace. Come as a poor sinner to Christ and you will never be cast away! But it you merely make a profession of a notional religion that you have in your head, and not in your heart, it will be all ill with you at the last. You will be like the plant which had not much earth—when the sun arose, the root was scorched and the plant withered away.

May God give you Grace—may you be deeply rooted with Divine Grace in your heart. But it is to you who have faith in God—it is to you that this final perseverance is promised! And I ask you to come this morning and take it. "How," you say, "shall I take it?" Why, come to Jesus just as you did when you first came! That is the true final perseverance—to come always to Christ, having nothing in self, but having all in Him! I hope you and I feel, this morning, that the sweet verse of Toplady still fits our case—

"Nothing in my hand I bring— Simply to Your Cross I cling. Naked, come to You for dress. Helpless, look to You for Grace. Foul, I to the Fountain fly— Wash me, Savior, or I die."

Keep to that, never get an inch beyond that. Stand at the foot of the Cross and view the sin-atoning blood! Rest there living! Rest there dying! And then when your spirit mounts to Heaven, may your last song be of being washed in blood. And in Heaven may it be said of you as of your fellow sinners, "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The Lord bless you and keep you, and cause His face to shine upon you, and give you peace. Amen and Amen!

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THE HUNGER-BITE

NO. 1510

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"His strength shall be starved."

Job 18:12.

Bildad was declaring the history of the hypocritical, presumptuous and wicked man. And he intended, no doubt, to insinuate that Job was just such a person—that he had been a deceiver and that, therefore, God's Providence had at last revealed him and was visiting him for his sins. In this, Bildad was guilty of great injustice to his friend. All the three miserable comforters of Job were mistaken in the special aim of their discourses and yet, concerning the speeches of each one, it may be said that their general statements were, for the most part, true. They uttered truths, but they drew mistaken inferences and they were ungenerous in the imputations which they cast upon Job. It is true that, sooner or later, either in this world or the next, all conceivable curses fall upon the hypocrite and the ungodly man, but it is not true that when a Christian is in trouble, we are to judge that he is suffering for his sin! It would be both cruel and wicked for us to think so.

Nevertheless, because what Bildad said was, in the most part, true, though unkindly and wrongly applied, we feel ourselves quite at liberty to take a text out of his mouth. It is true of many persons that their strength shall be starved—and I shall speak concerning these words in three ways, noticing, first, that this is a curse which will surely be fulfilled upon the ungodly. Secondly, this is a discipline which God often exercises upon the self-righteous when He means to save them. And, thirdly—and it is grievous work to have to say it—this is a form of chastisement upon Believers who are not living near to God as they ought to be—their strength becomes starved or weak.

I. First we shall view our text as A CURSE WHICH WILL BE FULFILLED UPON THE UNGODLY. "His strength shall be starved." It is not said that they are starved merely, but that their strength is. And if their strength is starved, what must their weakness be? When a man's strength is bitten with hunger, what a hunger must be raging throughout the whole of his nature! Now, a large proportion of men make their gold to be their strength, their castle and their high tower and, for a while they rejoice in their wealth and find great satisfaction in gathering it, in seeing it multiplied and in hoping, by-and-by, that it shall come to great store.

But every ungodly man ought to know that riches are not forever and often they take to themselves wings and fly away! Men of colossal fortunes have dwindled down to beggars—they made great ventures and realized great failures. None are secure. As long as a man is in this world, he is like a ship at sea, he is still liable to be shipwrecked. O you that are boasting in your gold and calling

your treasure your chief good, the day may come when your strength will be starved and, like the victims of famine, you will find yourselves helpless—you whose money answered all things and made you feel omnipotent!

But it will be said, of course, that it is not in every case that the ungodly man's strength of wealth is starved and I willingly concede it. But it comes to pass in another fashion. How many there are who keep their wealth and yet, for all that, are very poor? It is not that the gold goes, but it stays by them and does not comfort them! I do not know which would be the worse of the two—to be hungry for lack of bread, or to have abundance of bread and yet remain hungry, eat whatever you might. Thousands in this world are precisely in that condition! They have all that heart could wish, if their heart were right, but it seems nothing to them because they have envy in their spirits.

Remember Haman. He is invited to the banquet of wine. He is a chief noble of the empire. He has his monarch's favor. But all that avails him nothing because Mordecai sits in the gate. Envy has cankered his soul and if he were able to mount to the throne of Ahasuerus, himself, it would make no difference to him—he would be unhappy there—and all because one poor Jew will not bow to him! There are persons going up and down Cheapside every day who are intolerably wretched about a something which they would hardly like to mention to reasonable men. A wretched trifle frets them like a moth in a garment and all the glory of their position is eaten away—their strength is starved.

Where the canker does not happen to be envy, it may come to be a passion akin to it, namely, revenge. Alas, that we should have to talk of revenge as still existing upon this earth after Christ has been here and taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Yet there are ungodly men who even think it right to foster resentments. A word uncourteously spoken; a deed unkindly done will be laid up and an opportunity sought for retaliation. Or, if not, a hope will be cherished that some blight, or blow from God may fall upon the offender. And if that offender still bears himself aloft, lives right merrily and makes no recompense for the wrong done, the aggrieved one has eaten out his own heart with chagrin and the strength of his wealth has been starved! Where this has not been the case, it has, perhaps, more frequently happened that persons have been afflicted by avarice. Nothing more tends to impoverish a man than being rich. It is a hard thing to find a rich man who enjoys riches! A rich man is a man who has all he wants and many a man is rich on a few shillings a week. A poor man is a man who does not get what he wants and people with thousands a year are on that list. In fact, where shall you find such poverty as among those poor rich men? The miser is often pictured as afraid to sleep because thieves may break in—he rises at midnight to look over his hoarded treasure! He is afraid lest bonds, securities, mortgages and the like may, after all, turn out to be mere waste paper! He frets and stews and mars his life because he has too great a means of living—such a man may not be very common, but it is an easy thing to find people who have very much and yet are just as careful, just as grasping, just as fretful after more as if they had but newly started in business and were almost penniless—their strength is starved.

If somebody had told them, "You will one day reach to so many thousand pounds," they would have said, "Ah, if ever I get that amount I shall be perfectly satisfied." They have saved that sum long ago and 10 times as much! And now they say, "Ah, you don't know what it is to want money till you have a good portion of it. Now we have so much we must have more. We are up to our

necks in the golden stream and we must swim where the bottom cannot be touched." Poor fools! They have enough water to float them, but they must have enough to drown in! One stick is a capital thing for a lame man, as I know right well, but a thousand sticks would make a terrible load for a man to carry! When anyone has a sufficiency, let him be thankful for so convenient a staff, but if he will not use what he has until he has accumulated much more, the comfort of his substance is gone and his strength is starved.

There are cases in which the hunger-bite does not take a shape which I could well describe. Instances are met with of persons who have made their gold their strength who are altogether unrestful. Some have thought that their brain was diseased, but it is likely that the disease was lower down in their hearts. We have known wealthy men who believed themselves to be poor and were haunted with the idea that they should die in the poor house, even when they were worth a million! And others who have quarreled about the division of a farthing, when the loss of 10,000 pounds would have been a flea bite to them! In great substance they have found no substantial rest.

They have often wished they could be as cheerful as their own menial servants. As they have lolled in their carriage and looked at the rosy cheeks of the urchins in the village, they have coveted their health and felt willing to wear their rags if they could possess their appetites. As they have looked upon poor persons with family loves and domestic joys—and felt that their own joys were few in that direction—they have greatly envied them. It is a great mercy when the worldling is made uneasy in this world—it is a ground for hope that God means to wean him from his idols! And, alas, there are some who do not rest here and will not rest hereafter. They have no rest in all that God has given them under the sun and yet they will not fly to Him who is the soul's sure repose. I need not dwell for another moment upon the failure of the strength which is found in riches. It is the same with all sorts of men who try to find comfort out of Christ and away from God—"their strength shall be starved."

What a melancholy instance of this is Solomon. He had an opportunity to try everything in his quest for the chief good and, in fact, he did test everything—so that we need not repeat the experiment. He was the great alchemist who tried to turn all manner of metals into gold, but failed with them all. At one time he was building great palaces and when the building fit was on him, he seemed happy. But when once the gorgeous piles were finished, he said, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity." Then he would take to gardening and to the planting of rare plants and trees and to the digging of fountains. But when he had done enough of this he looked upon his orchards and vineyards and again muttered, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity."

Then he thought he would try laughter and madness— he would test the comic side of human life, as well as the useful. So he plunged into all manner of pleasures and gathered to himself singing men and singing women and all delights of the flesh. But after he had drank deep of that cup, he said, again, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity." Poor Solomon! He had great strength, but his strength was starved! He looked here and there, up and down, on the right hand and on the left and found no bread for his soul. He snatched at shadows and tried to feed himself with bubbles! He was devoured with hunger in the midst of plenty! And where the humble people of Israel were blessing the God who satisfied their mouth with good things and renewed their youth like the eagles, poor Solomon was complaining that there was nothing new under the sun and that it was better for a

man not to be born than to have lived at all!

Now remark that if this hunger does not come upon the ungodly man during the former part of his life, it will come to him at the close of it. While we have much to do and our minds are occupied, we may be able to put off thought, but when, at last, God sends us that messenger with the bony hand, whose oratory is soul piercing—the dullness of whose eyeless eyes darts fire into the soul—then will all human strength be starved! When death is left alone with the man, then he perceives that his money bags contain nothing precious because he must leave them. How now with his broad acres? How now with his large estates? How now with his palatial residence? How now with all that he called dear? How now with his doctor's degree and his learning? How now with his fame and his honor? How now, even, with his domestic comforts and the joys of life? They are all hunger-bitten!

When he comes to die they cannot help him. The soul that is within him, which he would not allow to speak, now opens its hungry mouth and cries, "You have denied me bread! God, and God alone, could fill me and you have denied me God! And now you feel the hunger which has come upon me and you must feel it and feel it, too, forever." Alas, alas, alas, for a man to have spent all his life in earning a disappointment, laboring hard to lose his soul, sweating and straining to lose the race, tugging and toiling to be damned! But that is the case of many a man and that is where the tide drifts with all mankind who seek for lasting good apart from God and apart from the blood and righteousness of God's dear Son. Of each one of them it shall be said, "His strength shall be starved."

I have said these things mournfully to my own heart. But I would say to any of you who may not be rich, but who are looking for your good in your own little home and the comforts of it—any of you young men who are seeking the great object of life in learning or the like—if you are not living for God, your strength will be starved! If you do not "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," whatever you gain and however satisfied you may be for a little while, an awful hunger must ultimately come upon you and you will then lament that you spent your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfies not!

II. Briefly, in the second place, we shall speak of our text as indicating A KIND OF DISCIPLINE THROUGH WHICH GOD PUTS THE SELFRIGHTEOUS WHEN HE MEANS TO SAVE THEM. Many people are very religious and yet are not saved. They are unsaved because they go about to establish their own righteousness and have not submitted themselves to the righteousness which is of God in Jesus Christ. Now, these persons may, for a while, be very well satisfied with their own righteousness and if they are not the children of God they will be satisfied with it for life. Some of them talk in this way—"I don't know that I ever wronged anybody. I have always been honest and honorable in my transactions and I have brought up my children respectably. I have had a hard fight of it and, for all that, nobody could say that I ever disgraced my character."

It is not very long ago that I was driven by a cabman, an aged man, and when I got out of his cab I referred to his age and he remarked upon it himself. I said, "Well, I trust when this life is over you will have a portion in a better world." "Yes, I think so, Sir," he said. "I was never drunk, that I know of, in my life. I was always reckoned a civil man. I never used bad language and I go to Church sometimes." He seemed to be perfectly satisfied and was quite astonished that I did not express my assurance of his safety. His confidence is the common reliance of all classes of Englishmen

and though they may not always put it in that shape, yet that is the notion—that by a sort of goodness, a very poor and mangled goodness—men may, after all, enter Heaven.

Now, when God means to save a man, the hunger of the heart comes in and devours all his boasted excellence. Why, a spiritually hungry soul would take 50 years of self-righteousness and swallow them up like a morsel and cry for more! Our goodness is nothing compared with the demands of the Law and the necessities of the case. Our fine righteousnesses, how they shrivel up like autumn leaves when the Spirit of God acts as a frost to them! Our virtues are as a meadow in the spring bedecked with golden kingcups, but when the Spirit of God blows upon it, the grass withers and the flowers fade, for all flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of grass. It is a part of the operation of the Holy Spirit to wither all the goodliness of human nature and to destroy all those lovely flowers of natural virtue in which we put such store, cutting them down as with a mower's scythe. In truth, there is none good, no, not one! We are all shut up in unbelief and sin by nature. In the best of natures, sin affects the whole body, "the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint"—and it is a great blessing when the Holy Spirit makes us feel this! Painful is the feeling, but blessed is the result when, once and for all, our strength is starved.

Yes, and there are some who are very satisfied because, in addition to a commendable life, they have performed certain ceremonies to which they impute great sanctity. There is a theory abroad, nowadays, which some persons who are not in either the lunatic or the idiot asylum believe, namely, the theory that sacramental performances convey Grace! It is wonderful how a rational being can ever think so, but there are persons who are, apparently rational in other things, who believe that the sprinkling of drops of water upon an infant's brow regenerates it! They believe, also, the absurdity that the eating of bread and the drinking of wine really convey Christ to the soul, and so on! They insist that aqueous applications and materialistic festivities can bring spiritual good to the heart—a monstrous doctrine worthy of the priests of Baal—but so foolish as to make one doubt his ears when he hears it stated!

Because they have gone through these operations and have been confirmed and I do not know what besides, many are content! Others, who happen to belong to a dissenting community, have passed through the ordeal of joining the Church or have attended class meetings and have subscribed to the various societies and so, they think, they are saved! Heirs of Hell will rest content with such outward things, but heirs of Heaven never can! Their strength, if they make external religion their strength, will, byand-by, be starved and they will cry out," My God, my soul pants for You as the hart pants for the water-brooks. I cannot be satisfied with outward forms, I need inward Grace and I cannot be content with being told that the Grace went with the form! I need to know the Grace of God in truth! I long to feel it! I pine to exhibit it in my own life."

To be told I was born again when I was a babe will not satisfy me! I need to feel the inner life, the new life of God within my spirit! To be told that I did eat Christ when I ate the bread will not content me! My heart longs to know that Christ is really the hope of Glory in me and that I am living upon Him! If I cannot have communion with God and with His dear Son for myself in my very soul, I turn with loathing from every substitute—ritualistic, priestly, or otherwise! Beloved, I would have you flee from every sacrament to the Savior! I would have you flee away from ceremonies to the Cross of Christ! There is your only hope! Look to Him by faith—for all the rest without this is but outward and carnal—and can minister no good to your spirit. May your strength be starved if you are

resting in anything which is external and unspiritual!

Many a person has known what it is to have this hunger-bite go right through everything he rested in. I once knew what it was to get a little comfort from my prayers before I found the Savior. But when the Spirit of God dealt with me, I saw that my prayers needed praying over again. I thought I had some sort of repentance and I began to be content with it. But when the Spirit of God came, I found that my repentance needed to be repented of! I had felt some confidence in my Bible readings and hoped that my regular attendance at public worship would bring me salvation, but I found that I was only reading the Word of God—not believing it! I was hearing it, but not accepting it! I was increasing my knowledge and my responsibility and yet was not rendering obedience to God!

Dear Soul, if you are resting anywhere short of Christ, may your strength be starved! You are at your strongest when you are utter weakness apart from Him. When you rest in Him completely and only in Him, then is salvation accomplished in you, but not till then! May God, in His infinite mercy, grant that all your strength apart from Christ may be starved and that speedily!

III. Lastly, and very earnestly—and perhaps this last part may have more reference to most of you than anything I have said—I believe THERE ARE MANY OF GOD'S SERVANTS WHOSE STRENGTH IS LAMENTABLY HUNGER-BITTEN. In this age we are all busy and through being busy we are apt to neglect the soul-feeding ordinances. I mean the reading of Scripture, the hearing of the Word, meditation upon it, prayer and communion with God. Some of you do not rise as soon as you might in the morning and prayer is hurried over. And too often at eventide you are half-asleep with the many cares of the day and prayer is offered in a slovenly way.

Nor is this all, for during the day when, if you were as you should be, you would be praying without ceasing, there is this to think of and that and the other—and such a pressure of business that prayers are few. How can you pray? You did at one time! You used to get a text of Scripture in the morning and chew it all day—and you used to get much sweetness out of it and your soul grew. But now, instead of a text of Scripture, you have pressing engagements as soon as you are out of bed! You would, now and then, steal into a mid-day Prayer Meeting, perhaps, or get two or three minutes alone. But you have gradually dropped that habit and you have felt justified in doing so for, "really, time is so precious and there is so much to do in this age of competition."

Dear Friend, I am not your judge, but let me suggest that you are becoming starved through not feeding upon the Word of God. Souls cannot be strong without spiritual meat any more than bodies can be well when meals are neglected. There is a good rule I have heard mothers say about children and chickens—"little and often"—and I think it is true with Christians. They need little and often during the day—not a long passage of Scripture, perhaps memory would fail—but a short passage now and a short passage then and a little prayer here and a little prayer there. It is wonderful how souls grow in that way. Alas, I fear all this is neglected and spiritual strength is starved! Let us begin, from this time forward, to give attention to the sustenance of our souls! Let us daily feed upon the Word of God that we may grow—and so shall our strength no more be starved.

END OF VOLUME 25

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Chapter 58

Job 19,25 #2909 - Job's Sure Knowledge

JOB'S SURE KNOWLEDGE

NO. 2909

A SERMON

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"For I know that my Redeemer lives."

Job 19:25.

I DARESAY you know that there are a great many difficulties about the translation of this passage. It is a very complicated piece of Hebrew, partly, I suppose, owing to its great antiquity, being found in what is, probably, one of the oldest Books of the Bible. Besides that, different persons have tried to translate it according to their own varying views. The Jews stiffly fight against the notion of the Messiah and His Resurrection being found in this verve, while many Christian commentators see here everything that we can find in the New Testament and translate the passage as though Job were as well instructed in this matter as we are now that Christ "has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." Others say that while there is, no doubt, a reference to the Person and the Resurrection of Christ, yet it is not so vivid as some seem to think.

Personally, I am quite satisfied with the translation given in our Authorized Version, yet it has occurred to me that possibly, Job, himself, may not have known the full meaning of all that he said. Imagine the Patriarch driven into a corner, badgered by his so-called friends, charged by them with all manner of evils until he is quite boiling over with indignation and, at the same time, smarting under terrible bodily diseases and the dreadful losses which he has sustained—and, at last, he bursts out with this exclamation, "I shall be vindicated one day. I am sure I shall. I know that my Vindicator lives. I am sure that there is One who will vindicate me and if He never clears my name and reputation as long as I live, it will be done afterwards. There must be a just God in Heaven who will see me righted and even though worms devour my body until the last relic of it has passed away, I do verily believe that, somehow, in the faroff ages, I shall be vindicated."

He throws his faith forward to some tremendous era which he anticipates and he declares that there will be found then, as he believes there is alive even now, a Goel, a Kinsman, an Avenger who will stand up for him and set right all this wrong. He cannot conceive that God will permit such gross injustice to be done to a man who has walked as he has walked, to be brought so low and then to be stung with such unfounded

Volume 50 1accusations. He is positive that there must be a Vindicator for him somewhere and he appeals to that Last Dread Tribunal which he dimly sees in the far-off future and he believes that someone will be found to stand up successfully for him there.

If that is the case, you will see that Job was driven, perhaps beyond his former knowledge, by his very pains and trials. He may but dimly have perceived a future state, but his condition revealed to him the necessity for such a state. He felt that if the righteous suffer so much in this life, often apparently without any just cause—and if the wicked prosper—then there must be another state in which God will set right the wrongs of this and rectify the apparent inequalities of His Providence here. Job realized that and, possibly, his deep griefs may have been the channel of another Revelation to him, namely, that there was a mysterious Divine Being concerning whom that dark prophecy had been handed down from the Garden of Eden, itself, "The Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." He felt sure that for those who were wronged as he had been, there must be an Advocate provided. He had before complained that there was no Umpire—no "Daysman"—to stand between them both, but now he asks for an Advocate and he feels that there must be one, yes, he knows that there is and he declares that somewhere or other, there is an Advocate who will, some day or other, set right all that concerns him, let things go now as they may! So possibly Job was seeing more than he had ever seen before of that mysterious One who pleads the cause of those who are oppressed and shows Himself strong on their behalf at the right hand of God!

I am not going to enter into any discussion of the matter, but shall use the passage in the full Evangelical sense. Job may have known all that we now know concerning Christ, for he may have had special Revelations and manifestations. We do not find all that we know in his Book, yet he may have meant all that I shall say in this discourse. If he did not mean it, I trust that we shall, under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit!

I. I shall speak first upon this point—JOB HAD A TRUE FRIEND AMID HIS MISTAKEN FRIENDS.

These men were miserable comforters, but Job had a real Comforter. They were estranged from him, but he had a true Friend left, so he said, "I know that my Goel lives." That is the Hebrew word. I suppose you all know that it means the person nearest akin to him who, because he was nearest akin, was bound to take up his cause. If a man was slain by misadventure, the goel pursued the one who had slain him and endeavored to avenge his death. If a person fell into debt and was sold into slavery because of the debt, his goel, if he was able, had to redeem him—and hence we get the word, "redeemer." Or if estates became mortgaged through poverty, it was the duty of the next of kin to redeem them, if possible, and so, again, we get the idea of redeemer. But the word, "goel," is more comprehensive than the word, "redeemer," so we will begin with its first meaning. Job, in the midst of his false friends, had One whom he called his Kinsman. "I know," he said, "that my Kinsman lives." We interpret that word, "Kinsman," as meaning our Lord Jesus Christ and we sing—

"Jesus, our Kinsman and our God, Arrayed in majesty and blood, You are our life, our souls in Thee Possess a full felicity."

I want you, just now, to think of Jesus Christ as your Kinsman if you are really in Him, for He is, indeed, the nearest akin to you of any—bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. "Forasmuch

then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also, Himself, likewise took part of the same." Now, your own flesh and blood, as you call them, are not so near to you in real kinship as Jesus is, for, often you will find flesh and blood near akin by birth but not by sympathy. Two brothers may be, spiritually, very different from one another and may not be able to enter into each other's trials at all. But this Kinsman participates in every pang that rends your heart. He knows your constitution, your weakness, your sensitiveness, the particular trial that cuts you to the quick—for in all your afflictions He was afflicted. Thus He is nearer to you than the nearest of earthly kin can possibly be, for He enters more fully into the whole of your life! He seems to have gone through it all and He still goes through it all in His constant sympathy with you.

Christ's kinship with His people is to be thought of with great comfort because it is voluntary. We have some, perhaps, who are akin to us, yet who wish they were not. Many a time, when a rich man has poor relations, he is half ashamed of the kinship between them and wishes that it did not exist. Shame upon him for thinking so! But our Lord Jesus Christ's relationship to us is no accident of birth—it was voluntarily assumed by him! He would be one with us because He loved us. Nothing could satisfy Him till He had come to this earth and been made one flesh with His Church. "For this cause," it is said concerning marriage, "shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery," said Paul, "but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." And, verily, so it was with Christ, as the poet sings—

"'Yes,' says the Lord, 'with her I'll go Through all the depths of care and woe And on the Cross will even dare The bitter pangs of death to bear.'"

This He did because He would be one flesh with His people and that is a very near kinship which comes as close as that, and which willingly does so—not by force, but by voluntary choice.

And further, this is a kinship of which Jesus is never ashamed. We have known or heard of the prosperous man who has been ashamed of his poor old mother and of the educated young man who has looked down with scorn upon the very father who has toiled and slaved in order to give him the advantages of such an education. It is disgraceful that there should ever be such ingrates, but it is written concerning our great Kinsman, "He that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren." He declares to the whole universe, concerning those persecuted ones—those who are ridiculed as being fools, "They are My brethren." The Prince of Glory, whose fingers are adorned with stars of light like rings of priceless value, calls the poor bedridden woman who is a child of God, His sister! And He calls the humble, toiling, laboring man who walks with Him, His brother! And He is not ashamed to do so. Think, Beloved, with most intense gratitude, of this great Kinsman of yours who is so near of kin to you— voluntarily near of kin and not ashamed to acknowledge the kinship!

Remember, too, that your Kinsman lives in this respect—that He will always be your Kinsman! The closest ties of earthly relationship must, to a great extent, end in death, for there are no husbands and wives, as such, in Heaven. There cannot be, "for in the Resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in Heaven." There are other ties, of a spiritual kind, that will far outshine the best of bonds that linked us together here, but, when all other ties are broken, Jesus will always be our Kinsman, our Brother! We shall find the fraternal relationship better understood, more fully enjoyed and more clearly manifested up there than it can ever be down here. When all other relationships are growing dim, this blessed eternal kinship will shine out

the more brightly! So I want all of you who truly love the Lord Jesus Christ to interpret my text in this way—"I know that my Kinsman lives"— and to feel how honored you are to have such a Kinsman as Christ is! Ruth was highly privileged in having such a kinsman as Boaz who was not content for her to glean in his fields, but who took her as his wife. And your great Kinsman intends that you should be betrothed to Him forever and He will bring you to His heavenly home at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

There was a second meaning to the word, "goel," arising out of the first—Job's Kinsman would become his Vindicator. It was the kinsman's duty to defend the rights of his needy relative, so Job intended here to say, "I know that my Vindicator lives." And the Lord Jesus Christ is the Vindicator of His people from all false charges. It is not easy for Christians to live in this world without being slandered and misrepresented. Certainly, those of us who live in the full blaze of public life can hardly utter a word without having it twisted, tortured and misconstrued. We are often represented as saying what we loathe even to think—yet we must not be surprised at that. The world loves lying—it always has done so and it always will. Even in private life you may meet with similar cruel treatment—there are some of God's best children who lie under reproach by the year together. The very things which they would not tolerate for a moment are laid to their charge and they are thought to be guilty of them—and even good people hold up their hands in pious horror at them though they are perfectly innocent all the while!

Well, Beloved, always remember that your Vindicator lives! Do not be too much concerned to clear your own character. Above all, do not attempt to vindicate yours in a court of law, but say to yourself, "I know that my Vindicator lives." When He comes, "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." His people may now be under a cloud, but, when He appears, the cloud shall break and their true glory shall be seen! The greater the censure under which any of us have unjustly lived on earth, the greater will be the joy and the honor which will be vouchsafed to us in the day when Christ shall clear our character from all the shameful aspersions that have been brought against us! All will be cleared up in that day, so leave the accusations alone, knowing that your Vindicator lives.

There is another most comforting thought—that our Vindicator will clear us from true charges as well as false ones. As for the false charges, what do they matter? It is the true ones that really concern us—can Christ clear us from them? Yes, that He can! Remember how the Apostle John writes, "If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." You see, it is not merely if we have been said to sin when we did not, but if we really sin, "we have an Advocate with the Father." O blessed Advocate, how do You clear Your people of the sin which they have actually committed? Why, in this way—He took it up Himself—the awful load of their guilt—and suffered the full penalty for it! So there He stands before the Eternal Throne to plead their cause and, as He does so, He says, "Those sins committed by My people—I have taken them upon Myself and suffered in the place of all who will believe in Me." O blessed Kinsman, how glorious are You in Your Grace, in that You have so completely undertaken our cause that You have been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in You!

Yes, Beloved, Jesus will plead the merit of His precious blood and His spotless righteousness and, before that powerful pleading, our sins and our transgressions shall sink beneath the flood and shall not be remembered against us any more forever!

In that day, too, our Vindicator will defend us against all the accusations of Satan. Our great adversary often assails and attacks us here— and the Lord says to him, as He did concerning Joshua the high priest, "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan; even the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!" We may tell the devil, when we stand foot to foot with him and are sore beset, that our Vindicator lives and we may quote to him that grand promise, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," because our Vindicator, who is to bruise the serpent's head, still lives! The old serpent may nibble at your heel for a while, as he did at your Master's, but you, in the strength of your Lord, shall bruise his head! And whatever other adversary of your soul there may be at any time, you can rest in quiet confidence. Even if that adversary is permitted to prevail over you for a while, say to him, "Rejoice not against me, O my enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

So you have two meanings of the word goel—my Kinsman, my Vindicator—lives. I hope you who are greatly tempted and tried and you who are persecuted and oppressed will catch that second meaning and commit your cause unto God. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord." Be slow to anger! Fret not yourselves because of the wicked man that prospers in his evil way and think not of being revenged upon your oppressors! In patience and quietness possess your souls knowing that your time of vindication will surely come, for your Vindicator lives!

Then the third meaning of the word goel certainly is, "Redeemer," so Job could say, "I know that my Redeemer lives." As I have already said, the next of kin in the process of vindicating his poor kinsman was accustomed to redeem him from bondage, or to redeem any part of his estate that might be under mortgage. So, let us next think of how the Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us from bondage. Having broken the Law of God, we were in bondage to that Law. We had received the spirit of bondage again to fear. But we who have believed in Jesus, our Kinsman, can say that He has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us, and that we are no longer in bondage. We were also in bondage under sin, as Paul wrote, "I am carnal, sold under sin," but Christ has come and broken the power of sin in us so that its reigning power is subdued—and though it still strives to get the mastery and often makes us to groan within ourselves, even as Paul did, yet do we, with him, thank God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!

There are two redemptions—redemption by price and redemption by power, and both of these Christ has worked for us—by price, by His Sacrifice upon the Cross of Calvary—and by power, by His Divine Spirit coming into our heart and renewing our soul. Ought we not unceasingly to bless the Lord who has redeemed us from under the Law, having paid the penalty for the commands which we had broken and who has also redeemed us from the power of sin? "I know that my Redeemer lives," then I know that I am a free man, for if the Son makes us free, then are we free, indeed! I know that He paid the price for my soul's eternal redemption—then may my soul continually exult in Him and rejoice in the liberty with which He has made me free!

But, as I have already reminded you, the redeemer was also accustomed to redeem the estate as well as the person of his kinsman. We had lost everything. Father Adam had put everything under a heavy mortgage and we could not even meet the interest on it—but the whole estate is free from a mortgage now, even to Paradise itself! Does someone ask, "Is there not any mortgage even

upon Paradise?" I answer—No, for Christ said to the dying thief, "Today shall you be with Me in Paradise." So it is clear that He has entered Paradise and claimed it on His people's behalf. Jesus Christ has said, in the words of the Psalmist, "I restored that which I took not away." Bankrupt debtors, through the Lord's Sovereign Grace you are no longer under any liabilities because of your sin if Christ is accepted by you as your Goel and Redeemer! He has restored the estates to you which your first father, Adam, had lost. And He has made you heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ through the wondrous redemption which He worked for you on the Cross of Calvary!

Suck the honey, if you can, out of these three glorious Truths of God and you will be able to do so in proportion as you can personally use the words of the text, "'I know that my Redeemer lives.' I know that He lives who will vindicate my character and rectify my wrongs. I know, too, that He lives who has redeemed me from sin and Hell—and even though I die, I know that He will redeem me from the power of the grave and that He will enable me to say, 'O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?'"

Dwell on the remembrance that you have such a Divine Helper and then let us pass on to another thought at which I will only briefly hint as I proceed to another part of my theme.

II. The second point is this—JOB HAD REAL PROPERTY AMID ABSOLUTE POVERTY.

Job had lost everything—every stick and stone that he possessed. He had lost his children and he had lost his wife, too, for all practical purposes, for she had not acted like a wife to him in his time of trial. Poor Job—he had lost everything else, but he had not lost his Redeemer! Notice, he does not say, "I know that my wife and my children live," but he said, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Ah, "my Redeemer"—he has not lost Him, so he has the best of all possessions still left! Looking up to Him by faith, with the tears of joy standing in his eyes, he says, "Yes, He is my Redeemer and He still lives. I accept Him as mine and I will cling to Him forever." Can you, beloved Friends, not merely rejoice in Christ as the Redeemer, but also as your Redeemer? Have you personally accepted Him as your Redeemer? Have you personally trusted Him with your soul, wholly and really? And do you already feel in your own heart a kinship to this great Kinsman, a trust in this great Vindicator, a reliance upon His great Redemption? Another man's redemption is of no value to my soul— the sweetness lies in the little word, "my"—"my Redeemer." Luther used to say that the marrow of the Gospel is found in the pronouns and I believe it is—"My Redeemer." Say, with me, each one of you for himself or herself—

"My faith would lay her hand On that dear head of Yours, While like a penitent I stand, And there confess my sin. My soul looks back to see The burdens You did bear, When hanging on the cursed tree And hopes her guilt was there."

If you really do rely upon Christ's atoning Sacrifice and so take Him as your Redeemer, you may not only hope your guilt was there, but you may know that it was! There, poor man, you may not have a penny in your pocket, but if you can truly say, "my Redeemer," you are infinitely better off than a millionaire who cannot say that! You who know not where you will have a lodging tonight, if you can truly say, "my Redeemer," you need not envy the very angels of God, for in this respect, you are ahead even of them, for they can call Him, "Lord," but not "Redeemer"! He is not so near akin to them as He is to you, "for verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham." He took your Nature and mine, Beloved, for Christ became a Man! So

Job had something real and valuable left even when he had lost all his property.

III. Thirdly, Job seems to lay stress upon the word, "lives"—"I know that my Redeemer lives." This teaches us that JOB HAD A LIVING KINSMAN AMID A DYING FAMILY.

All his children were dead. We cannot easily estimate the full force of that blow upon the Patriarch's heart. The loss of one child is a very painful event, even when the child is a very little one and the parents have many others left. But it is a far worse bereavement when the children who are taken away are grown up, as Job's were. They were evidently a very united family who used to meet in each other's houses for mutual fellowship. They seem to have been a very happy family and they were certainly a family under very gracious influences, for Job was accustomed, after their days of festival, to offer sacrifices for them lest they should have sinned against the Lord. Altogether, it was a fine family— seven sons and three daughters—and now they were all gone at once! To lose all one's family at once like that is a heavy stroke that none can measure but those who have felt it. All were gone!—The whole ten at once! That was sad for poor Job, but it was most blessed that he was able to say, "Though my children are all dead, 'I know that my Redeemer lives.' He is not dead and in Him I find more than all that I have lost."

Look at your Lord, dear Friend, if you are mourning, just now, the sons of loved ones and see whether He is not better to you than ten sons and daughters! See whether there is not in His heart room enough for that affection which has been so rudely snapped, to grow again. The tendrils of your soul need something to cling to and to twist around—then let them wrap around Him! Rejoice that He lives in a dying world. If you walk through the cemetery, or stand by the open grave, how blessedly these words seem to fall upon your spirit—like the music of angels— "These are dead, but 'I know that my Redeemer lives'—lives on, lives in power, lives in happiness, lives with a life which He communicates to all who trust Him. He lives and therefore I shall live with Him! He lives and therefore the dead who are in Him shall live forever." O blessed Truth of God!

You will yourself die soon, dear Friend. No, I must correct myself—you will not die, for it is not death for one who knows the Savior to die. You will fall asleep in Him one of these days at the very hour that God has appointed—and when you open your eyes, it will not be in the narrow death chamber—you will not be on the bed of sickness. I think you will be startled to find yourself amid such new surroundings! "What is this I hear?" you will say. "Such music as this has never charmed me before! And what is that I see?" But you will not need to enquire, for you will know that face at once! You knew, while on earth, that Jesus still lived, but you will know it better then—when you lay aside these heavy optics that do but dim our sight and get into the pure spirit state and then see HIM! Oh, the bliss of that first sight of Christ! It seems to me as if that would gather up an eternity of delight into a single moment! That first glimpse of Him will be enough to make us swoon away with excessive rapture! I do verily think that some saints whom I have known have done just that—swooned away with the excess of joy that they have felt in their departing moments. I have, sounding in my ears just now, the voice of a dear Brother by whose bedside I sat for a little while before I came to this service. He said to me, "I shall be Home tonight, Pastor. I wanted to see your face once more before I went, but I shall be Home tonight and see the face of Jesus!" I hope you will all be prepared to die after that fashion. The godly old Negro said, "Our minister is dying full of life." That is the way to die—full of life! Because Jesus lives, we shall also live and we may well die full of life because of our union to Him!

IV. The last thought I want to leave with you is this—JOB HAD ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY AMID UNCERTAIN AFFAIRS.

He said, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Why, Job, I should have thought you would not have known anything for certain now! I should not have liked to insure Job's farm animals, or the houses in which his children met together to feast. Nothing seemed to be certain with Job but uncertainty—yet there was one thing concerning which he felt that he could put his foot down firmly and say, "'I know.' The winds may rage and the tempests roar, but they cannot shake this rock. 'I know.' 'I know.' 'I know!'" Beloved, is everything uncertain with you in this world? Of course it is, for it is so with everybody! But does it appear to be more uncertain with you than it does with anybody else? Does your business seem to be slipping away and every earthly comfort is threatening to disappear? Even if it is so, there is, nevertheless, something that is certain—something that is stable—Jesus your Redeemer lives! Rest on Him and you will never fail. Let your faith in Him be firm and confident—you cannot be too fully established in the belief that Jesus, who once died, has left the grave to die no more and that you, in Him, must also live eternally! Something may be wrong with you for the next few days or weeks, but all is right with you forever and "all's well that ends well."

There may be some rough water to be crossed between here and the fair havens of eternal happiness, but all is right there forever and ever! There may be losses and crosses, there may be tumult and shipwrecks, but all is right forever with all who are in Christ Jesus! "Some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship"—but all who are in Christ Jesus shall escape "safe to land." There are innumerable uncertainties, but there is this one certainty—"Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: you shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." Spring on this Rock, man! If you are struggling in the sea, just now, and waves of sin and doubt beat over you, leap onto this Rock—Jesus lives! Trust the living Christ and, because He lives, you shall also live! I could cheerfully take my place with Job if I might be able to say as confidently as he did, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

And if you, as a poor sinner, are trusting wholly and only in Christ, then He is your Redeemer and you are saved forever! If He is the only hope that you have and you cling to Him as the limpet clings to the rock, then all is right with you forever, and you may know that He is your Redeemer as surely as Job knew that He was his! The Lord bless you, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Job 19:1-29.

Verses 1, 2. Then, Job answered and said, how long will you vex my soul and break me in pieces with words? They struck at him with their hard words as if they were breaking stones on the roadside! We ought to be very careful what we say to those who are suffering affliction and trial, for a word, though it seems to be a very little thing, will often cut far more deeply and wound far more terribly than a razor. So Job says, "How long will you vex my soul and break me in pieces with words?"

3. These ten times have you reproached me: you are not ashamed that you make yourselves strange to me. He means that they had reproached him several times over—and hints that they ought to have been ashamed to act so strangely, so coldly, so harshly towards him.

4. And be it indeed that I have erred, my error remains with myself. "I have done you no harm. The error, if error there is, is within my own bosom, for you cannot find anything in my life to lay to my charge." Happy is the man who can say as much as that!

5, 6. If indeed you will magnify yourselves against me, and plead against me my reproach: know now that God has overthrown me, and has compassed me with His net. Job seems to say, "I did not bring this trouble upon myself—it is God who has laid it upon me. Take heed lest in reproaching me because of my trouble, you should also reproach God." I suppose that we cannot, all of us, see into the inner meaning of these words, but if we are in very sore trouble and those who ought to comfort us are bringing cruel accusations against us, we shall read the language of Job with no small sympathy and satisfaction.

7. Behold, if I cry out concerning wrong, I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment. Poor Job! When our prayer is not heard, or we think it is not, then the clouds above us are indeed dark. You who are passing through a season of unanswered prayer—do not imagine that you are the first to travel that dreary way! You can see the footprints of others on that desolate sandy shore. Job knew what that experience meant. So did David and so did our blessed Lord. Read the 2nd verse of the 22nd Psalm, and hear Jesus say, "O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You hear not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

8. He has fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and He has set darkness in my paths. God had done this and done it to Job whom He called "a perfect and an upright man." Then how can you and I expect to escape trial and difficulty when such a man as the Patriarch of Uz found his road blocked up and darkness all around him?

9, 10. He has stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. He has destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and my hope has He removed like a tree. That is, torn up by the roots and carried down the stream to be forgotten by the people who once knew it and rejoiced in its welcome shade.

11. He has also kindled His wrath against me, and He counts me unto Him as one of His enemies. Does God ever act like that towards His own children? Yes, there are times when, without any anger in His heart, but with designs of love toward them, He treats His children, outwardly, as if He were an enemy to them. See the gardener going up to that beautiful tree. He takes out a sharp knife, feels its edge to be sure that it is sharp and then he begins pruning it here, gashing it there and making it to bleed in another place as if he were going to cut it all to pieces! Yet all that is not because he has any anger against the tree, but, on the contrary, because he greatly values it and wishes it to bring forth more fruit than it has ever done. Do not think that God's sharpest knife means death to His loved ones—it means more life and a richer, fuller life.

12. His troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp round about my tabernacle. Troops of trouble, troops of Chaldeans and Sabeans, troops in which Job counted the stormy winds as terrible allies of the Most High—all these had come up against Job and he seemed to be like a country that is beaten down and devoured by powerful invaders.

13. He has put my brethren far from me, and my acquaintance are verily estranged from me. He looks on those so-called "friends" of his and, remembering the bitter things they had said, he tells them that they are estranged from him.

14, 15. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in my house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight. What a long way a child of God may be permitted to go in trouble! Ah, Brothers and Sisters! We do not know how those who are most dear to God's heart may suffer all the more for that very reason—"for whom the Lord loves He chastens."

16, 17. I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I entreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's sake of my own body. He mentioned to his wife those whom death had taken away and asked her to speak kindly to him, but even she had hard words to throw in his teeth!

18-20. Yes, young children despised me; I arose, and they spoke against me. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me. My bone cleaves to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth. There is no skin upon the teeth, or scarcely any, and, therefore, Job means that there was next to nothing of him left, like the skin of his teeth.

21. Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O you my friends; for the hand of God has touched me. How full of pity it is that he has thus to beg for sympathy! This strong man—this most patient man—this perfect and upright man before God has to ask for sympathy! Do you wonder that it was so? HE, who was far greater than Job, ran back thrice to His sleeping disciples as if He needed some help from them, yet He found it not, for He had to say to them, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?" Let this be a lesson to us to try and possess hearts of compassion towards those who are in sorrow and distress.

22. Why do you persecute me as God does, and are not satisfied with my flesh? "If God smites me, why do you, who are round about me, do the same? Is it not enough that God seems to be turned against me? Why should you also be my enemies?"

23, 24. Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were engraved with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever! Inscriptions have been found, engraved in the rocks, that may have been done in the time of Job and it was common, in ancient days, to write on tablets of lead or brass. So Job desired that what he was saying might be recorded for future reference, for he was persuaded that he was being harshly dealt with and unjustly judged.

25. For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. "For I know." What a splendid burst of confidence this is, right out of the depth of his sorrow, like some wondrous star that suddenly blazes upon the brow of the blackest night, or like the sudden rising of the morning sun!

26-28. And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins are consumed within me. But you should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me? Job seems to say, speaking about himself, though in the third person, "He is a devout man, can you not see that? He has faith in God, my Friends, can you not perceive that? Why, then, do you persecute him so?"

29. Be you afraid of the sword: for wrath brings the punishments of the sword, that you may know there is a judgment. Now Job carries the war into the enemy's camp and he says, "You charge me with all sorts of sin and yet you cannot deny that the root of the matter is in me. Would it not be much wiser for you to be yourselves afraid lest God should cut you off for falsely accusing me and slandering me in the time of my sorrow?" There we may confidently leave Job, for the man who can truly say what he has said about his Redeemer will come out all right at the last.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—419, 326

AND FROM "SACRED SONGS AND SOLOS"—25.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 59

Job 19,25-27 #504 - I Know That My Reddmer Lives

I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES

NO. 504

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 12, 1863,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at the latter

day upon the earth: and after my skin worms destroy this body,

yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself

and my eyes shall behold, and not another; though my

reins be consumed within me."

Job 19:25-27.

THE hand of God has been upon us heavily this week. An aged Deacon, who has been for more than fifty years a member of this Church, has been removed from our midst. And a Sister, the beloved wife of another of our Church officers, a member for nearly the same term of years, has fallen asleep. It is not often that a Church is called to sorrow over the departure of two such venerable members—let not our ears be deaf to such a double admonition to prepare to meet our God. That they were preserved so long, and upheld so mercifully for so many years, was not only a reason of gratitude to them, but to us also. I am, however, so against the preaching of what are called funeral sermons, that I forbear, lest I appear to eulogize the creature, when my only aim should be to magnify the Divine Grace of God.

Our text deserves our profound attention. Its preface would hardly have been written had not the matter been of the utmost importance in the judgment of the Patriarch who uttered it. Listen to Job's remarkable desire—"Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever!" Perhaps, hardly aware of the full meaning of the words he was uttering, yet his holy soul was impressed with a sense of some weighty revelation concealed within his words. He therefore desired that it might be recorded in a book! His desire, by God's Grace, was granted.

The Book of books embalms the words of Job. He wished to have them graven on a rock—cut deep into it with an iron pen—and then the lines inlaid with lead. Or he would have them engraved, according to the custom of the ancients, upon a sheet of metal, so that time might not be able to eat out the inscription. He has not had his desire in that respect, except that upon many and many a sepulcher those words of Job stand recorded, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

It is the opinion of some commentators that Job, in speaking of the rock here, intended his own rock-hewn sepulcher, and desired that this might be his epitaph. That it might be cut deep, so that ages should not wear it out—that when any asked, "Where does Job sleep?" as soon as they saw the sepulcher of the Patriarch of Uz, they might learn that he died in hope of resurrection, resting upon a living Redeemer. Whether such a sentence adorned the portals of Job's last sleeping place, we know not, but certainly no words could have been more fitly chosen. Should not the man of patience, the mirror of endurance, the pattern of trust, bear as his memorial this golden line—which is as full of all the patience of hope and hope of patience—as mortal language can be?

Who among us could select a more glorious motto for his last escutcheon? I am sorry to say that a few of those who have written upon this passage cannot see Christ or the resurrection in it at all. Albert Barnes, among the rest, expresses his intense sorrow that he cannot find the resurrection here, and for my part, I am sorry for him. If it had been Job's desire to foretell the advent of Christ, and his own sure resurrection, I cannot see what better words he could have used. And if those truths are not taught here, then language must have lost its original object, and must have been employed to mystify and not to explain. To conceal and not to reveal.

What I ask, does the Patriarch mean, if not that he shall rise again when the Redeemer stands upon the earth? Brethren, no unsophisticated mind can fail to find here what almost all Believers have here discovered. I feel safe in keeping to the old sense, and we shall, this morning, seek no new interpretation. We shall adhere to the common one, with or without the consent of our critics.

In discoursing upon them I shall speak upon three things. First, let us, with the Patriarch, descend into the grave and behold the ravages of death. Then, with him, let us look up on High for present consolation. And, still in his admirable company, let us, in the third place, anticipate future delights.

I. First of all then, with the Patriarch of Uz, LET US DESCEND INTO THE SEPULCHER.

The body has just been divorced from the soul. Friends who loved most tenderly have said—"Bury my dead out of my sight." The body is borne upon the bier and consigned to the silent earth. It is surrounded by the earthworks of death. Death has a host of troops. If the locusts and the caterpillars are God's army, the worms are the army of Death. These hungry warriors begin to attack the city of man. They commence with the outworks. They storm the defenses and overturn the walls. The skin, the city wall of manhood, is utterly broken down and the towers of its glory covered with confusion.

How speedily the cruel invaders deface all beauty. The face gathers blackness. The countenance is defiled with corruption. Those cheeks, once fair with youth, and ruddy with health, have fallen in, even as a bowing wall, and a tottering fence. Those eyes, the windows of the mind where joy and sorrow looked forth by turns, are now filled up with the dust of death. Those lips, the doors of the soul, the gates of Mansoul, are carried away, and its bars are broken. Alas, you windows of agates, and gates of carbuncle, where are you now? How shall I mourn for you, O you captive city, for the mighty men have utterly spoiled you?

Your neck, once like a tower of ivory, has become as a fallen column. Your nose, so lately comparable to, "the tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus," is as a ruined hovel. And your head, which towered like Carmel, lies low as the clods of the valley. Where is beauty now?

The most lovely cannot be known from the most deformed. The vessel so daintily worked upon the potter's wheel is cast away upon the dunghill with the vilest potsherds. Cruel have you been, you warriors of Death, for though you wield no axes, and bear no hammers, yet have you broken down the carved work. And though you speak not with tongues, yet have you said in your hearts, "We have swallowed her up, certainly this is the day that we have looked for—we have found, we have seen it."

The skin is gone. The troops have entered into the town of Mansoul. And now they pursue their work of devastation. The pitiless marauders fall upon the body itself. There are those noble aqueducts, the veins through which the streams of life were custom to flow. These, instead of being rivers of life, have become blocked up with the soil and wastes of death, and now they must be pulled to pieces. Not a single relic of them shall be spared. Mark the muscles and sinews—like great highways that penetrating the metropolis, carry the strength and wealth of manhood along—their curious pavement must be pulled up and they that do traffic there must be consumed. Each tunneled bone, and curious arch, and knotted bond must be snapped and broken.

Fair fabrics, glorious storehouses, costly engines, wonderful machines—all, all must be pulled down and not one stone left upon another. Those nerves, which like telegraphic wires connected all parts of the city together to carry thought and feeling and intelligence—these are cut. No matter how artistic the work might be—and certainly we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and the anatomist stands still and marvels to see the skill which the eternal God has manifested in the formation of the body. But these ruthless worms pull everything to pieces, till, like a city sacked and spoiled, that has been given up for days to pillage and to flame, everything lies in a heap of ruin—ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

But these invaders stop not here. Job says that next they consume his reins. We are accustomed to speak of the heart as the great citadel of life, the inner keep and tower, where the captain of the guard holds out to the last. The Hebrews do not regard the heart, but the lower viscera, the reins, as the seat of the passions, and of mental power. The worms spare not. They enter the secret places of the tabernacle of life—and the standard is plucked from the tower. Having died, the heart cannot preserve itself, and falls like the rest of the frame—a prey to worms.

It is gone, it is all gone! The skin, the body, the vitals, all, all has departed. There is nothing left. In a few years you shall burn up the sod and say, "Here slept So-and-So and where is he now?" And you may search and hunt and dig, but you shall find no relic. Mother Earth has devoured her own offspring.

Dear Friends, why should we wish to have it otherwise? Why should we desire to preserve the body when the soul has gone? What vain attempts men have made with coffins of lead and wrappings of myrrh and frankincense! The embalming of the Egyptians, those master robbers of the worm, what has it done? It has served to keep some poor shriveled lumps of mortality above ground to be sold for curiosities, to be dragged away to foreign climes and stared upon by thoughtless eyes.

No, let the dust go, the sooner it dissolves, the better. And what matters it how it goes! What if it is devoured of beasts, if it is swallowed up in the sea, and become food for fishes! What if plants with their roots suck up the particles? What if the fabric passes into the animal, and from the animal

into the earth, and from the earth into the plants, and from the plant into the animal again? What if the winds blow it along the highway? What if the rivers carry it to the ocean waves? It is ordained that somehow or other it must be all separated—"dust to dust, ashes to ashes." It is part of the decree that it should all perish. The worms, or some other agents of destruction must destroy this body.

Do not seek to avoid what God has purposed. Do not look upon it as a gloomy thing. Regard it as a necessity—no, more—view it as the platform of a miracle! View it as the lofty stage of resurrection, since Jesus shall surely raise again the dead particles of this body, however divided from one another. We have heard of miracles, but what a miracle is the resurrection! All the miracles of Scripture, yes, even those worked by Christ, are small compared with this. The philosopher says, "How is it possible that God shall hunt out every particle of the human frame?" He can do it!

He has but to speak the word, and every single atom, though it may have traveled thousands of leagues, though it may have been blown as dust across the desert, and later have fallen upon the bosom of the sea, and then have descended into its depths to later be cast up on a desolate shore, sucked up by plants, fed on again by beasts, or passed into the fabric of another man—I say that individual atom shall find its fellow— and the whole company of particles at the trump of the archangel shall travel to their appointed place, and the body, the very body which was laid in the ground, shall rise again.

I am afraid I have been somewhat uninteresting while tarrying upon the exposition of the words of Job, but I think very much of the essence of Job's faith lay in this, that he had a clear view that the worms would, after his skin, destroy his body—and yet that in his flesh he should see God. You know we might regard it as a small miracle if we could preserve the bodies of the departed. If, by some process, with spices and gums, we could preserve the particles. For the Lord to make those dry bones live, and to quicken that skin and flesh were certainly a miracle. But not palpably and plainly so great a marvel as when the worms have destroyed the body.

When the fabric has been absolutely broken up, the tenement all pulled down, ground to pieces and flung in handfuls to the wind so that no relic of it is left—and yet when Christ stands in the latter days upon the earth, all the structure shall be brought together, bone to bone—then shall the might of Omnipotence be seen! This, then, is the doctrine of the resurrection. Happy is he who finds no difficulty here—who looks at it as being an impossibility with man, but a possibility with God—and lays hold upon the Omnipotence of the Most High and says, "You say it, and it shall be done!"

I comprehend You not, great God. I marvel at Your purpose to raise my moldering bones. But I know that You do great wonders, and I am not surprised that You should conclude the great drama of Your creating works here on earth by recreating the human frame by the same power by which You did bring from the dead the body of Your Son Jesus Christ, and by that same Divine energy which has regenerated human souls in Your own image.

II. Now, having thus descended into the grave and seen nothing there but what is loathsome, LET US LOOK UP WITH THE PATRIARCH AND BEHOLD A SUN SHINING WITH PRESENT COMFORT.

"I know," said he, "that my Redeemer lives." The word "Redeemer" here used, is in the original, "goel"—kinsman. The duty of the king, man, or goel, was this—suppose an Israelite had alienated his estate, as in the case of Naomi and Ruth. Suppose a patrimony which had belonged to a family had passed away through poverty. It was the goel's business, the redeemer's business, to pay the price as the next of kin, and to buy back the heritage. Boaz stood in that relation to Ruth. Now, the body may be looked upon as the heritage of the soul—the soul's small farm—that little plot of earth in which the soul has been accustomed to walk and delight, as a man walks in his garden or dwells in his house.

Now it becomes alienated. Death, like Ahab, takes away the vineyard from us who are as Naboth. We lose our patrimonial estate. Death sends his troops to take our vineyard, and to spoil its vines, and ruin it. But we turn round to Death and say, "I know that my Goel lives, and He will redeem this heritage. I have lost it. You take it from me lawfully, O Death, because my sin has forfeited my right. I have lost my heritage through my own offenses, and through that of my first parent, Adam. But there lives One who will buy this back." Brethren, Job could say this of Christ long before He had descended upon earth!

"I know that He lives," and now that He has ascended up on high, and led captivity captive, surely we may, with double emphasis, say, "I know that my Goel, my Kinsman lives, and that He has paid the price so that I should have back my patrimony, so that in my flesh I shall see God." Yes, my Hands, you are redeemed with blood—bought not with corruptible things, as with silver and gold—but with the precious blood of Christ. Yes, heaving Lungs and palpitating Heart, you have been redeemed! He that redeemed the soul to be His altar, has also redeemed the body, that it may be a temple for the Holy Spirit. Not even the bones of Joseph can reMal. in the house of bondage. No smell of the fire of death may pass upon the garments which His holy children have worn in the furnace.

Remember, too, that it was always considered to be the duty of the goel, not merely to redeem by price, but where that failed, to redeem by power. Hence, when Lot was carried away captive by the four kings, Abraham summoned his own hired servants, and the servants of all his friends, and went out against the kings of the East and brought back Lot and the captives of Sodom. Now, our Lord Jesus Christ, who once has played the kinsman's part by paying the price for us, lives—and He will redeem us by power. O Death, you tremble at this name! You know the might of our Kinsman! Against His arm you cannot stand!

You did once meet Him foot to foot in stern battle, and O Death, you did, indeed, tread upon His heel. He voluntarily submitted to this, or else, O Death, you had no power against Him. But He slew you, Death! He slew you! He rifled all your caskets, took from you the key of your castle, burst open the door of your dungeon! And now, you know, Death, you have no power to hold my body. You may set your slaves to devour it, but you shall give it up, and all their spoil must be restored. Insatiable Death, from your greedy mouth shall return the multitudes whom you have devoured. You shall be compelled by the Savior to restore your captives to the light of day.

I think I see Jesus coming with His Father's servants. The chariots of the Lord are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. Blow the trumpet! Blow the trumpet! Immanuel rides to battle! The Most Mighty in majesty girds on His sword. He comes! He comes to snatch by power His people's lands from those who have invaded their portion. Oh, how glorious the victory! There

shall be no battle. He comes, He sees, He conquers. The sound of the trumpet shall be enough! Death shall fly in fear! And at once from beds of dust and silent clay to realms of everlasting day, the righteous shall arise!

To linger here a moment. There was yet, very conspicuously, in the Old Testament, we are informed, a third duty of the goel, which was to avenge the death of his friend. If a person had been slain, the goel was the avenger of blood. Snatching up his sword, he at once pursued the person who had been guilty of bloodshed. So now let us picture ourselves as being smitten by Death. His arrow has just pierced us to the heart, but in the act of expiring, our lips are able to boast of vengeance. In the face of the monster we cry, "I know that my Goel lives." You may fly, O Death, as rapidly as you will, but no City of Refuge can hide you from Him. He will overtake you. He will lay hold upon you, O you skeleton monarch, and He will avenge my blood on you." I would that I had powers of eloquence to work out this magnificent thought. Chrysostom, or Christmas Evans could picture the flight of the King of Terrors, the pursuit by the Redeemer, the overtaking of the foe, and the slaying of the Destroyer. Christ shall certainly avenge Himself on Death for all the injury which Death has done to His beloved kinsmen. Comfort yourself then, O Christian! You have ever living, even when you die, One who avenges you. One who has paid the price for you, and One whose strong arms shall yet set you free.

Passing on in our text to notice the next word, it seems that Job found consolation not only in the fact that he had a Goel, a Redeemer, but that this Redeemer lives. He does not say, "I know that my Goel shall live, but that He lives"—having a clear view of the self-existence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. And you and I, looking back, do not say, "I know that He did live," but, "He lives today." This very day. You that mourn and sorrow for venerated friends, your prop and pillar in years gone by—you may go to Christ with confidence, because He not only lives—He is the source of life. And you can, therefore, believe that He can give forth out of Himself, life to those whom you have committed to the tomb.

He is the Lord and Giver of life originally, and He shall be especially declared to be the resurrection and the life when the legions of His redeemed shall be glorified with Him. If I saw no fountain from which life could stream to the dead, I would yet believe the promise when God said that the dead shall live. But when I see the Fountain provided, and know that it is full to the brim and runs over, I can rejoice without trembling. Since there is One who can say, "I am the resurrection and the life," it is a blessed thing to see the means already before us in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us look up to our Goel, then, who lives at this very time.

Still, the marrow of Job's comfort, it seems to me, lays in that little word, "My." "I know that MY Redeemer lives." Oh, to get hold of Christ! I know that in His offices He is precious. But, dear Friends, we must have a part in Him before we can really enjoy Him. What is honey in the woods to me, if like the fainting Israelites, I dare not eat? It is honey in my hands, honey on my lips, which enlightens my eyes like those of Jonathan. What is gold in the mine to me? Men are beggars in Peru, and beg for their bread in California. It is gold in my purse which will satisfy my necessities, purchasing the bread I need. So, what is a kinsman if he is not a kinsman to me?

A Redeemer that does not redeem me. An avenger who will never stand up for my blood—of what worth are such? But Job's faith was strong and firm in the conviction that the Redeemer was his. Dear Friends, dear Friends, can all of you say, "I know that my Redeemer lives"? The question is

simple and simply put, but oh, what solemn things hang upon your answer, "Is it MY Redeemer?" I charge you, rest not, be not content until by faith you can say, "Yes, I cast myself upon Him. I am His, and therefore He is mine." I know that full many of you, while you look upon all else that you have as not being yours, yet can say, "My Redeemer is mine."

He is the only piece of property which is really ours. We borrow all else—the house, the children. No, much more—our very body we must return to the Great Lender. But Jesus, we can never leave, for even when we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord. And I know that even death cannot separate us from Him! The body and soul are truly with Jesus even in the dark hours of death, in the long night of the sepulcher, and in the separate state of spiritual existence. Beloved, have you Christ? It may be that you hold Him with a feeble hand, you half think it is presumption to say, "He is my Redeemer." Yet remember, if you have but faith as a grain of mustard seed, that little faith entitles you to say and say now, "I know that MY Redeemer lives."

There is another word in this consoling sentence which, no doubt, served to give a zest to the comfort of Job. It was that he could say, "I KNOW"—"I KNOW that my Redeemer lives." To say, "I hope so, I trust so," is comfortable. And there are thousands in the fold of Jesus who hardly ever get much further. But to reach the marrow of consolation you must say, "I KNOW." Ifs, buts and perhaps, are sure murderers of peace and comfort. Doubts are dreary things in times of sorrow. Like wasps they sting the soul! If I have any suspicion that Christ is not mine, then there is vinegar mingled with the gall of death. But if I know that Jesus is mine, then darkness is not dark. Even the night is light about me. Out of the lion comes honey. Out of the eater comes forth sweetness. "I know that my Redeemer lives."

This is a brightly-burning lamp cheering the damps of the sepulchral vault, but a feeble hope is like a flickering smoking flax, just making darkness visible, but nothing more. I would not like to die with a mere hope mingled with suspicion. I might be safe with this, but hardly happy. But oh, to go down into the river knowing that all is well, confident that as a guilty, weak, and helpless worm, I have fallen into the arms of Jesus— and believing that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him! I would have you, dear Christian Friends, never look upon the full assurance of faith as a thing impossible to you. Say not, "It is too high. I cannot attain unto it." I have known one or two saints of God who have rarely doubted their interest at all.

There are many of us who do not often enjoy any ravishing ecstasies, but on the other hand, we generally maintain the even tenor of our way, simply hanging upon Christ, feeling that His promise is true, that His merits are sufficient, and that we are safe. Assurance is a jewel for worth but not for rarity. It is the common privilege of all the saints if they have but the Divine Grace to attain unto it. And this Grace, the Holy Spirit gives freely. Surely if Job in Arabia, in those dark misty ages when there was only the morning star, and not the sun—when they saw but little, when life and immortality had not been brought to light—if Job, before the coming and advent, still could say, "I know," you and I should not speak less positively!

God forbid that our positiveness should be presumption. Let us try ourselves, and see that our marks and evidences are right, lest we form an ungrounded hope. For nothing can be more destructive than to say, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." But oh, let us build for eternity, and build solidly. Let us not be satisfied with the mere foundation, for it is from the upper rooms that we get the widest prospect. Let us pray the Lord to help us to pile stone on stone, until we are

able to say as we look at it, "Yes, I know, I KNOW that my Redeemer lives." This, then, for present comfort today in the prospect of departure.

III. And now, in the third and last place—THE ANTICIPATION OF FUTURE DELIGHT. Let me call to your remembrance the other part of the text. Job not only knew that the Redeemer lived, but he anticipated the time when He should stand in the latter day upon the earth. No doubt Job referred here to our Savior's first advent, to the time when Jesus Christ, "the Goel," the Kinsman, should stand upon the earth to pay in the blood of His veins the ransom price, which had, indeed, in bond and stipulation, been paid before the foundation of the world in promise. But I cannot think that Job's vision stayed there. He was looking forward to the second advent of Christ as being the period of the resurrection.

We cannot endorse the theory that Job rose from the dead when our Lord died, although certain Jewish believers held this idea very firmly at one time. We are persuaded that, "the latter day," refers to the advent of Glory rather than to that of shame. Our hope is that the Lord shall come to reign in Glory where He once died in agony. The bright and hallowed doctrine of the second advent has been greatly revived in our Churches in these latter days, and I look for the best results in consequence. There is always a danger lest it be perverted, and turned by fanatical minds, by prophetic speculations, into an abuse.

But the doctrine in itself is one of the most consoling and, at the same time, one of the most practical, tending to keep the Christian awake— because the Bridegroom comes at such an hour as we think not. Beloved, we believe that the same Jesus who ascended from Olivet shall so come in like manner as He ascended up into Heaven. We believe in His personal advent and reign. We believe and expect that when both wise and foolish virgins shall slumber—in the night when sleep is heavy upon the saints, and when men shall be eating and drinking as in the days of Noah—we believe then, that, suddenly as the lightning flashes from Heaven, so Christ shall descend with a shout, and the dead in Christ shall rise and reign with Him. We are looking forward to the literal, Personal and actual standing of Christ upon earth as the time when creation's groans shall be silenced forever—and the earnest expectation of the creature shall be fulfilled. Mark that Job describes Christ as standing. Some interpreters have read the passage, "He shall stand in the latter days against the earth." That as the earth has covered up the slain, as the earth has become the charnel house of the dead, Jesus shall arise to the contest and say, "Earth, I am against you, give up your dead! You clods of the valley cease to be custodians of My people's bodies! Silent deeps and you, you caverns of the earth, deliver, once and for all, those whom you have imprisoned!" Machpelah shall give up its precious treasure, cemeteries and graveyards shall release their captives, and all the deep places of the earth shall resign the bodies of the faithful.

Well, whether that is so or not, the posture of Christ, in standing upon the earth, is significant. It shows His triumph. He has triumphed over sin, which once, like a serpent in its coils, had bound the earth. He has defeated Satan—on the very spot where Satan gained his power—Christ has gained the victory. Earth, which was a scene of defeated goodness, where mercy once was all but driven out, where virtue died, where everything heavenly and pure, like flowers, blasted by pestilential winds, hung down their heads, withered and blighted—on this very earth—everything that is glorious shall grow and blossom in perfection. And Christ Himself, once despised and rejected of men, fairest of all the sons of men, shall come in the midst of a crowd of courtiers, while

kings and princes shall do Him homage and all the nations shall call Him blessed. "He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth."

Then, at that auspicious hour, says Job, "In my flesh I shall see God." Oh, blessed anticipation—"I shall see God." He does not say, "I shall see the saints"—doubtless we shall see them all in Heaven—but, "I shall see God." Note he does not say, "I shall see the pearly gates, I shall see the walls of jasper, I shall see the crowns of gold, and the harps of harmony," but, "I shall see God." As if that were the sum and substance of Heaven. "In my flesh shall I see God." The pure in heart shall see God. It was their delight to see in the ordinances by faith. They delighted to behold Him in communion and in prayer.

There in Heaven they shall have a vision of another sort. We shall see God in Heaven, and be made completely like He is. The Divine Character shall be stamped upon us. And being made like He is, we shall be perfectly satisfied and content. Likeness to God—what can we wish for more? And a sight of God—what can we desire better? We shall see God, and so there shall be perfect contentment to the soul, and a satisfaction of all the faculties. Some read the passage, "Yet, I shall see God in my flesh," and therefore think that there is here an allusion to Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Word made flesh. Well, be it so, or be it not so, it is certain that we shall see Christ—and He, as the Divine Redeemer—shall be the subject of our eternal vision.

Nor shall we ever want any joy beyond simply that of seeing Him. Think not, dear Friend, that this will be a narrow sphere for your mind to dwell in. It is but one source of delight, "I shall see God," but that source is infinite. His wisdom, His love, His power, all His attributes shall be subjects for your eternal contemplation. And as He is infinite under each aspect, there is no fear of exhaustion. His works, His purposes, His gifts, His love to you, and His Glory in all His purposes, and in all His deeds of love— why, these shall make a theme that never can be exhausted. You may, with Divine delight, anticipate the time when in your flesh you shall see God!

But I must have you observe how Job has expressly made us note that it is in the same body. "Yet, in my flesh shall I see God." And then he says again, "whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold, and not another." Yes, it is true that I, the very man standing here, though I must go down to die, yet I shall as the same man most certainly arise, and shall behold my God. Not part of myself, though the soul, alone, shall have some view of God, but the whole of myself—my flesh, my soul, my body, my spirit shall gaze on God. We shall not enter Heaven, dear Friends, as a dismasted vessel is tugged into harbor. We shall not get to Glory, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship—but the whole ship shall be floated safely into the haven—body and soul both being safe.

Christ shall be able to say, "All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me." Not only all the persons, but all of the persons—each man in his perfection. There shall not be found in Heaven one imperfect saint. There shall not be a saint without an eye, much less a saint without a body. No member of the body shall have perished. Nor shall the body have lost any of its natural beauty. All the saints shall be all there and all of all. The same persons precisely, only that they shall have risen from a state of Grace to a state of Glory. They shall be ripened. They shall be no more the green blades, but the full corn in the ear—no more buds but flowers—not babes but men.

Please notice, and then I shall conclude, how the Patriarch puts it as being a real personal enjoyment. "Whom my eye shall behold, and not another." They shall not bring me a report as they did the Queen of Sheba, but I shall see Solomon, the King, for myself. I shall be able to say, as they did who spoke to the woman of Samaria, "Now I believe, not because of your word who did bring me a report, but I have seen Him for myself." There shall be personal discussion with God. Not through the Book, which is but as a glass. Not through the ordinances. But directly—in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ—we shall be able to commune with the Deity as a man talks with his friend. "Not another."

If I could be a changeling, and could be altered, that would mar my comfort. Or if my Heaven must be enjoyed by proxy, if draughts of bliss must be drunk for me, where is the hope? Oh, no! For myself, and not through another, shall I see God! Have we not told you a hundred times that nothing but personal religion will do, and is not this another argument for it, because resurrection and glory are personal things? "Not another." If you could have sponsors to repent for you, then, depend upon it, you would have sponsors to be glorified for you. But as there is not another to see God for you, so you must, yourself, see—and yourself find an interest—in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In closing, let me observe how foolish have you and I been when we have looked forward to death with shudders, with doubts, with loathing. After all, what is it? Worms! Do you tremble at those base crawling things? Scattered particles! Shall we be alarmed at these? To meet the worms we have the angels. And to gather the scattered particles we have the voice of God. I am sure the gloom of death is altogether gone now, that the lamp of resurrection burns. Disrobing is nothing now, that better garments await us. We may long for evening to undress, we may rise with God. I am sure my venerable friends now present, in coming so near, as they do now to the time of the departure, must have some visions of the Glory on the other side of the stream.

Bunyan was not wrong, my dear Brothers and Sisters, when he put the land Beulah at the close of the pilgrimage. Is not my text a telescope which will enable you to see across the Jordan? May it not be as hands of angels to bring you bundles of myrrh and frankincense? You can say, "I know that my Redeemer lives." You cannot want more. You were not satisfied with less in your youth, you will not be content with less now. Those of us who are young are comforted by the thought that we may soon depart. I say comforted, not alarmed by it. And we almost envy those whose race is nearly run, because we fear—and yet we must not speak thus, for the Lord's will be done—I was about to say, we fear that our battle may last long, and that perhaps our feet may slip.

Only He that keeps Israel does not slumber nor sleep. So since we know that our Redeemer lives, this shall be our comfort in life—that though we fall, we shall not be utterly cast down. And since our Redeemer lives, this shall be our comfort in death—that though worms destroy this body, yet in our flesh we shall see God!

May the Lord add His blessing on the feeble words of this morning, and to Him be glory forever. Amen.

"Grave, the guardian of our dust! Grave, the treasury of the skies! Every atom of your trust Rests in hope again to rise. Hark! The judgment trumpet calls! Soul, rebuild your house of clay, Immortality your walls, And Eternity your day."

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Chapter 60

Job 19,28 #1598 - The Substance of True Religion

THE SUBSTANCE OF TRUE RELIGION

NO. 1598

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 15, 1881,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But you should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the

root of the matter is found in me?"

Job 19:28.

You will always understand a passage of Scripture better if you carefully attend to its connection. The habit of picking out portions from the Bible and separating them from their context may be carried a great deal too far and in the process the reader may miss the mind of the Spirit and force upon the words a meaning of his own. If we were to treat men's books as we do God's Book we would, probably, be judged to be insane! It is, indeed, a wonderful Book to bear such mangling! Every sensible person will see that it must always be wise to study the context, for it is likely enough to cast a light upon the passage in hand.

Job, in the verse before us, is answering Bildad the Shuhite. Now, this Bildad on two occasions had described Job as a hypocrite and accounted for his dire distress by the fact that, though hypocrites may flourish for a time, they will ultimately be destroyed. In the two bitter speeches which he made, he described the hypocrite under the figure of a tree which is torn up by the roots, or dim even down to the root. In his first address, in the 8th chapter and the 16th verse, he says of the hypocrite, "He is green before the sun and his branch shoots forth in his garden. His roots are wrapped about the heap and sees the place of stones. If he destroys him from his place, then it shall deny him, saying, I have not seen you." Even the very root of the hypocrite was to be pulled up, so that the garden in which he once flourished should not remember that he had ever been there!

Being much pleased with his metaphor, Bildad, in the 18th chapter, uses it again. He says, in the 14th verse of the chapter, "His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors. His roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off." This, then, was his mode of attacking Job—he set forth, by the emblem of a tree, the state and fate of the false-hearted—they might flourish for a time, but they would wither at last, even down to the very root, dried up and blasted by the justice of God. The inference he meant to draw was this—"You, Job, are utterly dried up, for all your prosperity is gone and, therefore, you must be a hypocrite." The assault was very cruel, but the sufferer successfully parried it.

"No," says Job, "I am no hypocrite. I will prove it by your own words, for the root of the matter is still in me and, therefore, I am no hypocrite. Though I admit that I have lost branches, leaves, fruit and flowers, yet I have not lost the root of the matter, for I hold the essential faith as firmly as ever and, therefore, by your own argument, I am no hypocrite. You should say, 'Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?'" There is, then, dear Friends, a something in true religion which is its essential root. It has fundamental matters which cannot be dispensed with under any circumstances. Some things pertain to godliness, are useful as ornaments, pleasant and desirable, yet these may be absent and still there may be the truth of religion in the soul!

But there is a something which cannot be absent in any case without its being certain that the man is not a true child of God. There is a something which is vital, without which there is no spiritual life. Of this essential thing we are going to speak, this morning, as we are enabled by the Holy Spirit. Job derived comfort from the fact that the root of the matter was in him, whatever his accusers might say, and I trust that others will be encouraged as they, too, shall find that the root of the matter is in them. It will be pleasant to my heart to cheer the fainting and equally so if I can lead my stronger Brethren to deal tenderly with such.

I. Our first thought will be that THIS ROOT OF THE MATTER MAY BE CLEARLY DEFINED. We are not left in the dark as to what the essential point of true religion is—it can be laid down with absolute certainty. True, there has been considerable disputing over the phrase before us and questions have been raised as to what Job meant by, "the root of the matter," but I conceive that if we read the verse in its own connection, apart from any extraneous suggestion, there will be no doubt about its meaning. Commence at the 25th verse and read on as Job spoke—he tells us plainly what is "the root of the matter." Here it is—"I know that my Redeemer lives and He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins are consumed within me."

This knowledge of the Redeemer is evidently the root of the matter. Come, then, let us look more closely into this choice confession of faith! I shall not attempt to expound this golden utterance, but I shall glance at it with the one objective of showing what Job considered to be the essence of true religion. And, first, it is clear that "the root of the matter" is firm faith in the Redeemer! It is to be able to say from the inmost heart, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Not, "I think so," but, "I know"—for saving faith is certain and the true Believer is a positive. Faith abhors conjectures! It will not put its foot down upon fictions, but rests upon matters of fact! Faith never deals in the fancy goods of opinion, theory, speculation or probability—she searches for the priceless pearl of certainty—she must know!

Such was the faith of Job and he expresses it in firm, decided, clear language, saying—"I know that my Redeemer lives." This faith was an appropriating one, so that Job took to himself the Redeemer. "I know that my Redeemer lives," laying hold upon the lord to be unto him all that He was meant to be, namely, a Redeemer who would set him at liberty from his misery! He embraced the Redeemer as his own and believed that he would be raised by Him from the pit of corruption. Come, Brothers and Sisters, have we such a faith as this? Have we a faith which knows that there is a Savior able to redeem and sure to accomplish the work?

And do we take Him for our own, saying—"my Redeemer"? This is the point—Do we accept Him in His ordained office and cast our soul entirely upon Him? Are we content to sink or swim with God's appointed Savior? If saved, it shall be by Him! And at the foot of the Cross are we content to lie and wait the issue? Whatever other redeemers there may be, is the Lord Jesus our Redeemer in whom we trust as able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him? This is the "root of the matter"—a recognition of the redeeming Lord and a simple dependence upon Him for sure salvation! Look steadily at the passage and especially gaze into its original meaning and you will see that in this "root of the matter" there is a recognition of the blessed Christ of God in the peculiar relationship which He has taken up to man.

It is, "I know that my goel, or kinsman, lives." You know what the next of kin was among the Jews—it was he who must redeem the inheritance if it had been alienated from the family. He was the guardian of those to whom he was next of kin. If there had been manslaughter committed, it was the goel, the near kinsman, who must take vengeance on behalf of the murdered man. The goel was the patron of the weak ones of the family and the defender of the whole clan. Boaz was the redeemer of Ruth's patrimony because he was her next of kin after one other had refused to fulfill the office. Beloved, this is a cardinal point of saving faith, that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is next of kin to us poor, guilty men!

His name is Emmanuel, God With Us—not only God from before all worlds, but God with us in our nature! The Word was made flesh! Jesus was born at Bethlehem and there He was nursed at the breast of a woman. He lived among our race, bearing our infirmities and tempted in all points like as we are, though without sin. It is most sweet for faith to say He is nearest of kin to me—my Goel, my Redeemer; bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh—

"In ties of blood with sinners one."

He is the Head, the Second Adam of our race, a Brother born for adversity, yes, and more than a Brother! Because He has deigned to enter into the closest of all relationships with us by taking upon Himself our nature, the Lord Jesus has now become our Redeemer, bound to restore to those who are in Him the inheritance which was forfeited by the Fall. Glory be to His name! He has restored that which He took not away! He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy that which sin and Satan snatched from us by our first parents' fault!

Nor is this all. The goel was bound, also, to avenge the quarrel of his client. Our Lord is now our Advocate with the Father, pleading our cause both by the words of His mouth and by the power of His arm. "You have pleaded the causes of my soul," O Jesus! You are my Defender, my Patron, my Shield and my exceeding great Reward! Brethren, this is the root of the matter, to believe in the Incarnate God, to accept His headship, to claim His kinship and to rely upon His Redemption! This is the root of the matter, to call Jesus ours, our Kinsman and Redeemer and then to leave everything in His hands—to commit to Him our cause, our hopes, our fears, our past, our present and our future—and now and throughout life to fix our entire confidence upon Him because it is His office and prerogative to be the Redeemer of all that are akin to Him. This is plain enough and there is no mist about it! Say, is the Son of God all this to you?

Look at the text, farther, and you perceive that the root of the matter is to believe that this Kinsman, this Redeemer lives! We could never find comfort or salvation in one who had ceased to

be! We have no lively hope unless we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead! Job knew that the Redeemer lived in that capacity before He died and we know that He always lives, though He once died and was buried. If it were possible for us to believe in the merit of Christ's death and to deny His Resurrection, our faith would have a fatal flaw in it. "He was delivered for our offenses, but He was raised, again, for our justification," and, therefore, we must believe in the Resurrection or we are not justified! It is because He always lives to make intercession for us that He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him!

In the Romish Church her images are the image of her faith. What Christ is that which we see portrayed in places of worship of the papal order? We see there, times without number, Jesus as a child in His mother's arms—feeble, dependent, insignificant—well setting forth how the worship of Christ is overshadowed by that of the Virgin and how His blood and righteousness are forgotten amid the imaginary glories of Mary! How else do you see the Savior in papal churches? Why, everywhere He is represented as dead, as nailed to a cross, or wrapped in winding-sheets. So far, so good, for we, also, believe in Christ who died, though we set not up His image or picture! But Jesus is not now dead, neither is He here among the tombs, for He has risen! It is testified of Jesus that He lives! But in the Church of Rome it is the priest that lives and sets and does all things, while the Christ of God is virtually excluded and made of no use apart from sacraments and ceremonies.

Our Savior is still living and active in the midst of His people and this is one of the vital points of our holy faith. We address ourselves at once to the living Redeemer and His present power to save is the groundwork of our expectation of eternal life and resurrection! Oh, if it were not for this, we might all despair! We would be the ministers of a dead Christ and you would be Believers in a lifeless Savior! The Cross would be a powerless doctrine and the Gospel a lifeless message—and under it men would still lie dead in their trespasses and sins! Our Redeemer lives in fullness of power to bless us by His everlasting Priesthood! Say, then, dear Souls, do you believe in Jesus Christ, your Kinsman? Do you believe that He has redeemed both your persons and your inheritance? And do you believe that He lives, having gone up into Glory to prepare a place for you? This is the "root of the matter"—a living faith in a living Redeemer who, by His death, has ransomed His people!

There was still more than this. Job believed in this next of kin of his who still lived, that He would surely save him, seeing he trusted in Him. He expected that He would right all things, however wrong they might be, and clear the character of His servant. Job felt that though his accusers might condemn him and his appeal to God might not win him a vindication so that he might go down to his grave under a cloud of reproach and lie there and rot with a dishonored memory, yet he would, be one day, cleared. Though the worms might devour his body till no rag or relic of him remained, yet his living Kinsman would never rest till He had cleared him and enabled Job to see God without fear!

This is the grandeur of faith, to feel that whatever God may do with me, if I am in Christ and behave myself as His faithful servant, He will preserve me from all harm! My cause may seem so utterly dead that it is only fit for worms' meat, but the Christ of God will bring forth judgment unto victory! This is the work of faith, to cast my soul on Christ, my next of kin whose business it is to redeem me—and though I cannot see the way by which I am to be saved—yet to be sure that I

shall be! If my hopes perish and my soul sinks down into the dust of death, yet to the uttermost, Christ can save me and He will—and I am sure of it!

And when at last the death frost strikes cold at my heart and I can help myself no more and human helpers fail me, I will commit my spirit into the dear hands of Him who is nearest and dearest—and I shall feel, in that last fainting hour, that His presence is my stay. Yes, and I shall see my God, again, and even my poor failing body, full of aches and pains and weakness, after resting in the grave a little while, shall rise again in beauty and power! The grave is a refining pot where the bodies of the saints are purified and made fit to dwell with the pure and holy God forever! Faith has no question about the Resurrection—she has not a mere hope, but a firmly assured belief so that she cries—"I know that in my flesh, through Christ my Redeemer, I shall see my God without fear."

Every man, in a certain sense, will see God, for every eye shall behold the King upon the Throne of Judgment. But that expectation could not be a ground of comfort and, therefore, more is here meant by seeing God. Job evidently expected to see God with acceptance and with delight! And this he felt quite sure about, though the corruption of his body looked like an effectual barrier to the realization of such a hope. All his friends may condemn him and treat him as an alien and a stranger, but he so trusts himself with his Redeemer that he is quite sure of justification before God and men! Those who have a Divine Advocate must be cleared on the Judgment Day.

Now, Soul, answer this question—Do you commit yourself wholly and entirely to the Mediator, the Incarnate God, the Kinsman of humanity? Say, do you look only to your living Advocate in life, in death and in eternity? Is Christ your All in All, your only and solid hope? Oh, then, rest assured that "the root of the matter" is found in you! It is clear that the essence of true religion can be clearly defined—Job has defined it and there it is! Judge yourselves as to whether you possess it or not.

II. Secondly, let us spend a few minutes in remarking that in our text THIS FUNDAMENTAL MATTER IS MOST INSTRUCTIVELY DESCRIBED by the words which I have so constantly repeated—"the root of the matter." What does this mean? First, does it not mean that which is essential? "The root of the matter." To a tree, a root is absolutely essential—it is a mere pole or piece of timber if there is no root. It can be a tree of a certain sort without branches and, at certain seasons, without leaves, but not without a root. Look at the trees in the winter. Their substance is in them when they lose their leaves. The foliage has all fallen, but the bare branches and trunk still make a tree because a root is there.

You may call it a tree even though only the trunk remains rooted to the soil. But it is not a tree if you have taken the root away and set it up in the hedge—it is mere dead timber for the scaffold or the fire. So, if a man has faith in the Redeemer, though he may be destitute of a thousand other most necessary things, yet the essential point is settled—he that believes in Christ Jesus has everlasting life! If he has faith, he has the substance of things hoped for and hope will turn to experience as he grows in Divine Grace. But if he has no faith in the Redeemer, he may make a towering profession; he may possess vast knowledge; he may speak with the tongues of men and of angels and he may outstrip all his companions in zeal, but he is not a plant of the Lord's right hand planting, for he has no root in himself and will, before long, wither away.

The root, again, is not only that which is vital to the tree, it is from the root that the life-force proceeds by which the trunk and the branches are nourished and sustained. There is hope for a

tree, after it is cut down, that it shall sprout again at the scent of water. As long as there is a root, there is more or less of vitality and power to grow and so faith in Christ is the vital point of religion—he that believes lives. If you do not know the living Redeemer, you do not know life. Without trust in the work of Jesus, a man may attempt to follow the moral teachings of Jesus, but he will miss salvation since no morals which do not begin with faith in God can be acceptable to the Most High. The practical teaching of our holy religion is admirable and we must obey it or be lost—and the root of holy living is faith in Christ—and it cannot be produced otherwise.

I would not say a word against the right exercise of the emotions, or the education of the understanding, or the regulation of the passions—for all these are good as branches of the tree. But the root, the living part of godliness, is our union to Christ by faith, our laying hold upon the Incarnate Son of God as dying and rising, again, on our behalf. Again, it is called the, "root of the matter," because it comprehends all the rest, for everything is in the root. You walked your garden in the winter and many plants were entirely invisible—there was not the slightest token of their presence in the soil. Now they are above ground, they are flowering, they are proceeding to fruit. Where was the plant? It was all in the root. Leaf, branch, fruit, seed—all were there.

Even so, all the elements of a perfect character lie hidden in faith in Christ. The holiness of Heaven is packed away in the faith of a penitent sinner. Look at the crocus bulb. It is a poor, mean, unpromising sort of thing and yet wrapped up within that brown package lies a golden cup which, in the early Spring, will be filled with sunshine! You cannot see that wondrous chalice within the bulb, but He who put it there knows where He has concealed His treasure! The showers and the sun shall unwrap the folds and that dainty cup shall come forth to be set upon God's great table of Nature as an intimation that the feast of summer is soon to come!

The highest saintship on earth is hidden within the simplicity of a sinner's faith like a flower within a seed. Yes, the perfect character of those that are without fault before the Throne of God is all in embryo within that first look of faith which links the soul with the atoning merits of the great Redeemer! My Brothers and Sisters, a young Heaven sleeps within your childlike confidence in Christ! It will only need the culture of the Holy Spirit to develop your new life into the perfect image of Christ Jesus your Lord. Faith is the essence, the vitality, the sum of true godliness and, therefore, it is called, "the root of the matter."

III. So I come, thirdly, to dwell upon a further remark—THIS ROOT OF THE MATTER MAY BE PERSONALLY DISCERNED AS BEING IN A MAN'S OWN POSSESSION. Job says to his teasing friends, "You should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?" Notice the curious change of pronouns! "You should say, why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in him?" That is how the words would naturally run. But Job is so earnest to clear himself from Bildad's insinuation that he is a hypocrite that he will not speak of himself in the third person, but plainly declares, "The root of the matter is found in me."

Job seems to say, "The vital part of the matter may or may not be in you, but I know it is in me. You may not believe me, but I know it is so and I tell you, to your faces, that no argument of yours can rob me of this confidence; for as I know that my Redeemer lives, I know that the root of the matter is found in me." Many Christian people are afraid to speak in that fashion. They say, "I humbly hope it is so and I trust it is so." That sounds pretty, but is it right? Is that the way in which men speak about their houses and lands? Do you possess a little freehold? Did I hear you answer,

"I humbly hope that my house and garden are my own"?

What? Then are your title-deeds so questionable that you do not know? Is this the way in which you speak of your wages at the end of the week? "I sometimes have a hope that these shillings are mine." Is that the way you talk about your wife? Is that the manner in which you speak of your own life? Are you afraid, even, to call your soul your own? No, no! We demand certainties in reference to things of value and so it ought to be with regard to Christ and eternity! We cannot put up with mere hopes and surmises in reference to them. Believers should aim at certainty about eternal things and learn to say, like Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives," and, "The root of the matter is found in me." Note well that sometimes this root needs to be searched for.

Job says "the root of the matter is found in me," as if he had looked for it and made a discovery of what else had been hidden. Roots generally lie underground and out of sight and so may our faith in the Redeemer. His interest in the Redeemer may have been a question for self-examination with Job when first his griefs came thick and heavy. It may be a matter of search with us, too—

"He that never doubted of his state, He may—perhaps he may, too late."

I can understand a Christian doubting whether he is saved or not, but I cannot understand his being happy while he continues to doubt about it, nor happy at all till he is sure of it! Job had made his personal condition the subject of investigation. He had dug beneath the surface and had seen within his heart. You cannot always find roots in winter time unless you use a spade and turn over the soil—there are winter times with us when we cannot tell whether we have real faith in Christ or not till we examine whether we are in the faith.

After searching, Job found the treasure and said, "the root of the matter is found in me." And note again, the root of the matter in Job was an inward thing. "The root of the matter is found in me." He did not say, "I wear the outward garb of a religious man." No, but, "the root of the matter is found in me." If you, my Hearers, are in the possession of the essence of true Christianity, it does not lie in your outward profession, your baptism, your Church membership, or your reception of the Lord's Supper! It lies within your heart and mind. Faith, which is the evidence of the inner life, is altogether spiritual and inward. Its abode is within the vitals of the spiritual being—in the very core of the renewed heart. True godliness is not separable from the godly man—it is woven into him just as a thread enters into the essence and substance of the fabric.

When Grace is found in us and we really believe in our Redeemer, we ought to proclaim it, for Job says, "The root of the matter is found in me. I know that my Redeemer lives." Are there not some among you who have never said as much as that? Some of you who are Believers have never yet acknowledged our Lord! What did I call some of you the other day? I think I compared cowardly Believers to rats behind the wainscot that come out at night to eat a crumb or two and then run in again. The rat is a poor creature to be compared with—it is a domestic animal, I suppose, for it lives in the house—but it is not a beautiful object to be likened to and so I will not compare you to it, although there might be more untruthful comparisons.

I pray you try and change before I am driven to the simile. Never be ashamed of Christ, but if you ever are, be more ashamed of yourselves! There ought to be an open declaration of our faith whenever it is necessary, for it is written, "Be you always ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." The fact of our having the root of the matter in us will be a great

comfort to us. "Alas," says Job, "my servant will not come when I call him. My wife is strange to me, my kinsfolk fail me—but I know that my Redeemer lives! Bildad and Zophar and others of them all condemn me, but my conscience acquits me, for I know that the root of the matter is in me."

It is a blessed thing to be able to hear the harsh speeches of men as though we heard them not. What does it matter how others judge me if I know what I know and am sure in my own soul that I am right with God? What if men find fault with our eyes—does it matter, if we can say, "One thing I know, whereas I was once blind now I see"? Critics may find fault with our experience and they may call our earnest utterances, cant, but this will not affect the truth of our conversion or the acceptableness of our testimony for Jesus! If the little bird within our bosom sings sweetly, it is of small consequence if all the owls in the world hoot at us!

There is more real comfort in the possession of simple faith than in the fond persuasion that you are in a high state of Divine Grace. When we proudly think, "Oh, I need not look at the root of the matter, for my flowers and fruits are more than sufficient evidence," we are getting dangerously elevated. That man is in a perilous plight who glories in himself, saying, "How useful I am! How gifted! How influential! How highly my brethren think of me!" All this will turn out to be unsubstantial comfort in the hour of trial. But the root of the matter yields the sweetest and surest consolation at all times. If your Redeemer lives, you shall have a candle lighted for you in the darkest night! This fact will also be your defense against opposers. Thus may you answer them in Job's fashion, "You ought not to condemn me, for, though I am not what I ought to be, or what I want to be, or what I shall be, yet still the root of the matter is found in me. Be kind to me, therefore."

Carefully observe this, my dear young Friends. You have been lately converted and if you fall in with those who are very stern and censorious, you must not be surprised. Some venerable professors have not so much grown ripe as sour and they show their sourness by censuring their younger Brothers and Sisters. It does not occur to them to say, "Why do we persecute him, seeing the root of the matter is in him?" But you may defend yourself against their hard speeches by declaring that you believe in the Savior even as they do! Say to them, "I do not know as much about the Lord Jesus as you do, but I most heartily trust Him. He is as much my Redeemer as He is yours. Do not, therefore, drive me from your company, but deal gently with me, as with a lamb of the flock."

I hope that you who are now young and timid will become strong in the Lord before long and be no longer in danger from severe judgments. And when that comes about I hope that you will, by experience, be very gentle with those who are weak in the faith. If our friends are sincere in their attachment to the Redeemer, let us treat them as our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Thus much on our third point.

IV. Now we come to the fourth subject of discourse, which is a practical lesson from the text for those Believers in Christ who have passed beyond the root stage into a further development. Notice, then, that THIS ROOT OF THE MATTER IS TO BE TENDERLY RESPECTED BY ALL WHO SEE IT. "You should say, why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?" What a rebuke this is to the persecutions which have been carried on by nominal Christians against each other, sect against sect! Romanists have fiercely persecuted Protestants and Protestants have persecuted one another. If they had but listened to their gracious Lord and

Savior, they would have heard Him whisper, "You should say, why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in Me?"

How can those who trust in the same Savior rend and devour each other? In many of the islands of the South Seas our missionaries have been the means of converting the people to the faith. In one of these the shaven crowns of Rome began to put in their appearance with the view of turning away the people from the faith to the errors of Rome. Among their cunning instruments of conversion was a picture representing the tree of the Church. Certain twigs were represented as rotten—they were out off and were falling into the fire—these were such persons as Luther, Calvin and other famous teachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Protestant missionaries, too, were dead twigs and were all to be removed from the tree. The natives were not quite sure about this and made more enquiries. Certain other branches were green and vigorous— these were the priests of the Catholic Church and the larger branches were bishops and cardinals of the same community. The natives were not quite clear about that and passed on to examine the trunk. This, of course, consisted of an array of popes, of whom the islanders had never heard. They passed on, hoping to come to something they knew and so they did, for at the bottom was the name of our Lord Jesus. The enquiring islanders said, "And what is this at the bottom, marked with the name of Jesus?" "That is the root," said the priest. "Well, then," shouted the natives, "we have the root! The new teachers say we have the root and so we are all right—our missionaries have told us the truth."

There was philosophy in that. Let us see to it that "we have the root." Friend, do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God? If so, you have the root! I shall be very sorry if you belong to the Church of Rome, for she teaches much error. But if you rest only in Christ Jesus you will be saved. Do you believe in the once crucified but now living Christ? Well, my Brother, I am sorry you should be a high-churchman, or anything else which is not according to Scripture, but your faith has saved you! I pray you think the same of me, if I, too, am a Believer in the one Redeemer. If I believe and rest my soul on the one salvation which God has provided in Christ Jesus, have charity towards me, for this Rock will bear both you and me. This should end all religious persecutions.

But next it ought to be the end of all ungenerous denunciations. If I know that a man is really believing in Jesus Christ, I may not treat him as an enemy. If I perceive that he holds a great many wrong notions, I am to be grieved at his mistakes and to labor for his instruction, but I ought not to feel hatred towards him. It is my duty, especially if I am a public instructor, to expose and refute his errors, but as for the man, himself, if he trusts in the atoning blood, I am not to treat him as a reprobate. Does he believe in only Jesus Christ? Does he hold to the vital, fundamental Truths of God? Then I am not to make him an offender for a word and twist his language into a meaning what he never intended by it. I am too near akin to every Believer in Jesus to take down bell, book and candle and excommunicate him for not being so well-instructed as he might be!

If the Redeemer is next of kin to me and next of kin to him, why, then, we are near of kin to one another and it is unseemly for us to strive together being Brothers in Christ! For the faith and against all errors we are bound to contend, but anything like personal animosity must be far from us. O for more Christian love! If the root of the matter is in any man, do not let us persecute him, but encourage him. "Well, but I could not enter into any Christian work with him, nor enjoy

fellowship with him, for he does not agree with me." Is it, indeed, so? The Lord have pity upon you! I should not wonder but what you are the worse man of the two—he may be wrong in head, but you are certainly wrong in heart.

Very frequently it happens that the man who has most of the spirit of love is also the man who is nearest to the Truth of God and I generally assume that he who is the least sour is the most sound. The party who most needs to be questioned as to whether the root of the matter is in him is the Brother who has no love. He whose spirit is perfumed with love to others not only has the root, but something of the branch, too, for love is the fair outgrowth of faith. Death to error, death to sin, but salvation to the sinner and life to the Believer, notwithstanding all his mistakes! Let denunciations and exclusiveness be ended forever and let us admit our kinship with all who are in Christ!

Further than this, the question is, "Why persecute we him?" We can do that by a cold mistrust. I have seen chill suspicion exercised by good solid substantial Christians who have had a chronic fear and trembling lest new converts should not be true converts. The young man seems to be very earnest. He is evidently much impressed. He forsakes his sin and there is a great change in him. He boldly declares his faith in Jesus Christ, but the jealous guardian of the purity of the Church objects, for the young man was converted in an irregular way—he did not go among the Presbyterians or Baptists, or Congregationalists, or Evangelical Church people and get saved in a respectable manner! No, he went out in the street and he heard a mere ranter, or a Salvation Army captain and, therefore, it is feared that it cannot be a genuine work of Grace!

The cautious Brother does not say much, but he draws himself into himself and retires from the person whom he suspects, just as a snail draws in his horns and hides himself in his shell. The elder Brother is angry and will not go in and in that way he persecutes the returning prodigal! Why, some of these icy critics will cause the very marrow of a poor fellow's bones to freeze while he looks at him! Do not let us stand off in holy isolation from any who have the root of the matter in them! Why should we persecute such? Let us encourage them and give them information upon the points in which they are deficient. Some people appear to think that every convert ought to be born a fully developed man in Christ Jesus, even as, according to mythology, Minerva sprang from the brain of Jove a full length woman, fully armed, shield and spear and all!

I do not see people born again in this fashion. I believe that some of God's men who are to be leaders are born with beards and very early exhibit a knowledge far beyond their years which sets them in the front from the first—but for the most part, God's children are little when they are born, even as ours are. When my sons first came to my house they were by no means the young men they are now. I should think it likely that the same may be said of your children! What wonder, then, that it is so in God's house! Little children cannot run alone and cannot even speak plainly. Besides, they make strange noises and by their cries they become a nuisance to those who have no sympathy with babies. And so it is with new-born Christians—they cannot run as we wish them to and they cannot spit out the Doctrines of Grace as we desire, or pray as we should like them to pray. Well, but they are little children. And they are alive! Let us not bury them, but let us nurse them!

It is one of the duties of mature Christians to take these children and nurse them for God, for He will give us our wages. Dear Brothers and Sisters, I beg you to be on the lookout in this

congregation for those who have just received the root of the matter—those that have just had the Seed of God dropped into their soul! It has hardly begun to sprout, but you can see it is there. They can just say—

"We are poor sinners, and nothing at all, But Jesus Christ is our All in All."

Do not frighten them, do not distress them, do not chill them like a sharp frost! Cheer and encourage them and say, "I, too, was once as you are— Yes, and I, too, often am as you are. Yes, and I, too, sometimes wish I were still as you are, for I would still be on my knees, keeping humbly dependent upon Christ. Come, if elder Brothers and Sisters will not receive you, I will and I will cheer you and encourage you for Jesus' sake."

Well, try and do that this morning, if you can, before you leave the Tabernacle. There may be somebody sitting next to you who just needs a word. Try it. I know some will be quite frightened at your venturing to speak to them. Very well, frighten them a little, it will not hurt them! Try the power of courteous personal appeal. It may be if you frighten one or two you will be the means of blessing so many more that if those who are frightened do not forgive you, they will not break your heart. God Himself will not, because there will be nothing to forgive. He will commend you for what you have done and I pray you, therefore, do it for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

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Job 19,28 #505 - The Root of the Matter

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

NO. 505

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY EVENING, APRIL 12, 1863,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The root of the matter is found in me."

Job 19:28.

FOR the last three or four Lord's Day evenings I have been trying to fish with a net of small meshes. It has been my anxious desire to gather in and draw to shore the Much-Afraids, the Fearings, the Despondencies, and those of Little-Faith who seem to think it scarcely possible that they could belong to the people of God at all. I hope those sermons which have taken the lowest evidences of Christian life, and have been adapted rather to babes in Divine Grace than to those who are strong men in our Israel, will furnish comfort to many who beforetime had been bowed down with distress.

In pursuance of the same purpose this evening, I take up the expressive figure of our text to address myself to those who evidently have the Grace of God embedded in their hearts, though they put forth little blossom and bear little fruit. I pray that they may be consoled, if there is clear evidence that at least the root of the matter is found in them incidentally. However, the same truth may be profitable, not only to the saplings in the garden of the Lord, but to the most goodly trees. For there are times and seasons when their branches do not put out much luxuriant foliage, and the hidden life furnishes the only true argument of their vitality.

I. Our first aim, then, will be TO SPEAK OF THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ESSENTIAL TO TRUE GODLINESS IN CONTRAST, OR, I might better say, IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER THINGS WHICH ARE TO BE REGARDED AS SHOOTS RATHER THAN AS ROOT AND GROUNDWORK.

The tree can do without some of its branches, though the loss of them might be an injury. But it cannot live at all without its roots—the roots are essential—take those away, and the plant must wither. And thus, my dear Friends, there are things essential in the Christian religion. There are essential doctrines, essential experiences, and there is essential practice. With regard to essential doctrines, it is very desirable for us to be established in the faith. A very happy thing it is to have been taught from one's youth up the sound and solid doctrines which comforted the Puritans—which made blessed the heart of Luther and of Calvin, fired the zeal of Chrysostom and Augustine—and flashed like lightning from the lips of Paul.

By such judicious training we are, no doubt, delivered from many doubts and difficulties which an evil system of theology would be sure to encourage. The man who is sound in the faith, and who understands the higher and more sublime doctrines of Divine Revelation, will have wells of consolation which the less instructed cannot know. But we always believe, and are ever ready to confess, that there are many doctrines which, though exceedingly precious, are not so essential. We believe a person may be in a state of Divine Grace, and yet not receive them.

For instance—God forbid that we should regard a belief in the doctrine of election as an absolute test of a man's salvation—for no doubt there are many precious sons of God who have not been able to receive that precious Truth of God. Of course the doctrine is essential to the great scheme of Grace, as the foundation of God's eternal purpose—but it is not, therefore, necessarily the root of faith in the sinner's reception of the Gospel. And, perhaps, too, I may put the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints in the same list. There are many who, no doubt, will persevere to the end, but who cannot accept the possibility of being assured of the fact.

They are so occupied with the thoughts of their probation that they come not to the mature knowledge of their full salvation. They are securely kept while they credit not their security, just as there are thousands of the elect who cannot believe in election. Though Calvinistic doctrine is so dear to us—we feel ready to die in its defense—yet we would by no means set it up as being a test of a man's spiritual state. We wish all our Brothers and Sisters agreed with us, but a man may be almost blind, and yet he may live. A man with weak eyesight and imperfect vision may be able to enter into the kingdom of Heaven—indeed, it is better to enter there having but one eye, than, having two eyes and being orthodox in doctrine—to be cast into Hell fire.

But there are some distinct truths of Revelation that are essential in such a sense that those who have not accepted them cannot be called Christians. And those who willfully reject them are exposed to the fearful anathemas which are hurled against apostasy. I shall not go into a detailed list. Let it suffice that I give you a few striking illustrations. The doctrine of the Trinity we must ever look upon as being one of the roots of the matter. When men go unsound here, we suspect that, before long, they will be wrong everywhere. The moment you get any suspicion of a man's wavering about the Divinity of Christ, you have not long to wait before you discover that on all other points he has gone wrong. Well did John Newton express it—

"What think you of Christ is the test To try both your state and your scheme. You cannot be right in the rest, Unless you think rightly of Him."

Almost all the forms of error that have sprung up since the days of Dr. Doddridge, when sundry gentlemen began to talk against the proper Deity of the Son of God—all the forms of error, I say, whatever department of the Christian system they may have been supposed to attack—have really stabbed at the Deity of our Redeemer. That is the one thing that they are angry at, as if their mother-wit taught them it was the true line of demarcation between natural and revealed religion. They cannot bear that the glorious Lord should be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, and so they fly to do without Him.

But their tackling is loosed, they cannot well strengthen their mast, they cannot spread the sail. A Gospel without belief in the living and true God—Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity—is a rope of sand. As well hope to make a pyramid stand upon its apex as to make a substantial Gospel when

the real and Personal Deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is left as a moot or disputed point. But I ought to mention the strange incoherency of that discourse which sets forth the influences of the Spirit without a due regard to His Personal agency. Oh, how little is the Holy Spirit known! We get beyond the mere exercise of opinions when we believe in Christ, know the Father, and receive the Holy Spirit. This is to have a knowledge of the true God and eternal life.

Likewise essential is the doctrine of the vicarious sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Any bell that does not ring sound on that point had better be melted down at once. I do not think we have many in our denomination— we do have some who are not very clear—still, I think we have but few that are unsound in the doctrine of the real Substitution of Christ. But there are plenty elsewhere. Perhaps I need not indicate the locality, for in the denomination where they seem to be tolerably prolific, they have one earnest tongue, and one ready pen that is always willing at all times to expose the miscreants who thus do damage to the cause of Christ by giving up the precious blood of Jesus as the sole cause of the remission of sins, and the only means of access to God.

Why, my Brothers and Sisters, we have nothing else left after we have given up this choice seal of the Everlasting Covenant, on which all our hopes depend! Renounce the doctrine of Jesus dying in our place? Better for us all to be offered as one great slaughter, one mighty sacrifice to God on one fire, than to tolerate for a moment any doubts about that which is the world's hope, Heaven's joy, Hell's terror, and eternity's song! I marvel how men are permitted to stand in the pulpit and preach at all, who dare to say anything against the atonement of Christ! I find in the Dutch Church, in the French Church, and in the German Churches, that men are accepted as Christian ministers who will yet speak hard things against the Atonement, itself, and even against the Deity of Him by whom the Atonement was made!

There is no other religion in the world that has been false to its own doctrines in the way that Christianity has been. Imagine a Mohammedan allowed to come forward in the pulpit and preach against Mohammed! Would it be tolerated for a single moment? Suppose a Brahmin, fed and paid to stand up in a temple, and speak against Brahma! Would it be allowed? Surely not! Nor is there an Infidel lecturer in this country but would find his pay stopped at once, if, while pretending to be in the service of Atheism, he declaimed the sentiments he was sworn to advocate. How is it? Why is it? In the name of everything that is reasonable and instinctively consistent, where can it be that men can be called Christian ministers after the last vestige of Christianity has been treacherously repudiated by them?

How is it that they can be tolerated to minister in holy things to people who profess and call themselves sincere followers of Jesus, when they tread under foot the precious blood of Christ, and, "reduce the mystery of godliness to a system of ethics"? To use the words of a Divine of the last century: "Degrade the Christian Church into a school of philosophy. Deny the expiation made by our Redeemer's Sacrifice. Obscure the brightest manifestation of Divine mercy, and undermine the principal pillar of practical religion. And to make a desperate shipwreck of our everlasting interests, they dash themselves to death on the very rock of salvation."

No. We must have the Atonement, and that not tacitly acknowledged, but openly set forth. Charity can go a good way, but charity cannot remove the altar from the door of the Tabernacle, or admit the worshipper into the most Holy Place without the blood of propitiation. So, again, the doctrine of justification by faith is one of the roots of the matter. You know Luther's saying. I need not repeat it.

It is the article of a standing, or falling Church, "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast." Do you preach that doctrine? My hand and my heart are stretched out to you!

Do you deny it? Do you stutter over it? Are you half-afraid of it? My back must be turned against you. I know nothing of you. You are none of the Lord's! What says the Apostle Paul to you? Would he have communed with you? He lifts his hand to Heaven and he says—"If any man preach any other Gospel than that you have received, let him be accursed!" That is Paul's saintly greeting. That is Paul's Apostolic malediction—an "Anathema Maranatha" upon the man that preaches not the Lord Jesus, and who does not vindicate the great doctrine of salvation by Grace and not by works.

Well now, Friend, you may have come in here to listen to our doctrine, and to judge whether you can hold fellowship with us. We have been talking about the root of the matter. Permit me to say that if you are sound on these three points, the One God in Trinity, the glorious doctrine of the Substitution of Christ in the place of sinners, and the plan of salvation by simple faith in Jesus, then inasmuch as these roots of the matter are in you, God forbid that we should exclude you as heretical. If you are in other points unenlightened and groping about in uncertainty, doubtless the Lord will teach you—but we believe the root of the matter is in you so far as doctrine is concerned.

Turning to another department of my subject. There are certain root matters in reference to experience. It is a very happy thing to have a deep experience of one's own depravity. It may seem strange, but so it is. A man will scarcely ever have high views of the preciousness of the Savior who has not also had deep views of the evil of his own heart. High houses, you know, need deep foundations. And when God digs deep, and throws out the mire of self-sufficiency. Then He puts in the great stone of Christ's all-sufficiency, and builds us up high in union and fellowship with Him. To read the guilt of sin in the lurid glare of Mount Sinai, to hear the thunder, and shrink back in wild dismay at the utter hopelessness of approach to God by the Law is a most profitable lesson. Yes, and to see the guilt of sin in the mellow light of Mount Calvary, and to feel that contrition, which a view of Christ Crucified alone can produce—this is to prepare the heart for such an ecstasy of joy in God, through whom we have now received the Atonement—as surpasses, I verily believe, the common experience of Christians. Still I dare not make a criterion of the profound depths of anguish with which some of us have had the sentence of death in ourselves.

But it is absolutely essential that you should be brought to the end of all perfection in the flesh—that all your hopes of legal righteousness should expire—that you should be dead to the Law, in order that you may live unto God. This death may be with painful struggles, or it may be tranquil as a sleep. You may be smitten suddenly, as though an arrow from the Almighty were transfixed in your heart. Or you may pine away by a slow and tedious consumption. Yet die you must, before you can be made partaker of resurrection.

This much, however, I will venture to say—you may be really a child of God and yet the plague of your own heart may be but very little understood. You must know something of it, for no man ever did or ever will come to Christ unless he has first learned to loathe himself and to see that in him, that is in his flesh, there dwells no good thing. You may not be able to talk, as some do, of conflicts within, and of the fountain of the great deep of your natural sin—and yet you may be, for all that—a true child of God.

It is a happy thing, too, to have an experience which keeps close to Christ Jesus. To know what the word, "communion," means, without needing to take down another man's biography—to understand Solomon's Song without a commentary. To read it through and through, and say, "Precious Book! You did express just what I have felt, but what I never could have expressed." But, dear Friends, though all this is well, remember, it is not essential. It is not a sign that you are not converted because you cannot understand what it is to sit under His shadow with great delight. You may have been converted, and yet hardly have come so far as that. Always distinguish between the branches of the matter and the root of the matter. It is well to have branches like the cedars and to send up your shoots towards Heaven—but it is the root that is the all-important thing—the root of the matter.

Now what is the root of the matter experimentally? Well, I think the real root of it is what Job has been talking about in the verses preceding the text—"I know," he says, "that my Redeemer lives." We talked of that this morning. The root of the matter in Christian experience is to know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him. And to know this by a personal appropriation of His power to save by a simple act of faith. In other words, dear Friend, you have the root of the matter in you if your soul can say— "My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand."

There must be in connection with this the repentance of sin, but this repentance may be far from perfect, and your faith in Christ may be far from strong. But, oh, if you hate sin, if you desire to be rid of it, if it is your plague, your burden, your grief. If Christ Jesus is your only comfort, your help, your hope, your trust—then understand—this is the root of the matter. I wish there were more than the root, but inasmuch as that is there, it is enough—you are accepted before God—for the root of the matter is in you. A living faith in a living Savior, and a real death to all creature merit and to all hope in creature strength—this, I take it, is that which is the root of the matter in spiritual experience.

Did I not say that there was a root of the matter practically? Yes, and I would to God that we all practically had the branches and the fruits. These will come in their season, and they must come, if we are Christ's disciples. But nobody expects to see fruit on a tree a week after it has been planted. You know there are some trees that do not bring forth any great fruit till they have been in the ground some two or three years. And then at last, when the favorable season comes, they are white with blossoms and by-and-by are bowed to the earth with luscious fruit.

It is very desirable that all Christians should be full of zeal, should be vehemently earnest, should go about doing good, should minister to the poor, should teach the ignorant, and comfort the distressed. Yet these things cannot be called the real root of the matter. The real root of the matter practically is this—"One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see. The things I once loved I now hate, the things I once hated I love. Now it is no more the world, but God. No more the flesh, but Christ, no more pleasure, but obedience. No more what I will, but what Jesus wills." If any of you can, from your souls, say that you desire the tenor of your life to be, "Lord, not as I will, but as

You will," you have got the root of the matter practically.

Let me guard this part of my subject with one further remark. There are those who do certain duties with a conscientious motive, in order to make themselves Christians—such as observing the Sabbath, holding daily worship of God with their families, and attending the public services of the Lord's House with regularity. But they do not distinguish between these external acts—which may be but the ornaments that clothe a graceless life, and those fruits of good living that grow out of a holy constitution, which is the root of genuine obedience. Some habits and practices of godly men may be easily counterfeited.

Yet I think that there are certain virtues of God's children which defy imitation. "To bear reproach for Christ, and to suffer wrong patiently," is, to my mind, very much like the root in practical godliness. Perhaps there is a timid girl now present who has braved for many a month the persecution of her father and mother to serve that Savior whom her parents never knew. Nobody knows what rough words and harsh treatment she has had to encounter—all because she will come to Chapel. And she will steal away into her own room, sometimes, always with her Bible in her hand when she goes in. And she generally looks as if she had been crying when she comes out. Ah, poor Soul! I doubt not the root of the matter is in you!

Or, see there a young man who has risked losing his employment because he will not conceal his attachment to Christ. Such as these, are sometimes brought into great straits. They do not see any precept that plainly says "You shall do this," or, "You shall not do that." But they find they must be one thing or the other. They make their choice, and it is against their worldly interests—it is done for the love they bear to the Savior's name. Their gentle courage I admire. Their little faith takes a strong grip. Oh, I cannot doubt the root of the matter is found in them! There is practical evidence of it.

Let me pause here for a moment before leaving this first point to notice that you may generally ascertain whether you have got the root of the matter by its characteristic properties. You know a root is a fixing thing. Plants without roots may be thrown over the wall. They may be passed from hand to hand. But a root is a fixed thing. How firmly the oaks are rooted in the ground! You may think of those old oaks in the earth—ever so far off you have seen the roots coming out of the ground and then they go in again and you have said—"Why, what do these thick fibers belong to?"

Surely they belong to one of those old oaks ever so far away. They had sent that root there to act a good hold, so that when the March winds comes through the forest and other trees are torn up—fir trees, perhaps— trees that have outgrown their strength at the top, while they have too little hold at bottom—the old oaks bow to the tempest, curtsey to the storm, and later they lift up their branches again in calm dignity. They cannot be blown down. Well now., if you have got the root of the matter, you are fixed. You are fixed to God, fixed to Christ, fixed to things Divine. If you are tempted, you are not soon carried away. Oh, how many professors there are that have no roots! Get them into godly company and they are such saints.

But get them with other company and what if I say that they are devils? There you have them. Their mother is come up from the country, and she asked them to come tonight to hear Spurgeon. Here they are. Mother does not know but what John is one of the best lads anywhere while she is in town. Ah, but if it happens to be uncle William that comes up to London in a month's time, and

he should ask John to go to a theater! O yes, he will go there, too! And you would never know that John had any religion, for he will put that by until mother comes back again.

He has no roots. Give me the man that is bound hard and fast to Christ—lashed to the Cross by cords that even the knives of Hell cannot sever—lashed to the Cross forever! You have no roots unless you can say, "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed! By stern resolve and by firm covenant Yours I am! Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." Again, a root is not only a fixing thing, but a quickening thing. What is it that first sets the sap flowing in the spring? Why, it is the root. Down below, beneath the earth, it begins to feel the genial influence of the coming spring, and it talks to the trunk and says, "It is time to set the sap flowing." So the sap begins to flow and the buds begin to burst.

Ah, and you must have a vital principle. You must have a living principle. Some Christians are like those toys they import from France, which have sand in them. The sand runs down, and some little invention turns and works them as long as the sand is running. But when the sand is all out it stops. So on Sunday morning these people are just turned right, and the sand runs and they work all the Sunday. But the sand runs down by Sunday night and then they stand still, or else go on with the world's work just as they did before. Oh, this will never do! There must be a living principle—something that shall be a mainspring within—a wheel that cannot help running on, and that does not depend upon external resources.

A root, too, is a receiving thing. The botanists tell us a great many things about the ends of the roots. They can penetrate into the soil hunting after the particular food upon which the tree is fed. Ah, and if you have got the root of the matter in you, when you come to hear a sermon you will be sending out your root to look after the particular food which your soul wants. You will send those roots into the pages of Scripture— sometimes into a hymn book—often into the sermon. Even into a Brother's experience, and into God's Providence—seeking that something upon which your soul can feed.

Therefore it follows that the root becomes a supplying thing, because it is a receiving thing. We must have a religion that lives upon God, and that supplies us with strength to live for God. Oh, how divinely blessed are those men in whom the root of the matter is found!

II. Let me briefly notice, in the second place, that WHEREVER THERE IS THE ROOT OF THE MATTER, THERE IS VERY MUCH GROUND FOR COMFORT.

Sounds there in my ears the sigh, the groan, the sad complaint?—"I do not grow as I could wish. I am not so holy as I want to be. I cannot praise and bless the Lord as I could desire. I am afraid I am not a fruitful bough whose branches run over the wall"? Yes, but is the root of the matter in you? If so, cheer up, you have cause for gratitude. Remember that in some things you are equal to the greatest and most full-grown Christian. You are as much bought with blood, O little Saints, as are the holy Brotherhood. He that bought the sheep, bought the lambs, too. You are as much an adopted child of God as any other Christian.

A babe of a span long is as true a child of its parents as is the fullgrown man. You are as truly justified, for your justification is not a thing of degrees. Your little faith has made you clean every whit. It could have done no more had it been the strongest faith in the world. You have as much right to the precious things of the Covenant as the most advanced Believers, for your right to

Covenant mercies lies not in your growth, but in the Covenant itself. And your faith in Jesus may not assay to measure the extent of your inheritance in Him. So then, you are as rich as the richest, if not in enjoyment, yet in real possession.

You are as dear to your Father's heart as the greatest among us. If there is a weakling in a family, the father often loves it the most, or at least indulges it with the most caresses. And when there is a child that has lost one of its senses, be it sight or hearing, you will notice with what assiduous care the parents watch over that one! You are possibly such a tender one, and Christ is very tender over you. You are like the smoking flax—anybody else would say, "Put out that smoking flax. What a smell! How it fills the room with a foul and offensive odor!" "But the smoking flax He will not quench."

You are just like a bruised reed. There used to be some music in you, but now the reed is broken, and there is no tuneful note at all to be brought out from the poor, bruised, crooked and broken reed. Anyone else but the Chief Musician would pull you out and throw you away. You might think He would be sure to say, "I do not want a bruised reed. It is of no use at all among the pipes." But He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Instead of being downcast by reason of what you are, you should begin to triumph in Christ.

Am I but little in Israel? Yet in Christ I am made to sit in heavenly places! Am I poor in faith? Still in Christ I am heir of all things! Do I sometimes wander? Yet Jesus Christ comes after me, and brings me back. Though, "less than nothing, I can boast and vanity confess." If the root of the matter is in me, I will rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the God of my salvation!

III. This brings me to the third and closing part—WHEREVER THE ROOT OF THE MATTER IS, THERE WE SHOULD TAKE CARE THAT WE WATCH IT WITH TENDERNESS AND WITH LOVE.

Some of you may have the notion that you are advanced in knowledge, that you have much skill in interpreting the Word of God, and that you understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven. It is highly possible that your notion is correct. You go out into the world, and you meet with people who do not know quite as much as you do, and who have not yet learned all the doctrines of Grace as they are threaded together in the Divine plan of salvation. May I persuade you not to get into controversy, not to be continually fighting and quarrelling with people who do not hold to just your sentiments?

If you discover the root of the matter in any man, say at once—"Why should I persecute you? Why should we fall to quarrelling with each other, seeing that the root of the matter is in us both?" Save your swords for Christ's real enemies. The way to make men learn the Truth of God is not to abuse them. We shall never make a Brother see a doctrine by smiting him in the eye. Hold your lantern up and let him see. I remember, when in my boyhood, I sometimes held a candle at night for a man sawing who was a worldling. He used to say to me—"Now, my lad, hold the candle so that you can see yourself, and you may depend upon it that I can see, too."

And I have generally found that if you hold up the doctrines in such a way that you can see them yourselves, and just tell to others the way in which you have been led, by His Grace, to see them—and how you see them now—you will often give a light to other men, if they have the root of the matter in them. Quarrel not—fight not with them—but be friends and especially show yourself

friendly.

Then, again, if you meet with young professors who have the root of the matter in them, do not begin condemning them for lack of knowledge. I have heard of some old Believers, yes, and of some not very old, too, who had read a great deal and had, perhaps, more in the head than in the heart. And when young enquirers came to see them, they began to ask them—"Which theory do you hold, sublapsarian or supralapsarian?" I do not mean that they exactly said those very words, but they suggested some knotty points or something of that sort. And the young people have said—"I am sure I do not know, Sir."

It has sometimes been the case that these young enquirers have been dealt very harshly with. I remember one case where a certain Brother—a good man, too, in his way, said—"Well, now, I am sorry to tell you that you are no child of God. If you die as you are, you will be lost"—only because the poor child did not exactly know the difference between two things that are amazingly alike after all. I do not think we ought to do this. It is not for us to go about killing all the lambs. For if we do this, where will the sheep come from? If we are always condemning those who have only begun as yet to learn their letters, we shall never have any readers.

People must begin to say, "Two times two are four," before they can ever come to be very learned in mathematics. Should we stop them at once, and say—"You are no child of God, because you do not know how to compute the logarithms of Divine"? Why, then at once we have put out of the synagogue those who might have been its best ornaments! Remember, my dear Friends, that wherever we see the root of the matter, Christ has accepted the person, and therefore we ought to accept him. This is why I love to think that when we break bread at this table we always receive among us, as far as we know, all those who have got the root of the matter in them.

I have heard a story of the late good Dr. Stedman, when he was tutor of Bradford College. It appears he was a very strict-communion Baptist, and carried it out conscientiously. One day he preached for some Independents, and in the afternoon, after the service, there was to be Communion. Now Mr. Stedman prayed most earnestly that the Lord would be pleased graciously to vouchsafe His Presence to the dear Brothers and Sisters when they met around His Table. After the service was over he was going to the vestry to put on his great coat, intending to go home. One of the deacons said—"Doctor, you will stop with us, will you not, to Communion?" "Well, my dear Brother," he said, "it is no want of love, but, you see, it would compromise my principles. I am a strictcommunion Baptist, and I could not well stop and commune with you who have not been baptized. Do not think it is any want of love, now, but it is only out of respect to my principles." "Oh," said the deacon, "but it is not your principles, because what did you pray for, Doctor? You prayed your Master, the Lord Jesus, to come to His Table. And if according to your principles it is wrong for you to go there, you should not ask your Master to come where you must not go yourself. But if you believe that your Lord and Master will come to the table, surely where the Master is, it cannot be wrong for the servant to be."

The deacon's reasoning appears to me very sound. And it is in the same spirit I say of any, or to any whose sincere faith I have no reason to doubt—if they have got the root of the matter in them, "Come and welcome!" We are sorry that when our friends ought to keep the feast of tabernacles with great branches of trees they only pull small twigs, and so do not get the benefit of the broader shadow. We are sorry that when Christ tells them to be immersed they go and sprinkle—but that is

their own business and not ours. To their own Master they must stand or fall. But if the root of the matter is there, why persecute them? Seeing that the root of the matter is found in them, let them come. God has received them, and let us do the same.

That matter about encouraging young Believers and not putting stumbling blocks in their path may seem to some of you decidedly unimportant. But I am persuaded that there are many young Christians who have been made to suffer for years through the roughness of some more advanced Believers. Christian! You that are strong—be very tender towards the weak—for the day may come when you will be weaker than they. Never did bullock push with side and shoulder the lean cattle of the herd when they came to drink. The Lord took away the glory from the fat bull of Bashan, and made him willing to associate with the very least of the herd.

You cannot intimidate a child of God without making his Father angry. And though you are a child of God yourself—if you deal harshly with one of your Brothers and Sisters—you shall smart for it. The Master's rod is always ready, even for His own beloved children, when they are not tender with the sons and daughters of Zion, who are kept as the apple of God's eye. Remember, too, Brothers and Sisters, that the day may come when you will want consolation from the very friend whom you have treated so roughly. I have known some great people—some very great people—that have at last been made to sit at the feet of those whom before they called all sorts of ill names.

God has His ways of taking the wind out of men's sails. While their sails were full, and the wind blew, they said, "No, no. We do not care about that little port over yonder. We do not care to put in there. It is only a miserable little fishing village." But when the wind came howling on, and the deep rolled heavily, and it seemed as if the dread artillery of God were all mustering for the battle, ah, how with the reef sail they have tried to fly, as best they could, into the little harbor! Do not speak ill of the little harbor. Do not be ashamed of little Christians. Stand up for the weaklings of the flock, and let this be your motto, you strong Christians—

"There's not a lamb amidst the flock I would disdain to feed. There's not a foe before whose face I'd fear Your cause to plead."

Now I ask you, by way of solemn searching investigation: Have you the root of the matter in you? I have spoken for your encouragement, in case you have the root of the matter in you. If you have not, there awaits you nothing but destruction—but, by His Grace, you are not hopelessly lost! The root of the matter is still to be had. The Holy Spirit can yet give you a new heart and a right spirit. Jesus Christ is still able and willing to save.

Oh, look there! I see His five wounds. They flow with rivers of blood! Look there, Sinner! And as you look, by His Grace, you shall live! Whoever you may be, though you are the worst sinner out of Hell, yet—

"While the lamp holds out to burn, The vilest sinner may return."

Look there, Sinner, look, look and live! I think I have closed my sermon each night lately with those words, and I will do so again tonight. There is life in a look at a crucified Savior. There is life at this moment for you. Oh, look to Him, and you shall find that life for yourself. God bless you, for Jesus' sake.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all who love Jesus, now and eternally. Amen. Amen.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Chapter 62

Job 21,29-31 #410 - Not Now-But Hereafter!

NOT NOW, BUT HEREAFTER!

NO. 410

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 22, 1861,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Have you not asked them that go by the way? And do you not know

their tokens, that the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction?

They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. Who shall

declare his way to his face? and who shall

repay him what he has done?"

Job 21:29-31.

THE sermon which I preached two Lord's days ago upon the accidents has caused considerable consternation among pious people with weak heads. Their idea that all calamities are judgments is so inveterate a prejudice and so favorite a dogma that our exposure of its absurdity is, in their opinion, eminently calculated to encourage sin and quiet the consciences of offenders. Now I feel quite at ease in this matter and am confident that I have done service to our great cause—even though the timid should be alarmed and the superstitious should be annoyed.

Our gracious God and Father has seen fit to give us a whole book of the Bible upon the subject. The Mal. drift of the Book of Job is to prove that temporal afflictions are not evidences of the Lord's displeasure. And I beg the modern Bildads and Zophars to reconsider their position—lest they, too, should be found to be "speaking wickedly for God and talking deceitfully for Him" (Job 13:7). In my very soul I feel that if evil days shall come upon me, if poverty, desertion and disease should place me upon Job's dunghill, I shall point to that sermon with pleasure.

And I will say to those who will tell me that God is angry with me and has judged me to be unworthy, "No, you know not what you say for the judgment is not passed already, nor is this the field of execution; neither disease, nor bereavements, nor poverty, can prove a man to be wicked, nor do they even hint that the chosen are divided from the hearts of Christ." O my beloved Friends, settle it in your hearts that men are not to be judged according to their present circumstances! Learn like David to understand their end. It will save you from writing bitter things against yourselves in the time of trouble and prevent your scanning the works of Providence and measuring the infinite by line and plummet.

It is mainly my business, today, to deal with those who may wickedly continue in sin because their judgment tarries. If the Lord does not in this world visit the ungodly with stripes, this is but the surer evidence that in the world to come there is a solemn retribution for the impenitent. If the affliction which is here accorded to men is not the punishment of sin, we turn to Scripture and discover what that punishment will be. And we are soon informed that it is something far heavier than any calamities which occur in this life—something infinitely more tremendous than the most disastrous accident, the most shocking mutilation, or the most painful death.

I know that there are some in these days who are like those in the time of the royal Preacher, of whom He said, "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Should I be addressing some this morning who have found a stupid quiet for their consciences in the fact that God does not here usually visit men's sins upon their heads, let me put it to them whether such peace is reasonable.

There is a city which has revolted. A great king has threatened them with entire destruction for the revolt. He does not, in hurried passion, send against them a handful of soldiers to inflict instant and petty chastisement—he waits awhile and marshals all his hosts till every battalion has been put in array, till every mighty man has girded on his armor. Fools! Will you draw consolation from the delay of your destroyer? Will you say, because he has not ridden forth against you on the very day of your rebellion that therefore this is a time of revelry and mirth? No, inasmuch as he is gathering his hosts for the battle, let it cause you to tremble—for he shall break down your walls and give your whole company to the sword.

Imagine yourselves voyagers, far out upon the sea. A black cloud darkens the sky. You say you fear not the cloud because it is not at present pouring forth the flood. But that is the reason why you should fear it—for the cloud is waiting until it grows and spreads—till under the wing of darkness the egg of cloud has been hatched into the black screaming eagle of the storm. The clouds are hurrying from east and west, mustering for the strife! Mark you not the sea heaving heavily in sympathy with Heaven's convulsions? Behold how all the dread artillery of Heaven is gathering up for one tremendous shock. Fools! Do you say you will not fear because the thundercloud has not yet burst, because as yet the breath of wind has not transformed itself into the blast of hurricane?

It is gathering, Sirs, congregating its forces and accumulating its fury and the longer that it gathers the more terrible shall be the moment when it bursts upon your devoted heads. And so today, God's clouds that float in the sky—the calamities of Providence—are not pouring on you the tempest of wrath. But is this a reason why you should be at peace? No! The clouds are gathering, every sin is adding to the mass, every day of God's long-suffering is covering Heaven in blacker sable. Every moment that He spares He does but prepare to punish in more tremendous force. And dread and direful shall be the day when at last Omnipotence itself shall come to the assistance of outraged Justice and you shall feel that God is God as much in punishing sin as in the making of the worlds. It was a fable of the old Jewish rabbis that when the angel Gabriel flew he used both wings because he always came with good tidings. But that when Michael flew, bearing God's sword to smite through the loins of king, he always flew with one wing. But Michael arrives as surely at his destined goal as Gabriel himself. The feet of the avenging deities may seem to be shod with lead for tardiness and their tread may be as noiseless as wool—but they are

as sure as the feet of mercy. I know when God comes to bless, the axles of His chariot are hot with speed and His steeds are white with foam. And when He comes to curse He travels slowly, with many a sigh, for He wills not the death of any but had rather "that he should turn unto Him and live."

But remember in judgment He comes in all His might and He shall be discovered to be not less a God when He smites than when He gives the kisses of His lips and lifts the pardoned sinner into acceptance and favor.

We shall now deal with the sorrowful topic of the punishment of sin in the world to come. I have preached less upon this subject than almost upon any other—and yet always is it thrown in our teeth that we delight to dwell upon these horrors. I never come to this subject without the deepest distress of heart and God alone shall know how many tears it costs these eyes when I have to deal out as God's faithful ambassador the thunders of His Law. I delight to preach of Calvary and of divine love and of grace unsearchable. But this theme is to me the burden of the Lord. We must not. We dare not keep it back. Fidelity to conscience, truthfulness to God, love to the souls of men constrain us to make this a part of our ministry—not keeping back any part of the price.

I will divide the discourse this morning into three parts. First, I shall speak of the punishment of sin, by way of affirmation—or prove that it must be so. Secondly, by way of explanation—of what kind and nature this punishment must be. And then, thirdly, by way of expostulation— pleading with those who are yet in the land of mercy that they would hasten to the voice of wisdom and that God's grace may turn them from the error of their ways.

I. First, then, by way of affirmation—THERE MUST BE A PUNISHMENT FOR SIN.

Job says that this is a Truth so written upon the very nature of man that even those who go by the way, the ignorant traveler and wayfarer, dares not for a moment deny that such is the case. "Have you not asked them that go by the way? And do you not know their tokens?" And truly it is so. If there is one intuitive Truth which man perceives without need of argument, it is that sin deserves to be punished. And since sin in not punished here, it follows that the punishment must be endured in the world to come.

Let us, however, very briefly review the argument. Sin must be punished from the very nature of God. God is. If God is God, He must be just. You can no more separate the idea of justice from the idea of God than you can omniscience, or omnipresence, or omnipotence. To suppose of a God who was not omnipotent is to make a supposition which is contradictory in its terms. For the term "God" includes that thought. And to suppose an unjust God is to imagine an absurdity—you have used, I repeat it, contradictory terms—justice is included in the very thought of God.

See how the oppressed always recognize this. The slave who has long been trampled under the feet of a tyrannical master—with his back fresh from the gory lash—lifts up his eye to God the Avenger, for he feels instinctively that God must be just. Nationalities who have made appeals to arms but have been subdued again to serfdom—at last in their despair cry out to God—for this is the bottom of man's thoughts. This is the one which is sure to come forth when pain has emptied out his lighter notions—that God does execute righteousness and judgment "for all that are oppressed." So, too, when man would affirm a thing to be true he calls upon God to be his witness because in his innermost nature he feels that God will be a just and impartial witness.

If he thought not so it would be ridiculous to call upon God to witness to his statement. Note how the tearful eye, the groaning mind, the bursting heart all turn instinctively to the Judge of all the earth. Man feels that God must be just. But how just? How just, if crowned heads that do injustice shall go unpunished? How just, if the adulterer, the thief, the liar and the hypocrite unpunished here, should go unpunished in the world to come? Where is your justice, God, if this world is all? We say, "Alas for love if you were an end nothing beyond, O earth!" And we may add, alas, for justice, too. For where could it live, where could it dwell, unless there were a world to come in which God will right the wrongs and avenge Himself upon all who have trampled on His laws?

Not only does His very nature show this but those acts of God which are recorded in Revelation prove incontestably that He will by no means spare the guilty. There have been judgments. I am not now appealing to the crotchets and opinions of ill-judging man, but to the inspired chronicles, for I will quote those judgments alone which the Word of God calls such. Adam sinned. 'Twas but the touching of an apple—Eden was blasted, Adam was exiled. The world sinned. They ate, they drank, they married and were given in marriage. They forgot the Most High. The fountains of the great deep gave forth their floods. The cisterns of Heaven emptied out their cataracts. All the world was drowned. And the last shriek of the strong swimmer yielding at last to universal death told us that God is just.

Look across to the allies of the plain. When they had wholly given themselves up to unnatural lusts God rained fire and brimstone out of Heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah. And when He did so, what did He but write in letters of fire this word—"God is just, He furiously avenges and terribly punishes sin." Behold, too, Pharaoh and all his hosts drowned in the Red Sea. For what purpose was Pharaoh but that God might show forth His power in him—might prove to the world that there were vessels of wrath and that God knew how to fill them to the brim and break them as with a rod of iron? Look to Palestine and behold its kings put to death by the sword of the Lord and His servant Joshua.

What means a land stained in blood? It means this—that the race had offended much against Heaven. And God, that man might have some glimpses of His terrible justice, declared that He would root out the races of Canaan and would have war with Amalek from generation to generation. It is impossible to reconcile Old Testament history with the effeminate notion of Neological divinity—that God is only a universal Father and not a Governor and a Judge. If these gentlemen will quietly read some of those awful passages in the Old Testament, they cannot—unless they should deny the inspiration of the passage, or attempt to tone down its meaning—they cannot but confess that they see there far less a loving parent than a God dressed in arms.

A God of whom we may say, "The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name. Your right hand, O Lord, Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces Your enemies." A God without justice is what this modern church is seeking after. These new doctrines would fashion a deity destitute of those sublime attributes which keep the world in awe and command for Him the reverence of His creatures.

This brings me to my third argument. Not only do the nature and the acts of God prove that He will punish sin but the very necessities of the world demand it. Imagine the contrary. Put in all our Christian pulpits men who should teach sinners that there is no punishment for sin. Let them say to

them, "What you suffer here is to be looked upon as God's judgment on your offense. But there is no world to come in which your sins will be visited upon your heads." Friends, you may at once advise the government to multiply the number of our jails tenfold. If there is no punishment for sin in another world, if it be so light and trifling an offense that the little sufferings of this life are sufficient atonement for it, then you have thrown up the floodgates which have up to now dammed up the overflowing floods.

You will soon see society swept from its moorings. There will be no possibility that men will seek to be honest when they find that honesty or dishonesty are terms which have but a trifling difference between them. If sin is so slight a thing men will think virtue to be a slight thing, too. And if there is so little punishment for crime they will soon think that there can be but little reason for virtue. And then where will be our commonwealths and our social compacts? The best lawgivers, however amiably disposed they may be, find that they must back up their laws with penalties.

A State which should be founded upon laws without penalties could not last a week—or if it lasted—you would find that while the laws would be disregarded there would be more death and more suffering than there had been before. When was the guillotine most at work but when there was loudest boast of liberty and men's living without law? When would there be the most of murder but when there should no more be heard the threat of condemnation and when they who were assassins might be permitted to go abroad untouched? There must be punishment for the world's own good, to say nothing of the nature of God, which for its dignity and holiness necessarily demands that every offense and transgression should receive its just recompense of reward.

But further—I affirm the punishment of sin from the atonement of Christ. Friends, if there is no necessity that sin should be punished, why did Jesus die? Why, Father, did you send Your only begotten and wellbeloved Son and lay upon Him the iniquities of us all? Was He needed for an example? He might have been our example without dying—in fact if this were all—virtue, crowned and glorified might have been quite as noble an incentive to goodness as virtue mocked and crucified. He was needed that He might take our sins and having taken our sins it became absolutely necessary that Jesus Christ should die.

In the death of Christ, if sin must not necessarily be punished, I see nothing but the death of a martyr like James, or Peter, or Polycarp—the death of a man murdered for being better than his fellows. And why do we make this fuss and noise about salvation by the death of Christ if that is all? Why has the Christian church existed to be a false witness, to testify to a fiction? Why has her blood been shed these many centuries to maintain that the blood of Jesus Christ takes away the sin of the world—if the sin could be taken away without punishment? The wounds of Christ have no meaning, His precious blood has no value, His thorn-crowned head is not worthy of worship, nor is His death worthy of daily ministry unless it be that He suffered, "the Just for the unjust to bring us to God."

God in Christ punished the sins of His people. And if He did it in Christ, unpardoned Sinner, rest assured He will do it in you. If the imputed sins of Christ brought Him the agonies of Gethsemane, what will your sins bring you? If guilt that was not His own brought Him an exceeding heaviness, "even unto death," what will your sins bring you—sins, remember—which are your own? "He that spared not His own Son" will never spare rebels. He who did not spare His Son a single lash or a single stroke will certainly make no exemption in your favor if you live and die impenitent and reject

the Gospel of Christ.

Besides, my dear Friends, permit me to say that those who think that sin is not to be punished are generally the worst of men. Men hate Hell for the reason that murderers hate the gallows. The miscreant Youngman who was executed on the top of yonder jail, informed the chaplain that he objected on principle to all capital punishment—an objection natural enough when it was his own inevitable doom. They who dissent from the doctrine of divine justice are interested in forming that opinion. The wish is father to the thought—they would have their sin unpunished—they hope it may be and then they say it will be. You will not listen to a thief's objection to a policeman. You do not imagine that a criminal's objection to a judge is very valid and the sinner's objection to Hell lies only here—that he will not repent—and he therefore fears the dread certainty that he shall be punished. Besides, even these worst of men who pretend not to believe, do believe. Their fears betray the secret conviction of their consciences and on their dying beds, or in a storm—whenever they have thought they were about to see with their own eyes the stern realities of eternity—their fears have proved them to be as strong believers as those who profess the faith.

Infidelity is not honest. It may profess to be but it is not. I think that our judges are right in not accepting the oath of an infidel. It is not possible that he should be honest in the notion that there is no God when God is around him in every leaf, in every tree and in every star in the sky. It is not possible that a man should be honest when he calls himself an atheist. Nor do we believe that any man can speak the dictates of his inmost heart when he says that sin will never be punished and that he may sin with impunity. His conscience gives him the lie—he knows it must be so— and that God will visit his offenses upon his head.

I shall not enlarge further except to say in gathering up my thoughts. Impenitent Sinner, be you sure of this—there shall not a sin of yours fall to the ground unremembered, "For every idle word that you shall speak God will bring you into judgment." How much more for every blasphemous word and for every rebellious act? Do not wrap yourself up in the delusive thought that sin will escape unpunished. Even if it should be so, then the Christian is as well off as you are. But since righteousness will be laid to the line and judgment to the plummet, what will become of you? Be wise before it is too late. Believe today what you will find out to be a fact before long.

God has revealed it to you, His revelation has tokens and signs which prove its Divine Origin. Believe what He has revealed—do not say in your heart, "I never will believe there is a Hell unless one should come from it." Do you not see that if one should come from it then you would not believe at all? You would say, "If one person came from Hell, then another may and I may myself." It would take away all your dread of future punishment if any spirit should come back from it. Yet methinks the shrieks of dying sinners, the cries which some of you have heard coming up from the death beds of blasphemers, ought to be enough evidence that there is a world to come whereof we speak.

And that there are terrors of the Law which are happily concealed today from your eyes and from your ears but which you may soon know—and know far better than the best words can teach you. By your own feelings, by your own everlasting despair and banishment from God will you know them if you repent not.

II. I turn now to the second portion of the discourse—THE NATURE OF THIS PUNISHMENT by way of explanation. How will God punish sin? The text says, "The wicked is reserved to the day of destruction, they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath." The old Puritan preachers, such men as Alleine, who wrote the "Alarm," and others of his class always gave a very gross picture of the world to come. They could never represent it except by brimstone flames and dancing fiends and such like horrors. They were conscientious in the drawing of the picture and to them the terrors of the Lord were gross, corporeal, unscriptural ideas of Hell. But rather let us feel that it is a great mystery concerning which we must rather follow Scripture than imagination.

The first punishment which will be executed upon man for his sins will be punishment to his soul. The soul leaves the body—the body is here enclosed in the coffin—rotting in the tomb. The disembodied spirit will appear before its God. It will then know at once what its future destination shall be. The great assize will not then have been held. The Judge will not have officially pronounced the sentence but the soul, anticipating the sentence, will antidote its execution. Memory will begin to reflect upon past sins, past mercies unimproved, past opportunities neglected and past offenses which have long been forgotten.

Then the conscience will begin to thunder. "You did this wantonly," says Conscience. "You did it against light and knowledge. You did despise Christ. You did neglect the day of mercy. You have been a suicide. You have destroyed yourself." Then the fears will come in—the fears of the Day of Judgment—when the body shall be reunited with the soul. And those fears will sting the man with thoughts like these. "What will you say when He comes to judge you? How will you bear the eyes of Him that shall read you through and through? Now you know that what was preached to you on earth is true.

"You are no infidel now. Now the Truth is not kept out of your soul by the dullness of your fleshly body. You see you know it. What will become of you when earth shall pass away and Heaven shall shake and Hell shall gape to receive its prey?" So the spirit shall be virtually in Hell before the body goes there. This shall be the first punishment of sin. Then, when the day predestined shall have come, the trump of the archangel shall ring through the air—the trump this time of the Second Resurrection—for the dead in Christ shall have already risen and have reigned with Christ upon the earth.

Then rings the elation note that wakes the dead. They start up and the soul returns to its old house, the body. Then it receives its sentence. It is brought forth as the text says, "to the day of wrath"—it had been reserved in chains before, in blackness and darkness. It is now brought forth to receive the sentence, that the body may begin its Hell. Then, mark you beyond a doubt—for we cannot understand Scripture and especially the words of Christ without it—the body shall have pains meet for its offenses.

Your members were servants of your lusts. They shall now be partakers of the wage of your soul. The feet that carried you in the paths of sin shall tread the fiery road. The eyes which gazed with lustful glance shall now be made to weep the scalding tear. The teeth which ministered to your gluttony shall now gnash for pain. The tongue which talked so exceeding proudly against God, shall be "tormented in this flame." There shall be certainly a punishment for the body as well as for the soul—for what else did Christ mean when He said—"Fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell."

I shall not enlarge upon what sort of punishment this will be. Suffice it to say that whatever it is, it will be just. The sinner in Hell shall not endure one iota more than he deserves. He shall have the due reward of his deeds—no more. God is not unjust to punish men arbitrarily—I know of no arbitrary condemnation. There is no such thing as sovereign damnation. It will be justice—inflexible, I grant you—but yet not such as shall pass the bounds of due and right desert. God will give to man only the harvest of his own deeds. He sowed the wind and he shall reap the whirlwind.

You shall not have the consolation in Hell of saying that you did not deserve it—for in Hell you will be made to feel, "I brought this on myself. I destroyed myself. It is true I am in pain, but I am the father of my own pains. I planted the tree which yields the bitter fruit. I dug about it and I watered it. I did the work. I labored and these are my wages." And you will have to feel there and then that in every pang that rends the heart God is infinitely just. And then, whatever the pain may be, we know that while it is just, it will be terrible.

Whose are those awful words, "He shall burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"! Is this the language of Moses? No, of Christ! It is a remarkable fact that the most frightful descriptions of punishment of another world are from the lips of the Savior. Had Peter spoken them you would have said Peter was harsh in spirit. It was the Master spoke them. He who wept over Jerusalem said, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." He spoke of "burning up the chaff." He spoke of "binding hand and foot and giving them up to the tormentors." In the compass of Revelation there are no words so grim and terrible in their awful suggestiveness as the words of Him, "who went about doing good." He who wept and cried, "Come unto Me, you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

And we know, again, that this punishment will be eternal. This is the very essence of it. There were no Hell if it were not eternal—for the hope of an end would be the end of fear. If there could be an end to Hell at any time, there would be an end to it at once. No man would feel that desperate despair if there were a hope that it should come to a close. But it is eternity, eternity, eternity that makes punishment bad. This is the bell which tolls the funeral of every hope—eternity, eternity, eternity. To sail across a sea of fire forever, never reaching a haven. To sink, but never reach the bottom, or to rise to heights of greater agony and never reach the summit.

Oh, Brethren—Brothers and Sisters—it is not the wrath of God in this world that you have so much to fear. The wrath's to come, the wrath's to come. And it is not the wrath that the soul shall be filled with when it has been there a thousand years—it is the wrath to come. They will go on sinning and God will go on avenging. They will go on blaspheming and they shall go on gnawing their tongues. They shall go on hating God and they shall go on feeling His anger. They shall go from bad to worse in character and doubtless from bad to worse in agony. O God, help us to escape from this awful thing—the wrath, the wrath to come!

III. I close now by offering SOME FEW WORDS OF EXPOSTULATION. You will kindly look at the thirty-first verse. He says, "Who shall declare

his way to his face? And who shall repay him what he has done!" Now there are many men who think they shall come off Scot free because in this life there are none who will dare to mention their sins to their face. The covetous man is very seldom rebuked for his covetousness. If a man lives

an unclean life he does not usually read books which would prick his conscience. If a man acts dishonorably in his trade, if another should tell him of it, he would be exceedingly insulted.

It is true a faithful minister will often make men feel uneasy in their sins—for he will be led by God's direction to give such a description of the offenses and of the punishment—that he will make sinners tremble in their shoes. But still are there not some among you here today who can sin with both your hands and there is no Elijah to say, "You are the man"? You have none to meet you in Naboth's vineyard and say to you, "Have you killed and taken possession?" There is perhaps hardly a "still small voice"—though there used to be one—the agonizing face of your wife when first you had forsaken the way of virtue.

The ghastly look of your mother as you were bringing down her gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. The sorrowful gaze of your little children when first their father became a drunkard—these were still voices to you, but they are hushed now. When God gives you up, then indeed your damnation slumbers not. But remember however cheaply you can sin now, God will not fear insulting you. He will bring your sins to your remembrance and there shall be no consideration of your dignity. He will not consult your feelings. He will not look upon you as a great one. He will bring your sins to remembrance in no courtly phrases and in no polished terms.

You shall find that the lips of Justice know not how to make distinctions between you and the basest menial whom once you despised. Now if a man should speak your character it would be libel. But when God speaks it, you shall not threaten Him! What? Do you think that He will fear and tremble before you? Who are you, O man, that the lips of the Eternal God should be silent about you? Who are you that He should fail to draw your character in black or crimson hues? He will convict you to your face and you shall be utterly unable to plead guiltless of your sins.

And then the text says "Who shall repay him?" Ah, there is no hand which dares repay you now. You have gone unpunished. No law can touch you, you say. Ah, but there is a Divine Law which overrides the law that is human. And if the arm of human justice is too short, the arm of God is as long as it is strong and He will reach you—and to the last jot and tittle pay you your due reward. You shall not escape even in the slightest degree. No pleas and prayers, no tears and excuses shall have any avail with Him— till Justice shall have had its uttermost farthing—you shall by no means come out from there.

And now, Sinner, why will you dare the wrath of God? Why will you run this fearful risk? Why will you make your bed in Hell? Why will you dwell in everlasting burnings? Is it wise, or are you mad and is your reason gone? Have I preached to you a bugbear and a fable?—If so, go your way and sin. But oh, if it is true—and it must be—unless you are prepared to reject that precious Book and the very name of Christian—if it is true! Soul, I pray you let me feel for you, if you will not feel for yourself.

Why dash yourself upon the point of Jehovah's javelin? Why destroy yourself against the bosses of His shield? What can there be that makes you so in love with ruin? Why will you hug the grave and embrace destruction? Soul, again I say—are you mad?—Are you mad?—Are you mad? May the Lord teach you reason and may He help you to flee to the only Refuge where a sinner may find mercy.

I shall close when I have tried to set out the way of Mercy. I have read in the old Histories of England that Edward the Second, one of our kings, was exceedingly enraged against one of his courtiers. Being out hunting one day he threatened the courtier with the severest punishment. There was a river between them at the time and the courtier, thinking that he was perfectly safe, ventured to offer some jeering remark upon the king— telling him that at any rate he would not be likely to chastise him until he got at him. The king, feeling his anger hot within him, told him that the water should not long divide them. He leaped into the middle of the stream and with some difficulty gained the other side.

The courtier, in great alarm, fled in terror. The king pursued him with might and main, spurring his horse to the utmost. Nor did his anger cease. He carried his drawn sword in his hand with the intention of killing him. At last the courtier, seeing that there was no hope for any escape, knelt down upon the grass and laying bare his neck, said, "I heartily deserve to die. Mercy, King! Mercy!" The king put his sword back into the scabbard in a moment and said, "While you sought to escape me I determined to destroy you, but when I see you humble at my feet I freely forgive you."

Even so is it with the King of Heaven. Sinners, you say there is this life between you and God. Ah, but how soon will the white horse of Justice pass the stream and then flee. Flee as you may today, He will surely overtake you. He now is swift to destroy—let it be yours on your knees to make confession of your sin and say, "I deserve Your wrath, Great King, I deserve Your wrath." And if to this you are enabled to add the plea of the precious blood of Christ, the sword of Justice will return into its scabbard and He will say, "I am just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly." For Jesus died and inasmuch as Jesus Christ has died, Justice is satisfied on the account of all believers. Go your way, your sins which are many are all forgiven you.

"What must I do to be saved?" one says. This is all you have to do—and this the Holy Spirit will work in you—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart." "What is that?" you say. "I believe Him to be Divine. I believe that He is able to save." That will not save you, there must be something more than that. "What then?" "Believe in him"—carry out practically your belief that He is able to save by trusting yourself in His hands. To exhibit again an old picture which has often been used—there is a child in a burning house hanging from the upper window. A strong man stands beneath and offers to catch him, if he will but drop from yonder hot window sill to which he still clings.

"Drop, my child," he says, "I will catch you." The child believes the strength of his preserver. That does not save him. He trusts to the strength—he lets go his hold and falls—is caught and is preserved. That is faith. Let go your hold of your good works, your good thoughts and all else—and trust in Christ. He never did let one soul dash itself to earth yet, that did but fall into His hands. Oh, for grace for everyone of us to say in the words of Watts—

"A guilty, weak and helpless worm, On Christ's kind arms I fall; He is my strength and righteousness, My Jesus and my all."

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Job 22,15-17 #859 - The Old Way of the Wicked

THE OLD WAY OF THE WICKED

NO. 859

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 7, 1869,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Have you marked the old way which wicked men have trod?

Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was swept away with a flood: Which said unto God,

Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them?"

Job 22:15-17.

"HAVE you marked the old way?" Antiquity is no guarantee for truth. It was the old way, but it was the wrong way. If our religion is to be settled by antiquity, we shall presently pass back to the worst form of idolatry, for we would have to become Druids. It is not always that "the old is better." Sometimes, by reason of the depravity of human nature, the old is the more corrupt. The oldest of all would be the best, but how shall we come at it? Adam was once perfection—but how shall we regain that state? Old, exceedingly old, is the path of sin and the path of error, for as old as the Father of Lies is sin.

Antiquity is, moreover, no excuse for sin. It may be that men have long transgressed, but use in rebellion will not mitigate the treason before the eternal Throne. If you know better, it will not stand you in any place that God winked at the ignorance of others in former ages. If you have had more light than they, you shall have severer judgment than they— therefore plead not the antiquity of any evil custom as an excuse for sin. It was an old way, but they who ran in it perished in it just as surely as if it had been a new way of sinning entirely of their own invention. Antiquity will be no consolation to those who perish by following evil precedents. It will serve no purpose to lost souls that they sinned as thousands sinned before them! And if they shall meet long generations of their ancestors lost in the same overthrow, they shall by no means be comforted by such grim companionship.

Therefore, it becomes all of us to examine whether those religious dogmas which we have accepted on account of their apparent venerableness of age and universality of custom are, indeed, the Truth of God. We are not among those who believe that the traditions of the fathers are the ultimate tests of the Truth of God. We have heard the voice which says, "To the Law and to the Testimony. If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." We would not affect novelty for its own sake—that were folly—neither will we adore and venerate

antiquity for its own sake, for that would lead us into idolatry and superstition. Is the thing right? Then follow it, though you have discovered it but yesterday. Is it wrong? Then, though the road were trod by sinners of the first ages, yet do not pursue it unless you desire to meet with the same end as they. Search and look to your creeds, your worships and your customs, for this world has long enough been deluded by hoary superstitions. Search, my Hearer, search and look right carefully within your heart, for you may be deceived and it were a pity if it should be so with you while there are such opportunities given you to discover and rectify your mistakes. We shall now, this morning, in the words of the text, mark the old way of wicked men, observe it carefully and consider it well. There shall be three points this morning, the way, the end, the warning.

I. The first shall be THE WAY—"the old way which wicked men have trod." First, what it was. There is no doubt that Eliphaz is here alluding to those who sinned before the Flood. He is looking to what were ancient days to him. Living as he did, in what is olden time to us, his days of yore were the days beyond the Flood and the old way he speaks of is the way and course of sinners before the world was destroyed by water.

Now this way, in the first place, was a way of rebellion against God. Adam, our first parent, knew God's will—that will ought not to have been irksome to him. The command was a very easy one. The denial of the one tree to him should have been no great loss. He ought to have been well content when all the rest of the garden was his own leasehold, to have that one tree belong to the Great Freeholder of all—but he set his will in direct antagonism to the will of the Most High. The sin itself looked small. The act of plucking the forbidden fruit appeared to be trivial, but within the loins of it lurked a dark hostility to the mind of God which led to open breach of the Lord's command.

That is the way in every transgressor's case, for every sinner is a rebel against God. Though the man, at the time when he commits the sin, may claim that he was not thinking of God, yet the fact of his acting without regard to Him whom he ought always reverently to consider was, in itself, a sin. Sin is a defiance of Divine authority, it throws down the gauntlet and challenges the rights of the King of kings. Are there any here, this morning, who are pursuing that old way which wicked men have trod? Do not many of you neglect, as a rule, the consideration of what is God's mind? Do you not act as unrestrainedly as if there were no God at all? Do you not constantly follow after that which the Lord abhors?

I fear many of you are traversing the way of rebellion and are daily provoking the Great Judge. I pray you beware, for this is the old way which wicked men have trod and you may be sure that as God met with them, and their rebellion soon ended in terrible destruction, so will He also meet with you, for God's ways are equal and He deals out justice to sinners, now, as He did then.

In the next place, the old way was a way of selfishness. Why did Eve take of that fruit? It was because she believed that the taking of it would delight her appetite and would also make her wise. It was to gain something for self that evil was done. And her children also have participated in the same feeling. It was this that made Nimrod the mighty tyrant of the world. It was this which led the sons of God before the Flood to look upon the daughters of men, for they were fair, because they sought their own pleasure and not the service of God. Self reigned! The men cast themselves down before their own natural propensities, indulged their wantonness and had no delight in God. This is the old way which wicked men have trod and I fear it is a well-trod path today.

How do the mass of mankind cry? "Show us any good! Show us something that shall give us pleasure, amusement, sport—we care little what it is! Let it be decent and respectable, if so it may be, but by any means let us disport ourselves and find pleasure, or get gain, or heap to ourselves honor!" Man seeks himself, still, and this is the root of man's sin. He cannot believe that if he would find himself he must not seek himself. He cannot believe the Savior's testimony that he that would save his life must be content to lose it—that in looking after God and denying self we follow the highest and surest road to promote our own happiness.

No, the sinner resolves to serve self, first, and then, perhaps, he will condescend, even, to follow God Himself out of self-love and be religious and devout and worship God after his fashion in order to save himself, still seeking self even at the foot of the Throne of God! Well, dear Friend, if you, this morning, have not been taught that you must live unto God and not to self. If you are still following out your own ends and aims, and if the main object of your life is to acquire wealth or to get position, or to live in comfort, or to indulge your passions—then depend upon it, you are treading in the old way which wicked men have trod—and as it has always ended in disappointment, so will it with you! The apple stolen out of God's garden has turned to ashes in the hand! The Abimelech of self has become a tyrant! Fire has come forth from the bramble which men have made a king and their cedars have been burned! Be wise, I pray you, and forsake the road which leads to misery!

The old way, in the third place, was a way of pride. Our mother, Eve, rebelled against God because she thought she knew better than God did. She would be as a God—that was her ambition and the same thought had entered into her husband's mind. He was not content to be what his Maker would have him. He would, if he could, leap into the very Throne of Deity and put upon his own head the diadem of universal dominion! An ambitious pride led them both astray and this, I fear, is the road in which many are constantly treading. Content to be as nothing before God, no, they will not—they boast that they are something and they lift up their heads and claim dignity and ask for respect.

Lie at the feet of Jesus Christ and receive salvation as a gift of mercy, pure mercy? No, that they will not—they talk of merits, prayers, tears! They will, if they can, find something of their own in which to trust. They wrap their miserable rags about them and claim that they are welldressed, and being fascinated by self-deceit, they imagine that they are rich and increased in goods when they are naked and poor and miserable!

This old way which wicked men have trod is still frequented by the mass of those who hear the Gospel, but who reject it, to their own confusion. O you who are pilgrims in it, remember Pharaoh and how the Lord crushed the pride of that haughty monarch! Remember He has always cut down the lofty trees and leveled towering hills, and it is His sworn purpose to stain the pride of all glory and to bring into contempt all the excellency of earth. Tarry awhile, O pilgrim of pride, and humble yourself in dust and ashes that you may be exalted by the hand of God!

Hoping that each one before me is undergoing the process of selfexamination, I would further remark that the old way which wicked men have trod is a way of self-righteousness. Cain, especially, trod that road. He was not an outwardly irreligious man, but quite the reverse. Inasmuch as a sacrifice must be brought, he will bring an offering on his own account. If Abel kneels by the altar, Cain will kneel by the altar, also. It was respectable and reputable in that age

to pay deference to the unseen God—Cain therefore does the same. But mark where the flaw was in his religion!

Abel brought a bloody sacrifice, a lamb, indicating his faith in the great atoning sacrifice which was to be offered in the end of the world in the Person of the Lamb of God, Christ Jesus. But Cain presented an unbloody offering of the fruits of the earth, the products of his own toil. And he thought himself as good as Abel, perhaps better. When the Lord did not accept his service, the envious heart of the self-righteous man boiled over with indignation and he became a persecutor, yes, a murderer. None are so bitter as the self-righteous. None so cruelly persecute the righteous as those who think themselves righteous and are not.

It was because Saul of Tarsus boasted in a fancied righteousness of his own that he breathed out threats against those who found their righteousness alone in Christ. The old way of self-righteousness, then, was trod by the feet of the first murderer and it is trod still by tens of thousands of men. Ah, your Church attendance and your Chapel attendance, your receiving of the sacrament, your Baptism, your confirmation, your ceremonies of all sorts and kinds, your gifts to the poor, your contributions to charities, your amiable speeches and your repetitions of your liturgies, or of your extemporaneous prayers—these, all put together, are rested on as the rock of your salvation!

Beware, I entreat you, for this is the old way of the Pharisee when he thanked God that he was not as other men! It is the old way of universal human nature which evermore goes about to establish its own righteousness and will not submit itself to the righteousness of Christ! As surely as the Pharisees were condemned as a generation of vipers and could not escape the damnation of Hell, so surely every one of us, if we set up our righteousness in the place of Christ's righteousness, will meet with condemnation and will be overthrown by God's sudden wrath! Mark that old way and I beseech you, Brothers and Sisters, flee from it! By God's Grace, flee from it now!

The old way which wicked men have trod was, in the next place, a way of unbelief. Noah was sent to tell those ancient sinners that the world would be destroyed by a flood. They thought him an old dotard and mocked him to scorn. For 120 years that "preacher of righteousness" continually lifted up his warning voice. He threatened that the world would certainly be deluged and the ungodly sons of men would surely be swept away. He pointed to the ark of safety which he was building in testimony against them and besought them to humble themselves and break off their sins by righteousness—but they would not believe the Prophet, preacher of righteousness though he was—they turned his most earnest words into jests and his tender invitations were made the subject of their scorn.

This was the old way and the old way has not lost its pilgrims. In different forms and different ways, the atheism of the human heart still continues to discover itself, yes, and discover itself in Christian congregations. You that are unconverted surely do not believe that you will be condemned by the righteous justice of God, or you would not be so much at ease. If you solemnly believed in the justice of God, you would not dare to bring it down upon your heads! If you really and in very truth believed in the great assize and in the Judge of all, you would not spend your lives in violation of the Law and in bringing upon yourself the penalty!

Oh, if you believed that there is a Hell for such as die out of Christ, you would be afraid to remain out of Christ another day! You would seek your chambers, fall upon your knees and cry to God in mercy that He would now accept you and let you now be reconciled to Him through His blood. Alas, you hear of God's anger and you profess to believe in it, but you act like infidels and as you act, so you are! This old way of disbelief has always ended in confusion, for the Flood did come and their disbelief could not arrest its rising. The angry waters burst out from their lairs like beasts of prey, hungry for human life and the rebellious race was utterly destroyed! Even thus most surely shall the vengeance of God overtake us, whether we believe it or not, unless we fly to Christ, the Ark, and are housed in Him from the coming tempest.

I will not detain you much longer over this very terrible story, but the old way which wicked men have trod is a way of worldliness and carelessness and procrastination. What did those men do before the Flood? They married and were given in marriage till the Flood came and swept them all away. If any of them believed in Noah, they, at any rate said, "We will wait a little longer, there will be time for us to escape from the threatened flood when the first appearance of the descending rains and the heaving up of fountains shall be visible to us." The whole world seems to have been making festival on that black day that closed the years of mercy. Never did the joy-bells ring more sweetly. Never was the marriage dance more merry. Never did eyes of love speak to loved eyes more than when the first booming of the terrible battle were heard afar off and Jehovah came forth to vengeance, dressed like a man of war, resolved to ease Him of His adversaries!

Are there not some of you treading in this old way of worldliness, dear Hearers, this very morning? Perhaps you are professors of religion and yet treading in this way. I mentioned the sons of God just now who are said by Moses to have looked upon the daughters of men and formed alliances with them. Perhaps you may be contemplating the same act and when the flood comes your profession will be no refuge to you, but you shall be swept away with the rest. Alas, this is the world's great catechism, "What shall we eat and what shall we drink and with what shall we be clothed?" And this is the world's trinity in unity, "The lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life." And this is the course of this world—ever does it seek after its own gain and its own pleasure, saying to more solemn and serious things—"When I have a more convenient season I will send for you."

Though the King of Heaven has spread a banquet, yet men make light of it! Though He has killed His oxen and His fatlings, they go their way, every man, to his farm and to his merchandise and so will they do till—

"God's right arm is bared for war, And thunder clothes His cloudy car."

Where shall the ungodly fly in that tremendous day? They have chosen this old way and have walked in it, but how will they escape Him when His flood shall sweep them away? Eliphaz says, "Have you marked the way?" I want you to stop a little while and look at that road, again, and mark it anew. The first thing I observe, as I look at it, is that it is a very broad way. Our Savior's words are most true, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many there are which go in there."

The road of sin is so wide that it has room for rebels, for selfish sinners, for proud sinners, for professors of religion, for infidels, for the worldly and for the hypocrite. Those who tread the narrow

way must all go in at one gate. They must all partake of one washing in the Savior's blood. They must all be renewed by one Holy Spirit. They must walk in one command. But as for the ungodly, they may follow—

"Each a different way Though all the downward road."

The road is so wide that there may be many independent tracks in it and the drunkard may find his way along it without ever ruffling the complacency of the hypocrite. The mere moralist may pick a clean path all the way, while the immoral wretch may wade up to his knees in mire throughout the whole road. Behold how sinners disagree and yet agree! How the Sadducee and the Pharisee are opposed to each other in most respects and yet agree in this—that they are opposed to God! It is a broad road. Observe that it is a very popular road. The way downward to destruction is a very fashionable one and it always will be. To follow God and to be right has always been a thing espoused by the minority. Holy Richard Baxter says that, when a child, he marveled that if he ever met with a man who was much more holy than other men—spoke more of Christ, was more prayerful, was more scrupulous in business—he was always the man of whom the neighbors spoke worst! And he wondered more, as he read history, that the children of God always were the nicknamed ones, the persecuted ones, the despised ones—until he began to understand that text of Scripture, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her Seed."

It must be so! The people of God must expect to go against the stream, as the living fish always do. They must stem the torrent of custom and of fashion. But if you want to follow the old way which wicked men have trod, you will find plenty of companions and everyone will give you good cheer. It is a very easy way, too. You need not trouble yourself about finding the entrance into it, you can find it in the dark! And the path is so exceedingly smooth that you need not exert yourself much to make great progress in it.

If you desire to go to Heaven and you ask me what is to be done, why, I am earnest to inform you rightly. But if you ask me what you are to do to be damned, well, nothing at all, it is only a little matter of neglect. "How shall we escape," says the Apostle, "if we neglect so great a salvation?" Leave your boat alone, slip the oars, just sit still and fold your arms and she will descend to the rapids swiftly enough. The way to total destruction is most easy! But ah, if you would escape, Divine Grace must make you work out your own salvation! You must trust in Jesus and by His Grace tug at the oars like a man, for if the righteous scarcely are saved, where shall the ungodly and the wicked appear?

This old way, if you look at it, is the way in which all men naturally run. I called it a popular road and a crowded road, but, indeed, it is the road of universal human nature! Only put a child on his feet and leave him alone, and his first footsteps are towards this broad way. He will need no teaching. You shall have no difficulties in training him. He will find out the evil path and he will run in it. Yes, and will delight in it—and unless the Grace of God shall turn him, he will continue in it even when he leans upon his staff. And when his hair grows gray he will still persevere in the old way which wicked men have trod.

For all that, it is a most unsatisfactory road. Dangerous, I should think, it must clearly be seen to be, even by those who think the least of it. Since you set out on it, my Brother, how many have perished from the way? Look back, I pray you, upon your companions—where are they now? They

have gone to the place appointed for all living, one by one, and I will ask you, now, what testimony have they left behind as to the way? When I speak of the pathway to the skies, I can recount a thousand testimonies of dying Christians who have all spoken well of the ways of God. Their unanimous testimony, borne, mark you, in the light of another world where hypocrisy will be impossible—the unanimous testimony has been, that her, "ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace."

But who ever heard of the testimony of an ungodly man, when dying, to the sweetness of sin and to the excellence of unholiness? Why, I think I might stake the whole matter upon the testimony of such a one as Byron, a man of gigantic genius, having an experience of the widest kind, who had drunk of the bowl of pleasure and of fame to its very dregs. His testimony put into other words is precisely that of Solomon—"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He became an unhappy man, wearied of life and died disgusted with all that he had seen. Better far for him had he lived the most obscure Believer in Christ, who, dying, could have exclaimed, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, therefore there is laid up for me a crown of life that fades not away." Let the testimonies, then, of those who have trod this road and found it out to be so poor a one, convince you that it is dangerous for you to tread it, for all along the route you meet with nothing but disappointments. If you wish to spend your money for that which is bread and your labor for that which truly profits, you will leave this tempting but deceptive pathway and fly to another road in which you shall have present comfort and everlasting felicity.

One thing more I want you to notice before I take you away from this old way which wicked men have trod, and it is this, that across it here and there Divine mercy has set bars. Along the road of sin men dash with increasing rapidity every year. It is marvelous the rate at which wickedness will travel when it has once overcomes all the drags and brakes of common sense and of respect to one's fellows. The course of sin is downhill and the rate of sinning is every day accelerated. Across the first part of the ungodly man's course, God has been pleased to place many chains and bars and barricades—and one of those, though it may be but a frail one—is to you, dear Hearer, the subject of this morning.

You were led here that I might say to you as solemnly as I can, if you are selfish, if you are proud, if you are self-righteous, if you are indulging the lusts of your flesh, you are on the old way which wicked men have trod and, for your own sake, stop! The Angel of Mercy stands before you, now, and bids you tarry. Why will you die? Why will you choose a path that even now gives you no rest? Why select a way which hereafter shall fill you with eternal misery? O tarry awhile and ask yourself whether it is well to fling away your everlasting hope and ruin yourself for present willfulness! O pause awhile!

That dead child at home lies in your pathway like the dead Amasa, who, as he lay decaying in his blood, made an army pause. That sickness of yours from which you have just recovered. That loss of property which has made you so sorrowful. That dire affliction which you see in a beloved wife—all these are bars and chains—will you leap over them—will you go steeple-chase to Hell? Oh, sorry exertion for so miserable an end! No, but let Mercy arrest you. God's hand is put upon the bridle now—He reins up your horse. He thrusts back the steed upon its haunches—will you heed your Maker? Will you let your conscience listen to His voice? Stay on the plains of mercy! If you break through this warning, you may have another and another, but the further the road is

traveled the fewer the barricades and the impediments become—till the last part of that tremendous road which leads down to death is all smooth as glass and a soul may take a dreadful slide—as down the steep sides of an Alpine mountain and so glide into Hell without the soul being disturbed.

The Lord may give you up and then, like the train of which we read the other day in the newspapers, when the engine had become overpowered by the weight and the brakes were of no further use, the whole will run down the tremendous decline to destruction. God permits the last end of many men to be just such an awful descent. Oh, for God's sake, put the breaks on this morning! For Christ's sake, I pray you, seek to arrest the growing force of your lusts—its growing tendency towards evil—and may His Spirit make use of the words which the text has suggested to us, to come to a dead halt, and to be saved by faith in Jesus!

II. We come now to say a little concerning THE END—"Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was swept away with a flood." The end of these ancient travelers was that the Flood came and swept them all away. It is a parallel case to the end of all ungodly men. I do not intend, however, to detain you long upon the horrible subject, but only to utter these few words. The end of these travelers was not according to their unbelief, but according to the despised Truth of God. They would not believe Noah, but the Flood came. You may reject the testimony of God's Bible. You may despise the daily warnings of God's ministers, but the result will be as we have said.

God is bound to make true His threats as well as His promises. His people bear witness that He has never lied to them in a single gracious Word and you may be sure He will never lie to you if you persevere in your sin—every single threatening Word will be fulfilled. He is very loath to punish, but He will do it. He will unsheathe His heavenly sword, and He will strike and none shall stand against the stroke. God did not fail at the end of the 120 years to visit the guilty world, and He will not fail, when your iniquities are full, to visit you. If your ears refuse the language of His Grace, as surely as there is a God in Heaven, you shall be made to feel the power of His vengeance.

Those who will not be covered by the wings of Mercy, as a hen covers her chicks, shall see Justice darting upon them as with the wings of an eagle. Power reigned in the world's creation—Providence reigns in the world's preservation. Mercy reigned in its redemption, but Justice will reign in its condemnation. Remember this, then, unbelief will not, laugh as it may, remove one jot of the penalty! The Flood, like the destroying fire which will come upon ungodly men, was total in its destructiveness. It did not sweep away some of them, but all, and the punishments of God will not be to a few rebels, but to all. It will find out the rich in their palaces, as well as the poor in their hovels. The sword of Vengeance will not be bribed, neither will it be made quiet by prayers and entreaties—when it is once drawn out of the scabbard of Mercy—it shall find out the sinner, even though he seeks sanctuary in the Church of God and lays hold on the horns of the altar of profession.

He that is not washed in Jesus' blood and covered with His righteousness, shall find the overthrow of God to make no exceptions. It will be an overthrow of the most awful kind. What a sight the angels must have seen as they saw the miserable men and women of that old world fleeing to the hills and to the mountains and to the tops of the craggy rocks to escape, if possible, the ever-advancing Flood! I shall not try to make your ears listen to their cries and their imprecations.

Oh, will it ever be your fate, thus hopelessly, to fear the floodgates of Divine Vengeance drawn up and the wrath of God, like flaming fire, let loose upon you and your fellow sinners?

Moreover, it was a final overthrow. None out of the ark outlived the Flood. They perished, every one of them. So shall it be when the wrath of God comes—it shall be eternal destruction from the Glory of the Lord and from the presence of His power. There is no hope for those with whom God deals in justice—no expectation—no, not a ray of expectancy can ever reach the gloomy chambers of their despair. Their death-knell is tolled. Their prison is fastened forever. God has turned the key in the lock and hurled that key into the abyss where even He will never find it to unlock and to unloose. The fetters of the damned are everlasting! The fires that burn about them never can be quenched and their worm shall never die!

O that men would take heed of this and not wantonly incur that tremendous wrath of which the Scripture, if it speaks but sparingly, yet speaks most solemnly! I am not of those who delight to dwell upon this subject. I have accused myself, sometimes, that I have so seldom spoken of the terrors of the Law, that I have not entered into details with regard to the wrath to come and the judgments that await the wicked. O let me urge you not to tempt the mercy of God, nor provoke His wrath lest you should know in your own experience with a bitter and fearful knowledge far more than I either care to say to you this morning, or could say if I cared! Consider the old way which wicked men have trod and how they were swept away with the devouring Flood.

The text gives us two pictures and these two may suffice to bring out the meaning of Eliphaz. First, he says, they were "cut down out of time." The representation here is that of a tree with abundant foliage and widespreading boughs, to which the woodsman comes. He feels his axe—it is sharp and ready—and he gives blow after blow till the tree begins to shake and quiver. And at last, leaning to the side to which it must fall, with a tremendous crash it falls headlong on the turf. Such is the sinner in his prosperity, spreading himself like a green bay tree—birds of song are among his branches and his fruit is fair to look upon. But the axe of Death is near and where the tree falls there it must forever lie. Fixed is its everlasting state. The crash which we hear in this world as the sinner dies does but foretell to us his perpetual doom.

The other picture of the text is that of a building which is utterly swept away. Here I would have you notice that Eliphaz does not say that the Flood came and swept away the building of the wicked, but swept away their very foundations! If in the next world the sinner only lost his wealth or his health, or his outward comforts of this life, it would be subject for serious reflection. But when it comes to this—that he loses his soul, his very self. When not the comfort of life, but life itself is lost—not the comforts of the mind, but the mind itself—oh, then it becomes a thing to consider with all one's reason and with something more of the enlightenment which God's Spirit can add to our reason!

O that we would but be wise and think of this! May God grant that we may not run the risks of having the foundation of our hope, our comfort, our very joy torn up by an overwhelming torrent and swept away, every stone of it, while we poor fools who built on sand shall wring our hands with anguish to think that we would not take the warning and build on the Rock while we might have done so!

III. And now our last word is THE WARNING of the text. And its warning seems to me to be summed up in the enquiry of everyone of us, "Am I, or am I not, treading in that broad way?" I would not like a hearer to go out of this place, this morning, without my having accosted him personally, as best I may while standing here and put to him the question, Are you treading in the old way which wicked men have trod?

"Ah," says one, "I do not know." Do you want to know? I will help you to answer it. Are you traveling in the narrow way in which Believers in Christ are walking? "I cannot say that," you say. Well, then, I can tell you without hesitation that you are treading in the broad way, for there are but two ways—the one the way of mercy that leads upward to the chambers of peace—and the other the way of sin that leads down to the gates of Hell. Be not deceived, there are no neutrals here! Christ's word is, "He that is not with Me, is against Me. And he that gathers not with Me, scatters abroad."

Do you say, "I take no part in this quarrel. I am not for God and I am not against Him"? No, then, out of your own mouth are you condemned! If you are not for God, who made you, then you have thrown off your allegiance and denied the rights of God to possess the creature which He Himself has formed! You are in the wide and broad way. The Lord help you! But if you cannot answer the question, I will help you in another way. Friend, did you ever experience a great change? Are you a new man? If not, you are in the old way, for the way of nature for every one of us is the old way and none ever runs in the way of righteousness but such as are renewed by the interposition of the Holy Spirit.

"You must be born again." "Except a man be born again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh. And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Do I hear one say, "Then I trust I am changed. I trust I have come into the narrow way"? Brother, bless God for it this morning! Hang your head in shame to think you have been in the broad road, but bless the Grace which has taken you from it! And be sure to prove your gratitude by trying to rescue others! This very day, as much as lies in you, tell the Gospel of your salvation, that it may be the Gospel of their salvation, too. Have you bread to eat while others starve? Eat not your morsel alone. Have you light while others are in the dark? Lend them your candle—you shall see all the better for the loan. God help you, dear Brothers and Sisters, to prove by your life to others that you love God because you love your brother also.

As for you who confessedly are in the old way, would you turn, would you leave it? Then the turning point is at yonder Cross where Jesus hangs a bleeding Sacrifice for the sons of men. Stop there, stay there! Look up and count the purple drops which flow from His dear hands and feet and side! And if the Holy Spirit shall help you to say, "Jesus, accept me, wash me from my sin and take me to be Your servant and lead me in a right way, even the way everlasting," then it is done and this very day you may go your way rejoicing! The turning point is not a thing of months, weeks, and years, but rather of seconds when the Grace of God comes to work with man!

My prayer is that some who came in here today the slaves of Satan, may go out the Lord's free men and that pilgrims in the way to ruin may become travelers on the road to Heaven and to God be the glory! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Peter 3:1-18.

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Chapter 64

Job 22,26 #1839 - Delight in the Almighty

DELIGHT IN THE ALMIGHTY

NO. 1839

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 3, 1885,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For then shall you have your delight in the Almighty, and

shall lift up your face unto God."

Job 22:26.

THE Lord said to Eliphaz and his friends, "you have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job has." And, therefore, we must always regard what they said with careful discrimination. They were wise men according to their light, but they were quite at sea in their judgment of Job. However, in this particular verse, Eliphaz declared that which is taught in many other parts of Holy Scripture and we may profit by his utterance. God grant that by His Spirit we may fully experience the joys described in the words before us.

Eliphaz and his friends had judged Job from their own point of view, making their own experience to be the standard. They, themselves, had prospered and, therefore, they inferred that if a man served God, he must necessarily prosper in worldly things—and that if he did not succeed as they had done, he must have been guilty of great crimes. Though they could not discover any actual fault in Job, they concluded, without further evidence, that he must have been a hypocrite and have acted oppressively to his servants, or have been unmindful of the claims of the poor, or in some other way have brought upon himself the wrath of God. It never entered their mind that so terrible a sickness and such a list of dreadful calamities could have befallen any man except as a punishment for special sin. They inferred virtue from prosperity, and sin from adversity. Unrighteous and cruel logic! At once false and brutal! It renders men at once false witnesses and Pharisees, condemning the innocent because of their sorrows, and flattering themselves because of their ease.

To judge according to outward circumstances has been the tendency of men in all times—even David could not understand how it was that the wicked were so free from troubles while all day long he was, himself, plagued and chastened every morning. A right principle lay at the bottom of this wonder for, indeed, the Lord will reward the good and will punish the wicked, but a great mistake is made when we suppose that this life is the time for meting out rewards and punishments. God will, undoubtedly, when the time shall have fully come, discharge the full vials of His wrath upon the ungodly, but the present is a period of long-suffering, where the wicked spread themselves like a green bay tree. Unless God's mercy shall

Volume 31 1lead them to repentance, they are in the same wretched condition as bullocks which are being fattened for the slaughter! Who envies them? Many of the ungodly have their portion in this life—they increase in riches— their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart can wish.

As for the children of God, it often happens that gall and wormwood are mingled with their drink—waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. We must not judge according to the sight of the eyes, or according to present conditions, or we shall make gross mistakes. The richest may be the most wicked and the poorest may be the most gracious. Those who suffer least may deserve to suffer most and those who are most afflicted in this life may have the highest glory in the life to come.

I suspect that Eliphaz and his friends had enjoyed smooth sailing. How could they judge the man who had done business amid tempests? Their mental life was not disturbed by great conflicts. They had not gone deeply into things, nor searched to the bottom of spiritual matters—they had no knowledge of their own hidden corruptions and had endured but little of the rod of chastisement and, consequently, they had been at ease. Their mistake was that they sat in judgment upon another who was more tried than themselves—and condemned him for being in sore distress. Their own serenity led them to judge the troubled one very harshly. This ought not to be. If any of us are inclined, thus, to judge and condemn, it is time that we put this mischievous spirit far from us. If we judge others, others will judge us. Two can always play at that evil game!

I remember a company of terribly despondent Believers who were, for years, a severe scourge to their happier Brethren. Having a deep sense of their inward corruptions, being sorely tempted of the devil and having only a weak and trembling faith, they tyrannized over others who were more happy than themselves. They judged that those who were not as much tempted as themselves did not exhibit the spot of God's children. None were more bitter than these humble people in denouncing those who had not been as much humbled as themselves. Those who did not sit in the dust and groan to the same tunes as themselves, they judged to be very dubious Christians—and took care to scald them with that kind of hot pity which is not much different from contempt! This was as wrong as wrong can be. It is not to be endured that the sick should make themselves the standard of health; that dwarfs should set up to be the models of manhood! These worthy people set up a standard marked in very black ink and those who did not come up to so much grief and so much unbelief, they set aside as very questionable members of the Divine family.

This is manifestly vicious, but it is equally evil when judgments are pronounced from the other side. For persons in good health, whose livers act well, who have abundance of this world's good and very little care and trial—who have not often had to stand by the grave and weep because the arrows of death have struck their dearest ones, who have never known what it is to be wounded in spirit—for these to set up their standard and condemn the weak and the sad, is a crime against the Lord! To say, "If you do not believe as firmly as we do. If you do not rejoice as we do; if you are not as sensible of sanctification as we are—you are not in Christ at all," is a piece of arrogance very grievous to the Spirit of the Lord.

Oh, my strong Brother, listen to one who knows by experience the heaviness of a child of sorrow! Who made you a ruler in Israel? God's children always play the fool when they play the

judge—they are never in order when they act as if they were the head of the family of Grace. The Father knows all His children. All who observe carefully will also know that while some are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, others are weak in faith and mere babes in Grace. These little ones are not one jot the less precious in the sight of the great Father than the more fully grown ones! Let none of the strong cattle push the weak cattle with horn and with shoulder, for when the weak ones complain unto God, He will regard them and will avenge them upon the proud. If you are strong, God keep you so, and make you stronger—but use not your strength for treading down the weak! If you are weak, the Lord strengthen you, and deliver you from this malady, but do not envy the strong and begin to speak lightly of those who excel you. The more of light, the more of joy, the more of holy confidence, the more of faith—the more glory to God—therefore covet these things earnestly as among the best gifts. May the Holy Spirit help us to attain the highest degree of Grace, but may He always prevent us from judging our Brethren! Here was the fault of Eliphaz. He was right in many of his statements, but he was wrong in his ungenerous application of them to holy Job.

I want, this morning, as God shall help me, to lead you up to the pastures on the hilltops. I pray that I may help you to a higher and joyful experience in the things of God, while I shall speak, first, of a desired position towards God—"Then shall you have your delight in the Almighty, and shall lift up your face unto God." And secondly, upon the question—when can this happy experience be realized? "Then," says the text and, therefore, there is such a time when we can have delight in the Almighty and lift up our face unto God.

I. First, here IS A DESIRED POSITION TOWARDS GOD. Many men forget God—He is no object of delight to them, for they ig

nore His existence and they would even think it a great relief if it could be proven that there were no God—no God to observe them, no God to record their misdeeds, no God to call them to judgment, no God to punish them for their iniquities. Let us pity the multitudes who claim to be happy without God, for it is the extreme of depravity when, blotting out God from his soul, a man obtains a wretched comfort as the consequence of his folly. To be without God is to be without rest in the present and without hope for the future.

Great numbers of men go a stage further—they believe in God, they cannot doubt that there is a Most High God who judges the children of men— but their only thought towards Him is that of dread and dislike. They do not want to hear of Him! If the things of God are forced upon their attention, they are soon weary of such distasteful themes, for they only look upon God as a just and terrible Judge who will certainly punish them for their transgressions. It is woe to them even to think of the great God. Though this dread of God and this neglect of God cannot deliver them out of His hands, yet they find a kind of comfort in it. As we are told of the ostrich, (I know not whether it is true or not), that when it cannot escape the hunter, it buries its head in the sand so as not to see its pursuer—so these foolish persons blind their own eyes and thus produce a foolish security of heart! They think of God with dread, dismay, despondency and despair.

I am grieved to add that this principle even tinctures the thoughts of true friends of God, for when they bow before God it is not only with the reverence of a loving child, but with the terror of a slave! They are afraid of Him who should be their exceeding joy. Their view of God is incorrect, for it is not such as the Spirit of Adoption would give them. They are really trusting in Him and in the great

Propitiation which He has set forth, but they have not come to know Him under that blessed term which our Savior puts into our mouth when He bids us say, "Our Father, which are in Heaven." Such trembling ones are still under the spirit of bondage which causes them to fear, as condemned persons dread the executioner. They stand like Israel trembling at the foot of Sinai—they have not come unto Mount Zion and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than that of Abel. God is still, to them, exceedingly terrible, so that they fear and quake. Even though they are His children, they are not able to lift up their faces unto their own Father. They haunt the outer courts of the sanctuary, but into the Most Holy Place they do not dare to enter—they see the smoke of the burnt offering, but they have not learned to feed upon it and so to have happy communion with God. These people may be safe, but they are not happy! They may be saved from sin, but not from sorrow! Faith, if it were stronger, would, effectually slay and bury servile fear.

Let us meditate upon what is here meant by delighting in the Almighty. The man who experiences this delight is glad that there is a God. That atheistic philosophy which makes the whole world to be a chance production which grew of itself, or developed itself by some innate force, is a very dreary piece of fiction to the man who delights himself in the Almighty. I tremble at any teaching, religious or scientific, which seems to place God further off than we have believed Him to be. To draw Him nearer to me and, myself nearer to Him, is the innermost longing of my soul! Do you not feel the same? I know you do if you have a child-like spirit towards Him. We delight to see God in the shadow of every passing cloud, in the coloring of every opening flower, in the glitter of every dewdrop, in the twinkle of every star! The Lord is personally at work in all the processes of Nature and natural laws are simply the Lord's usual method of operation. Our God is so near us that in Him we live and move and have our being! At this spring tide, in the fragrance of the flowers and the song of birds, we perceive God everywhere present, renewing the face of the year. Beloved, the thought of God is to the souls of those who know and love Him the most delightful that can cross the mind! To put God away from us is injury to our happiness, as well as treason to our duty—but to get nearer and clearer views of His Omnipresence, His Omniscience, His Omnipotence, is to increase the joy of our heart.

To go a step further, the delight of the Believer in his God is a delight in God as He really is, for there are, in the world, many false gods of men's own imagination. Remember that your own thoughts of what God is are far from being correct unless they are drawn from His own Revelation. This sacred Book is infallible, but not our thoughts—and where we differ from God as He has revealed Himself, we differ from the Truth of God. It is as easy to make an idol out of your own thought as it is for the Hindu to make a god of the mud of the Ganges. There is but one God revealed in Holy Scripture, in Nature and in Providence—His name is Jehovah—the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob and who has still further declared Himself as the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! He is God in undivided unity of Essence, in the trinity of His Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

With all our souls we worship and adore Him! Just as God appears in Holy Scripture, we are to delight in Him, regarding Him as love, as mercy, as long-suffering, as justice, as power, as purity, as all goodness and greatness in one! The characteristic which seems to cause most delight to perfect saints in Heaven is not love, alone, nor mercy, alone, but that which comprehends Grace and mercy, and much more—I mean holiness. This is the perpetual cry of the seraphim, "Holy,

holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." The holiness of God, or, if you will, the wholeness of God, the completeness of God, the perfection of God is the delight of all Believers. We would not tone down a single attribute. We would not disturb the equilibrium of the Divine perfections, but we delight in God in all those aspects of His Character which are mentioned in His Holy Word.

Further, he that delights in God delights not only in God as He is, but in all that God does—and this is a higher attainment than some have reached. "It is the Lord," said one of old, "let Him do what seems good to Him." Too many would call God to their bar and hold a trial upon what He does with men in this life, and with the wicked in the world to come. Far other was the spirit of the Apostle when he said, "No, but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why have You made me thus?" Concerning any event we simply ask—Has God done it? Then we bow before His decree and say no more, for what He has done must be right and wise. When the Lord afflicts us and hides the reason from our eyes, let us not contend with Him. And if we cannot go further, let us be silent before Him, even as was the afflicted man of God of whom we read, "Aaron held his peace." Better, still, will it be if we can complete our confidence and say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." He that delights in the Almighty will delight in Him even though he smarts beneath His hand, and will bless Him even when His dispensations are killing ones—as said the Patriarch of Uz, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Practically put, this delight in the Almighty shows itself in the Christian when nothing else remains to him. If he is stripped of everything, he cries, "The Lord is my portion!" When the cupboard is bare and the garments are worn out—and poverty stares the man in the face—he says, "My God is such a satisfactory and all-sufficient portion that I am rich and increased in goods while possessing nothing but my God." The same is true when such a man is surrounded with every earthly comfort, for he still feels, "The Lord is my portion." The saint begs vehemently of his God that he may not have his portion in this life. If God were to multiply his stores beyond his power to count them, he would be dissatisfied unless in all these he saw his Father's covenant love. One saint, who suddenly became poor, was still as happy as ever, for he said, "When I had abundance, I saw God in all things and now that I have lost my property I see all things in God." These are equally blessed states of mind!

It were well to combine them and see God in all things, and all things in God at the same time! So it should be with the Believer. "Why," he says, "these earthly comforts never were my delights—these were not my daily manna, but only little snacks for the time—sips of sweetness while I pass through the barren wilderness." The Lord was and is my chief portion, my well of comfort, the rock of my salvation. If we make props of our outward joys, we shall fall when they are taken away, but it we rest wholly upon the foundation of Divine Love, altogether apart from external things, we shall never be moved. Happy is the Christian who can practically enjoy delight in the Almighty by making Him to be his All in All—all the day and every day!

You will see this delight in God exhibiting itself in frequent meditations upon God. Such a man has pleasure in being alone with God and his sweetest occupation is meditation upon the years of the right hand of the Most High. He finds, in holy contemplation, pastures large and green in which his soul does feed and lie down—

"My God, You are mine, what a comfort Divine! What a blessing to know my Jesus is mine."

These happy meditations very soon show themselves in words. The man that delights in the Almighty delights to speak about Him. That which is in the well will, before long, come up in the bucket—and that which is in the heart will soon display itself in the tongue. Is there any conversation more elevating, more consoling, more strengthening than conversation about the Lord our God? And when you go home from such society, do you not feel it sweet to fall asleep with the savor of it upon your lips? Is not holy converse infinitely better than all the mirth and merriment of the world's amusements? Here is something to feed upon, something solid, something real—saints delight to contribute to such conversation and to receive instruction from it.

"Delight yourself in the Lord." This will give you pleasure in the midst of pain. Do you know what it is to have many aches, sufferings and, perhaps, a throbbing head—and yet to feel that you have another self which has no pain because it dwells in God, where all is calm and quiet? You felt that it would be a great mercy to be released from this painful life and yet you have not raised the question with your God, but have waited His good pleasure. Faith has made you feel, "wherever I am, whatever I feel, so long as God is near me and His sweet love fills my bosom, I will greatly rejoice and triumph in the God of my salvation."

This will show itself in your life, for it will be a pleasure to do anything to exalt the name of God. It will gild your ordinary conversation with heavenly splendor if, in it, you adorn the doctrine of God your Savior in all things. You will march to Heaven beneath the spell of celestial music and the bliss of the glorified will stimulate your spirits when you can feel that all is for God, and that God is All in All to you. This is to delight yourself in the Almighty. God give us to get into that state and to stay there till we leap to Heaven and are in that state!

I call your attention to the special name by which Eliphaz describes the ever-blessed God. He says, "Delight yourself in the Almighty." Is it not singular that he should choose a term descriptive of Omnipotence as the paramount cause of the Believer's delight? God is Love and I can readily understand how one might delight himself in God under that aspect. But the Believer is taught to delight himself in God as strong and mighty. What a mercy it is that there is a power that makes for righteousness!— that at the back of all these wars and confusions and behind all sin and false doctrine—there is an infinitely powerful God! During the last few weeks you have felt an intense joy in the Omnipotence of God. You have whispered to your forebodings—"It is all right. The Almighty is not paralyzed, His arm is not shortened: the Lord reigns." Brothers and Sisters, the pendulum swings to and fro, advancing and retreating, but yet there is a real progress made—you cannot see it by watching the pendulum, but up higher on the face of the clock there is evidence of an onward march and of a coming hour!

The Kingdom of God is coming—righteousness shall prevail! Delight, also, in the fact that Jehovah is almighty in mercy—mighty to save. He can forgive the greatest sin. He can change the hardest heart. He can help us to fight out unto victory the sternest of our battles against unrighteousness! He is stronger than sin and Satan, for all power dwells with Him. When you look at this phase of it and think of His dear Son exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins, you may, indeed, delight in the Almighty Redeemer, as "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." Surely, when you see Omnipotence linked with righteousness and mercy, you will delight yourself in the Almighty!

Think, also, of the Lord's almightiness in the matter of the keeping, preserving, defending and perfecting of all His people. The sheep of His pasture shall not perish, for the Good Shepherd is Omnipotent to smite the roaring lion who would devour them. None that trust in Him shall ever be ashamed or confounded, world without end. All the elect are well secured within the fold of Jesus, neither shall any pluck them out of His hand. Delight yourselves in the Almighty, for all the power of God is enlisted on the side of the Believer. To me, I confess, it is an intense joy that He is almighty to carry out every one of His eternal purposes. Jesus shall not fail nor be discouraged! That which Jehovah has willed shall be—in the unfolding of the great roll of history it shall be found that it tallies exactly with the Divine purposes and immutable decrees! He that sits on the flood reigns King forever and ever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Let our hearts delight that the Lord God Omnipotent already reigns and let us pray that in yet, a further sense, His Kingdom may come, as come it will. Let us delight ourselves in the Almighty, linking that word to every other attribute and rejoicing that He has almighty love and Omnipotent Grace. Again, let us say "Hallelujah!"

Now, let us turn with intense satisfaction to the other expression used by Eliphaz—"You shall lift up your face unto God." What does it mean? Does it not mean, first, joy in God? When a man hangs his head down, he is unhappy—it is the attitude of misery. But oh, when our thoughts of God are changed, and our relationship to God is different, we lift up our faces and sun our countenances in the light of God's favor! The face of God in His Anointed is toward the Believer and, therefore, the Believer's face is toward the Most High. He has said, "Seek you My face," and how can we seek His face but with our own faces? "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth," is the Divine call—and the Believer looks to God with intense joy, knowing that in Him is his salvation!

Does it not signify, also, that this man is reconciled to God and clear before Him? How can he, who is guilty, look up? Guilt makes a man hang his head. "Conscience makes cowards of us all." But oh, my Brothers and Sisters, when the atoning Sacrifice has come with all its power to us—when we are washed in the blood of the Lamb and we are clean every whit—then we lift up our face unto God! In that tremendous day when Heaven and earth shall flee before the face of the Judge, we shall be bravely calm, fearing no word of doom because we are cleansed by the atoning Sacrifice, and justified by the righteousness in which we put our trust! What a blessed thing to lift up one's face unto God in confidence towards Him through Christ Jesus!

Does not our text indicate fearlessness? Fear covers her face and would gladly hide herself, altogether, even though to accomplish concealment, the rocks must fall upon her. That sacred bravery which the Holy Spirit breathes into the child of God makes him cry, "Abba, Father," and, in the spirit of adoption, he lifts up his face unto God!

May it not also signify expectation? "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from where comes my help." "My expectation is from Him," says David. Oh, to lift one's face toward God, looking for deliverance, safety and rest— and expecting both Grace and glory from His right hand!

Brethren, I am talking very simply of things well known to me, and yet I cannot convey to you a sense of the joy of a face uplifted unto God. You must feel it for yourselves, by lifting up your own faces. Some of you poor creatures cannot lift up your faces unto God by reason of despondency, but we pray that you may yet do so. If you have ever looked unto the Lord through the glass of the

Atonement, you will then be able to lift up your faces towards Him with a calm delight. As for you who are God's own people and yet go through the world in bondage, I charge you, cry unto the Lord to change your condition and fill you with His joy—for then your faces will shine in the light of His face!

I am sure that he who has this delight in God and this lifting up of the face towards God, is a man that has wonderful peace with regard to the past. The past is forgiven, its iniquity covered, for the Lord has looked in love upon him. The man who walks in happy communion with God has a wonderful peace with regard to the present. Is it well with you? "Exceedingly well! God loves me, and I love Him. I am brought into fellowship with Him by Christ Jesus, my Lord, and we are friends, with a friendship which is secured by mutual delight and sealed by Covenant engagements, so that it can never cease to be."

Such a man has peace with regard to the future. He has no fear of evil tidings. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. He is not afraid of coming dangers in life, nor of the pangs of death, nor the terrors of judgment. When you delight in the Lord, nothing can disturb the unbroken current of your joy! The sublime serenity of the heavens which arch above your head enters into your own spirit when the Lord, who made the heavens, dwells in your heart! Strive after this sacred peace! Delight in the Almighty and lift up your faces unto God.

II. I must close by noticing our second point, and that is, WHEN CAN WE REALIZE THIS? I have not confidence enough in Eliphaz to make his answer to the question the only one that I shall give you. I must give you something fuller and better than was known to him.

First, a man can realize all this when he knows that he is reconciled to God. What is God's way of effecting reconciliation between a sinner and Himself? Every sinner is under the curse of the broken Law, for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law, to do them." No one of us has continued in the perfect observance of the whole Law and, therefore, God's righteous verdict is against us! The only way of escape from the curse is through the glorious Son of God who took our nature and was made a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree." He stood in our place, bore the punishment due to our guilt and thus became a curse on our behalf. All the sacrifices of the Jews were types of this—they were fingers of light pointing to the one, all-sufficient Sacrifice. That Sacrifice the Lord has accepted for men and He has set forth the Lord Jesus to be the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours, only, but for the sins of the whole world, so that whoever believes in Jesus Christ, God's appointed Sacrifice, is set free from sin. And being set free from sin, he can then delight in the Almighty and lift up his face unto God!

Yet even this could not effect our delight in God unless there was something else. So there must be, in the next place, a renewed nature. Our old nature will never delight in God. The carnal mind is enmity against God! It is not reconciled to God, neither, indeed, can be. It is an alien from the life of God and an alien it will always be. So, then, you must be born again— and when a man is born again of the Spirit of God and receives a new nature—that new nature delights in the Almighty! There is an old nature in us which still fights against God, but the new nature, which is of Divine origin, cries after God as a child after its mother. It lives in God as fish live in the sea! God is its element, its life, its All in All. So, Beloved, if you have been both reconciled and renewed. If you have felt the power of the blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit begetting in you a new

nature— then you can delight yourselves in God!

In addition to this, you will delight in God much more fully when the Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you are born of God. The spirit of sonship is the spirit of delight in God. What son is afraid to behold his father's face? A loving child suns himself in his father's smile! How I have seen little children clambering up their father's knees looking into his face and saying, "What a dear face it is!" This is a faint picture of our joy in God through Jesus Christ, by whom, also, we have received the Atonement. What would some of you give to see the dear face of that dear father who was taken from you years ago! I can understand Cowper saying of his mother's picture—

"Oh, that those lips had language!"

Oh, that our departed ones could speak to us, again! But our heavenly Father always lives, so never let it be said that we dare not lift up our faces unto Him! We look up and say in our darkest moments—

"For yet I know I shall Him praise, Who graciously gave to me, The health of my countenance, Yes, my own God is He."

I cannot tell you the inexpressible sweetness of that last line to my soul. Thousands of times it has fallen from my lips. If I have nothing else, I have a God, and my soul lays hold on Him as Jacob grasped the angel. I will not let Him go! Whether He blesses me or does not bless me, I still will cling to Him with desperate resolve and cry, "my Lord and my God." This God is our God forever and ever! He shall be our God even unto death.

To come back to Eliphaz and to conclude with him. We shall delight ourselves in God and lift up our face when we do as Eliphaz, here, tells us. First, when we live in communion with Him. "Acquaint, now, yourself with Him, and be at peace." If we do not know God, how can we delight in Him? What delight can there be in an unknown God? Brothers and Sisters, you are not half as happy as you might be because you do not study this Book, where, as in a glass, you may see the face of Jehovah your God! Oh, that you knew more of His dear Son, for he that has seen Him has seen the Father! Take God for your daily company. "Acquaint now yourself with Him." Great as He is, dare to be free with Him. Though you are but dust and ashes, yet, like Abraham, speak with Him as a man speaks with his friend, for as you know your God so shall you delight in Him and lift up your face unto Him.

Then, further, we must, if we are to know this delight, lay up God's words in our hearts—(v. 22). "Receive, I pray you, the Law from His mouth and lay up His words in your heart." Your neglected Bibles hide your God! When dust falls on the Scriptures, dust falls on the eyes of those who have neglected them—and then they cannot behold the Glory of the Lord God. The more of Scripture is understood, fed upon and received into the inward parts, the more will be your delight in God! You can have no pleasure in the Speaker if you despise the Word spoken—let it be to you as marrow and fatness.

There must be added to this delight in the Word of God a constant cleansing of the way. "If you return to the Almighty, you shall be built up, you shall put away iniquity far from your tabernacles." God cannot manifest Himself to us if we continue in sin. If you professing Christian people are as greedy and hard as other people in your dealing with the world— and if in your families you are as

quarrelsome and untruthful as the ungodly—God cannot come to your tabernacles. There must be purification of life, or there cannot be fellowship with the Lord. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Impurity of heart will cause blindness of the eyes as to spiritual things. Careful walking will bring joyful walking, but if you lose your purity, you will lose your peace. If you are a child of God, you cannot sin without feeling the rod—you must obey the Lord in order to enjoy the Lord. Walk in the footsteps of Christ, who did always the things which pleased the Father, and you will receive the joyful witness—"This is My beloved son!" Put away sin wherever you perceive it and ask for Grace to be helped to detect it in all its lurking places. Seek out the Babylonian garment and the wedge of gold which Achan has hidden, or else the Lord cannot abide with you. Get rid of your idols!—

"So shall your walk be close with God, Calm and serene your frame. So purer light shall mark the road That leads you to the Lamb."

In addition to this, there must be a constant trust. "Yes, the Almighty shall be your defense, and you shall have plenty of silver." (See v. 25). He who does not trust God cannot delight in Him. You cannot lift up your face to Him while you think Him untrue. A childlike confidence is essential to a holy joy. Let us throw ourselves upon God, as a swimmer casts himself upon the water, that it may bear him up! Let us trust in God as a child trusts its mother, without the shadow of a question. We sometimes know a great deal too much of what we ought not to know. I see some of God's children very anxious to feed upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—but as for me, I am content with the tree of life! The old serpent still persuades men to pluck forbidden fruit from that evil tree!

I know children of God who hold their hands to their heads and cry, "Would God we had never read that skeptical book and never learned how to distrust the Lord!" Let the times past suffice for the feeding of doubt. Let us eat no more carrion, but feed upon the salted meat of the Word of God! Let us quit the garlic of Egypt and feed on the manna of Heaven! We do not need to know what the world believes or does not believe, for the world lies in the Wicked One. We do not care what may be the spirit of the age, for the spirit of the world in all ages is the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience! Be it yours and mine to come to Christ, to live on Him and to believe on Him with unstaggering faith—so shall we delight ourselves in God and lift up our faces to Him.

Lastly, let us abide in continual prayer. Verse 27—"You shall make your prayer unto Him, and He shall hear you, and you shall pay your vows." Lack of prayer is a great lack, indeed! Slackness at the Mercy Seat will soon take away the spring and elasticity of our spiritual walk. If we are to have a closer walk with God, we must have closer communion with God in supplication.

Now, dear children of God, I have set all this before you, but what power can be in my words unless the Holy Spirit blesses them? I have watered this sermon with strong desires for the spiritual benefit of you all and now I am mourning over the many who do not know anything at all about it! They are still devoid of the knowledge of God and of all desire for Him. I am very, very sorry for you. My heart pities you. We have heard of "the Bitter Cry" from the slums of London, and a bitter cry it well may be, but there is a poverty, compared with which mere lack of bread is riches! There is a degradation, compared with which the low estate of the pauper is nobility itself! To live without your God—how terrible a death! You know not what joy means! You have not begun to

spell the word, "delight," until you have begun with God. True joy comes only from a true knowledge of the true God.

Oh, Sirs, if I had to die like a dog, I should wish to be a Christian, for the sake of the bird in the hand of present delight! If there were no hereafter, the immediate peace and joy of trusting my God are an overflowing reward. But there is a hereafter and what will you ungodly ones do when that hereafter dawns upon you? You have done without God all your days and God will do without you all eternity! What terror lies in that fact! He will say, "Depart!" because you always did depart. He will decree your continuance in the path which you chose and bid you keep on going away from Him forever.

He will say, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still," and what more dreadful doom can fall upon any one of you? O, you immortal spirits, you need an immortal God! O, you that cannot cease to be, you need the Highest of all Beings in whom you may hide yourselves from ceaseless anguish! Trust in God and then shall you be filled with infinite happiness, but not till then. God bring you to Himself, that He may bring you to delight! May the uplifted Savior draw you and uplift you! May you begin the life of Heaven by an immediate delight in the Almighty—and from that delight may you never cease! To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms 62:1-12; Psalms 63:1-11. HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—42 (PART I), 229, 688.

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Job 22,29 #2546 - A Message to the Glad and Sad

A MESSAGE TO THE GLAD AND THE SAD

NO. 2546

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 5, 1897,

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 17, 1884.

"When men are cast down, then you shall say, there is lifting up;

and He shall save the humble person."

Job 22:29.

THIS is Eliphaz, the Temanite, who is speaking, and he is telling Job what he thinks would be the condition of a man who had been sincere. He says that surely, God's Presence would be with him, the light would shine upon his ways and then, when he was, himself, happy in the Light of God, when other men were cast down, he would be able to say to them, "there is lifting up." Keeping that thought in mind, I will commence my discourse, this evening, by observing that if any of us have the Light of God, it is not given to us for ourselves alone. There is nothing selfish in the gifts of God. The Jews were elected to receive the Oracles of God, but it was in order that they might keep them for the rest of us, that in the midst of Israel the lamp of the Truth of God might be trimmed and kept burning for the nations that then waited in darkness.

When God calls any man by His Grace, it is with a view to others. Your salvation has many hooks to it with which to draw on the salvation of many more. If a man is truly converted, the influence of his conversion will spread to others—it is an act of mercy from God to him with a view also to his children, his friends, his neighbors, his dependents. It is the same with the Light in the Believer's heart. When you are very merry, shut not up your mirth within your own soul, but sing Psalms that others may hear your gladness. When God makes you a feast, eat not your morsel, alone, but call in many of the poor, the lame, the halt and the blind, that they may feast with you, for there are many such in God's family and they will be glad to come to spiritual as well as to temporal feasts. If your face is made to shine in the Light of God, it is not that you may see it, for Moses "knew not that the skin of his face shone," but it is that others may see what a Light God has put in your countenance and may rejoice in that Light.

I fear that many Christian people have lost their comfort through trying to keep it to themselves. The manna was sweet and they had gathered more than they could eat. They went, therefore, to their chest and stored it up, and expected to go on the morrow and have another feast all to themselves. But when they lifted the lid—ah, you know what happened to manna if they kept it till

the morning! And our joys will also

Volume 43 1breed worms and stink (that is the plain English of it), when we keep them to ourselves! They are meant to be scattered abroad. In this respect, "There is that which scatters and yet increases and there is that which withholds more than is meet, but it tends to poverty."

Now, coming to our text, my talk will be on this wise. First, I will try to show you what the happy Christian ought to do. And, secondly, what downcast people ought to do.

I. first, then, WHAT THE HAPPY BELIEVER OUGHT TO DO. "When men are cast down, then you shall say, there is lifting up."

Well, he ought to do this, first—he should notice those who are cast down. We are such foolish creatures that sometimes, when the Lord trusts us with a happy experience, we begin to grow mightily proud and we look down upon His tried and afflicted people. Even among those who know the Lord, if they have a very charming experience and enter into high fellowship with God, there is a tendency to begin to think that the poor doubting and fearing ones are very much to be censured and blamed, or, at any rate, that they are to be ignored and left to themselves. "Well," says someone, "really it quite depresses me to talk with old Mrs. So-and-So, and I could not keep my joy if I were to go and try to encourage that young man who is always so cast down." Ah, my dear Friend, but if you begin to talk like that, it may not be long before you will even envy that old lady you now despise—and wish you were half as hopeful of salvation as that young man whom you just now condemned! Remember that when the fat cattle begin to push with horn and with shoulder, the Lord knows how to bring their fat down very speedily, so that they can be trusted among the lean cattle without being so domineering over them. The duty of a happy Christian is to take notice of those who are not so joyous as he is, to seek them out, to condescend to men of low estate. When you have abundant provision in your house, it is your duty to send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. Mind that you attend to this matter lest your Lord should put you on short commons, too, and make you feel a little more as you ought to towards the afflicted.

The next thing a happy Christian ought to do when he has noticed and found out the sad ones, he should go and talk to them. "When men are cast down, then you shall say, there is lifting up." I often speak upon this subject and, therefore, I cannot say anything new. But I do wish to say over again that if all joyful Believers who have attained to full assurance of faith would more often speak to troubled ones, they might do a vast amount of good. I think, dear Friends, that you miss many opportunities of serving the Lord through forgetfulness or through diffidence. I notice that when converts do not begin to speak a little for Christ very early in their Christian career, they become tongue-tied—that is how we get so many dumb members of the Church who seem as if they could not offer up a prayer to save their lives. And what is worse, they cannot talk to their personal friends about the things of God. It is a very great pity that it is so and I think I must have an operation performed on some of you children who are dumb. It is a very sad thing for the father of a family to have a number of children who never speak. There is a sweetness about every child's voice, is there not? There is a different tone, a different form of speech with each child, and it would not content the head of the household if he could say, "I can hear the older ones speak, but the youngest is quite silent." We want them all to open their mouths, to begin their speech with childlike prattle—then we shall be glad when they can all speak plainly the language of the land in which they were born.

Dear Christian people, try to be speaking Christians! Especially when you come across any who are cast down. Remember what you, yourself, owe to some loving word spoken by a Brother or Sister in years gone by. Will you not repay it by speaking comfort to some of the sorrowing ones? Many of you owe your hope of Heaven to the preaching of the Word. It may be that you cannot preach and if you attempted it, you would be very unwise. But do try, with such ability as you have, to tell at least to one other in bondage that there is liberty to be had, that his chain may be cut and that he may escape from the taskmaster's hand. Say to him, "though you are cast down, there is lifting up." Look for the sad and sorrowful and speak to them, and so be, each one of you, according to your ability, a comforter by the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit.

The particular thing I would have you say to them is this, remind them of the promises of God. When any persons say to you, "Well, if I were to meet with a desponding person, I would not know what to do," tell them to commence by quoting a promise from the Scriptures. When that eminent German critic, Bengel, the very father of true Biblical criticism, lay sick, he was very sorely tried with doubts and fears and he, therefore, sent for a young man from the College and said to him, "Young brother, it is very dark with me I need you to say something that will cheer me." But the youth answered, ,'My dear Sir, you are an old man, you cannot expect me to say anything that can comfort you." "But," said Bengel, "you are a student of divinity and you will have to speak to men, like me, who are cast down, if you are to do any real service in the ministry. I hope you will have something cheering to say to me." "Then, Sir," the student replied, "I do not know that I can say anything to you except that, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'"

"Ah!" exclaimed Bengel, "what better thing could you have said? You have opened a window for me." When that great saint and preacher, Augustine, lay dying—and I venture to say of Augustine that among all who were born of women, there has hardly ever been a greater than he— his mind was equal to any philosophy for its depth, its length and its breadth. And as an instructor in theology he still remains, under Christ, next to the Apostle Paul, the master-teacher of the churches—yet, as he lay dying, he asked to have certain texts of Scripture printed in large capitals. Which do you suppose he chose? You may think that he selected some deep and mysterious passage about the high doctrine which he so greatly loved, but he did nothing of the kind. He chose those texts of Scripture which we commonly quote to sinking sinners—such as these—"He that believes on the Son has everlasting life." "Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." And that great saint feasted his dying eyes on the texts which we usually give to babes in Christ's faith, or those who are seeking the Savior, for they suited him just then!

I want you who are very happy, you whom the Lord has made joyous and glad so that you keep high festival from January to December, and all your days seem like Heaven upon earth—and there are some of us who have come to that blessed point—to be sure to tell others those rich and gracious words of God which abound in the Scriptures! Have them at your fingertips, so that you can find them in the Bible. Have them on the end of your tongue, so that you can quote them without turning to the Bible! Have them in the very center of your heart, so that they shall cheer and warm you, and that the heat from them shall radiate to warm others! It is a very bad stove that lets all the heat go out at the top of the chimney—we need a grate that will throw the warmth into the room. I pray that God may make us distributors of joy among those who have little or none of it in themselves.

We ought, with those who are cast down, not only to tell them the promises, but we should tell them our own experience. A recital of our personal experience of God's goodness often helps a poor soul who is in deep trial. Just draw a chair up and sit by the sick one's bedside, and say, "I sought the Lord and He heard me." "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." If you can tell something that happened to you when you were in a condition similar to that of the person you are trying to comfort, you have hit the nail on the head. Who can cheer the widow like those of you who are widows? Who can comfort a bereaved mother like one who has been, herself, bereaved? Who can speak with a man in a great business trial like one who has been in much the same business and has been a loser, too? You feel so glad, somehow, that there is sympathy left in the world, that there is somebody whose face has been furrowed and tear-stained like your own. So, tell your own experience, dear Friends. If you haven't any, do not tell it—but if you have, spread it abroad to the honor of your great Father's name that others may be encouraged. Tell them, when they are cast down, that there is lifting up, for you were cast down and you were lifted up! Tell them that God deals thus with His children, and brings them low on purpose that they may see the power of His hand when He lifts them up!

If you do this, you may hope to be successful in cheering other people. Our text says, "When men are cast down, then you shall say, there is lifting up; and He shall save the humble person." And as the next verse puts it, very often the good man will "deliver the island of the innocent." When it is in danger, the godly man shall interpose and God will hear his prayer, and God's suffering people shall be screened from danger. To all of you who are very joyful and happy, I would say—do not go to bed until you have found somebody who is sitting in darkness, to whom you can say, "Friend, the Lord has, by His Grace, made my lamp burn very brightly, so I have brought it to you, that your lamp may be lighted, too." There is so much misery in this world that none of us ought to add to it. Some, alas, do so by their nasty speeches, their cross-grained tempers, their cutting, sarcastic observations and, sometimes, by their slanderous judgments. Let us, on the contrary, seek to increase happiness and joy wherever we can! Let us try to cheer all the disconsolate and spread throughout this weary world some of that savor of rest which the Lord smelled of old in Noah's sacrifice, and which He makes us, also, to rejoice in as we take Christ's yoke upon us and learn of Him, and so find rest unto our souls.

II. Now, secondly, I will pass on to tell you WHAT DOWNCAST PEOPLE OUGHT TO DO.

What should they do when we speak to them in the spirit I have described? Ought they not to respond to our desire to comfort them? You know, dear Friends, you cannot comfort a man against his will. You may lead a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. You may bring forward the most cheering promises, but you cannot lay them home to the heart that is weary if it refuses to receive them. What ought those who are cast down to do in order to help us in the task of cheering them?

Well, first, they should remember that they are not infallible. The most infallible people I have seen are those who are very much cast down, for they know so much better than we do who try to comfort them. "Yes, yes," they exclaim, "that is all very well for you to talk like that, but if you were in our circumstances, it would be a very different thing." Then you quote what you judge to be a suitable promise, but they say, "that does not apply to our case," and they spy out some little real or supposed difference by which they escape from the comfort you are so anxious to administer to

them. Some people are wonderfully ingenious in inventing a great variety of processes of self-torture. In the black days of the Spanish Inquisition, with their thumbscrews, and their racks, and their Virgin's embrace, and other diabolical things, they went a very long way in torturing their fellow men, but even the Spanish Inquisition had nothing like as much cleverness as the little inquisition that men and women set up in their own souls with which to torture themselves!

About a month ago, you remember that my text was concerning those fools who abhor all manner of meat [Sermon #1824, Volume 31—The History of

Sundry Fools—read/download the entire sermon free of charge at

http://] and there are still some persons of that kind

left in the world! This dish is too hot and that is too cold. This steak is too tender and that other is too tough—they do not like this drink because it is so sweet, others cry out because it is so sour—their food is never cooked so as to suit them and, "their soul abhors all manner of meat." My dear Friend, without being in the least sarcastic, but speaking to you very tenderly, I should like to hint that you do not know everything, after all. Though you may be a peer in the realm of misery, yet all wisdom does not lie with peers, in whatever house they may dwell! They sometimes make mistakes and, perhaps, you, also, are making a mistake just now. Is it not just possible that some of us know at least a little which you do not know, which might really help you in your time of trouble? There is a saying that "lookers-on see more than players," and I believe that, often, lookers-on can see the needs of a man's case better than he can see them himself! If you were not much of a seaman, and were out at sea, tossed up and down, and almost ready to perish through the fury of the waves, I think you ought not to be above taking warning from the signal of some old sailor who can tell you just what you ought to do in the hour of your distress. Should you not be willing to say, "That man is not so much troubled as I am. His brain is clearer, his heart is calmer, I should not wonder but what he might direct me rightly"?

The way for you sad souls to help us to comfort you is for us to see that you are willing to receive the message that the comforter is anxious to bring you. Then the battle is well begun and will soon end in a victory. Yet, how often, when we try to cheer the downcast, we meet with many who say, "We will never be convinced by that style of argument. It may be very good reasoning for some people, but it would never affect us." If it had so happened that the style of address had been quite different. If the earnest pleader had spoken from quite another quarter of the heavens of the Truth of God, such a hearer would have said, "That is not the way to persuade me. There may be a good deal for some minds in that style of talking, but to persons of my disposition and of my peculiar culture, there is no force about it." I have met with this gentleman numbers of times and I have heard him confute himself again and again. He has said today what he denied yesterday, and will repeat tomorrow! It has been his method to constantly say and to unsay, only he must always hinder all who would be the means of comforting him! I wish that any of us who may be in that state of mind would try to get out of it because if there is a good thing to be had, we ought not to need much persuasion to accept it—and if this good thing should be peculiarly necessary to our welfare and somebody who cannot have any motive but our good should entreat us to think of it—I fancy that it would be a sensible thing on our part to give a sober and discreet hearing to what he has to say.

Why, ordinarily, when we are unprejudiced, if we are driving along a road and somebody holds up his hands to alarm us, we pull up to know what he needs and if anybody were to shout at our door in the middle of the night, we would be anxious to enquire what was the reason for the disturbance. If there is a fire near us, we are usually ready enough to be warned, or if there is any good news to be heard, we are usually eager to be informed concerning it. And it is a strange thing that in matters which relate to our higher nature, our immortal soul which is to live forever in happiness or woe, we are so apt to refuse instruction and turn a deaf ear to those who seek our good! I beg you, dear Friends, to believe that in these matters you are not infallible, and that some people know more than you do! Next to that, you should be willing to believe what is reported to you by credible persons. Suppose any of us who have been troubled as you now are troubled, come to you and say, "Dear Friend, you will get out of this horrible pit and miry clay; he that is cast down, as you now are, will be lifted up again. You are feeling the burden of sin, but there is mercy and pardon even for you. You say that you have no strength, but there is One who is both able and willing to give you strength. I went to the Lord when I was just as downcast as you now are and when I rested wholly on Him, I found mercy, and if you will do the same, you will find mercy, too. Do you not think that you ought to believe my testimony? Do you imagine that I would deceive you? I know your sorrow of heart makes you feel a little bitter, yet do not say, in your haste, 'All men are liars,' for there are many who can join me in testifying to the Lord's pardoning mercy. If it is a matter touching your body, you will trust yourself with the doctor when you believe he has some ability as a physician and, in like manner, ought you not, when Christian people earnestly tell you the Truth about the Good Physician, to say to yourself, 'They would not deceive me. They are speaking in accordance with God's Word. I will believe them and I will believe God, and I will not doubt that through faith in Christ I shall have as happy an issue out of my soul-trouble as they have had'? If you will not go as far as that, you must permit me to say that I think you are acting very wrongly and that I really fear you desire to remain somewhat in the dark. I pray you, believe first, that you are not infallible and believe next, that which Christians testify to you.

Especially, dear sad Heart, believe the great Truth of my text— "When men are cast down, there is lifting up." Let me ask why you are cast down. "Oh," you cry, "I am so sad because of my sin." Then listen—"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Oh, that you would believe these testimonies of God concerning the putting away of sin and not be cast down any longer! "But," you say, "I have no righteousness and I cannot be accepted of God without a righteousness. I thought I had one, once, but I see that it is only a heap of filthy rags." Just so. I am glad you have discovered that fact, but the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth and worked out a perfect righteousness which He puts upon every believing sinner! The righteousness of Christ will be set to your account and imputed to you, if you believe in Him! And then, with His spotless vesture on, you shall be, even in the sight of the Most High, holy as the Holy One! You are cast down, but "there is lifting up."

"Yes," you say, "I know that the Lord says that there is lifting up, but I am so weak I cannot do anything." Should you be cast down about that? The Lord Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, is able to give you boundless strength. There is nothing that you will be called upon to do but what you shall be enabled to do if you will but trust the Lord. He will be your strength! He will help you to

repent! He will help you to believe! He will help you to be gracious, to persevere, to resist temptation and to conquer sin if you will only trust Him! You are cast down, but you have no need to be, for "there is lifting up." I do not mind what it is about which you are cast down, dear Soul, if you will but trust. All things are possible to him that believes. Many of us have found it so ourselves, therefore we pray you to do as we have done—cease from all confidence in yourself and rest wholly in Christ—for so shall you certainly find eternal salvation.

Do not neglect to notice the second part of the text, for there is something else to be believed there—that God will save the humble. The margin has it, "He shall save him that has low eyes." The man who looks low. Now, dear Friends, are you a man who looks low? Some men are always looking up to the stars—their heads are swimming with conceit of their own excellence. God will not save such people—at least not while they continue to be so proud. He will bring you down, if you are as high as that in your own estimation, for God will not give His Glory unto another. But if you are a man who looks low, He will save you. You have been looking to yourself, have you? You cannot see anything bright there—all is dark. I am glad it is so, for you are the sort of man God delights to save!

You have been looking down to the earth and you wondered you were not in your grave, or in Hell. That is right—you are the sort of man on whom God looks with approval! You thought that the very poorest of His people were worth ten thousand times as much as you were. You have envied the doorkeeper in the House of God. You are the sort of man God will save! We have some people about who are so big, so good, so intelligent, so wonderfully cultured and altogether such superior persons, that they cannot be content in any ordinary position. But these very superior persons, in their own opinion, are generally despised by God and by men, too! But those who think nothing of themselves, those who feel that they deserve only condemnation from God and who say that if He will but save them, it will be all of Grace, the gratitude for which they can never express—these are the people whom the text tells us that God will save!

I like to hear sinners give themselves a bad character—I mean, not in pretense, but in real earnest. There was a Brother came to me, the other night, in deep distress of soul. I let him tell me all his case. By what he said, he seemed to have been a terrible sinner, and when he had gone through the long black list, I said, as I looked at him, "You are the very man Jesus Christ came to save." And then I began to pick out the texts of Scripture that suited his case. I know he thought Jesus Christ came to save good people, but nowhere in the Bible is there anything of that kind, though we are told that, "Christ died for the ungodly." I got my poor sinful friend to see that Christ came to take the place of the guilty and that great Truth of Substitution laid hold upon him! I would that you might be led to the same point, and to say, "I am a sinner and I trust the sinners' Savior." If you are cast down on account of your sin, "there is lifting up." God will save the humble, the man or woman of low eyes. If you are as nothing in your own sight, God will save you! If you are less than nothing and yet trust Christ, He will be your All in All. I would that every downcast soul in the world would simply believe the promise of God and rest on it, trusting in Jesus and in Jesus only!

I have just two observations to make and then I have done my sermon. First, what a very little difference there is, after all, between those who are up and those who are down! You, my Brother, are full of joy and you begin to comfort a man who has no joy at all. He tells you what a sinner he is and if you feel as you ought, you say to yourself, "I was once just the same as this man now is,

only perhaps he feels his sin more than I did." And when you comfort and direct him, so that he says, "My faith would touch the hem of Christ's garment," I know it brings the tears into your eyes and you say, "I will do the same. It may be that my past faith has been all a mistake, so I will begin again." I like to meet with people who are always beginning, just resting in Christ after 30 years' experience, as they did at the first, and saying, "I am nothing, but Christ is everything. I am more and more decreasing, that He may more and more increase and fill the full circle of my being to its utmost bound."

Then, do you not think it would be a good thing if those who are very happy and those who are very miserable, would alike give up walking by their feelings and would, both of them, live by faith? If there were two women in Sarepta, and one of them had a bushel of meal and a great keg of oil—and the other had only a little oil in a cruse and a handful of meal in the barrel—if they both lived by faith, it would not make any difference whether they had much or little meal and oil. Of the two, I should think that the one who had the big barrel would begin to see the meal diminish—and she might fret—while the woman who had so little would never see her handful diminish, so she would not fret, for she lived by a miracle of faith! And I should think that the rich woman had better get down to be as poor as the other woman and live in the best possible way—by faith in God! I find that I cannot get on when I live by my feelings. They are like a barometer, sometimes they point to, "fair," sometimes to, "much rain." There is very little in our feelings that is to be depended upon! The air may have something to do with them, or they may be affected by what we wear, or what we eat, or with the last person who spoke to us—the most unreliable things in the world are our own feelings! Let us, each one, say, "Lord, I will believe You though I feel heavy and dull. Lord, I will still believe You, though I am now light and joyful. Lord, my hope is in Your Son when I cannot see any evidence of Grace in my soul—and my trust is in your Son alone when all my evidences are bright and clear."

Our poor feelings may depend on which way the wind is blowing! When a man goes to France on business three times a week, he is not very particular to ask what sort of passage he will be likely to have. It is those who play at traveling that need to have the water as smooth as glass! So, children of God who do real business with their Heavenly Father come to be almost indifferent whether they are very glad or very sad, for, after all, the safety of the man who crosses the sea does not depend upon his feelings, but on the boat in which he is sailing! So, our safety lies in the stability of the Christ to whom we have committed ourselves— not in our feelings which are as variable as the vapors that fill the sky. "Trust you in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Put down your own feelings and lift up the Cross of Christ! Cling to Him and say, with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." So shall it be well with you, both now and forever. The Lord bless you all, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Job 23:1-17.

We shall read, this evening, in the Book of Job. May the good Spirit instruct us during our reading! Here we shall see Job in a very melancholy plight, grievously distressed in mind and yet, for all that, holding fast to his God. We do not want any of you to get into this gloomy condition, but if you are in such a state as that, or if you ever should be, may you behave as well as Job did! It needs a deal of Divine Grace to travel all right in the dark, to keep in the good way when you cannot see it,

to cling to God when you cannot even feel that He is near you. But the Lord can give Grace even for such an emergency as that.

Verses 1, 2. Then Job answered and said, Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Job admitted that he groaned, but he claimed that he had good reason for doing so—that, indeed, the source of his grief was greater than the streams of his grief—so that he could not, even with his groans and tears, express half the anguish that he felt.

3, 4. Oh that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him and fill my mouth with arguments. Good men are washed towards God even by the rough waves of their grief. And when their sorrows are deepest, their highest desire is not to escape from them, but to get at their God. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" Job wanted to spread out his whole case before the Lord, to argue it with Him, to present his petitions to the Most High and to find out from God why He was contending with him. It is all right with you, Brothers and Sisters, if your face is towards your God in rough weather. It is all wrong with you, Brothers and Sisters, if the weather is very calm and your face is turned away from your God.

5. I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me. I am not sure that Job would know and understand all that God said. The Lord says a great deal, even to men like Job, that they do not easily understand, and it is not for us to require that God should explain everything to us. He gives not account of any of His matters. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus?" Our wisdom will be to plead with God our suit for pardon and for mercy, and to ask Him to at least make us understand the way of salvation, that we may run in it and be at peace with Him.

6. Will He plead against me with His great power! "If I were to go to God and urge my suit with Him, would He crush me with the might of His majesty? Would He overwhelm me with His Omnipotence?"

6. No, but He would put strength in me. Such was Job's faith in God, that he was sure He would rather help him than hinder him—"He would put strength in me."

7, 8. There the righteous might dispute with Him; so should I be delivered forever from my Judge. Behold, I go forward, but He is not there. "I look to the future, I try to forecast the days that are yet to come, but I cannot see God there."

8. And backward, but I cannot perceive Him. "I remembered the days of old. I turned over the pages of my diary, but I could not find Him there." There are cases in which one who is a true child of God cannot, for a while, find his Father. Do not condemn yourself because you are in the dark! On the contrary, remember then that there are many who fear the Lord, yet who walk in darkness and have no Light. Let all such trust in the name of the Lord and stay themselves upon their God—and in due season the Light of God will come to them.

9. On the left hand, where He does work, but I cannot behold Him: He hides Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him. If this is the case with you, be thankful that you want to see your God. Let your very desires after Him, your anxiety because you miss Him and the sorrow of your spirit when you are, apparently, deserted by Him, encourage you to believe that you are one of His children! Another woman's child will not cry after you, dear mother—it is your own child that cries

after you—and if you were not a child of God, you would not long and cry for the joy of His Presence. If you were not His child, that Presence would be no delight to you, it would be your dread.

10. But He knows the way that I take. Oh, what a mercy that is! "I cannot see Him, but He can see me. My grief has blinded my eyes with floods of tears, but nothing blinds His eyes. Like as a father pities his children, so does He pity me and regards me with the full observation of His gigantic mind—'He knows the way that I take.'"

10. When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. It is grand to be able to say that while you are in the fire! It is very easy to say it about another man who is in the furnace, but when you are in there, yourself, then to say, "I shall come forth as gold," is the sublimity of faith! It is a very simple matter to say, "If I were again put into the fire, I know I should come forth as gold." But it is when the burning heat is melting you, when you seem to be shriveled up in the crucible and so little of you is left—then is the time to say, "When the Lord has finished His work upon me, when He has thoroughly assayed me, I shall come forth as gold." 11. My foot has held His steps, His way have I kept, and not declined. You cannot talk like that in the time of trouble if you have not led a sincere, upright and gracious life. Those battles into which men come in the Valley of Humiliation are often brought about by their tripping when they are going down the hill. Our sins find us out at length, but if God enables us to walk uprightly, then we feel very confident—not in our own uprightness, but in God's love and Grace.

12, 13. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips. I have esteemed the Words of His mouth more than my necessary food. But He is in one mind and who can turn Him! Job looks at His grief and says concerning it, "It is according to God's mind that I should have this grief, and who can turn Him?" There may be times when God wills that His servant should be in trouble. And when God lets down the iron bar, who can lift it up? When He shuts up a soul in Doubting Castle, how shall it escape until He wills its deliverance?

13-15. And what His soul desires, even that He does, for He performs the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with Him. Therefore am I troubled at His Presence, when I consider if am afraid of Him. Yet he longed for Him. So, sometimes, we long for the Presence of God, yet that Presence strikes us with a solemn awe whenever we are favored with it. We ask to see our Lord, yet when we do see Him, we have to say, with John, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead." Or perhaps we are like Peter who, when the Lord Jesus was in his boat, fell down before Him and cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The majesty of Christ's pure Presence was too much for poor imperfect Peter—and so it is for us.

16, 17. For God makes my head soft, and the Almighty troubles me because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither has He covered the darkness from my face. Now you see where you might be if you had Job's experience. If you are not there, be very grateful. And if you are there, say, "There is a better man than I am who has been this way before me. I can see his footprints on the sands of time and I am encouraged by his example to trust my Lord in the darkest hour." You are not the only man or woman who has been in the coal cellar—there have been better than you in the dark places of the earth before now! Therefore, still have hope and be confident in God that in His own good time He will deliver you.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 22,29 #731 - A Word in Season

A WORD IN SEASON

NO. 731

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"When men are cast down, then you shall say, There is lifting up;

and He shall save the humble person."

Job 22:29.

ALTHOUGH we cannot take everything that Eliphaz the Temanite happened to say as being of Divine authority—the immediate Inspiration of the Holy Spirit—yet in this case he evidently gives utterance to such a great and important Truth of God that we may regard these words of his as being the words of God, confirmed as they are by like sentiments to be found in other parts of the Scriptures. If you read the verse carefully you will sympathize with the perplexity of expositors who have been not a little puzzled to know which, out of three meanings, is the one intended. I shall not presume to pronounce an arbitrary decision, but after mentioning the three different constructions, I shall dwell upon the last, and amplify it for practical uses.

The first is that this verse may be read by way of discrimination. When other men—the wicked and ungodly—are cast down, Believers, resting upon their God, shall be able to say, "There is lifting up." And instead of harboring a thought of despair, they shall cling to the promise that God will save the humble person. The text may thus indicate the distinction there is between the righteous and the wicked. When the flood came, the ungodly world was bowed down by fear, but Noah could say, "There is lifting up." And as the ark began to float upon the waters, his mind was perfectly convinced that God would save the humble.

When the fiery sleet began to fall upon Sodom and Gomorrah, the wicked were wise too late, and they, too, were filled with dismay. But Lot, as he escaped out of the city, could feel that there was for him "lifting up," and that God had saved out of the midst of destruction that "humble person," whose ears and heart had been vexed with the ungodly speeches of the Sodomites. Let us learn, therefore, and so leave this aspect of the text, that the Lord has put a difference between Israel and Egypt—a difference never so conspicuous as in time of trouble. He will not mete out the same measure to His friends as to His enemies. The black side of the pillar of Providence shall be turned towards the Egyptians, while the bright side shall shine fully and cheerfully into the faces of the Israelites. Just as the Red Sea is swallowing up God's foes, His friends upon the other bank shall be singing their psalms of victory and magnifying His power to save. Humble Christian, whatever may occur, you need never fear! If all the predicted tribulations which some men delight in anticipating should be fulfilled tomorrow, it would not matter to you. If the earth should rock and

reel, if the sun should be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, and the stars should fall like fig leaves from the tree— you, if you could no longer be safe under Heaven—would be caught up into Heaven! But anyhow, God would be sure to preserve you. When the wicked are bowed down you shall be able to sing, "There is lifting up."

The second way of reading the text is full of personal consolation. "When men are cast down"—appropriating the calamity when we, ourselves, are cast down, and leaving out the discrimination between the righteous and the wicked. When we, in common with the rest of mankind, suffer by the adversities incidental to all men—when we find out that we are "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward"—then our Father comes to our relief, cheers us with comfort and inspirits us with hope, sweetly whispering in our ears, "There is lifting up. Hope in God." After all the waves and billows had gone over the Psalmist's head, Hope rises up out of the deep and sings, as the waters stream from her hair, "Hope you in God, for I shall yet praise Him."

And as her countenance glistens in the sun, and is made bright by the brine into which she has dived, she adds, "He is the help of my countenance and my God." Christian Brother, possibly you are at this very hour sorely cast down. You are reflecting upon yesterday's ills, or foreboding worse ills on the morrow. "What shall I eat? And what shall I drink?" may be questions which are pressing grievously on your mind. Parents may be here whose dear children are sick, or it may be worse than that. Perhaps there is a father whose rebellious son is vexing his heart and making his hair turn gray. You are bowed down, many of you. Some from one cause and some from another. Oh that your trials may bring your faith into exercise!

You are in your Father's hands. He is the God of hope! Yes, and He is the God of patience and consolation. The Lord reigns—all things work together for good to them that love God. You may safely conclude that there is lifting up. Though you may now feel very humble under these afflicting dispensations, yet, as certainly as God's Word says, "He shall save the humble person," so certainly will he send salvation unto you. Be of good courage, then! Perhaps the text is God's message to your sinking spirits— "It is I. Be not afraid."

The third way of understanding the text, however, is that upon which I wish to dwell. A practical obligation is here enforced. "When men are cast down"—that is, when other men are cast down, either by spiritual anxieties or by peculiar troubles of a worldly sort—then the Christian's business is to act the part of a comforter. He is to step in and say to his brethren or his neighbors, "There is lifting up." It should be his occupation to tell out this good news—this panacea for heart-troubles—God saves humble souls. There is no necessity for despair this side of Hell. As long as a man is in this trial state there is hope that his sackcloth may be put off, that he may be girded with gladness and made partaker of the fullness of joy!

You will see then, Friends, that my intention is to address myself to Christians—earnestly exhorting them to look after opportunities for usefulness, that they may tell others of the glad tidings.

I. To this end, FAVORABLE SEASONS, a well-timed occasion, a suitable hour should never be lost sight of. "When men are cast down." You cannot talk with some men until you find them cast down. They are too shy and reserved, too proud and unapproachable, or perhaps too profane and blustering to allow you to say a word to them about eternal things. But you can catch them

sometimes. When sorrow has plowed the soil, the good seed may get, perhaps, into the heart that always was so hard.

Now, Brethren, as you read it, "When men are cast down," you will do well to remember that these seasons frequently occur in the life of every man. Sometimes men are cast down because they have had losses in business, or have had sickness in the house. Or death has come and taken away a child, or they are infirm in body. Or maybe the cholera has been down the street, or something or other has occurred to alarm and agitate and dispirit them. They feel that this world is not the happy world they thought it was.

Now is your opportunity! Now is your time! When men are cast down, then go to them and say, "There is lifting up." Tell them that there is another Lamp that was never kindled in this world, and never blown out in this world, either, which will gild the darkness of their poverty, of their sickness, and of their sorrow. Be sure not to let a single Providential opportunity escape you, but plunge in, now that God has made the breach in the sinner's city wall. Make haste now! Dash in, you soldiers of the Cross, sword in hand!

Sometimes men are cast down when they have been listening to a very solemn sermon. God has helped the minister to sketch their portraits and they have sat and wondered at it. And though they have been careless before, yet now they begin to quake. Have you ever found your friends leaving the House of God thoughtful and serious—not chatting about a thousand frivolities, but saying to you, when you get home—"What a striking sermon!"? Why, such things occur here every day! The tear of penitence often waters this floor, and when it does not amount to that, though the sinner's goodness may be as the morning cloud and as the early dew, yet there are frequent times when our hearers are impressed and depressed.

They sit in the pew and begin to think it is all wrong with them. Their soul is cast down, and they wish that they could find salvation. Now is your time, Christian! Now is your time! Do not lose it! Do not let them go behind those curtains, or outside those doors till you have told them that there is lifting up. When the darkness is around their spirits, point them to the great Light of the world. Tell them that "there is life for a look at the Crucified One," that there is life at this very moment for everyone who casts himself upon the Redeemer's finished sacrifice! These opportunities are very frequent, and if you think for a minute you will see that they are not to be despised by those of you who wish to win souls.

If David would win the battle he must take care to remember God's advice. "When you hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then shall you bestir yourself." When you see the sign of an impression in a man's mind, then you should be active to seek to bring the Truth of God home to him, and to lead him to the Cross! For at such times men are willing to hear. They would stop their ears before, but now they will give you a comparatively cheerful audience. No, they are often even anxious to hear!

They will send for the minister when they are sick. And at a funeral, what an opportunity the Christian minister may often have, and not the Christian minister only, but any of you! When God's great minister, Death, comes into a house, then remember they will want to hear you. A man's fellow workman, who chaffed the Christian and laughed at him, will be pleased enough to see him when the wife gets ill. And he will even ask him to come and tell her of the things which make for

her peace. Never be slow to go, my Brothers and Sisters! If you can but find time, never miss one of these opportunities!

Now that the fish are ready to take the bait, you Galilean fishermen let the nets be cast and the hooks laid, and seek if you can to catch souls! These opportunities, be it remembered, are sent by God for this very purpose. No doubt Providence is the handmaid of Grace. If Christians were but wide awake they would soon see that the wheels of Providence are all working to assist the Church of God. To an earnest Christian laborer everything is a tributary of labor. He knows how to use the roughest instruments. I will venture to say that the beasts of the field are in league with him and the stones of the field are at peace with him. For him cholera is less to be dreaded than to be turned to account—it will give him an entrance where he found none before.

Even poverty, with all its drawbacks, may help the man of God who sincerely desires to bring souls to Jesus. Greatly as you dread the evils which are before you, yet may you have a holy skill to use them, as the mariner does an ill wind, just tacking about, and putting the sail so that the wind, which seemed to drive in his teeth, may help him towards his desired haven. At such times, then, when men are cast down, I say it to you, Brothers and Sisters, and especially would I say it to myself, let none of these favorable seasons be lost!

II. The ACCEPTABLE TIDINGS we have to announce may now, for a few minutes, engage our thoughts. Do any of you say, "If we speak to these people, what are we to tell them?" You are to tell them that, "There is lifting up." That is the best and most opportune news you can bring them, after all. When men are not cast down we have to tell them that they ought to be. We have to deal out to them the Law of God, as the seamstress takes the sharp needle first and then draws the silken thread afterwards.

But in this case, when a man is cast down, the needle has gone through. Men are impressed, thoughtful, anxious, and now the Gospel which we have to take to them is that there is lifting up. Of all things in the world to be dreaded, despair is the chief. Let a man be abandoned to despair and he is ready for all sorts of sins. When fear unnerves him action is dangerous. But when despair has loosed his joints and paralyzed his conscience, the vultures hover round him waiting for their prey. As long as a man has hope for himself you may have hope of him. But Satan's object is to drive out the last idea of hope from men that then they may give themselves up to be his slaves forever.

Brothers and Sisters, let me just say to you who are in trouble—and I hope every faithful Christian will repeat what I say again and again— THERE IS HOPE. There is hope about your pecuniary difficulties, about your sickness, about your present affliction. God can help you through it. Do not sit down with your elbows on your knees and cry all day. That will not get you through it. Call upon God who sent the trouble. He has a great design in it. It may be that He has sent it as a shepherd sends his black dog to fetch the wandering sheep to him. It may be He has a design in making you lose temporal things that you may gain eternal things. Many a mother's soul had not been saved if it had not been for that dear infant which was taken from her bosom—not till it was taken to the skies did God give the attractive influence which drew her heart to pursue the path to Heaven!

Do not say there is no hope! Other people have been as badly off as you are. And even if it should seem as if you have come to the end of your rope, yet still there is hope. Go and try again on

Monday morning, [Prayer Meeting at the Tabernacle] my good Friend. God's Providence has a thousand ways of helping us if we have but the heart to pray. Are you in despair about your character? It may be that there is somewhere here a woman who says, "I have fallen. my character is gone. There is no hope for me." My Sister, there is lifting up! Some who have fallen as terribly as you have done have been restored by Sovereign Grace.

And there may be one here who has been a drunkard, or about to become a thief—no one knows it, perhaps, but he is conscious of great degradation—and he says, "I shall never be able to look my fellow men in the face." Ah, my dear Friend, you do not know what Christ can do for you if you but rest and trust in Him! Supposing you should be made into a new creature, would not that alter the matter? "Oh!" you say, "but that can never be!" No, say I, but that shall be, for Christ says, "Behold, I make all things new." "If any man is in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature."

There was an old fable about a spring at which old men washed their faces and then grew young. Now there is a spring which wells up from the heart of the Lord Jesus, and if an old sinner washes there, not only his face, but his whole spirit shall become like unto a little child, and shall be clean in the sight of God! There is hope still. "Ah," says one, "but you do not know my case." No, my dear Friend, and I do not particularly desire to know it, because this sweeping truth can meet it no matter what it may be!

"All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." Oh, what a precious Gospel I have to preach! I have not to preach a little Christ for little sinners, but a great Savior for great offenders! Noah's ark was not made to hold a few mites—the elephant went in, and the lion went in, and the largest beasts of prey went in—and there was found room for each of them. So my Master, who is the great Ark of salvation, did not come into this world to save a few of you who are little sinners—"He is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him."

See Him yonder? See Him on the Cross in agonies extreme, bearing grief and torment numberless, and sweating in agony—all for love of you who were His enemies? Trust Him! Trust Him, for there is hope! There is lifting up! However bowed down you may be, there is in the Gospel, hope even for you! I seem as if I were walking along a corridor, and I see a number of condemned cells. As I listen at the keyhole I can hear those inside weeping in doleful, dolorous dirges. "There is no hope, no hope, no hope!"

And I can see the warden at the other end smiling calmly to himself, as he knows that none of the prisoners can come out as long as they say there is no hope. It is a sign that their manacles are not broken, and that the bolts of their cells are not removed. But oh, if I could look in! I think I can, I think I can open the little wicket gate, and cry, "There is hope!" He who said there is no hope is a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and the father of lies! There IS hope since Jesus died! There is hope anywhere except in the infernal lake. There is hope in the hospital where a man has sickened, and is within the last hour of his departure. There is hope though men have sinned themselves beyond the pale of society.

There is hope for the convict though he has had to smart under the lash. There is hope for the man who has cast himself away. Jesus is still able to save! "No hope" is not to be said by any of the mariners life brigade while he sights the crew of the sinking vessel. "No hope" is not to be said by

any of the fire brigade while he knows there are living men in the burning pile. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the valiant brigade of the Christian Church while the soul is still within reach of the sound of mercy.

"No hope" is a cry which no human tongue should utter! "No hope" is a cry which no human heart should heed. Oh, may God grant us Grace whenever we get an opportunity to go and tell all we meet with that are bowed down, "There is lifting up." And tell them where it is likewise. Tell them it is only at the Cross! Tell them it is through the precious blood! Tell them it is to be had for nothing, through simply trusting Christ! Tell them it is of Free Grace, that no merits of theirs are wanted, that no good things are they to bring, but that they may come just as they are, and find lifting up in Christ!

III. What JOYFUL EMPLOYMENT this is! I should like to go forth enlisting tonight! I shall not require you to wear scarlet. You shall wear what you like, but if I may but enlist you I shall be very happy. Christian men and women, all of you without exception, old and young, I want you! I know many of you are already engaged but I want you all to follow out the dictates of my text, "When men are cast down, then you shall say, There is lifting up; and He shall save the humble person."

I want you to volunteer in this blessed enterprise, this heavenly mission of saying to cast-down ones, "There is lifting up." If you engage in this holy adventure there are several things which you will need. The first will be observation. You must have a quick eye to know when a man is cast down. Some people are so out of sympathy with souls that they do not know a broken heart from a hard heart—but there is a way of getting into such communion with people without even talking with them—that you know within a little who is impressed and who is not. I should like to have, all over the Tabernacle, a little lot of you Christian people like sentries, watching that young man who is here for the first time to-night.

Watching that young woman who has been here for the last six weeks— watching your opportunity! As soon as ever you see the first wave of the Spirit's manifestation—the face is often the tell-tale sign of what is going on within—to speak to them. I want you to watch, so as to say, "Now that one is cast down I will break the ice, I will speak, and I will say, There is lifting up." You must have keen eyes to watch for the Spirit's work if you are to be fishers of men! Next to this you have need of deep sympathy. If you try to speak for Christ, and do it in a rough way, you had better hold your tongue.

A person I saw only a day or two ago said that she was standing in deep thought after a sermon, under which she had been devoutly impressed, when a good friend accosted her in a gruff voice and with an uncouth manner, and said, "When are you coming forward to join the Church?" It was well meant. But it was done in such a way that every good impression melted before the repulsive tones. Speak gently and kindly, with tenderness and sympathy. You know what I mean. There is a world of difference between the putting on of a pretense of kindness and the real "kindness" which comes right down to a man and makes him feel that you really do sympathize with him, and can enter into all his griefs.

Ask the Lord, Christian Friend, when you have got a quick eye for observation, to drop a tear with it, so that you may know how to weep with them that weep, and to speak gently. Another thing you will want will be knowledge. How can you tell them about the Savior if you do not understand,

yourselves, how it is that He saves, or never proved the remedy you attempt to apply? Be well-instructed in the faith, and seek also to be wellinstructed in the twists and turns of the human heart so that you may know how to follow up these persons when they will try to escape from their own mercy, and, if possible, to put from them the comfort which you have to bring them.

In all this you will find great help from your own experience. No luau is so fitted to bring others to Christ as one who has come himself, though perhaps the means by which he was drawn may have been peculiar and somewhat different from the common course. It was said that Martin Luther was one of the best teachers for a minister. He had been so much troubled in getting peace for his own soul that he was singularly wellqualified to assist others who were struggling in the Slough of Despond. Make good use of your experience! Store up lessons from it so you will be making yourselves yet more and more serviceable as a helper to these distressed ones.

Add to your experience assurance. The text does not tell us to say to these people, "I hope there may be lifting up," but, "There is lifting up." Full assurance makes a man strong. The Gospel is your lever, but full assurance must be the arm to work it with. Yes, and the fulcrum, too, upon which the lever must rest. Know yourselves to be saved! Do not live in the misty dungeon of doubt, where, "I hope so," is the only ray of light that breaks through the crevice, while, "I fear it is not so," is the reflection cast on the opposite wall. Come forth into the daylight that you may be sure of it. Then you will be able to speak boldly and so you will be likely to comfort those that are cast down. And do let me recommend promptness to you. There is nothing like quickness and decision in speaking when the opportunity presents itself. If you are about to seal a letter, you must bring down the seal while the wax is still hot enough to receive the impression. Do not procrastinate, and say, "Well, I should like to speak to that young man, but I will put it off till tomorrow." If he has the appearance of being impressionable tonight, look after him now! As "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," so a present opportunity is worth unspeakably more than any precarious venture that lies beyond your present reach. Do not let the time slip.

While, however, it becomes you to be prompt, you need not be in a hurry. Calm self-possession is very preferable to impetuous haste. I remember seeing a doctor when there was an accident in the street. He proceeded immediately to the spot, but do you think he went rushing down to the man as if he would break his neck? No. On the contrary, he walked down very quietly and demurely to the chemist's shop where the man was lying, and I could not help thinking that this was a common-sense thing to do even in an emergency—for if he had run and got out of breath, he would not have been able to have done half so well when he got there as he was able to do by going steadily to his work.

The feverish excitement of hurry you should avoid—but there must be no delay. Unseemly haste might spoil your aim because you would not be able to speak properly. But a senseless hesitancy would miss the golden opportunity, thwart the purpose altogether and leave you to regret that you had ever spoken at all. Still nothing will avail unless there is much prayer. We had need pray that God may give efficacy to the counsels He has given us, and reward our obedience to them with abundant fruit. Oh, Brethren, prayer is the grand thing, after all, for us who have no might of ourselves!

It is wonderful what prayer can do for any of us. A dear Friend said the other day, "Look at Jacob. In the early part of his life there was much that was unseemly in his character, and very much that

was unhappy in his circumstances. Crafty himself, he was often the victim of craft, reaping the fruit of his own ways. But one night in prayer—what a change it did make in him! Why it raised him from the deep poverty of a cunning supplanter to the noble peerage of a prince in Israel!"

Bethel itself is hardly more memorable in his history than Peniel. And what might one night spent in prayer do for some of us? Supposing we were to try it instead of the soft bed! We need not go to the brook—it is enough that, like Jacob, we are alone in some place where sighs and cries would be heard by none but God. One night spent thus in solitary prayer might put the spurs on some of you, and make you spiritual knights in God's army, able to do great exploits. Oh, yes, may all other gracious exercises be started in prayer, crowned with prayer, and perfected by much prayer.

IV. I must now close by noticing some STIMULATING MOTIVES to engage in this blessed employment. Remember, Christian Friend, your own case. When you were troubled in spirit did anybody speak to you? Then you are bound to repay the kindness by speaking to someone who is now in the same condition. Or do you say that nobody spoke to you? Well, then, I am sure you blame them for not doing so, and you may well see to it that you do not incur the same censure yourselves.

I thank God that most of you do try to look after souls. But occasionally, very occasionally, it happens that a young convert will say to me, "I have been here six months, Sir, and no one has spoken to me." I sometimes ask them in what part of the Tabernacle they sit, and yet I do not like to know when I am informed. However, I will suppose that I have forgotten it now, or, at least I will forbear to indicate it tonight, but one of these times I shall make bold to say that there is a certain corner of the Tabernacle where nobody seems to care for souls. If I should do that, you know, it will be a cause of blushing and of shame to some of you!

Do mend your ways before it comes to that. Oh, do not let there be a single spot in this place where it shall be possible for a person to sit even for a month without someone earnestly asking him about his soul! Do it wisely, prudently, gently—not rudely, but lovingly—not intrusively, but kindly. Who can tell how much good may be done by this simple means! Let it be done with a gracious motive, remembering how needful it was in your own case. Let it be done, moreover, with a grateful recollection of what you owe to Christ. Oh, you owe your own soul to Him! How can you repay Him but by bringing others?

I beseech you, prove your gratitude—not by bringing the alabaster box and breaking it upon His head—but by bringing sinners whose penitence and faith shall be sweeter perfume even than the costly ointment which the woman poured on her Lord. Watch for souls out of gratitude to Him. Let me cheer you onward by the prospect of success. Perhaps the very first person you speak to may be given you for your reward! Possibly you may meet with a repulse. If so, try again, and yet again and again—as long as you have breath. But what if you should bring only one soul to Christ? It were a rich reward for a thousand disappointments! Remember, dear Friends, that it is for your own good. While you sleep you do not know whether you love Christ or not—but you would soon prove the sincerity of your love if you were trying to serve Him.

You do not know what you can do till you have tried! He who can only do a little, if he does that little, will soon be able to do twice as much! If he still perseveres, he will be able to do four times as much presently, and his labors of love will increase and multiply till I know not what extent they

may reach. You cannot preach, the most part of you. You could not go out into the street and proclaim the Word of Life, but you can talk to a neighbor—any or all of you! And since this is a thing that you can do, do it, I pray you! It may be breaking the ice for you, and by-and-by you will be able to swim in the deep waters and serve the Lord right well. To make a beginning, therefore, I ask you to do this small thing.

Oh, my Christian Friends, shall the blood of souls lie on any of you? Would you wish to feel that you were responsible for the spiritual ruin of some person who sits next to you here? I wish I could always feel that I was clear of the blood of this congregation myself. I do seek to be. Yet I feel convinced that my own efforts for the conversion of men are so feeble that if I do not have the assistance of you all, I cannot reckon upon a blessing commensurate to the great assembly gathered here. But if you will help me! If you will each of you watch as some of you do! If you will each pray as some of you do! If you all catch the holy enthusiasm and are filled with the Divine fire, I know not what eternal purposes God may here fulfill, nor what glory He may bring to His name!

You have, many of you, been Christians now for years. You are not young, raw recruits that need to be trained in the very elements of our spiritual warfare. You have seen battle. You have been in the midst of its din. I speak to you as to veterans—serve your God, now. By the blood that bought you, by the Spirit that quickened you, by the rest that is in store for you, by the Hell that awaits sinners if they perish—I charge you by the living God, the Judge of the quick and the dead—be instant in season and out of season! Be ever abundant in every good word and work! Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord! And may His blessing descend upon the whole of our efforts, through His Divine Spirit.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Job 23,10 #2098 - Where Are You Going

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

NO. 2098

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 4, 1889,

BY C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me,

I shall come forth as gold."

Job 23:10.

On several Sabbath mornings of late I have earnestly handled spiritual subjects which I trust may have been for the edification of the people of God. But it will not do to continue in that line. I am a fisher of men as well as a shepherd of the flock. I must attend to both offices. Here are souls perishing, sinners that need to be saved by Christ, and therefore I must leave the flock and go after the wanderers. I must lay down the crook and take up the net.

By a simple sermon, full of earnest expostulation, I would reason with the careless. At this moment I have not so much to expound doctrine as to arouse hearts. Oh, for the power of the Holy Spirit, without which I must utterly fail in my design! We have this morning been praying for the conversion of many—we expect our prayers to be heard. The question is not, Will there be any converted under this sermon? But, Who will it be? I trust many who have come here with no higher motive than to see the great congregation and to hear the preacher, may, nevertheless, be met with in God's infinite mercy and placed in the way of eternal life. May this be the spiritual birthday of many—a day to be remembered by them throughout eternity!

Job could not understand the way of God with him. He was greatly perplexed. He could not find the Lord, with whom at some prior time he constantly abode. He cries, "Behold, I go forward but He is not there. And backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He does work but I cannot behold Him: He hides Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him." But if Job knew not the way of the Lord, the Lord knew Job's way.

It is a great comfort that when we cannot see the Lord, He sees us, and perceives the way that we take. It is not so important that we should understand what the Lord is doing as that the Lord should understand what we are doing and that we should be impressed by the great fact that He does understand it. Our case may be quite beyond our own comprehension, but it is all plain to Him who sees the end from the beginning and understands the secrets of all hearts.

Because God knew his way, Job turned from the unjust judgments of his unfeeling friends and appealed to the Lord God Himself. He pleaded in the supreme court, where his case was known and he refused the verdicts of erring men. He that does right seeks the light. And as Job saw that

the light was with God, he hastened to that light, that his deeds might be made manifest. Like a bird of the day, which begins to signal the return of the morning, he could sing when he stood in the light of God. He was glad that the Lord knew his way, his motive and his desires. For from that truth he inferred that he would be helped in his trials and brought safely through them—"When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

These words afford rich consolation to the saints. And if I were to use them for that purpose, I should expect the Lord's people greatly to rejoice in the Lord, whose observant eyes and gracious thoughts are always upon them. Our whole condition lies open to Him with whom we have to do. Though never understood by men, we are understood by our God—

"It is no surprising thing That we should be unknown— The Jewish world knew not their King, God's everlasting Son."

As the Son of God was known to the Father, though unknown to all the world, so are we hidden from the knowledge of men but well known of the Most High. "The Lord knows them that are His." "You have known my soul in adversities."

I quit the design of comforting the people of God for the more presently pressing work of arousing the unconverted. Their way is evil and the end thereof is destruction. Oh, that I could arouse them to a sense of their condition! To that end I shall ask four questions of every man and woman within reach of my voice. God knows the way that you take. I will ask you first—Do you know your own way? Secondly—Is it a comfort to you that God knows your way? Thirdly—Are you tried in the way? And, if so, fourthly—Have you confidence in God as to the result of that trial? Can you say with Job, "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold"?

I. My Hearer, I ask you, first—Do You have a way? There is a way which you have taken, chosen, selected for yourself—there is a way which you follow in desire, word and act. So far as your life is left to your own management, there is a way which you voluntarily take and willingly follow. Do you know what that way is? It is not everyone who does know as much as that. It is a very simple question to put to you. But yet it is a very needful one to a great many. For many walk on as in a dream.

Do you know where you are going? "Of course," says one, "everybody knows where he is going." Do you know where you are going and do you carefully consider your end? You are steaming across the deep sea of time into the main ocean of eternity—to what port are you steering? Where go you, O Man? The birds in the Heaven know their time and place when they fly away in due season. But do you know where you are speeding? Do you keep watch, looking ahead for the shore? What shore are you expecting to see? For what purpose are you living? What is the end and drift of your daily action?

I fear that many in this vast congregation are not prepared to give a deliberate answer which will be pleasant to utter and to think upon. Is not this suspicious? If I were to go out tomorrow by sea, I should not walk on board a steamboat and then enquire, "Where are you going?" The captain would think me a crazy fellow if I embarked before I knew where the vessel was going. I first make up my mind where I will go, and then select a vessel which is likely to carry me there in comfort. You must know where you are going.

The main thing with the captain of a steamer will be the getting his vessel safely into the port for which it is bound. This design overrules everything else. To get into port is the thought of every watch, every glance at the chart, every observation of the stars. The captain's heart is set upon the other side. His hope is safely to arrive at the desired haven and he knows which is the haven of his choice. He would not expect to get there if he did not set his mind on it. How is it with you, dear Friend? You are speeding towards Heaven or Hell—which of these is your port?

I know of no ultimate abode of souls except the brightness of the Father's glory, or the darkness of Jehovah's wrath—which of these will be your end? Which way are you intentionally going? What is it you are aiming at? Are you living for God? Or are you so living that the result must be eternal banishment from His Presence?

Surely, to press this inquiry upon you needs no eloquence of speech. The question is vital to your happiness and self-interest should induce you to weigh it. I shall not use a single metaphor or illustration. For I am not here to please, but to arouse. I charge every man and woman in this house now to consider this question—Where are you going? What will be the end of the life you are now leading? Do not cast away the inquiry. It is not impertinent. It is not unnecessary. In the name of the Lord, I beseech you, answer me.

If you answer that question, allow me to put another—Do you know how you are going? In what strength are you pursuing your journey? If you feel able to say, "I am seeking that which is right and good," I then press the inquiry, In what strength are you pursuing it? Are you depending upon your own power, or have you received strength from on High? Do you rely on your own resolves and determinations, or have you received help from the Spirit of God? Remember, there are days in every life-voyage in which the storm-fiend puts all human power to a nonplus. Even in the fairest weather we are all too apt to run on rocks or quicksand.

But the voyage of life is seldom altogether a pleasant one and we must be prepared for tempests. Our own unaided strength will not endure the waves and the winds of the ocean of life. And if you are trusting to yourself, disaster will befall you. The Lord brings men to the desired haven. But left to themselves, they are no match for the thousand dangers of their mysterious voyage. Is God with you? Has the Lord Jesus become your strength and your song? Do you sail beneath the blood-red flag of the Cross? If you are trusting in the Lord alone, disappointment, failure and shipwreck are impossible.

But if you are hastening on without God for your Guide and Protector, then will your weakness and folly be made clear before long to your inevitable ruin. You may put on all steam and forge ahead in the teeth of the wind. But all in vain—you will never reach the fair havens. Are there any here who decline to answer my question? Will you not tell us where you are going? When a great vessel is crossing the sea and another comes within sight, they propose the question, "Where are you bound?" If the other vessel took no notice, gave no answer whatever, it would look suspicious.

A craft that will not say where it is going! We don't like the looks of it. If one of Her Majesty's vessels were about and it challenged a sail and received no reply to the question, "To what port are you bound?" I think they would fire a shot across her bow and make her heave to, till she did answer. Might not the silent craft prove to be a pirate? When a man confesses that he does not know where he is going, or what his business may be, the policeman concludes that he is probably

going where he ought not to go and has business on hand which is not what it should be. If you are afraid to consider your future, your fear is a bad omen.

The tradesman who is afraid to look into his accounts will before long have them looked into for him by an officer from the Bankruptcy Court. He that dares not see his own face in the glass must be an ugly fellow. And you that dare not behold your own characters, have bad characters. Not know where you are going? Ah me, do you wish to find yourselves in Hell all of a sudden? Would you, like the rich man, lift up your eyes in hopeless misery? I am suspicious of you who cannot tell where you are going. And I wish you would be suspicious of yourselves. You who do not like self-examination are the persons who need it most. You who shun awkward questions are the very people who need to face them.

I usually speak out—pretty plainly—and those of you who are used to me are not displeased. But sometimes strange hearers are offended and say that they will not come to be spoken to in such a fashion. Ah, my Friend! Your ill humor shows that you are in an ill condition and do not care to be corrected. If you were honestly desirous to be set right, you would like straight talk and honest rebukes. Do you prefer to go to a doctor who is known to say, "There is not much the matter—a little change and a dose of medicine, will soon put you all right"? Do you pay your guineas to be flattered? No.

The man who is wise wants to know the truth, however alarming that truth may be. The man who is honest and hopeful, desires a thorough examination and invites the preacher to deal truthfully with him, even if the result should cause distress of mind. If you decline to see where you are going, it is because you are going down into the pit. If you decline to answer the question, What is your way? I fear your way is one that you cannot defend, whose end will cause you endless lament.

Is anyone here compelled to say, "I have chosen the evil road"? Remember, the Lord knows the way that you take. I am anxious that you should, yourself, know the truth about your condition and prospects. I dread much your going on in ignorance. I wish every man here who is serving Satan to be aware that he is doing it. "If Jehovah is God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him"—be hearty one way or the other. If you have chosen the service of sin, own it like a man, to yourself, at least. Choose your way of life in broad daylight. If you propose to die without hope in Christ, say as much.

If you resolve to let the future happen as it may, and to run all risks, then put down in black and white your daring resolution. If you believe that you shall die like a dog and see no hereafter, do not at all conceal from yourself your doggish degradation but be true to your own choice. If you choose the way of evil pleasures, do it deliberately, and after weighing all that can be said on the other side.

But there is this comfort to me, if it does not comfort you—that if you have chosen the wrong way, that choice need not stand. The Grace of God can come in and lead you at once to reverse your course. Oh, that you may now say, "I had not thought of it but I certainly am going in the wrong direction and, God helping me, I will not go an inch further!" Through our Lord Jesus Christ the past can be forgiven. And by the power of the Holy Spirit the present and the future can be changed. The Grace of God can lead you to turn away from that which you have eagerly followed,

and cause you to seek after that which you have disregarded.

Oh, that today your cry might be, "For holiness and Heaven!" You have not been up to now on the Lord's side but now enlist in the army of the Lord Jesus. I would gladly stay your vessel in her evil voyage. I am firing a shot across your bow. I solemnly warn you to consider your ways. Think, what will the end of these things be? Break off your sins by righteousness. For it is time to seek the Lord. "Turn you, turn you; why will you die, O house of Israel?" This is the voice of God's own Word to you—hear it and be admonished and, God helping you, turn at once.

But, my Friend, are you drifting? Do you say, "I am not distinctly sailing for Heaven, neither am I resolutely steering in the other direction. I do not quite know what to say of myself"? Are you drifting, then? Are you like a vessel which is left to the mercy of the winds and the waves? Ignoble condition! Perilous case! What? Are you no more than a log on the water? I should not like to be a passenger in a vessel which had no course marked out on the chart, no pilot at the wheel, no man at watch. Surely, you must be derelict, if not water-logged. And you will come to a total wreck before long.

Yours is a dark prospect. Some time ago, I read in a paper of a gentleman being brought up before the magistrate. What was the charge against him? "Nothing very serious," you will say. He was found wandering in the fields. He was asked where he was going and he said he was not going anywhere. He was asked where he came from and he said he did not know. They asked him where his home was and he said he had none. They brought him up for wandering as—what?—a dangerous lunatic. The man who has no aim or object in life but just wanders about anywhere or nowhere, acts like a dangerous lunatic and assuredly he is not morally sane.

What? Am I aiming at nothing? Have I all this machinery of life, making up a vessel more wonderful than the finest steamboat and am I going nowhere? My heartthrobs are the pulsing of a Divinely arranged machinery—do they beat for nothing? Do I get up every morning and go about this world and work hard and all for nothing which will last? As a being created of God for noble purposes, am I spending my existence in a purposeless manner? How foolish! Why, surely, I have need, like the prodigal, to come to myself. And if I do come to myself, I shall ask myself, Can it be right that I should thus be wasting the precious gifts of time and life and power? If I were nothing, it were congruous that I should aim at nothing. But, being a man, I ought to have a high purpose and to pursue it heartily.

Do not say that you are drifting. It is a terrible answer, implying grievous danger and casting a suspicion upon your sanity. If you have reason, use it in a reasonable way and do not play the fool.

But can you say, "Yes, I am bound for the right port"? It may be that your accents are trembling with a holy fear. But none the less I am glad to hear you say as much. I rejoice if you say, "Christ commands me. I am trusting to His guidance. He is my way, my life, my end." Dear Friend, I congratulate you. We will sail together, as God shall help us, under the convoy of our Lord Jesus, who is the Lord High Admiral of the sea of life. We will keep with His squadron till we cast anchor in the glassy sea.

But now that you know your way and are assured that you are on the right tack, put on all steam. Exert your strength in the work to which your life is consecrated. Waste not a single moment. Let no energy lie dormant, arouse every faculty. If you are serving the Lord, serve Him with all your

might. Is it not written, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"? Those words sound to me like great strokes of the soul's paddle wheels! They urge us to press forward in the holy voyage.

Brothers and Sisters, we must run, for our life is to be a race. It must be hard running, too. "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which does so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." If we really are on the right way, let us press forward with all our powers. And may God help us that we may win the prize! Answer this first question and know of a surety whose you are, and where you are, and where you are going.

II. Secondly, IS IT A COMFORT TO YOU THAT GOD KNOWS YOUR WAY? Solemnly, I believe that one of the best tests of human character is our relation to the great Truth of God's omniscience. If it startles you that God sees you, then you ought to be startled. If it delights you that God sees you, you may reasonably conclude that there is within your heart that which is right and true, which God will approve of. You are among those who know the truth, for you come to the light and cry, "Search me, O God."

Allow me to apply the test to you now, by asking what you think of the Truth of God that the Lord knows you altogether. Remember, if your heart condemns you, God is greater than your heart and knows all things. But if your heart condemns you not, then have you confidence towards God. Dear Friend, it is quite certain that God does know the way that you take. The Hebrew may be read, "He knows the way that is in me," from which I gather that the Lord not only knows our outward actions but our inward feelings. He knows our likes and dislikes, our desires and our designs, our imaginations and tendencies. He knows not only what we do but what we would do if we could. He knows which way we should go if the restraints of society and the fear of consequences were removed. And that, perhaps, is a more important proof of character than the actions of which we are guilty. God knows what you think of, what you wish for, what you are pleased with—He knows not only the surface of your character but the secret heart and core of it. The Lord knows you altogether. Think of that. Does it give you any joy, this morning, to think that the Lord thus reads all the secrets of your bosom? Whether you rejoice therein or not, so it is and ever will be.

The Lord knows you approvingly if you follow that which is right. He knows them that put their trust in Him. That is to say, He approves of them. If there is in you even a faint desire towards God, He knows it and looks with pleasure upon it. If you practice private prayer, if you do good by stealth, if you conquer evil passions, if you honor Him by patience, if you present gifts to Him which nobody ever hears of—He knows it all and He smiles upon it. Does this give you pleasure, greater pleasure than if men praised you for it? Then it is well with you. But if you put the praise of men before the approval of God, you are in an evil way. If you can say this morning, "I am glad that He knows what I do, for His approval is Heaven to me," then conclude that there is a work of Grace in your heart and that you are a follower of Jesus.

God knows your way, however falsely you may be represented by others. Those three men who had looked so askance upon Job, accused him of hypocrisy and of having practiced some secret evil. But Job could answer, "The Lord knows the way that I take." Are you the victim of slander? The Lord knows the truth. Though you have been sadly misunderstood, if not willfully misrepresented by ungenerous persons, yet God knows all about you. And His knowledge is of

more importance than the opinions of dying men. If you are not afraid to put your character and profession before the eyes of the Lord, you have small reason for disquietude, though all men should cast out your name as evil.

The Lord knows the way that you take, though you could not yourself describe that way. Some gracious people are slow of speech and they have great difficulty in saying anything about their soul affairs. Coming to see the elders of the Church is quite an ordeal. I am half afraid that they even feel it a trial to see me, poor creature that I am. They are timid in speech, though they would be bold in act. They could die for Jesus but they find it hard to speak for Him. Their heart is all right. But when they begin to talk, their tongue fails them. They are unable to describe their conversion, though they feel it. They love repentance but can barely describe their own repenting.

They have believed in the Lord Jesus but it would puzzle them to tell what faith is. Trembling One, fall back on this—"He knows the way that I take." If I cannot express my faith, yet He accepts it—if I cannot describe His work in my soul, yet He discerns the work of His own hands. Another great mercy is that God knows the way we take when we hardly know it ourselves. There are times with the true children of God when they cannot see their way, nor even take their bearings. It is not every saint that knows his longitude and latitude. No, it is not every saint that is sure that he is a saint. We have to ask, "Is my repentance real? Is my faith true? Have I really passed from death to life? Am I the Lord's own?"

I do not wish you to be in such a state—it is a pity that such a question should be possible. But I know full well that many sincere saints are often put to the question and not altogether without reason. Herein is comfort— the Lord knows His children and He knows the truth of their graces, the preciousness of their faith, the heavenliness of their life. For He is the Former, the Author of them all. He knows His own work and cannot be deceived. Therefore, dear Friends, let us feel confident in God's knowledge of us, since He is greater than our hearts and His verdict is more sure than that of conscience itself.

Once more, remember that at this very moment God knows your ways. He knows not only the way you have taken and the way you will take, but the way you are now choosing for yourself. He knows how you are acting towards the sermon you are hearing. It may be you conclude that the preacher is very tiresome. Be it so—but still the subject is one which ought to be pressed upon your consideration. Therefore, bear with me. But if you reply, "No, it is not that. But I do not want to be probed and pressed in this way." Well, the Lord knows that you are taking the way of resisting His Spirit and hardening your neck against rebuke. Do you like that fact?

I think I hear one say, "I really wish to be right and I am afraid I am not right. Oh, that I could be made so!" God knows that feeling—breathe it into His ear in prayer. If you can say, "I am willing to be tested. I know to what port I am going. I am no pirate. I am bound for the New Jerusalem," then I rejoice. Well, well, the Lord knows. He dearly sees your present thoughts, your present wishes, your present resolves. He knows your heart. Is that a comfort to you? If it is, well. But if it saddens you that God should know your present condition, then be afraid, for there is something about you to be afraid of.

He that sews fig leaves together, as Adam did, that he may hide himself from God, must know that he is naked. If he were clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, he would seek no

concealment but would be willing both to examine himself and to be examined of the Lord. Thus have I handled these two questions—Do you know your way? Is it a comfort to you that God knows your way?

III. Thirdly, DO YOU MEET WITH TRIALS IN THE WAY? I anticipate your answer. Out of the many here present, not one has been quite free from sorrow. I think I hear one saying, "Sir, I have had more trouble since I have been a Christian than I ever had before." I met with such a case the other day—a man said to me, "I never went to a place of worship for many years and I always seemed to prosper. At last I began to think of Divine things and I attended the House of God. But since then I have had nothing but trouble." He did not murmur against God but he did think it very strange. Friend, listen to me. These troubles are no token that you are in the wrong way. Job was in the right way and the Lord knew it. And yet He allowed Job to be very fiercely tried. Consider that there are trials in all ways. Even the road to destruction, broad as it is, has not a path in it which avoids trial. Some sinners go over hedge and ditch to Hell. If a man resolves to be a worldling, he will not find that the paths of sin are paths of peace. The wicked may well be ill at ease—for God walks contrary to them because they walk contrary to Him. No man, be he on the throne, or on the woolsack, or up in a mill, or down in a coal pit, can live without affliction.

In a cottage near a wood there are troubles as well as in the palace by the sea. We are born to trouble—if you look for a world without thorns and thistles, you will not find it here. Then, remember, the very brightest of the saints have been afflicted. We have in the Bible, records of the lives of Believers. Can you remember the life of a single Believer who lived and died without sorrow? I cannot. Begin with father Abraham—the Lord did try Abraham. Go on to Moses, a king in Israel. Were not his trials many and heavy? Remember David and all his afflictions.

Come down to New Testament times. The Apostles were so tried that one of them said, "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." Through much tribulation they reached their rest. If the saints of God confessed that theirs was a troublous way, you need not suppose that you are out of the road because your way is full of difficulty. Is there any ocean upon which a ship can sail in which it shall be quite sure that no storms will arise? Where there is sea there may be storms. So where there is life there will be changes, temptations, difficulties and sorrows.

Trials are no evidence of being without God—many trials come from God. Job says, "When He has tried me." He sees God in his afflictions. The devil actually worked the trouble. But the Lord not only permitted it but He had a design in it. Without the Divine concurrence, none of his afflictions could have happened. It was God that tried Job, and it is God that tries us. No trouble comes to us without Divine permission. All the dogs of affliction are muzzled until God sets them free. No, against none of the seed of Israel can a dog move its tongue unless God permits.

Troubles do not spring out of the ground like weeds that grow anywhere but they grow as plants set in the garden. God appoints the weight and number of all our adversities. If He declares their number ten, they cannot be eleven. If He wills that we bear a certain weight, no one can add half an ounce more. Since every trial comes from God, afflictions are no evidence that you are out of God's way.

Besides, according to the text, these trials are tests—"When He has tried me." The trials that came to Job were made to be proofs that the Patriarch was real and sincere. Did not the enemy

say—"Have not You made an hedge about him and about his house and about all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has and he will curse You to Your face." The devil will have it that as dogs follow men for bones, so do we follow God for what we can get out of Him.

The Lord lets the devil see that our love is not bought by temporal goods. That we are not mercenary followers but loving children of the Lord, so that under dire suffering we exclaim, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." By the endurance of grief, our sincerity is made manifest—and it is proven that we are not mere pretenders but true heirs of God.

Once more upon this point—if you have met with troubles, remember they will come to an end. The holy man in our text says, "When He has tried me." As much as to say, He will not always be doing it. There will come a time when He will have done trying me. Beloved, put a stout heart to a steep hill and you will climb it before long. Put the ship in good trim for a storm, and though the winds may howl for a while, they will at length sob themselves asleep. There is a sea of glass for us after the sea of storms. Only have patience and the end will come.

Many a man of God has lived through a hundred troubles when he thought one would kill him. And so will it be with you. You young beginners, you that are bound for the kingdom but have only lately started for it, be not amazed if you meet with conflicts. If you very soon meet with difficulties, be not surprised. Let your trials be evidence to you that you are in the right, rather than that you are in the wrong way—"for what son is he whom the Father chastens not?" He that will go to Hell will find many to help him there. But he that will go to Heaven may have to cut his way through a host of adversaries.

Pluck up your courage. The rod is one of the tokens of the child of God. If you were not God's child you might be left unchastened. But inasmuch as you are dear to Him, He will whip you when you disobey. If you were only a bit of common clay, God would not put you into the furnace. But as you are gold and He knows it, you must be refined. And to be refined it is needful that the fire should exercise its power upon you. Because you are bound for Heaven you will meet with storms on your voyage to glory.

IV. Fourthly, HAVE YOU CONFIDENCE IN GOD AS TO THESE STORMS? Can you say, in the language of the text, "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold"? If you are really trusting in Jesus, if He is everything to you, you may say this confidently. For you will find it true to the letter. If you have really given yourself up to be saved by Divine Grace, do not hesitate to believe that you will be found safe at the last. I do not like people to come and trust Christ with a temporary faith as though He could keep them for a day or two but could not preserve them all their lives. Trust Christ for everlasting salvation—mark the word "everlasting."

I thank God, that when I believed in His Son, Jesus Christ, I laid hold upon final perseverance—I believed that where He had begun a good work He would carry it on and perfect it in the day of Christ. I believed in the Lord Jesus, not for a year or two but for all the days of my life and to eternity. I want your faith to have a hand of that kind, so that you grasp the Lord as your Savior to the uttermost. I cannot tell what troubles may come, nor what temptations may arise. But I know in whose hands I am and I am persuaded that He is able to preserve me, so that when He has tried

me, I shall come forth as gold. I go into the fire but I shall not be burned up in it—"I shall come forth."

Like the three holy children, though the furnace was heated seven times hotter, yet the Son of Man will be with me in the furnace and, "I shall come forth," with not even the smell of fire upon me. Yes, "I shall come forth," and none can hinder me. It is good to begin with this holy confidence and to let that confidence increase as you get nearer to the recompense of the reward. Has He not promised that we shall never perish? Shall we not, therefore, come forth as gold?

This confidence is grounded on the Lord's knowledge of us. "He knows the way that I take"—therefore—"when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." If something happened to us which the Lord had not foreseen and provided for, we might be in great peril. But He knows our ways even to the end and is prepared for its rough places. If some amazing calamity could come upon us which the Lord had not reckoned upon, we might well be afraid of being wrecked. But our Lord's foreseeing eyes have swept the horizon and prepared us for all weathers. He knows where storms do lurk and cyclones hide away. And He is at home in managing tempests and tornadoes.

If His far-seeing eyes have spied out for us a long sickness and a gradual and painful death, then He has prepared the means to bear us through. If He has looked into the mysterious unknown of the apocalyptic revelation and seen unimaginable horrors and heart-melting terrors, yet He has forestalled the necessity which He knows is coming on. It is enough for us that our Father knows what things we have need of and, "when He has tried us, we shall come forth as gold."

This confidence must be sustained by sincerity. If a man is not sure that he is sincere, he cannot have confidence in God. If you are a bit of gold and know it, the fire and you are friends. You will come forth out of it. For no fire will burn up gold. But if you suspect that you are some imitation metal, some mixture which glitters, but is not gold, you will then hate fire and have no good word for it. You will proudly murmur at the Divine dispensations, Why should I be put into the fire? Why should I be tried? You will kick against God's Providence if you are a hypocrite. But if you are really sincere, you will submit to the Divine hand and will not lie down in despair.

The motto of pure gold is, "I shall come forth." Make it your hopeful confidence in the day of trouble. I want you to have this sense of sincerity which makes you know that you are what you profess to be, that you may also have the conviction that you will come forth out of every possible trial. I shall be tempted, but "I shall come forth." I shall be denounced by slander, but "I shall come forth." Be of good cheer—if you go into the fire gold, you will come forth gold!

Once more, he says, "I shall come forth as gold." But how does that come forth? It comes forth proved. It has been assayed and is now warranted pure. So shall you be. After the trial you will be able to say, "Now I know that I fear God. Now I know that God is with me, sustaining me. Now I see that He has helped me and I am sure that I am His."

How does gold come forth? It comes forth purified. A lump of ore may not be so big as when it went into the fire but it is quite as precious. There is quite as much gold in it now as there was at first. What has gone? Nothing but that which is best gone. The dross has gone. But all the gold is there. O Child of God, you may decrease in bulk but not in bullion! You may lose importance but not innocence. You may not talk so big, but there shall be really more to talk of. And what a gain it is to lose dross! What gain to lose pride! What gain to lose self-sufficiency! What gain to lose all

those propensities to boastings that are so abundantly there! You may thank God for your trials, for you will come forth as purified gold.

Once more, how does gold come forth from the furnace? It comes forth ready for use. Now the goldsmith may take it and make what he pleases of it. It has been through the fire and the dross has been taken away from it and it is fit for his use. So, Beloved, if you are on the way to Heaven and you meet with difficulties, they will bring you preparation for higher service—you will be a better and more useful person. You will be a woman whom God can more fully use to comfort others of a sorrowful spirit.

Spiritual afflictions are heavenly promotions. You are going a rank higher—God is putting another stripe upon your arm. You were only a corporal, but now He is making a sergeant of you. Be not discouraged. You that have set out for Heaven this morning, do not go back because you get a rainy day when you start. Do not be like Pliable. When he got to the Slough of Despond, and tumbled in, all he did was to struggle to get out on the side nearest home. He said, "If I may only once get out of this bog, you may have that grand city for yourself."

Come, be like Christian, who, though he did sink, always kept his face in the right way and always turned his back to the City of Destruction. "No," he said, "if I sink in deep mire where there is no standing, I will go down with my eyes towards the hills from where comes my help." "I am bound for Canaan and if all the Canaanites stand in the way in one block, I will die with my face towards Jerusalem—I still will hold on, God helping me, even unto the end."

May the Lord so bless you, for He knows the way you take. And when He has tried you, He will bring you forth as gold. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms 139:1-24.

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Job 23,11-12 #1526 - The Fair Portrait of a Saint

THE FAIR PORTRAIT OF A SAINT

NO. 1526

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 7, 1880,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"My foot has held fast to His steps, His way have I kept and not declined.

Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips;

I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

Job 23:11-12.

THUS Job speaks of himself, not by way of boasting, but by way of vin

dication. Eliphaz the Temanite and his two companions had brought distinct charges against Job's character. Because they saw him in such utter misery they concluded that his adversity must have been sent as a punishment for his sin and, therefore, they judged him to be a hypocrite who, under cover of religion, had exercised oppression and tyranny. Zophar had hinted that wickedness was sweet in Job's mouth and that he hid iniquity under his tongue. Eliphaz charged him with hardness of heart to the poor and dared to say, "You have taken a pledge from your brother for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing." This last, from its very impossibility, was meant to show the extreme meanness to which he falsely imagined that Job must have descended—how could he strip the naked? He was evidently firing at random.

As neither he nor his companions could discover any palpable blot in Job upon which they could distinctly lay their finger, they bespattered him right and left with their groundless accusations. They made up, in venom, for the lack of evidence to back their charges. They felt sure that there must be some great sin in him to have procured such extraordinary afflictions and, therefore, by smiting him all over, they hoped to touch the sore place. Let them stand as a warning to us never to judge men by their circumstances and never to conclude that a man must be wicked because he has fallen from riches to poverty.

Job, however, knew his innocence and he was determined not to give way to them. He said, "You are forgers of lies, physicians of no value. O that you would altogether hold your peace and it should be your wisdom!" He fought the battle right manfully. Not, perhaps, without a little display of temper and self-righteousness, but still, with much less of either than any of us would have shown had we been in the same plight and had we been equally conscious of perfect integrity. He has, in this part of his selfdefense, sketched a fine picture of a man perfect and upright before God. He

has set before us the image to which we should seek to be conformed. Here is the high ideal after which every Christian should strive and happy shall he be who shall attain to it.

Blessed is he who, in the hour of his distress, if he is falsely accused, will be able to say with as much truth as the Patriarch could, "My foot has held His steps, His way have I kept and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." I ask you, first, to inspect the picture of Job's holy life, that you may make it your model. After we have done this, we will look a little below the surface, asking the question, "How was he enabled to lead such an admirable life as this? Upon what meat did this great Patriarch feed that he had grown so eminent?"

We shall find the answer in our second head, Job's holy sustenance—"I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." May He, who worked in Job His patience and integrity, by this, our meditation, teach us the same virtues by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I. Let us sit down before this sketch of JOB'S HOLY LIFE—it will well repay a meditative study. Note, first, that Job had been, all along, a man fearing God and walking after the Divine Rule. In the words before us he dwells much upon the things of God—"His steps." "His way." "The commandment of His lips." "The words of His mouth." He was pre-eminently one that "feared God and eschewed evil." He knew God to be the Lord and worthy to be served and, therefore, he lived in obedience to His Law which was written upon his instructed conscience. His way was God's way! He chose that course which the Lord commanded. He did not seek his own pleasure, nor the carrying out of his own will.

Neither did He follow the fashion of the times, nor conform himself to the ruling opinion or custom of the age in which he lived—fashion and custom were nothing to him—he knew no rule but the will of the Almighty. Like some tall cliff which breasts the flood, he stood out almost alone, a witness for God in an idolatrous world. He acknowledged the living God and lived "as seeing Him who is invisible." God's will had taken the helm of the vessel and the ship was steered in God's course according to the Divine compass of Infallible Justice and the unerring chart of the Divine Will!

This is a great point to begin with. It is, indeed, the only sure basis of a noble character. Ask the man who seeks to be the architect of a great and honorable character this question—Where do you place God? Is He second with you? Ah, then, in the judgment of Him whose view comprehends all human relationships, you will lead a very secondary kind of life, for the first and most urgent obligation of your being will be disregarded. But is God first with you? Is this your determination, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"? Do you seek, first, the kingdom of God and His righteousness?

If so, you are laying the foundation for a whole or holy character, for you begin by acknowledging your highest responsibility. In this respect you will find that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Whether the way is rough or smooth, uphill or down dale, through green pastures or burning deserts, let God's way be your way! Where the fiery cloudy pillar of His Providence leads, be sure to follow and where His holy statutes command, there promptly go. Ask the Lord to let you hear His Spirit speak like a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk you in it." As soon as you see from the Scriptures, or from conscience, or from Providence, what the will of the Lord is,

make haste and delay not to keep His Commandments.

Set the Lord always before you. Have respect unto His statutes at all times and in all your ways acknowledge Him. No man will be able to look back upon his life with complacency unless God has been sitting upon the throne of his heart and ruling all his thoughts, aims and actions. Unless he can say with David, "My soul has kept Your testimonies and I love them exceedingly," he will find much to weep over and little with which to answer his accusers. We must follow the Lord's way, or our end will be destruction! We must take hold upon Christ's steps, or our feet will soon be in slippery places! We must reverence God's Word, or our own words will be idle and full of vanity. And we must keep God's Commandments, or we shall be destitute of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

I set not forth obedience to the Law as the way of salvation, but I speak to those who profess to be saved already by faith in Christ Jesus and I remind all of you who are numbered with the company of Believers that if you are Christ's disciples you will bring forth the fruits of holiness—if you are God's children you will be like your Father! Godliness breeds Godlikeness! The fear of God leads to imitation of God and where this is not so, the root of the matter is lacking. The Scriptural rule is, "by their fruits you shall know them," and by this we must examine ourselves.

Let us now consider Job's first sentence. He says—"My foot has held fast to His steps." This expression sets forth great carefulness. He had watched every step of God, that is to say, he had been minute as to particulars, observing each precept which he looked upon as being a footprint which the Lord had made for him to set his foot in and, observing, also, each detail of the great example of His God. In so far as God is imitable He is the great example of His people, as He says—"Be you holy, for I am holy"—and again, "Be you perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." Job had observed the steps of God's Justice that he might be just.

Job had observed the steps of God's mercy that he might be pitiful and compassionate. He had observed the steps of God's bounty that he might never be guilty of churlishness or lack of liberality. And he had studied the steps of God's Truth that he might never deceive. He had watched God's steps of forgiveness, that he might forgive his adversaries and God's steps of benevolence that he might, also, do good and communicate, according to his ability, to all that were in need. In consequence of this he became eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. He delivered the poor that cried and the fatherless and those that had none to help. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. "My foot," he says, "has held fast to His steps." He means that he had labored to be exact in his obedience towards God and in his imitation of the Divine Character.

Beloved, we shall do well if we are, to the minutest point, observant of the precepts and example of God in all things. We must follow not only the right road, but His footprints in that road. We are to be obedient to our heavenly Father not only in some things, but in all things—not in some places but in all places, abroad and at home, in business and in devotion—in the words of our lips and in the thoughts of our hearts. There is no holy walking without careful watching. Depend upon it, no man was ever good by chance, nor did anyone ever become like the Lord Jesus by a happy accident. "I put gold into the furnace," said Aaron, "and there came out this calf"—but nobody believed him. If the image was like a calf it was because he had shaped it with an engraving tool. If it is not to be believed that metal will, of itself, take the form of a calf, much less will character

assume the likeness of God, Himself, as we see it in the Lord Jesus! The pattern is too rich and rare, too elaborate and perfect to ever be reproduced by a careless, half-awakened trifler! No, we must give all our heart and mind and soul and strength to this business and watch every step or else our walk will not be close with God, nor pleasing in His sight. O to be able to say, "My foot has held fast to His steps!" Notice here that the expression has something in it of tenacity. He speaks of taking hold upon God's steps. The idea needs to be lit up by the illustration contained in the original expression. You must go to mountainous regions to understand it.

In very rough ways a person may walk all the better for having no shoes on his feet. I sometimes pitied the women of Mentone coming down the rough places of the mountains barefooted, carrying heavy loads upon their heads, but I ceased to pity them when I observed that most of them had a good pair of shoes in the basket at the top! And I perceived, as I watched them, that they could stand where I slipped because their feet took hold upon the rock, almost like another pair of hands. Barefooted they could safely stand and readily climb where feet encased after our fashion would never carry them!

Many Orientals have a power of grasp in their feet which we appear to have lost from lack of use. An Arab in taking a determined stand, actually seems to grasp the ground with his toes! Roberts tells us in his wellknown, "Illustrations," that Easterns, instead of stooping to pick up things from the ground with their fingers, will pick them up with their toes. And he tells of a criminal condemned to be beheaded, who, in order to stand firm when about to die, grasped a shrub with his foot. Job declares that he took fast hold of God's steps and thus secured a firm footing. He had a hearty grip of holiness, even as David said, "I have stuck unto Your testimonies." That eminent scholar, Dr. Good, renders the passage, "In His steps will I rivet my feet." He would set them as fast in the footprints of truth and righteousness as if they were riveted there, so firm was his grip upon that holy way which his heart had chosen.

This is exactly what we need to do with regard to holiness—we must feel about for it with a sensitive conscience to know where it is and when we know it, we must seize upon it eagerly and hold to it as for our life. The way of holiness is often craggy and Satan tries to make it very slippery. Unless we can take hold of God's steps we shall soon slip with our feet and bring grievous injury upon ourselves and dishonor to His holy name. Beloved, to make up a holy character, there must be a tenacious adherence to integrity and piety. You must not be one that can be blown off his feet by the hope of a little gain, or by the threatening breath of an ungodly man—you must stand fast and stand firm and against all pressure and blandishment you must seize and grasp the precepts of the Lord and abide in them, riveted to them.

Standfast is one of the best soldiers in the Prince Immanuel's army and one of the most fit to be trusted with the colors of His regiment. "Having done all, still stand." To make a holy character we must take hold of the steps of God in the sense of promptness and speed. Here again I must take you to the East to get the illustration. They say of a man who closely imitates his religious teacher, "His feet have laid hold of his master's steps," meaning that he so closely follows his teacher that he seems to take hold of his heels. This is a blessed thing, indeed, when Divine Grace enables us to follow our Lord closely. There are His feet and close behind them are ours. He takes another step and we plant our feet where He has planted His.

A very beautiful motto is hung up in our infant classroom at the Stockwell Orphanage, "What would Jesus do?" Not only may children take it as their guide, but all of us may do the same, whatever our age. "What would Jesus do?" If you desire to know what you ought to do under any circumstances, imagine Jesus to be in that position and then think, "What would Jesus do? for what Jesus would do, that ought I to do." In following Jesus we are following God, for in Christ Jesus the brightness of the Father's Glory is best seen. Our example is our Lord and Master, Jesus the Son of God, and, therefore, this question is but a beam from our guiding Star. Ask in all cases—"What would Jesus do?" That unties the knot of all moral difficulty in the most practical way and does it so simply that no great wit or wisdom will be needed.

May God's Holy Spirit help us to copy the line which Jesus has written, even as scholars imitate their writing master in each stroke and line and mark and dot. Oh, when we come to die and have to look back upon our lives, it will be a blessed thing to have followed the Lord fully! They are happy who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Blessed are they in life and death of whom it can be said—as He was, so were they, also, in this world. Though misunderstood and misrepresented, yet they were honest imitators of their Lord! Such a true-hearted Christian can say, "He knows the way that I take. He tried me and I came forth as gold. My foot has held fast to His steps." You will avoid many a sorrow if you keep close at your Master's heels.

You know what came of Peter's following afar off—try what will come of close walking with Jesus. Abide in Him and let His Words abide in you, so shall you be His disciples. You dare not trust in your works and will not think of doing so, but you will bless God that, being saved by His Grace, you were enabled to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit by a close and exact following of the steps of your Lord. Three things, then, we get in the first sentence—an exactness of obedience, a tenacity of grip upon that which is good and a promptness in endeavoring to keep in touch with God and to follow Him in all respects. May these things abound in us!

We now pass on to the second sentence. I am afraid you will say, "Spare us, for even unto the first sentence we have not yet attained." Labor after it then, Beloved. Forgetting the things that are behind, except to weep over them, press forward to that which is before. May God give you those sensitive grasping feet which we have tried to describe—feet that take hold on the Lord's way—and may you throughout life keep that hold, for "blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord."

The next sentence runs thus—"His way have I kept"—that is to say, Job had adhered to God's way as the rule of his life. When he knew that suchand-such a thing was the mind of God, either by his conscience telling him that it was right, or by a Divine Revelation, then he obeyed the intimation and kept to it! He did not go out of God's way to indulge his own fancies, or to follow some supposed leader—to God's way he kept from his youth—even till the time when the Lord Himself said of him, to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God and eschews evil?" The devil could not deny it and did not attempt to do so, but only muttered, "Does Job serve God for nothing? Have You not set a hedge about him and all that he has?"

When Job uttered our text, he could have replied to the malicious accuser that even when God had broken down his hedges and laid him waste, he had not sinned nor charged God foolishly. He heeded not his wife's rash counsels to curse God and die—he still blessed the Divine Name even

though everything was taken from him. What noble words are those—"Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Though bereft of all earthly comfort, he did not forsake the way of holiness, but still kept to his God! Keeping to the way signifies not simply adherence, but continuance and progress in it.

Job had gone on in the ways of God year after year. He had not grown tired of holiness, nor weary of devotion, neither had he grown sick of what men call straight-laced piety. He had kept the way of God on and on and on, delighting in what Coverdale's version calls God's, "high street"—the highway of holiness. The further he went, the more pleasure he took in it and the more easy he found it to his feet, for God was with him and kept him—and so he kept God's way. "Your way have I kept." He means that, notwithstanding the difficulties in the way he persevered in it. It was stormy weather, but Job kept to the old road. The sleet beat in his face, but he kept His way—he had gone that path in fair weather and he was not going to forsake his God now that the storms were out—and so he kept His way.

Then the scene changed, the sun was warm and all the air was redolent with perfume and merry with the song of birds, but Job kept His way. If God's Providence flooded Job's sky with sunshine, he did not forsake God because of prosperity, as some do, but kept His way—kept His way when it was rough, kept His way when it was smooth. When he met with adversities, he did not turn onto a side road, but traveled the King's highway, where a man is safest, for those who dare to assail him will have to answer for it to a higher power. The high street of holiness is safe because the King's guarantee is given that, "no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up on it." The righteous shall keep God's way and so Job did, come fair, come foul.

When there were others in the road with him and when there were none, he kept His way. He would not even turn aside for those three good men, or men who thought themselves good, who sat by the wayside and miserably comforted, that is to say, tormented him! He kept God's way as one whose mind is made up and whose face is set like a flint. There was no turning him, he would fight his way if he could not have it peaceably. I like a man whose mind is set upon being right with God, a self-contained man, by God's Grace, who does not need patting on the back and encouraging and who, on the other hand, does not care if he is frowned at, but has counted the cost and abides by it. Give me a man who has a backbone—a brave fellow who has grit in him!

It is well for a professor when God has put some soul into him and made a man of him, for if a Christian man is not a man as well as a Christian, he will not long remain a Christian man. Job was firm—a well-made character that did not shrink in the wetting. He believed his God! He knew God's way and he kept to it under all circumstances from his first start in life even until that day when he sat on a dunghill and transformed it into a throne where he reigned as among all mere men, the peerless prince of patience! You have heard of the patience of Job and of this, as one part of it, that he kept the way of the Lord.

Now, dear Brothers and Sisters, on this second clause let me utter this word of self-examination. Have we kept God's way? Have we got into it and do we mean to keep it? Some are soon hot and soon cold. Some set out for the New Jerusalem like Pliable, very eagerly, but the first Slough of Despond they tumble into shakes their resolution and they crawl out on the homeward side and go back to the world. There will be no comfort in such temporary religion, but dreadful misery when

we come to consider it on a dying bed! Changeful Pliables will find it hard to die! O to be constant even to the end, so as to say, "My foot has held fast to His steps, His way have I kept." God grant us Grace to do it by His Spirit abiding in us!

The third clause is, "And not declined," by which I understand that he had not declined from the way of holiness, nor declined in the way of God. First, he had not declined from it. He had not turned to the right hand nor to the left. Some turn away from God's way to the right hand by doing more than God's Word has bid them do—such as invent religious ceremonies and vows and bonds and become superstitious—falling under the bondage of priestcraft and being led into will-worship and things that are not Scriptural. This is as truly wandering as going out of the road to the left would be!

Ah, dear Friends, keep to the simplicity of the Bible! This is an age in which Holy Scripture is very little accounted of. If a Church chooses to invent a ceremony, men fall into it and practice it as if it were God's ordinance! Yes and if neither Church nor Law recognize the performance, yet if certain self-willed priests choose to burn candles and to wear all sorts of bedizenments and bow and cringe and march in procession, there are plenty of simpletons who will go whichever way their clergyman chooses, even if he should lead them into downright heathenism. "Follow my leader" is the game of the day, but, "Follow my God," is the motto of a true Christian!

Job had not turned to the right. Nor had he turned to the left. He had not been lax in observing God's Commandments. He had shunned omission as well as commission. This is a very heart-searching matter, for how many there are whose greatest sins lie in omission. And remember, sins of omission—though they sit very light on many consciences and though the bulk of professors do not even think them sins—are the very sins for which men will be condemned at the last! How do I prove that? What said the great Judge? "I was hungry and you gave Me no meat. I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; sick and in prison and you visited Me not." It was what they did not do that cursed them, more than what they did do. So look well to it and pray God that you may not decline from the way of His precepts, from Jesus who, Himself is the one and only Way.

Furthermore, I take it Job means that he had not even declined in that way of God. He did not begin with running hard and then get out of breath and sit by the wayside and say, "Rest and be thankful." No, he kept up the pace and did not decline. If he was warm and zealous once, he remained warm and zealous. If he was indefatigable in service, he did not gradually tone down into a sluggard, but he could say, "I have not declined." Whereas we ought to make advances towards Heaven, there are many who are, after 20 years of profession, no more forward than they were, but perhaps in a worse state! Oh, beware of a decline!

We were accustomed to use that term years ago to signify the commencement of a consumption, or perhaps the effects of it and, indeed, a decline in the soul often leads on to a deadly consumption. In a spiritual consumption the very life of religion seems to ebb out little by little. The man does not die by a wound that stabs his reputation, but by a secret weakness within him which eats at the vitals of godliness and leaves the outward surface fair. God save us from declining! I am sure, dear Friends, we cannot, many of us, afford to decline much, for we are none too earnest, none too much alive now! This is one of the great faults of Churches—so many of the members are in a decline that the Church becomes a hospital instead of a barracks.

Many professors are not what they were at first—they were very promising young men, but they are not performing old men. We are pleased to see the flowers on our fruit trees, but they disappoint us unless they knit into fruit and we are not satisfied, even then, unless the fruit ripens to a mellow sweetness. We do not make orchards for the sake of blossoms—we want apples! And so it is with the garden of Grace. Our Lord comes seeking fruit and instead He often finds nothing but leaves. May God grant to us that we may not decline from the highest standard we have ever reached. "I would," said the Lord of the Church of Laodicea, "that you were either cold or hot."

Oh, you lukewarm ones, take that warning to heart! Remember, Jesus cannot endure you—He will spit you out of His mouth—you make Him sick to think of you. If you were downright cold He would understand you. If you were hot He would delight in you. But being neither cold nor hot He is sick at the thought of you! He cannot endure you and, indeed, when we think of what the Lord has done for us, it is enough to make us sick to think that anyone should drag on in a cold, inanimate manner in His service, who loved us and gave Himself for us!

Some decline because they become poor—they even stay from worship on that account. I hope none of you say, "I do not like to come to the Tabernacle because I have no fit clothes to come in." As I have often said, any clothes are fit for a man to come here if he has paid for them! Let each come by all manner of means in such garments as he has and he shall be welcome. But I know some very poor professors who, in the extremity of their anxiety and trouble, instead of flying to God, fly from Him. This is very sad. The poorer you are, the more you need the rich consolations of Divine Grace. Do not let this temptation overcome you, but if you are as poor as Job, be as resolved as he to keep to the Lord's way and not decline.

Others fly from their religion because they grow rich. They say that three generations will never come on wheels to a dissenting place of worship and it has proven to be sadly true in many instances, though I have no cause to complain of you as yet. Some persons, when they rise in the world, turn up their noses at their poor friends. If any of you do so, you will be worthy of pity, if not of contempt! If you forsake the ways of God for the fashion of the world you will be poor gainers by your wealth! The Lord keep you from such a decline! Many decline because they conform to the fashion of the world and the way of the world is not the way of God! Does not James say, "Know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"?

Others wander because they get into ill company, among witty people, or clever people, or hospitable people who are not gracious people. Such society is dangerous! People whom we esteem, but whom God does not esteem, are a great snare. It is very perilous to love those who love not God. He shall not be my bosom friend who is not God's friend, for I shall probably do him but little service and he will do me much harm. May the Grace of God prevent your growing cold from any of these causes and may you be able to say, "I have not declined." One more sentence remains— "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips"—that is to say, as Job had not slackened his pace, so much less had he turned back. May none of you ever go back.

This is the most cutting grief of a pastor, that certain persons come in among us and even come to the front, who, after a while, turn back and walk no more with us. We know, as John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of

us." Yet what anguish it causes when we see apostates among us and know their doom! Take heed, Brothers and Sisters, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God! Let Lot's wife be a warning! Season your souls with a fragment of salt from that pillar and it may keep you from corruption.

Remember that you can turn back, not only from all the Commandments and so become an utter apostate, but there is such a thing as backing at single Commandments. You know the precept to be right, but you cannot face it—you look at it and look at it and look at it and then go back, back, back from it, refusing to obey. Job had never done so. If it was God's command, he went forward to perform it. It may be that it seems impossible to go forward in the path of duty, but if you have faith, you are to go on whatever the difficulty may be. The slave was right who said, "Massa, if God say, 'Sam, jump through the wall,' it is Sam's business to jump and God's work to make me go through the wall." Leap at it, dear Friends, even if it seem to be a wall of granite! God will clear the road. By faith the Israelites went through the Red Sea as on dry land. It is ours to do what God bids us, as He bids us, when He bids us and no hurt can come of it. Strength equal to our day shall be given, only let us cry, "Forward!" and push on.

Here just one other word. Let us take heed to ourselves that we do not go back, for going back is dangerous. We have no armor for our back, no promise of protection in retreat. Going back is ignoble and base. To have had a grand idea and then to turn back from it like a whipped cur, is disgraceful. Shame on the man who dares not be a Christian! Even sinners and ungodly men point at the man who put his hand to the plow and looked back and was not worthy of the kingdom. Indeed, it is fatal! For the Lord has said, "If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." Forward! Forward though death and Hell obstruct the way, for backward is defeat, destruction, despair! O God, grant us of Your Grace that when we come to the end of life we may say with joy, "I have not gone back from Your Commandments." The Covenant promises persevering Grace and it shall be yours—only be sure that you trifle not with this Grace.

There is the picture which Job has sketched. Hang it up on the wall of your memory and God help you to paint after this old master, whose skill is unrivalled!

II. Secondly, let us take a peep behind the wall to see how Job came by this character. Here we note Job's HOLY SUSTENANCE—"I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." First, then, God spoke to Job. Did God ever speak to you? I do not suppose Job had a single page of inspired writing. Probably he had not even seen the first books of Moses. He may have done so, but probably he had not. God spoke to him! Did He ever speak to you? No man will ever serve God aright unless God has spoken to him. You have the Bible and God speaks in that Book and through it—but mind you, do not rest in the printed letter without discerning its spirit. You must try to hear God's voice in the printed letter.

"God has, in these last days, spoken unto us by His Son" but oh, pray that this Divine Son may speak by the Holy Spirit right into your heart! Anything which keeps you from personal contact with Jesus robs you of the best blessing! The Romanist says he uses a crucifix to help him to remember Christ and then his prayers often stop at the crucifix and do not get to Christ—and in the same manner you can make an idol of your Bible by using the mere words as a substitute for God's voice to you. The Book is to help you to remember God, but if you stick in the mere letter and get not to God at all, you misuse the sacred Word of God. When the Spirit of God speaks a

text right into the soul. When God Himself takes the promise or the precept and sends it with living energy into the heart—this is that which makes a man have a reverence for the Word—he feels its awful majesty, its Divine supremacy and while he trembles at it he rejoices and goes forward to obey because God has spoken to him!

Dear Friends, when God speaks, be sure that you have open ears to hear, for oftentimes He speaks and men regard Him not. In a vision of the night when deep sleep falls upon men, God has spoken to His Prophets, but now He speaks by His Word, applying it to the heart with power by His Spirit. If God speaks but little to us, it is because we are dull of hearing. Renewed hearts are never long without a whisper from the Lord. He is not a dumb God, nor is He so far away that we cannot hear Him! They that keep His ways and hold His steps, as Job did, shall hear many of His Words to their soul's delight and profit! God's having spoken to Job was the secret of his consistently holy life.

Then note that what God had spoken to him, he treasured it up. He says in the Hebrew that he had hid God's Word more than ever he had hidden his necessary food. They had to hide grain away in those days to guard it from wandering Arabs. Job had been more careful to store up God's Word than to store up his wheat and his barley! He was more anxious to preserve the memory of what God had spoken than to garner his harvests! Do you treasure up what God has spoken? Do you study the Word? Do you read it? Oh, how little do we search it compared with what we ought to do! Do you meditate on it? Do you suck out its secret sweets? Do you store up its essence as bees gather the life-blood of flowers and hoard up their honey for winter food?

Bible study is the metal that makes a Christian! It is the strong meat on which holy men are nourished! It is that which makes the bone and sinew of men who keep God's way in defiance of every adversary! God spoke to Job and Job treasured up His Words. We learn from our version of the text that Job lived on God's Word—he reckoned it to be better to him than his necessary food. He ate it. This is an art which some do not understand—eating the Word of the Lord. Some look at the surface of the Scriptures. Some pull the Scriptures to pieces without mercy. Some cut the heavenly bread into pieces and show their cleverness. Some pick it over for plums, like children with a cake. But blessed is he that makes it his meat and drink! He takes the Word of God to be what is, namely, a Word from the mouth of the Eternal and he says, "God is speaking to me in this and I will satisfy my soul upon it. I do not need anything better than this, anything truer than this, anything safer than this! And having got this, it shall abide in me, in my heart, in the very bowels of my life. It shall be interwoven with the warp and woof of my being."

But the text adds that he esteemed it more than his necessary food. Not more than dainties only, for those are superfluities, but more than his necessary food and you know that a man's necessary food is a thing which he esteems very highly. He must have it. "What? Take away my bread?" he asks, as if this could not be borne. To take the bread out of a poor man's mouth is looked upon as the highest kind of villainy—but Job would sooner that they took the bread out of his mouth than the Word of God out of his heart! He thought more of it than of his necessary food and I suppose it was because meat would only sustain his body, but the Word of God feeds the soul. The nourishment given by bread is soon gone, but the nourishment given by the Word of God abides in us and makes us live forever! The natural life is more than meat, but our spiritual life feeds on meat even nobler than itself, for it feeds on the Bread of Heaven, the Person of the Lord Jesus!

Bread is sweet to the hungry man, but we are not always hungry and sometimes we have no appetite. But the best of God's Word is that he who lives near to God has always an appetite for it and the more he eats of it the more he can eat! I confess I have often fed upon God's Word when I have had no appetite for it, until I have gained an appetite. I have grown hungry in proportion as I have felt satisfied—my emptiness seemed to kill my hunger—but as I have been revived by the Word I have longed for more! So it is written, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled"—and when they are filled they shall continue to enjoy the benediction, for they shall still hunger and thirst, though filled with Grace!

God's Word is sweeter to the taste than bread to a hungry man and its sweetness never spoils, though it dwells long on the palate. You cannot be always eating bread, but you can always feed on the Word of God. You cannot eat all the meat that is set before you—your capacity is limited that way and none but a glutton wishes it otherwise. But oh, you may be ravenous of God's Word and devour it all and yet long for more! You are like a little mouse in a great cheese and you shall have permission to eat it all, though it is a thousand times greater than yourself! Though God's thoughts are greater than your thoughts and His ways are greater than your ways, yet may His ways be in your heart and your heart in His ways! You may be filled with all the fullness of God, though it seems a paradox. His fullness is greater than you and all His fullness is infinitely greater than you, yet you may be filled with all the fullness of God! So that the Word of God is better than our necessary food—it has qualities which our necessary food has not.

No more, except this—you cannot be holy, my Brothers and Sisters, unless you, in secret, live upon the blessed Word of God—and you will not live on it unless it comes to you as the Word of His mouth. It is very sweet to get a letter from home when you are far away. It is like a bunch of fresh flowers in winter time. A letter from the dear one at home is as music heard over the water. But half a dozen words from that dear mouth are better than a dozen pages of manuscript, for there is a sweetness about the look and the tone which paper cannot carry! Now, I want you to get the Bible to be not a book, only, but a speaking trumpet through which God speaks from afar to you so that you may catch the very tones of His voice! You must read the Word of God to this end, for it is while reading, meditating and studying and seeking to dip yourself into its spirit that it seems, suddenly, to change from a written book into a talking book or phonograph!

It whispers to you or thunders at you as though God had hidden Himself among its leaves and spoke to your condition! It speaks as though Jesus, who feeds among the lilies, had made the chapters to be lily beds and had come to feed there! Ask Jesus to cause His Word to come fresh from His own mouth to your soul and if it is so and you thus live in daily communion with a personal Christ, my Brothers and Sisters, you will then, with your feet take hold upon His steps! You will then keep His way! You will then never decline or go back from His Commandments, but you will make good speed in your pilgrim way to the Eternal City.

May the Holy Spirit daily be with you! May each of you live under His sacred mist and be fruitful in every good word and work. Amen and amen.

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Chapter 69

Job 23,13 #406 - The Infallibility of God's Purpos

THE INFALLIBILITY OF GOD'S PURPOSE

NO. 406

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 25, 1861,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But He is in one mind and who can turn Him? And what

His soul desires, even that He does."

Job 23:13.

IT is very advantageous to the Christian mind frequently to consider the deep and unsearchable attributes of God. The beneficial effect is palpable in two ways—exerting a sacred influence both on the judgment and the heart. In respect to the one it tends to confirm us in those good old orthodox doctrines which lie as the basis of our faith. If we study man and make him the only object of our research, there will be a strong tendency in our minds to exaggerate his importance. We shall think too much of the creature and too little of the Creator—preferring that knowledge which is to be found out by observation and reason to that divine Truth which revelation alone could make known to us. The basis and groundwork of Arminian theology lies in attaching undue importance to man and giving God the second place rather than the first.

Let your mind dwell for a long time upon man as a free agent, upon man as a responsible being—upon man, not so much as being under God's claims as having claims upon God—and you will soon find in your thoughts a set of crude doctrines. You will support these doctrines with the letter of some few isolated texts in Scripture which may be speciously quoted but which really in spirit are contrary to the whole tenor of the Word of God. Thus your orthodoxy will be shaken to its very foundations and your soul will be driven out to sea without peace or joy.

Brethren, I am not afraid that any man who thinks worthily about the Creator—stands in awe of His adorable perfections and sees Him sitting upon the Throne, doing all things according to the counsel of His will—will go far wrong in his doctrinal sentiments. He may say, "My heart is fixed, O God" and when the heart is fixed with a firm conviction of the greatness, the omnipotence, the divinity of Him whom we call God, the head will not wander far from Truth. Another happy result of such meditation is the steady peace, the grateful calm it gives to the soul. Have you been a long time at sea and has the continual motion of the ship sickened and disturbed you? Have you come to look upon everything as moving till you scarcely put one foot before the other without the fear of falling down because the floor rocks beneath your path?

With what delight do you put your feet at last upon the shore and say, "Ah, this does not move. This is solid ground. Though the tempest howl this island is safely moored. She will not start from her bearings. When I tread on her she will not yield beneath my feet." Just so is it with us when we

turn from the ever-shifting, often boisterous tide of earthly things to take refuge in the Eternal God who has been "our dwelling place in all generations." The fleeting things of human life and the fickle thoughts and showy deeds of men are as moveable and changeable as the waters of the treacherous deep. But when we mount up, as it were, with eagles' wings to Him that sits upon the circle of the earth—before whom all its inhabitants are as grasshoppers—we nestle in the Rock of Ages which from its eternal socket never starts and in its fixed immovability never can be disturbed.

Or to use another simile. You have seen little children running round and round and round till they get giddy. They stand still a moment and everything seems to be flying round about them. But by holding fast and still and getting into the mind the fact that that to which they hold at least is firm—at last the world grows still again—and the world ceases to whirl. So you and I have been these six days like little children running round in circles and everything has been moving with us. Perhaps as we came to this place this morning we felt as if the very promises of God had moved, as if Providence had shifted, our friends had died, our kindred passed away. We came to look on everything as whirling—nothing firm, nothing fixed.

Brethren, let us get a good grip today of the immutability of God. Let us stand still awhile and know that the Lord is God. We shall see at length that things do not move as we dreamed they did—"to everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heavens." There is still a fixedness in that which seems most fickle. That which appears to be most dreamy has a reality. Inasmuch as it is a part of that divinely substantial scheme which God is working out, the end whereof shall be His eternal glory. It will cool your brain, it will calm your heart, my Brother. It will make you go back to the world's fight quiet and composed. It will make you stand fast in the day of temptation if now through divine grace you can come near to God, who is without variableness or shadow of a turning and offer Him the tribute of our devotion.

The text will be considered by us this morning—first, as enunciating a great general Truth. And secondly, out of that general Truth we shall fetch another upon which we shall enlarge, I trust, to our comfort.

I. The text may be regarded as TEACHING A GENERAL TRUTH. We will take the first clause of the sentence, "He is in one mind." Now the fact taught here is that in all the acts of God in Providence He has a fixed and a settled purpose. "He is in one mind." It is eminently consolatory to us, who are God's creatures, to know that He did not make us without a purpose and that now, in all His dealings with us He has the same wise and gracious end to be served. We suffer, the head aches, the heart leaps with palpitations, the blood creeps sluggishly along where its healthy flow should have been more rapid. We lose our limbs, crushed by accident, some sense fails us. The eye is eclipsed in perpetual night. Our mind is racked and disturbed. Our fortunes vary. Our goods disappear before our eyes. Our children, portions of ourselves, sicken and die. Our crosses are as continual as our lives, we are seldom long at ease. We are born to sorrow and certainly it is an inheritance of which we are never deprived. We suffer continually. Will it not reconcile us to our sorrows that they serve some end? To be scourged needlessly we consider to be a disgrace—but to be scourged if our country were to be served we should consider an honor— because there is a purpose in it. To suffer the maiming of our bodies because of some whim of a tyrant would be a thing hard to bear. But if we administer thereby to the weal of our families, or to the glory of our

God, we would be content not to be mutilated once but to be cut piecemeal away so that His great purpose might be answered.

O Believer, ever look, then, on all your sufferings as being parts of the Divine Plan and say, as wave upon wave rolls over you, "He is in one mind!" He is carrying out still His one great purpose. None of these comes by chance—none of these happens to me out of order—but everything comes to me according to the purpose of His own will and answers the purpose of His own great mind. We have to labor, too. How hard do some men labor who have to toil for their daily bread! Their bread is saturated with their sweat. They wear no garment which they have not woven out of their own nerves and muscles. How sternly, too, do others labor who have with their brain to serve their fellowmen or their God!

How have some heroic missionaries spent themselves and been spent in their fond enterprise! How have many ministers of Christ exhausted not simply the body but the mind! Their hilarity so natural to them has given place to despondency and the natural effervescence of their spirits has at last died out into oneness of soul through the desperateness of their ardor. And sometimes this labor for God is unrequited. We plow, but the furrow yields no harvest. We sow, but the field refuses the grain and the devouring bellies of the hungry birds alone are satisfied therewith. We build, but the storm casts down the stones which we had quarried with Herculean efforts piling one on another.

We sweat, we toil, we fail. How often do we come back weeping because we have toiled, as we think, without success! Yet, Christian man, you have not been without success, for "He is still in one mind." All this was necessary to the fulfillment of His one purpose. You are not lost—your labor has not rotted under the clods. All, though you see it not, has been working together towards the desired end. Stand upon the beach for a moment. A wave has just come up careening in its pride. Its crown of froth is spent. As it leaps beyond its fellow it dies. It dies. And now another and it dies. And now another and it dies. Oh, weep not, deep sea! Be not sorrowful, for though each wave dies, yet you prevail!

O mighty ocean! Onward does the flood advance till it has covered all the sand and washed the feet of the white cliffs. So is it with God's purpose. You and I are only waves of His great sea. We wash up. We seem to retire as if there had been no advance. Anther wave comes. Still each wave must retire as though there had been no progress. But the great divine sea of His purpose is still moving on. He is still of one mind and carrying out His plan. How sorrowful it often seems to think how good men die! They learn through the days of their youth and often before they come to years to use their learning they are gone. The blade is made and annealed in many a fire but before the foeman uses it, it snaps!

How many laborers, too, in the Master's vineyard, who when by their experience they were getting more useful than ever have been taken away just when the Church wanted them most! He that stood upright in the chariot guiding the steeds suddenly falls back and we cry, "My father, my father, the horsemen of Israel and the chariot thereof!" Notwithstanding all this we may console ourselves in the midst of our grief with the blessed reflection that everything is a part of God's plan. He is still of one mind— nothing happens which is not a part of the divine scheme. To enlarge our thoughts a moment—have you ever noticed, in reading history, how nations suddenly decay? When their civilization has advanced so far that we thought it would produce men of the highest

mold, suddenly old age begins to wrinkle its brow, its arm grows weak, the scepter falls and the crown drops from the head and we have to say, "Is not the world gone back again?"

The barbarian has sacked the city and where once everything was beauty, now there is nothing but ruthless bloodshed and destruction. But, my Brethren, all those things were but the carrying out of the Divine Plan. Just as you may have seen sometimes upon the hard rock the lichen spring—as soon as the lichen grows grand—it dies. But why? It is because its death prepares the moss and the moss which is feebler compared with the lichen growth, at last increases till you see before you the finest specimens of that genus. But then the moss decays. Yet weep not for its decaying—its ashes shall prepare a soil for some plants of a little higher growth—and as these decay, one after another, race after race, they at last prepare the soil upon which even the goodly cedar itself might stretch out its roots.

So has it been with the race of men—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome have crumbled. Each and all—when their hour had come—to be succeeded by a better. And if this race of ours should ever be eclipsed—if the Anglo Saxons' boasted pride should yet be stained—even then it will prove to be a link in the divine purpose. Still, in the end His one mind shall be carried out. His one great result shall be thereby achieved. Not only the decay of nations but the apparent degeneration of some races of men—and even the total extinction of others—forms a part of the fixed purpose of God. In all those cases there may be reasons of sorrow, but faith sees grounds of rejoicing.

To gather up all in one, the calamities of earthquake, the devastations of storm, the extirpations of war and all the terrible catastrophes of plague have only been co-workers with God—slaves compelled to tug the galley of the divine purpose across the sea of time. From every evil, good has come. And the more the evil has accumulated the more has God glorified Himself in bringing out at last His grand, His everlasting design. This, I take it, is the first general lesson of the text—in every event of Providence God has a purpose. "He is in one mind."

Mark, not only a purpose, but only one purpose—for all history is but one. There are many scenes, but it is one drama. There are many pages, but it is one book. There are many leaves, but it is one tree. There are many provinces, yes, and there are many lords and rulers, yet there is but one empire and God the only Potentate. "O come let us worship and bow down before Him—for the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods!"

2. "Who can turn Him?" This is the second clause of the sentence and here I think we are taught the doctrine that the purpose of God is unchanged. The first sentence shows that He has a purpose, the second shows that it is incapable of change. "Who can turn Him?" There are some shallow thinkers who dream that the great plan and design of God was thrown out of order by the Fall of man. The Fall they consider all accidental circumstances—not intended in the Divine Plan and thus—God being placed in a delicate predicament of requiring to sacrifice His justice or His mercy used the plan of the atonement of Christ as a divine expedient.

Brethren, it may be lawful to use such terms—it may be lawful to you— it would not be to me. For am I persuaded that the very Fall of man was a part of the divine purpose—that even the sin of Adam, though he did it freely—was nevertheless contemplated in the divine scheme and was by no means such a thing as to involve a digression from His primary plan. Then came the deluge

and the race of man was swept away but God's purpose was not affected by the destruction of the race. In later years His people Israel forsook Him and worshipped Baal and Ashtaroth. But His purpose was not changed any more by the defection of His chosen nation than by the destruction of His creatures.

And when later the Gospel was sent to the Jews and they resisted it and Paul and Peter turned to the Gentiles, do not suppose that God had to take down His book and make an erasure or an amendment. No, the whole was written there from the beginning. He knew everything of it—He has never altered a single sentence nor changed a single line of the divine purpose. What He intended the great picture to be—that it shall be at the end. And where you see some black strokes which seem not in keeping, these shall yet be toned down. And where there are some brighter dashes, too bright for the somber picture—these shall yet be brought into harmony. And when in the end God shall exhibit the whole, He shall elicit both from men and angels tremendous shouts of praise, while they say, "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, You King of Saints! You only are holy. All nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments are made manifest."

Where we have thought His government wrong, there shall it prove most right and where we dreamed He had forgotten to be good, there shall His goodness be most clear. It is a sweet consolation to the mind of one who muses much upon these deep matters that God never has changed in any degree from His purpose. And the result will be, notwithstanding everything to the contrary, just precisely in every jot and tittle what He foreknew and foreordained it should be. Wars may rise and other Alexanders and Caesars may spring up, but He will not change. Now, nations and peoples, lift up yourselves and let your parliaments pass your decrees but He changes not.

Now, rebels, foam at the mouth and let your fury boil—but He changes not for you. Oh, nations and peoples and tongues—and you round earth— you spin on your orbit still and all the fury of your inhabitants cannot make you move from your predestinated pathway. Creation is an arrow from the bow of God and that arrow goes on, straight on, without deviation to the center of that target which God ordained that it should strike. Never varied is His plan. He is without variableness or shadow of a turning. Albert Barnes very justly says, "It is, when properly understood, a matter of unspeakable consolation that God has a plan—for who could honor a God who had no plan—who did everything haphazardly? It is matter of rejoicing that He has one great purpose which extends through all ages and embraces all things. For then everything falls into its proper place and has its appropriate bearing on other events. It is a matter of joy that God does execute all His purposes—for as they are all good and wise—it is desirable that they should be executed. It could be a calamity if a good plan were not executed. Why, then, should men murmur at the purposes or the decrees of God?"

3. The text also teaches a third general Truth. While God had a purpose and that purpose has never changed, the third clause teaches us that this purpose is sure to be effected. "What His soul desires, that He does." He made the world out of nothing. There was no resistance there. "Light be," said He and light was. There was no resistance there. "Providence be," said He and Providence shall be. And when you shall come to see the end as well as the beginning you shall find that there was no resistance there. It is a wonderful thing how God effects His purpose while still the creature is free. They who think that predestination and the fulfillment of the divine purpose

is contrary to the free agency of man know not what they say, nor what they affirm.

It were no miracle for God to effect His own purpose if He were dealing with sticks and stones, with granite and with trees—but this is the miracle of miracles—that the creatures are free, absolutely free and still the divine purpose stands! Herein is wisdom! This is a deep unsearchable mystery. Man walks without a leash—yet treads in the very steps which God ordained him to tread in—as certainly as though manacles had bound him to the spot! Man chooses his own seat, selects his own position, guided by his will he chooses sin, or guided by diving grace he chooses right. And yet in his choice God sits as sovereign on the Throne—not disturbing but still overruling—and proving Himself to be able to deal as with free creatures as with creatures without freedom. As able to effect His purpose when He has endowed men with thought and reason and judgment, as when He had only to deal with the solid rocks and with the imbedded sea.

O Christians! You shall never be able to fathom this but you may wonder at it. I know there is an easy way of getting out of this great deep— either by denying predestination altogether or by denying free agency altogether. But you can hold the two—you can say, "Yes, my consciousness teaches me that man does as he wills, but my faith teaches me that God does as He wills and these two are not contrary the one to the other. And yet I cannot tell how it is. I cannot tell how God effects His end. I can only wonder and admire and say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out." Every creature free and doing as it wills yet God more free still and doing as He wills—not only in Heaven but among the inhabitants of this lower earth.

I have thus given you a general subject upon which I would invite you to spend your meditations in your quiet hours. I am persuaded that sometimes to think of these deep doctrines will be found very profitable. It will be to you like the advice of Christ to Simon Peter—"Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." You shall have a draught of exceeding great thoughts and exceeding great graces if you dare to launch out into this exceeding deep sea and let out the nets of your contemplation at the command of Christ.

"Behold God is great." "O Lord! how great are Your works and Your thoughts are very deep! A brutish man knows not, neither does a fool understand this."

II. I now come to the second part of my subject, which will be, I trust, cheering to the people of God. From the general doctrine that God has a plan—that this plan is invariable and that this plan is certain to be carried out—I drew the most precious doctrine that IN SALVATION GOD IS OF ONE MIND. And who can turn Him? And what His heart desires, that He does. Now, mark, I address myself at this hour only to you who are the people of God. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart? Is the spirit of adoption given to you whereby you can say, "Abba, Father"? If so, draw near, for this Truth is for you.

Come then, my Brethren—in the first place let us consider that God is of one mind. Of old, my Soul, He determined to save you. Your calling proves your election and your election teaches you that God ordained to save you. He is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent. He is of one mind. He saw you ruined in the Fall of your father Adam, but His mind never changed from His purpose to save you. He saw you in your nativity. Your youthful follies and disobedience He saw, but never did that gracious mind alter in its designs of love to you. Then in

your manhood you did plunge into vice and sin. Cover, O darkness, all our guilt and let the night conceal it from our eyes forever! Though we added sin to sin and our pride waxed exceeding high and hot, yet He was of one mind—

"Determined to save, He watched over my path When Satan's blind slave, I sported with death."

At last, when the happy hour arrived, He came to our door and knocked and He said, "Open to Me." And do you remember, O my Brother, how we said, "Go away, O Jesus! We want You not"? We scorned His grace. We defied His love! But He was of one mind and no hardness of heart could turn Him. He had determined to have us for His spouse and He would not take "No" for an answer. He said He would have us and He persevered. He knocked again. And do you remember how we half opened the door? But then some strong temptation came and we shut it in His very face. But even then He said, "Open to Me, my Dove, My head is wet with the dew and My locks with the drops of the night"—yet we bolted and barred the door and would not let Him in. But He was of one mind and none could turn Him.

Oh, my soul weeps now when I think of the many convictions that I stifled, of the many moves of His Spirit that I rejected and those many times when conscience bade me repent and urged me to flee to Him but I would not. My souls weeps when I think of those seasons when a mother's tears united with all the intercession of the Savior, yet my heart was harder than granite—and I refused to move and would not yield. But He was of one mind.

He had no fickleness in Him. He said He would have us and have us He would. He had written our names in His book and He would not cross them out. It was His solemn purpose that yield we should. And O that hour when, by His grace, we yielded at last! Then did He prove that in all our wanderings He had been of one mind. And O since then, how sorrowful the reflection! Since then how often have you and I turned? We have backslidden and if we had the Arminian's god to deal with, we should either have been in Hell or out of the Covenant at this hour.

I know I should be in the Covenant and out of the covenant a hundred times a day if I had a god who put me out every time I sinned and then restored me when I repented. But no, despite our sin, our unbelief, our backslidings, our forgetfulness of Him, He was of one mind. And Brethren, I know this, that though we shall wander still, though in dark hours you and I may slip and often fall, yet His loving kindness changes not. Your strong arm, O God shall bear us on. Your loving heart will never fail. You will not turn Your love away from us, or make it cease or pour upon us Your fierce anger—but having begun You will complete the triumphs of Your grace.

Nothing shall make You change Your mind. What joy is this to you, Believers? For your mind changes every day, your experience varies like the wind and if salvation were to be the result of any purpose on your part, certainly it never would be effected. But since it is God's work to save and we have proved that He is of one mind, our faith shall revel in the thought that He will be of one thought even to the end—till all on Glory's summit we shall sing of that fixed purpose and that immutable love which never turned aside until the deed of grace was triumphantly achieved. Now, Believer, listen to the second lesson—"Who can turn Him?" While He is immutable from within, He is immovable from without. "Who can turn Him?" That is a splendid picture presented to us by Moses in the Book of Numbers. The children of Israel were encamped in the plains of Moab. Quietly and calmly they were resting in the valley—the tabernacle of the Lord in their midst and the

pillar of cloud spread over them as a shield. But on the mountain range there were two men—Balak, the son of Zippor, king of the Moabites and Balaam the Prophet of Pethor.

They had built seven altars and offered seven bullocks and Balak said unto Balaam, "Come, curse me Jacob, come, defy Israel." Four times did the Prophet take up his parable. Four times did he use his enchantments, offering the sacrifices of God on the altars of Baal. Four times did he vainly attempt a false divination. But I would have you mark that in each succeeding vision the mind of God is brought out in deeper characters. First, Balaam confesses his own impotence, "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? How shall I defy whom the Lord has not defied?"

Then the second oracle brings out more distinctly the divine blessing, "Behold, I have received commandment to bless—and He has blessed and I cannot reverse it." A third audacious attempt is not with a heavier repulse, for the stifled curse recoils on themselves—"Blessed is he that blesses you and cursed is he that curses you." Once again in the vision that closes the picture, the eyes of Balaam are opened till he gets a glimpse of the Star that should come out of Jacob and the Scepter that shall rise out of Israel with the dawning glory of the latter days. Well might Balaam say, "There is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel."

And now transfer that picture in your mind to all your enemies and specially to that arch-fiend of Hell. He comes before God today with the remembrance of your sins and he desires that he may curse Israel. But he has found a hundred times that there is no enchantment against Jacob nor divination against Israel. He took David into the sin of lust and he found that God would not curse him there, but bless him with a sorrowful chastisement and with a deep repentance. He took Peter into the sin of denying his Master and he denied Him with oaths and curses. But the Lord would not curse him even there, but turned and looked on Peter, not with a lightning glance that might have shivered him but with a look of love that made him weep bitterly.

He has taken you and me man times into positions of unbelief and we have doubted God. Satan said—"Surely, surely God will curse him there," but never once has He done it. He has smitten, but the blow was full of love. He has chastised, but the chastisement was fraught with mercy. He has not cursed us nor will He. You can not turn God's mind. Then, fiend of Hell, your enchantments cannot prosper, your accusations shall not prevail. "He is in one mind, who can turn Him?" And Brethren, you know when men are turned, they are sometimes turned by advice. Now who can advise God. Who shall counsel the Most High to cast off the darlings of His bosom or persuade the Savior to reject His spouse? Such counsel offered were blasphemy and it would be not pungent to His soul. Or else men are turned by entreaties. But how shall God listen to the entreaties of the Evil One? Are not the prayers of the wicked an abomination to the Lord? Let them pray against us—let them entreat the Lord to curse us. But He is of one mind and no revengeful prayer should change the purpose of His love. Sometimes men are changed by the ties of relationships—a mother interposes and man yields—but in our case who can interpose?

God's only begotten Son is as much concerned in our salvation as His Father and instead of interposing to change, He would—if such a thing were needed—still continue to plead that the love and mercy of God might never be withdrawn. Oh, let us rejoice in this—

"Midst all our sin and care and woe, His Spirit will not let us go."

The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people. "He is in one mind and who can turn Him?"

I know not how it is but I feel that I cannot preach from this text as I should like. But oh, the text itself is music to my ears! It seems to sound like the martial trumpet of the battle and my soul is ready for the fray. It seems now that if trials and troubles should come—if I could but hold my hand upon this precious text—I would laugh at them all. "Who can turn Him?"—I would shout—"Who can turn Him?" Come on, earth and Hell, come on—for "who can turn Him?" Come on, you boisterous troubles, come on, you innumerable temptations, come on, slanderer and liar, "who can turn Him?" And since He cannot be changed, my soul must and will rejoice "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

I wish I could throw the text like a bombshell into the midst of the army of doubters that that army might be routed at once—for when we get a text like this—it must be the text which takes effect and not our explanation. This surely is a most marvelous deathblow to our doubts and fears—

"He is in one mind, And who can turn Him?"

And now with a few words upon the last sentence I shall conclude— God's purpose must be effected—"What His soul desires, that He does."

Beloved, what God's soul desires is your salvation and mine—if we are His chosen. And that He does. Part of that salvation consists in our perfect sanctification. We have had a long struggle with inbred sin and as far as we can judge we have not made much progress. Still is the Philistine in the land and still does the Canaanite invade us. We sin still and our hearts still have in them unbelief and proneness to depart from the living God. Can you think it possible that you will ever be without any tendency to sin? Does it not seem a dream that you should ever be without fault before the Throne of God—without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing?

But yet you shall be—His heart desires it and that He does. He would have His spouse without any defilement. He would have His chosen generation without anything to mar their perfection. Now, inasmuch as He spoke and it was done, He has but to speak and it shall be done with you. You cannot rout your foes but He can. You cannot overcome your besetting sins but He can do it. You cannot drive out your corruptions, for they have chariots of iron, but He will drive out the last of them till the whole land shall be without one enemy to disturb its perpetual peace. O what a joy to know that it will be before long! Oh, it will be so soon with some of us—such a few weeks—though we perhaps are planning on years of life!

A few weeks, or a few days and we shall have passed through Jordan's flood and stand complete in Him, accepted in the Beloved! And should it be many years—should we be spared till the snows of a century shall have fallen upon our frosted hair—yet even then we must not doubt that His purpose shall at last be fulfilled. We shall be spotless and faultless and unblameable in His sight before long.

Another part of our salvation is that we should at last be without pain, without sorrow—gathered with the Church of the First-born before the Father's face. Does it not seem—when you sit down to think of yourself as being in Heaven—as a pretty dream that never will be true? What? Shall these fingers one day smite the strings of a golden harp? O aching head! Shall you one day wear a

crown of glory that fades not away? O toil-worn body! Shall you bathe yourself in seas of heavenly rest? Is not Heaven too good for us, Brothers and Sisters? Can it be that we, poor we, shall ever get inside those pearly gates or tread the golden streets? Oh shall we ever see His face? Will He ever kiss us with the kisses of His lips?

Will the King immortal, invisible, the only wise God, our Savior, take us to His bosom and call us all His own? Oh, shall we ever drink out of the rivers of pleasure that are at the right hand of the Most High? Shall we be among that happy company who shall be led to the living fountains of waters and all tears be wiped away from our eyes? Ah, that we shall be! For "He is in one mind and who can turn Him? and what His soul desires, that He does." "Father, I will that they whom You have given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." That is an immortal omnipotent desire. We shall be with Him where He is. His purpose shall be effected and we shall partake of His bliss.

Now rise, you who love the Savior and put your trust in Him—rise like men who have God within you and sit no longer down upon your dunghills. Come, you desponding ones. If salvation were to be your own work you might despair—but since it is His and He changes not, you must not ever doubt—

"Now let the feeble all be strong, And make Jehovah's power their song; His shield is spread o'er every saint. And thus supported, who can faint?"

If you perish—even the weakest of you—God's purpose cannot be effected. If you finally fall, His honor will be stained. If you perish, Heaven itself will be dishonored—Christ will have lost one of His Members. He will be a king whose regalia has been stolen—no, He will not be complete Himself—for the Church is His fullness and how can He be full if a part of His fullness shall be cast away? Putting these things together, let us take courage and in the name of God let us set up our banners. He that has been with us up to now will preserve us to the end and we shall soon sing in the fruition of Glory as we now recite in the confidence of faith—that His purpose is completed and His love immutable.

I say by way of closing such a subject ought to inspire every man with awe. I speak to some here who are unconverted. It is an awful thought— God's purpose will be subserved in you. You may hate Him, but as He got honor upon Pharaoh and all his hosts, so will He upon you. You may think that you will spoil His designs—that shall be your idea—but your very acts, though guided with that intent, shall only tend to subserve His glory. Think of that! To rebel against God is useless, for you cannot prevail. To resist Him is not only impertinence but folly. He will be as much glorified by you, whichever way you go. You shall either yield Him willing honor or unwilling honor—but either way His purpose in you shall most certainly be subserved.

O that this thought might make you bow your heads and say, "Great God, glorify Your mercy in me, for I have revolted. Show that You can forgive. I have sinned, deeply sinned. Prove the depths of Your mercy by pardoning me. I know that Jesus died and that He is set forth as a Propitiator. I believe on Him as such. O God! I trust Him—I pray You will glorify Yourself in me by showing what Your grace can do in casting sin behind Your back and blotting out iniquity, transgression and sin."

Sinner, He will do it. He will do it. If thus you plead and thus you pray, He will do it. There was never a sinner rejected yet that came to God with humble prayer and faith. Go to God today.

Confess your sin and take hold of Christ as upon the horns of the altar of mercy and of sacrifice. If you do you shall find that it was a part of the Divine Plan to bring you here today, to strike your mind with awe, to lead you humbly to the Cross, to lead you afterwards joyfully to your God—and to bring you perfect at last before His Throne!

God add His blessing for Christ's sake! Amen.

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Chapter 70

Job 23,3 #2272 - Longing to Find God

LONGING TO FIND GOD

NO. 2272

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"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!"

Job 23:3.

Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" Observe that Job is so taken up with his one great desire that he forgets that everybody else is not thinking in the same way—and he uses a pronoun, though he has not before uttered the name of God. The man is carried away with his desire. He does not say, "Oh, that I knew where I might find God!" but, "where I might find Him." An overwhelming passion will often speak like that. See how the Song of Songs, that sweet canticle of love, begins, "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth for Your love is better than wine." There is no mention of any person's name. We forget many things when we are taken up with one thing. We forget that, as Madame Guyon wrote—

"All hearts are cold, in every place"

and when our heart grows warm, we fancy that all other hearts are warm, too. Remember how Mary Magdalene, when she met our Lord on the Resurrection Morning and, "supposing Him to be the gardener," said to Him, "Sir, if you have borne Him hence, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." No, but Mary, you have not mentioned the name of the Person! You begin, "If you have borne Him hence." How should another know of whom you speak? This is the way of a concentrated individuality! When it is set, desperately set, upon some one object, it forgets to whom it speaks—it only remembers the beloved one upon whom its affections are fixed.

Now, this is one reason why the man who is earnestly seeking after God is often misunderstood. He does not speak as one would speak who is cool and calm. His heart is hot within him and his words are fire-flakes, so that those about him say, "The man is mad! He is not sober as he used to be. He is going out of his mind." I would to God that many were so mad that they cried in the depths of their soul, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" If God knows whom you are seeking, it is of small consequence whether your fellow creatures know, or do not know! If He accepts you, do not be cast down if men misunderstand you.

Thus, you see, Job's longing was all-absorbing. It was also personal— he longed to personally find God. I know many people who have great longings, but they are for things that are trivial compared with the longing of Job! Job does not sigh to comprehend the incomprehensible. He does

Volume 38 1not wish to find out the Divine decree. He does not trouble about where free agency and predestination meet. He does not desire to know out of mere curiosity, or for the attainment of barren knowledge! His cry is, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him! Oh, that I could get at God! Oh, that I could have dealings with the Most High! Oh, that I could feel at perfect peace with Him, rest in Him and be happy in the light of His Countenance!"

Now, some of you, perhaps, in years gone by, were very curious and anxious about various theological questions. The time was when you would have disputed with almost anyone who came along, but you have given all that up and now you want to find God and to be reconciled to Him. You want to know from God's own lips that there is peace between you and that He loves you and will never cease to love you. You have been, perhaps, for weeks trying to find a way of access to God and, though there is such a way, and it is close to you, you have not yet perceived it. This one thing occupies your mind—not that you may know about God, or split hairs about doctrinal theories concerning Him—but that you may find HIM. I would to God it were the case with everyone in this congregation, that you either had Him or were sighing and crying after Him. This is not a point upon which any man can afford to be neutral. We must find God, for if we do not, we are lost!

On further reading the text, I feel still more pleased with Job's determination about getting to God. He says, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" He does not make any condition as to where he might find God. If it were in Heaven, he would try to scale its heights. If it were in the abyss, he would hopefully plunge into the deep. If God is far away, at the uttermost ends of the earth, Job is willing to go there. If God is to be found in His Temple, or, for the matter of that, in the lowest dungeon, Job only wants to know where he may find Him. And if he may find Him, he will not make any conditions as to where it may be. We noticed in our reading that Job said, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come even to His seat!" He was willing to come even to God's Judgement Seat if he could not find Him anywhere else.

It will be a great mercy for you if you are so anxious to find God that you will not set any bounds as to where you shall find Him. You would be glad to find Him at your usual place of worship, but you would be just as glad to find Him in the midst of quite another people. You would be thankful to find Him in your own chamber when you bow your knees in prayer, but you would be quite as pleased to find Him in the midst of your business. You would rejoice to find Him whether it was in the heat of noontide, or in the cool of midnight. Your cry is, "Only let me find Him, and time and place shall be of no consequence to me."

With regard to instrumentalities, also, you would be pleased to be converted to God by a learned and eloquent minister, but you would be quite as willing to find Christ by means of the most illiterate. You will be quite content with the man against whom you have been prejudiced, if God will but bless him to you. Yes, though it were your own servant girl, or some boy in the street—if they could but tell you the way of salvation so that you could find God—you would be perfectly satisfied! I know you would, for you put in no, "ifs," or, "buts," or conditions. Your one cry is, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" You are absorbed with that one desire! Your whole soul is

possessed by that one earnest longing to find God! This desire is intensely personal and practical and it inspires you with the full determination that, at all costs and all hazards, if you can but find out where God is, you will come to Him.

Now, I am going to talk about this desire to find God. I have had it from one or two here present who are deeply anxious, that this is the cry of their spirit day and night, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" In trying to meet their case, our first enquiry will be, What sort of desire is this?—the desire that makes a man, or a woman, or a child cry out, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" And, secondly, What is the answer to it? How can they find God? And, thirdly, Why are some so long in finding God?

I. Our first question, concerning this longing to find God, is, WHAT SORT OF DESIRE IS THIS?

I answer, first, that it takes many forms according to the circumstances of the person who has the desire. In Job's case, it was a somewhat hazardous desire to come before the court of God to have his righteousness established. I have no doubt that, in bitterness of soul, many a sincere man, when maligned and lampooned, has wished that he could turn to God and have the matter judged by Him. "You know," he says, "that I am not wicked. I have not been false. I have not been treacherous. Let the case against me be tried by the Great Judge of All who is righteous and impartial. Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!"

But the desire is better and more usual on the part of children of God when they have lost the light of His Countenance. Beloved, the model Christian is the man who always walks in the Light of God, as God is in the Light. But how comparatively few there are of these! Many, I half fear the most of us, are at times in the dark. We wander. We lose our first love. We grow lukewarm. And then God hides His face. Many and many a true child of God has sighed out of the depth of his spirit, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" Are any of you less happy than you used to be? Are you less holy than you used to be? Are you less in prayer than in former years? Have you less tenderness of conscience? Have you less joy in the Lord? Are you doing less for Jesus and are you more content with the little that you do? Are you going back? Well, then, if God has not hid His face from you, in all probability He will!

And then, when you are in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water, you will be like the fainting hart that pants for the brooks, and you will cry out after God. If you do not, it will be a damning mark. If you can live without your God, you who profess to be a child of God, it will look as if you never were His child. God has spoiled some of us for the world. It is never a matter of self-denial to us to give up its pleasures, for we have no taste for them. If we do not find joy in God, we are, of all men, most miserable. The brooks and cisterns are dry—and if the smitten Rock does not yield us water, we thirst, we faint, we die. But, Beloved, I want to dwell mainly upon this cry as coming from the convicted sinner who has not yet rejoiced in God. He has a burden pressing heavily upon him and he knows that he can never get rid of it except through the Grace of God in Jesus Christ—and he wants to get rid of it! So it has come to this, that day and night he says, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" I like this form of the desire best of all and I would willingly spend and be spent that I might encourage and help any who are thus seeking God as their Savior.

Let me say this to any such who are here. This desire is quite contrary to the desire of nature. You feel yourself lost and yet this cry comes to your tongue, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" My dear Friend, this is not a natural desire! When you were satisfied with the world, you never had this desire! Time was when it never crossed your soul for a moment. When Adam and Eve sinned, they did not want to find God—they hid themselves among the trees of the Garden. And you, while you love sin, do not want to find God. You are like Jonah—you would willingly take ship and flee from God's Presence, even to Tarshish. No, the natural man, without the Holy Spirit, never said, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" I should like you to get just a ray of the Light of God, not more, out of that remark. That ray of Light might cheer you while we proceed.

I think that this desire never comes except by Grace. It never takes full possession of any man unless it is worked in him by the Grace of God. There may be a transient desire, but it is no more a sign of spiritual health than is the hectic flush of consumption a proof that the poor patient possesses vigorous physical strength. In the excitement of a revival meeting, you may say, "I wish I were a Christian," but to carry this desire about with you—to have it always within you as a deep ground-swell of your soul, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!"—this is the work of the Holy Spirit! I trust that we have many here who feel these first pangs of the new birth, for where God begins with us by working in us this desire, He will, in due time, gratify it! If He gives us hunger, He gives us bread to satisfy its cravings. If He gives us a desire for Himself, He gives us Himself to satisfy that desire.

Then it is sweet to think that this desire is met by the seeking of the Savior. The desire of a man after God is paralleled by Christ's desire after him. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Now, when a sheep begins to seek its shepherd and, at the same time the shepherd is seeking it, it cannot be long before the two meet! I read to you, last Thursday night, a letter from a poor soul, a harlot, who had come in here on the Sabbath morning and God had met with her. You know how easy it is to make up such a letter with the idea of asking for charity, but there was no name to this note, and it contained no request for charity. It was a true letter. There was one part of it that I commend to you. The writer said, "Before you receive this letter, I shall be home at my father's house, from which I wickedly ran away."

Ah, there is the point, that going home, that getting back to the father! Now, I have no doubt that the father had sought his girl, but when the girl began to seek him, there would be a meeting very soon! If there is a soul here that wants Christ, Christ wants you! If you were sitting, now, upon Samaria's well, He would come and sit by you, and He would say to you, "Give Me to drink," for you alone can assuage the Savior's thirst, the thirst to save, the thirst to forgive, the thirst to bring wanderers Home to the great Father's House! Oh, Friend, if this cry is your cry, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" I can see much to comfort you in the thought that while you are seeking the Lord, He is also seeking you!

But let me add that it will be well if this desire never gets satisfied except by God, for there are so many who do not seek till they find Him. A friend, writing to me, says, "You have taken away from me all my comfort. You have destroyed my self-righteousness. You have left me in a dreadful condition through the Word of God which you have preached to me. I used to go to early celebrations. I was at church three times a day. I thought that I took the very body and blood of Christ in the holy Eucharist. I had rested in my works—and now the whole structure is gone. I can

rest in none of those things any more. My one cry is (and please to sing tonight that hymn that ends)—

"Give me Christ, or else I die!"

My dear Friend, your letter gave me great delight! I was glad to give out that hymn, but I pray you do not get content till you find God, for you can come here, you know, and you may even succeed in deceiving us so that you may be baptized, and join the Church and take communion—and you may rest in all that without saving faith in Christ—and you will not be an inch nearer to God than you were when you rested in the ceremonies of your former church. It is only God who can save you, only God in Christ who can give true rest to your soul! Men may change their churches and only change their refuge of lies. But if they come to Christ, whatever church they are in, if they have found Him and are trusting in Him and in Him, alone, their peace will be like a river and their righteousness as the waves of the sea! God bless any here who are opening their mouths and panting with this strong desire. But be sure that you are never comforted till Jesus comforts you! Never be fed except with the Bread of Heaven. Never rest until you find rest in Him whom God has appointed to be our rest, or else you will make a blunder, a fatal blunder, after all.

II. Our second question, concerning this desire, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" is, WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

Well, in the first place, there is something in the desire, itself, that gives you comfort, for God is near you now. If you want God, He is everywhere. He is here, He is nearer to you than your hands and feet, nearer to you than your eyes or your nerves. He is within you and round about you. You might ask, with the Psalmist, "Where shall I flee from Your Presence?" and find that task to be impossible. But if you really wish to find God, you may readily do so. He is here! You have not to pray at Jerusalem, nor at Mount Gerizim—

"Where'er we seek Him, He is found, And every place is hallowed ground."

Believe it and speak to Him now! Show Him your heart now! Appeal to Him now, for He is truly near you at this moment! But you wish to lay hold upon Him. Then remember that God is apprehended only by faith. Eyes are of no use in this case—you cannot see a Spirit. Ears are of no use in this case—you cannot hear a Spirit. Your senses may be put aside now—the new senses—the new eyes, the new ears, is faith. If you believe, you shall see and you shall hear. Come, deal with God who is near you now, by faith. Believe that He is near you. Speak to Him. Gladly trust Him. Faith will apprehend all of God that can be apprehended and out of faith shall come many other blessed things that will make you still more familiar with your God. But now, even now, put out the arms of an inward faith and say, "I believe You." Faith comprehends the Incomprehensible and takes the Infinite within itself!

But still, if what you mean is, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him in the sense of calling Him my own, and having a joyful belief in His love!" well, then, I would say to you, if you want to find Him, search His Word. If you will read the Bible with the steady resolve to find God in Christ within its pages, I am certain that you will not have to read it long. There is here a holy magnetism, which if a man comes in contact with these sacred Words, shall begin to operate upon him. If you will take the Book and search it through to learn how God is to be found, you will find Him.

Then, in connection with the Word written, go and hear the Word spoken, for there are minds that are more affected by speech than by what they read. If you will only hear a faithful Gospel minister attentively, it will not be long before you find God. If you go to hear a man merely because he is clever, or one who will tell you stories and interest you, you may never get any good out of him. But if you go saying, "I want to find Christ during this service. I want to lay hold on God to my soul's eternal salvation," I do not think that you will long frequent some places of worship that I could mention without saying, "I have found God."

Next to that, if you do not seem to profit by the reading and hearing of the Word, seek the Lord in prayer. Get to your chamber and there cry unto God and cease not your cries, for if you will seek Him as for silver and search for Him as for hidden treasure, you shall surely find Him! Prayer has a wonderful effect on God. He turns at the cry that comes from the heart. He is sure to look to the man who cries to Him for mercy.

And at the same time that you are in prayer, or in connection with it, meditate on Divine things. Especially meditate on the Person of Christ, God and Man—on the work of Christ, especially His atoning Sacrifice. Meditate on the promises. Meditate on God's wonders of Grace recorded in this delightful Book. Think and pray, and then think and pray again—and my impression is that you will not long have to say, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!"

Yet there is one more word for you. If you would find God, He is to be found in Christ Jesus, "reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Do you know the Man, Christ Jesus? Can you, by faith, see Him? Fall at His feet! Accept Him as your Savior! Trust Him as the Giver and Forgiver, as saving from death and imparting life! Come and take Christ—and you have found God! No man believes in Christ and remains without the favor of God. Oh, that you would believe in Christ right now! This morning I preached about His Incarnation, Im

manuel, God with us [#2163, Volume 36—Immanuel—The Light of Life— Read/download entire sermon athttp://www.spurgeongems.org .] Think much on this. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." God came here among men and took the form of a mortal creature—and here lived and died! Think of that, and believe in Him who is God and Man. Then think much of His life, of the many that He healed, the sick ones that He relieved, the sinful that came to hear Him, to whom He spoke only words of love. Look through the life of Christ and I am persuaded that if you are willing to do so, you will find among those who came to Him a case parallel to your own and will find Him dealing with it in love and mercy. And, while you are perusing that wondrous Life of love, you will find God! But if it is not so, go a little further—

"Go to dark Gethsemane, You that feel the tempter's power."

Stand amid the shade of the olives! Hear the Son of God groaning out His very soul, His sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. He pleaded there for sinners, for the guilty. Follow Him to Pilate's Hall, see Him scourged and spat upon—and go, at last, to Calvary and sit down there in meditation—and mark the wounds in His blessed body, those sacred fountains of blood. See His emaciated frame exposed before the sun to the gaze of cruel men. Watch Him till you hear Him cry, "It is finished!" Then see the soldier set His heart abroach, for, even after death, His heart poured its tribute for us and then, as you remember that He made the heavens and the earth, and yet did hang upon that tree for the guilty, believe and trust Him.

"Oh!" says one, "I cannot believe." Now it is a curious thing that when I have met with persons who find it difficult to believe, I have often been obliged to say to them, "Well, now, there is a strange difference between you and me, for you cannot believe and I cannot disbelieve." That is to say, when I see Christ, the Son of God, dying for guilty men, I cannot make myself disbelieve. It seems to me to flash its own evidence upon my soul and I am convinced by the sight I see. How is it that you cannot believe when the Almighty God is one with His sinful creatures and dies to save them from eternal death? "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." When you see that marvel of marvels, how can you disbelieve? I charge you, by the living God, look to Jesus on the Cross, as Israel in the wilderness, bitten by the serpents, looked to the bronze serpent—and by that look live!

I think this is the way to find God, that is, to come to Christ, for, remember that He is not dead. He is risen! Where is the Christ now? He is at the right hand of God. He makes intercession for us—yes, for the rebellious, also, that the Lord God may dwell among them! Do you believe that Christ makes intercession for sinners? Then trust yourself with Him, first as your Redeemer, and now as your Intercessor! And so, by a simple trust, you shall find your God and no more say, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" III. I have finished my discourse when I have very briefly answered the third question—WHY ARE SOME SO LONG IN FINDING GOD?

I answer, partly because they are not clear as to what they are seeking. If you want to find God, well, here He is! You yourself know that He is everywhere, so that you have found Him! But what I fear some of you need is some kind of mark, some sign, some feeling. Now, that is not seeking God—you are seeking something in addition to God. I am sure that, in the hour of trial, nothing will stand a man in good stead but simple faith in God by Jesus Christ. "Oh!" says one, "I read of a man, the other day, who was under most wonderful conviction, and of another who had a very remarkable dream, and of another who heard a voice speaking to him."

Yes, yes, and all these pretty things are very well when you have faith in Christ. But if you do not trust yourself to Christ, these things are not worth a penny, for some day you will say to yourself, "How do I know that I did hear that voice? Might I not have been deceived? How can I be sure that that dream meant anything? May I not have eaten something for supper that made me dream it? And that joy that I felt may have been all a delusion." But if you want God without any of these things, you want exactly what you need, and I pray you to come and take it by faith in Jesus. Here am I, a guilty sinner—that I know and confess. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—that I know by the witness of this Book. I am told that if I trust Him, I am saved. I do trust Him—I will not ask for a dream, or a vision, or a voice, or anything. Why should I? Beggars must not be choosers! If God gives me His salvation as He gives it to anybody else, I am perfectly happy, even though I have no striking story to tell and shall never point a moral or adorn a tale with any anecdote about myself. I am afraid, however, that many are not wanting God so much as wanting the odds and ends that sometimes go with Him.

Again, there are some who are crying after God who are hankering after their own idols. Ah, me! You would like to keep some of your selfrighteousness, or some of your sins. One of our friends, coming up from the Norfolk Broads, told me that when the time came to row home, he began pulling away at the oars and he thought that it was a very long way, and that the scenery was very monotonous, with the same old willow tree and everything the same as when he started. And

someone going by said, "I suppose you know, old fellow, that you have got your anchor down." That is exactly what he had forgotten! He was rowing with his anchor still down. You will not find God that way if you have an anchor still down! I do not know what your anchor is—perhaps it is the wine cup—you still take that drop too much. Perhaps it is an evil woman. Perhaps it is some trick in trade that you have been used to. Perhaps it is some secret sin that cannot be told. You cannot find God while you keep that. Achan, how can God come to your tent unless it is for judgment, while the Babylonian garment is hidden in the ground? Away with the idols and then shall you find the true God!

And yet again, there are some who are waiting to feel their need more. They think that they cannot come to Christ till they feel more than they do at present. Now, again, I must get you to alter your cry. I thought that your cry was, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" But now your cry is, "Oh, that I knew that I really needed Him!" Have you not had enough of that experience? Time was with me when I thought too much of it. I believe a deep plowing does us good, but, if a man is always plowing and never sows anything, he will never have a harvest! Some of you are looking too much to your sense of need. You are NOT saved by your sense of need! You are saved by the supply of that need. Come as you are. "I have not a broken heart," says one. Come to Christ for a broken heart. "I have not a tender conscience," says another. Come to Christ for a tender conscience. You are not to get half the work done yourself, and then come to Christ to have it finished! Come as you are, just as you are, hard heart and all! Come along with you and trust yourself to Jesus—and you shall find God!

I am afraid that there are also a great many who are clouded in their minds by the great sorrow through which they have passed, for you can be so distressed and distracted that you do not judge clearly. You remember Hagar, when the water in her bottle was spent, and her boy was dying of thirst? Just there, close behind her, was a well of water! The angel said to her, "What ails you, Hagar?" And we read, "God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water." Some of you have salvation at your fingertips, but you do not know it. You have it in your mouth, as Paul says, and you do not know it, or else you would swallow it down and live by it at once! Salvation is not up there in the heights, or down here in the deeps. The Apostle puts it thus, "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."

So runs the Gospel. Look for no other way. Believe! I said not, "Feel," but, "Believe!" Dream not, dote not, imagine not, but believe! Say with your heart, "I believe that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. And I trust Him to save me—

"Tis done, the great transaction's done; I am my Lord's, and He is mine"

Now you shall begin a new life of obedience and holiness worked in you as the result of your having believed in Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth to be the Propitiation for sin! Will you have Christ or not, Sinner? If you will not have Him, you must perish! If you will have Him, He gives Himself freely to you—and nothing is freer than a gift! Take Him, and go your way happy as the angels. God bless you! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

Job 23:1-17.

Job is in great physical pain through the sore boils that cover him from head to foot. He is still smarting under all the bereavements and losses he has sustained and he is somewhat irritated by the hard speeches of his friends. We read, in the second chapter of this book, that, "they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him." "Job's comforters ," even to this day, are regarded as those whose thoughts are preferred to their company. As the result of all the trials through which Job was called to pass, there is, in this chapter, somewhat of bitterness. We need not wonder at it—the wonder is that there is not more. You ought, in estimating a man's actions or words, to judge of his circumstances at the time. Do not take Job's words by themselves, but consider in what condition he was. Think what you would have done if you had been in his place—and you will not censure him, as you might otherwise have done.

Verses 1, 2. Job answered and said, Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. He could not express all his pain. He felt that he did not complain too much. His stroke was heavier than his groaning. His Words had bitterness in them, but he thought that they were justified by his affliction.

3. Oh that I knew where I might find Him! Job longed to find his God. He wanted to come to Him. He had been slandered by men, so he turns from the court of injustice below to the Divine Court of King's Bench above, where he is sure of a righteous verdict—

"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!"

3. That I might come even to His seat! To His Mercy Seat, and even to His Judgement Seat. Job was willing to appear even there!

4. I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. He felt that he dared plead before God. He was not guilty of the things laid to his charge, so he would be bold to speak even before God's Judgement Seat. If Job had known a little more of God, as he did before his life ended, he might not have talked so glibly about ordering his cause before Him and filling his mouth with arguments. We remember how he afterwards spoke to the Lord, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ears: but now my eyes see You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Who among us would desire to come and argue our case with God without our heavenly Advocate?

5. I would know the words, which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me. He was willing to hear God's side of the argument, patient and anxious to understand the mind of God with whom he desired to plead. So far so good. There are some who do not wish to know what God would say to them. As long as they may express their own passionate desires, they have no ear and heart waiting to hear the voice of God. Very beautiful is the next verse—

6. Will He plead against me with His great power? No; but He would put strength in me. He has confidence in the Lord that if he could have an audience with Him, God would not use His power against him, but, on the contrary, would strengthen him in order that he might state his case. Do I speak to a troubled heart here? Come to God with your burden! He will not use His power against you, but He will help you to plead with Him. Trembler, come and bow at His feet! He will not spurn you! He will lift you up. Despairing one, look to the Lord! He will not turn His wrath upon you, but

He will help you to plead with Him. "Will He plead against me with His great power? No; but He would put strength in me."

7-9. There the righteous might dispute with Him; so should I be delivered forever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: On the left hand, where He does work, but I cannot behold Him: He hides Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him. Job had done his best to find his God. Forward, backward, to the right, and to the left, he had gone in all directions after Him, but he could not find Him. I know there are persons here, tonight, who are in that condition. And you will never rest, I hope, until you find the Lord. He is not far from you. I trust that with many of you, tonight is the happy hour in which your long searching shall end in a delightful finding!

10. But He knows the way that I take. If I do not know His way, He knows mine! If I cannot find Him, He can find me! Here is my comfort— "He knows the way that I take."

10. When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. Here the true Job comes to the front. You get the gracious man once more on his feet. He staggered a little, but he now stands firm—"When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." So will you, my tried Sister, my afflicted Brother! The trial of your faith is but for a time—there will come an end to this furnace work! And when God has tried you, tested you, and taken away your dross—He will bring you forth and you will be pure gold—meet for the Master's use—

"In the furnace God may prove you, There to bring you forth more bright, But can never cease to love you— You are precious in His sight! God is with you, God your everlasting light."

11. My foot has held His steps, His way have I kept, and not declined. Happy Job, to be able to say that, and to speak the truth! But there is a touch of self about it which we cannot quite commend. Be holy, but do not claim to be holy! Be steadfast before God, firm in your obedience to Him—but do not mention it—for your hope lies somewhere else. Yet we cannot condemn Job for declaring that he had kept God's way. His friends were pleading against him, so he felt that he must defend himself.

12. Neither have I gone back from the Commandment of His lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food. Job was a happy man to be able to say that. I hope that many of you can say the same. If you were tried with great bodily pain and depression of spirit, you could say, through Divine Grace, "I have not turned away from God." These are days when we need men of principle—men who can put their foot down and keep it down—men who cannot be turned aside. They call this firmness, "bigotry." It is, however, only another name for Christian manliness! If you dare to do right and face a frowning world, you shall have God's commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

13. But He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? God has one mind and He will carry out what He wills. It is vain for any man to think of turning Him from His eternal purpose. 13, 14. And what His soul desires, even that He does. For He performs the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with Him. You will find that men who are much tried fall back upon the granite foundation of the Divine Decree. God has ordained it, so they yield to it. They acquiesce in it because it is according to the eternal purpose of the Most High. Though we say little about it, now, there may come a time when some of you will have to say, as Job does, "For He performs the

thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with Him."

15. Therefore am I troubled at His Presence: when I consider, I am afraid of Him. It is a bad sign when a man of God becomes afraid of God! Yet there is a holy awe which may degenerate into a servile fear which has bondage. But even this may be the foundation of a holy confidence which will keep us in obedience to the Lord.

16. For God makes my heart soft—and the Almighty troubles me. Are you saying that tonight? If so, I am glad you are here! I have, for many years, been compassed about with a large number of persons who come from the ends of England and Scotland—and from longer distances, too, in despair of soul, and seeking comfort—but I think that never in my life have I had more than I have had this week—persons unknown to me who are under conviction of sin and feeling the hand of God heavy upon them. By hard tugs I have had to bring them out of Giant Despair's Castle! The Holy Spirit, alone, can do this work, but He sometimes makes use of a sympathetic brotherly word to give light to those who are in the dark. I am praying that He may do so, tonight, for there may be some here who say with Job, "God makes my heart soft, and the Almighty troubles me."

17. Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither has He covered the darkness from my face. He wished he had died before he came to such trouble, or that by some means such trouble had been turned away from him. May the Lord, if He sends you Job's trouble, send you Job's consolation! May He glorify Himself by your patient endurance, if He lays upon you His heavy hand!

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Job 23,3 #2615 - The Anxious Enquirer

THE ANXIOUS ENQUIRER

NO. 2615

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 26, 1899.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

EARLY IN THE YEAR 1857.

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him!"

Job 23:3.

WE will say nothing at this time concerning Job. We will leave the Patriarch out of the question and take these words as the exclamation forced from the aching heart of a sinner when he finds that he is lost on account of sin and can only be saved by Christ. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him"—my Savior—"That I might be saved by His love and blood!" There are some who tell us that a man, can, if he pleases, in one moment obtain peace with God and joy in the Holy Spirit. Such persons may know something of religion in their own hearts, but I think they are not competent to be judges of others. God may have given them some peace through believing and brought them into an immediate state of joy—He may have given them some repentance for sin and then quickly made them to rejoice in Jesus. But I believe that in many more cases, God begins by breaking the stony heart in pieces and often makes a delay of days, of weeks and even of months, before He heals the soul which He has wounded and gives life to the spirit which He has killed. Many of God's people have been, even, for years seeking peace and, finding none, they have known their sins, they have been permitted to feel their guilt and yet, notwithstanding that they have sought the Lord earnestly with tears, they have not attained to a knowledge of their justification by faith in Christ.

Such was the case with John Bunyan. For many a dreary month he walked the earth in desolation and said he knew himself to be lost without Christ. On his bended knees, with tears pouring like showers from his eye, he sought mercy, but he found it not. Terrible words continually haunted him! Dreadful passages of Scripture kept ringing in his ears and he found no consolation until, afterwards, God was pleased to appear unto him in all the plentitude of Divine Grace and lead him to cast himself on the Savior!

I think there may be some here who have been for a long while under the hand of God—some who have been brought so far toward Heaven as to know that they are undone forever unless Christ shall save them. I may be addressing some who have begun to pray—many a time the walls

Volume 45 1of their chamber have resounded with their supplications. Not once, nor twice, nor 50 times, but very often have they bent their knees in agonizing prayer and yet, up to this moment, so far as their own feelings are concerned, their prayers are unanswered. Christ has not smiled upon them. They have not received the application of His precious blood and, perhaps, each one of them is at this hour saying, "I am ready to give up in despair. Jesus said He would receive all who came to Him, but apparently He has rejected me." Take heart, O Mourner! I have a sweet message for you and I pray the Lord that you may find Christ on the spot where you are now standing or sitting—and rejoice in a pardon bought with blood!

I shall now proceed to consider the case of a man who is awakened and is seeking Christ, but who, at present, has not, to his own apprehension, found Him. First, I shall notice some hopeful signs in this man's case. Secondly, I shall try to give some reasons why it is that a gracious God delays an answer to prayer in the case of penitent sinners. And then, thirdly, I shall close by giving some brief and suitable advice to those who have been seeking Christ, but have, up to the present time, found it a hopeless search.

I. First, then, observe that THERE ARE SOME VERY HOPEFUL SIGNS IN THE CASE OF THE MAN WHO HAS BEEN SEEKING CHRIST, THOUGH HE MAY NOT HAVE FOUND HIM.

Taking the text as the basis of observation, I notice as one hopeful sign that the man has only one objective—that he may find Christ. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" The worldling's cry is, "Who will show us any good—this good, that good, or any other good—fifty kinds of good! Who will show us any of these?" But the quickened sinner knows of only one good and he cries, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!" When the sinner is truly awakened to feel his guilt, if you could pour the gold of India at his feet, he would say, "Take it away! I need to find HIM." If you could then give him all the joys and delights of the flesh, he would tell you he had tried all these and they but soured his appetite. His only cry is, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!"—

"These will never satisfy! Give me Christ, or else I die!"

It is a blessed thing for a man when he has brought his desires into a focus. While he has 50 different wishes, his heart resembles a pool of water which is spread over a marsh, breeding foul air and pestilence. But when all his desires are brought into one channel, his heart becomes like a river of pure water, running along and fertilizing the fields. Happy is the man who has only one desire, if that one desire is set on Christ, even though it may not yet have been realized. If it is his desire, it is a blessed sign of the Divine work within him. Such a man will never be content with mere ordinances. Other men will go up to God's House and when they have heard the sermon, they will be satisfied. But not so this man! He will say, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!" His neighbor, who hears the sermon, will be content, but this man will say, "I need more than that! I want to find Christ in it." Another man will go to the Communion Table—he will eat the bread and drink the wine—and that will be enough for him. But the quickened sinner will say, "No bread, no wine, will satisfy me! I need Christ. I must have Him! Mere ordinances are of no use to me. I want not the Savior's clothes, I want Him! Do not offer me these things—you are only bringing me the empty pitcher while I am dying of thirst! Give me water, the Water of Life, or I shall die. It is Christ that I want." This man's cry is, as we have it here in our text, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!"

Is this your condition, my Friend, at this moment? Have you but one desire, and is that desire that you may find Christ? Then, as the Lord lives, you are not far from the Kingdom of Heaven. Have you but one wish in your heart, and is that one wish that you may be washed from all your sins in Jesus' blood? Can you really say, "I would give all I have to be a Christian—I would give up everything I have and hope for if I might but feel that I have an interest in the Person and death of Christ"? Then, poor Soul, despite all your fears, be of good cheer—the Lord loves you and you shall soon come out into the daylight and rejoice in the liberty in which Christ makes men free.

There is another hopeful sign about this anxious enquirer. Not only has the man this one desire, but it is an intense desire. Hear the text again. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" There is an, "Oh," here. This proves an intensity of desire. There are some men who are apparently very religious, but their religion is never more than skin deep—it does not reach as far as their heart. They can talk of it finely, but they never feel it—it does not well up from the heart and that is a bad spring that only comes from the lips. But this character whom I am describing is no hypocrite—he means what he says. Other men will say, "Yes, we would like to be Christians. We would like to be pardoned and we would like to be forgiven." And so they would—but they would like to go on in sin, too! They would like to be saved, but they would also like to live in sin! They want to hold with the hare and run with the hounds. They have no desire whatever to give up their sins—they would like to be pardoned for all their past transgressions—but go on just the same as before. Their wish is of no use because it is so superficial! But when the sinner is really quickened, there is nothing superficial about him. Then his cry is, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" and that cry comes from his very heart!

Are you in that condition, my Friend? Is your sigh a real one? Is your groan no mere fancy, but a real groan from the heart? Is that tear which steals down your cheek a genuine tear of penitence, which is the evidence of the grief of your spirit? I think I hear you saying, "Sir, if you knew me, you would not ask me that question. My friends say I am miserable day after day and so, indeed, I am. I go to my chamber at the top of the house and I often cry to God. Yes, Sir, I cry in such a style that I would not have anyone hear me. I cry with groans and tears that I may be brought near to God. I mean what I say." Then, Beloved, you shall be saved! So surely as it is a real emotion of the heart, God will not let you perish. Never was there a sinner whose inmost spirit cried to the Lord for salvation who was not already loved of God! Never was there one who, with all his might, desired to be saved and whose soul groaned out that desire in hearty prayer, who was cast away by God! His mercy may tarry, but it will come. Pray on—He will hear you at last—and you shall yet "rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

But notice again that in the text there is an admission of ignorance, which is another very hopeful sign. "Oh that I knew!" Many people think they know everything and, consequently, they know nothing. I think it is Seneca who says, "Many a man would have been wise if he had not thought himself so. If he had but known himself to be a fool, he would have become wise." The doorstep to the Temple of Wisdom is a knowledge of our own ignorance. He cannot learn aright who has not first been taught that he knows nothing. A sense of ignorance is a very excellent sign of Grace. It is an amazing thing that every man seems to think himself qualified to be a Doctor of Divinity—a man who knows nothing of any other science, fancies he perfectly understands this greatest of all sciences and, alas, alas, for those who think they know so much about God's things and yet have never been taught of God! Man's school is not God's school. A man may go to all the Colleges in

creation and know as little of theology when he comes out as when he went into them. It is a good thing for a man to feel that he is only beginning to learn and to be willing to open his mind to the teaching of God's Spirit, that he may be guided in everything by Him. He that is foolish enough to fancy that he knows everything need not think himself a Christian. He that boasts that he understands all mysteries, needs to fear as to his true state. But the quickened soul prays to the Lord, "Teach me." We become little children when God begins to deal with us. Before that we were big, tall, men and women, and oh, so wise! But when He takes us in hand, He cuts us down to the stature of children and we put on the form of humility to learn the true lessons of wisdom—and then we are taught the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Happy are you, O Man, if you know yourself to know nothing! If God has emptied you of your carnal wisdom, He will fill you with that which is heavenly. If He has taught you your ignorance, He will teach you His wisdom and bring You to Himself! And if you are taught to reject all you know and know it, God will certainly reveal Himself to you.

There is one more hopeful sign in my text that I must mention. It is this—the person I have spoken of is very careless about where it is he seeks Christ, so that he does find Him. Do you know, Beloved, that people, when they really feel the weight and the guilt of their sins, are the worst people in the world to stick up for denominations? Other men can fight with their fellow creatures about various minor matters, but a poor awakened sinner says, "Lord, I will be glad to meet You anywhere!" When we have never seen ourselves to be sinners, we are the most respectable religionists in the world—we venerate every nail in the church or chapel door—and we would not have anyone differ from us on any point of doctrine or practice! But when we feel our sins, we say, "Lord, if I could find You anywhere, I would be happy. If I could find you at the Baptist Meeting House. If I could find you in the Independent Chapel, I would be glad enough to go there. I have always attended a large, handsome church, but if I could find You in that little despised Meeting House, I would be glad to go there. Though it would be degrading to my rank and respectability, I would go there to find my Savior." Some are foolish enough to think that they would rather not have Christ if He goes anywhere except to their own church—they must keep to their own denomination and can, by no means, overstep the line.

It is a marvelous thing, but I believe I describe the experience of many whom I am now addressing, when I say that there are very few of you who were brought to know the Lord where you were in the habit of attending. You have, perhaps, worshipped there since you were converted, but it was not your father's church, not the place where you were born and bred, but some other into which you strayed for a time, where the King's arrows stuck fast in your heart! I know it was so with me—I never thought of going to the Chapel where I was first brought to know the Lord, but it snowed so hard that I could not go to my ordinary place of worship, so I was obliged to go to the little Primitive Methodist meeting. And when I got in, the preacher read his text—"Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth." It was a blessed text and it was blessedly applied to my soul! But if there had been any opportunity as to going into other places, I would not have been there! So the awakened sinner says, "'Oh that I knew where I might find Him!' Only let me know where Christ is to be found! Let the minister be the most despised in the world, I will go and hear him! Let the denomination to which he belongs be the most calumniated and slandered, there I will be found seeking Him! If I can but find Christ, I will be content to meet Him anywhere!"

If divers can go into the deeps to bring up pearls, we should not be ashamed, sometimes, to dive deep to bring up precious jewels of Divine Grace. Men will do anything to get gold—they will work in the most muddy streams, or under the most scorching sun—surely, then, we ought not to mind how much we stoop if we find that which is more precious than gold and silver, even "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Is this how you feel? Then, Beloved, I have not only a hope for you, but I have a certainty concerning you! If you are brought to cry out, in all the senses I have mentioned, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" then, assuredly, the Lord has begun a good work in you and He will carry it on even unto the end.

II. But now, for my second point, I SHALL ENDEAVOR TO GIVE SOME REASONS WHY IT IS THAT A GRACIOUS GOD DELAYS AN ANSWER TO THE PRAYER OF PENITENT SINNERS. I think I hear someone asking, "How is it that God does not give a man comfort as soon as he repents? Why is it that the Lord makes some of His people wait in bondage when they are longing for liberty?" In the first place, it is to display His own Sovereignty. Ah, that is a word that is not often mentioned in pulpits! Divine Sovereignty is a very unfashionable Doctrine. Few people care to hear of a God who does as He pleases, who is absolute monarch over man, who knows of no law but His own will—which is always the will to do that which is right, to do good to those whom He has ordained unto eternal life—and to scatter mercy lavishly upon all His creatures. But we assert that there is such a thing as Divine Sovereignty and, more especially in the work of salvation! God seems to me to argue thus, "If I gave to all men peace as soon as they asked for it, they would begin to think they had a right to it. Now, I will make some of them wait so that they may see that the mercy is absolutely in My hands and that if I chose to withhold it altogether, I might do so most justly. And so I will make men see that it is a gift of My Free Grace and not of their own merit." In some of our squares, where the owners are anxious to keep the right of way in their own hands, they sometimes shut the gates, not because they would inconvenience us, but because they would have the public see that, although they may let them through, yet they have no right of way and might be excluded if the proprietors please. So is it with God—He says, "Man, if I save you, it is entirely of My own will and pleasure. I give My Grace, not because you deserve it, for then it were not Grace, but I give it to the most undeserving of men that I may maintain My right to dispense it as I please." And I take it that this is the best way of proving God's Sovereignty, namely, His making a delay between penitence and faith, or between penitence and that faith which brings peace with God and joy in the Holy Spirit. I think that is one very important reason.

But there is another. God sometimes delays manifesting His forgiving mercy to men in order that they may find out some secret sin. There is something hidden in their hearts of which they do not know. They come to God confessing their sins and they think they have make a clean breast of all their transgressions. "No," says God, "I will not give you pardon yet, or I will not, at present, apply it to your conscience. There is a secret sin you have not yet discovered." And He sets the heart to examine itself again—as Jerusalem is searched with candles—and, lo, there is some iniquity dragged out from the corner in which it was hidden! Conscience says, "I never knew of this sin. I never felt it to be a sin! Lord, I repent of it—will You not forgive me?" "Ah," says the mighty Maker, "now I have proved you, tried you and cast out this dross. I will now speak to you the word of consolation and comfort." Are you, then, a mourner seeking rest, and not finding it? I beseech you, look into your heart once more! Perhaps there is some hidden lust there, some secret sin. If so, turn the traitor out! Then will the Holy Spirit come and dwell in your soul and give you "the peace of

God which passes all understanding."

Another reason why God delays His mercy is that He may make us more useful in later life. A man is never made thoroughly useful until he has passed through suffering. I do not think there is much good done by a man who has never been afflicted. We must first prove in our own hearts and lives the Truths of God we are afterwards to preach, or we shall never preach them with effect! And if we are private Christians, we can never be of much use to our fellow men unless we have passed through trials similar to those which they have had to endure. So God makes some of His people wait a long time before He gives them the manifestation of their pardon, in order that, in later days, they may comfort others. The Lord is saying to many a tried soul, "I need you to be a consolation to others. Therefore I will make you full of grief and drunk with wormwood so that when you shall, in later years, meet with the mourner, you may say to him, 'I have suffered and endured the same trial that you are passing through.'" There are none so fit to comfort others as those who have once needed comfort themselves. Then take heart, poor afflicted one, perhaps the Lord designs you for a great work! He is keeping you low in bondage, doubt and fear, that He may bring you out more clearly and make your light like the light of seven days, and bring forth your righteousness "fair as the moor, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners." Wait, then, with patience, for God intends good to you and good to others through you, by this delay.

But the delay often arises not so much from God, as from ourselves. It is ignorance of the way of salvation which keeps many a man longer in doubt than he would be if he knew more about it. I do not hesitate to affirm that one of the hardest things for a sinner to understand is the way of salvation. It seems the plainest thing in all the world—nothing appears more simple than, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." But when the sinner is led to feel himself a sinner, he finds it not so easy to understand as he thought. We tell a man that with all their blackness, sinners may be pardoned. That with all their sins, they can be freely forgiven for Christ's sake. "But," says the man when he feels himself to be black, "do you mean to tell me that I am to be made whiter than snow? Do you really mean that I, who am lost, am to be saved, not through anything I do, or hope to do, but purely through what Another did ?" He can hardly believe it possible! He will have it that he must do something—he must do this, or that, or the other to help Christ—and the hardest thing in the world is to bring a man to see that salvation is of the Lord, alone, and not at all of himself! That it is God's free and perfect gift which leaves nothing of ours to be added to it, but is given to us to cover us completely, from head to foot, without anything of our own!

Men will conceive what God would not have them imagine and they will not receive that which God would have them embrace! It may be very easy to talk of certain cures and to read of them. We may say, "Suchand-such a medicine is very effective and will work such-and-such a cure." But when we, ourselves, are sick, we are often very dubious about the medicine! And if, having taken draught after draught of it, we find that it does not help us, perhaps we are brought to think that though it may cure others, it cannot cure us, because there has been such delay in its operation. So the poor soul thinks of the Gospel, "Certainly it cannot heal me." And then he misunderstands the nature of the sacred medicine, altogether, and begins to take the Law instead of the Gospel. Now the Law never saved anyone yet, though it has condemned full many in its time—and will condemn us all unless we receive the Gospel.

If any here should be in doubt on account of ignorance, let me, as plainly as I can, state the Gospel. I believe it to be wrapped up in one word—Substitution. I have always considered, with Luther and Calvin, that the sum and substance of the Gospel lies in that word, Substitution—Christ standing in the place of man. If I understand the Gospel, it is this—I deserve to be lost and ruined. The only reason why I should not be damned is that Christ was punished in my place and there is no need to execute a sentence twice for the same sin. On the other hand, I know that I cannot enter Heaven unless I have a perfect righteousness. I am absolutely certain I shall never have one of my own, for I find that I sin every day. But then Christ had a perfect righteousness and He said, "Here, take My garment, put it on—you shall stand before God as if you were Christ—and I will stand before God as if I had been you. I will suffer in your place and you shall be rewarded for works which you did not do, but which I did for you."

I think the whole substance of salvation lies in the thought that Christ stood in the place of man. The prisoner is in the dock. He is about to be taken away to death. He deserves to die, for he has been a great criminal. But before he is removed, the Judge asks whether there is any possible plan whereby the prisoner's life can be spared. Up rises One who is, Himself, pure and perfect, has known no sin and, by the allowance of the Judge, for that is necessary, He steps into the dock and says, "Consider Me to be the prisoner. Pass the sentence on Me and let Me die. Reckon the prisoner to be Myself. I have fought for My country. I have deserved a reward for what I have done—reward him as if he had done good-and punish Me as if I had committed the sin." "But," you say, "Such a thing could not occur in an earthly court of law." No, but it has happened in God's Court of Law, in the great Court of King's Bench where God is the Judge of All, it has happened! The Savior said, "The sinner deserves to die. Let Me die in his place and let him be clothed in My righteousness."

To illustrate this, I will give you two instances. One is that of an ancient King who enacted a law against a certain crime—the punishment of anyone who committed the crime was that he should have both his eyes put out. His own son committed the crime. The king, as a strict judge, said, "I cannot alter the law. I have said that the loss of two eyes shall be the penalty—take out one of mine and one of his." So, you see, he strictly carried out the law, but, at the same time, he was able to have mercy, in part, upon his son. But the case of Christ goes further than that. He did not say, "Exact half the penalty on Me and half on the sinner." He said, "Put both My eyes out; nail Me to the tree; let Me die; let Me take all the guilt away and then the sinner may go free." We have heard of another case, that of two brothers, one of whom had been a great criminal and was about to die, when his brother, coming into the court, decorated with medals and having many wounds upon him, rose up to plead with the judge that he would have mercy on the criminal for his sake. Then he began to strip himself and show his scars—how here and there on his big broad chest he had received saber cuts in defense of his country. "By these wounds," he said, and he lifted up one arm, the other having been cut away, "by these, my wounds, and the sufferings I have endured for my country, I beseech you, have mercy on him." For his brother's sake, the criminal was allowed to escape the punishment that was hanging over his head. It was even so with Christ. "The sinner," He said, "deserves to die. Then I will die in his place. He deserves not to enter Heaven, for he has not kept the Law of God, but I have kept the Law for him—he shall have My righteousness and I will take his sin—and so the Just shall die for the unjust, to bring him to God."

III. I have thus turned aside from the subject, somewhat, in order to clear away any ignorance that might exist in the minds of certain of my hearers as to this essential point of the Gospel plan. And now I am, in closing my discourse, to give SOME ADVICE TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SEEKING CHRIST, BUT WHO HAVE NEVER FOUND HIM, AS TO HOW THEY MIGHT FIND HIM.

In the first place, let me say, Go wherever Christ goes. If Christ were to walk this earth again and heal the sick, as He did when He was here, before, many sick people would enquire, "Where will Christ be tomorrow?" And, as soon as they found out where He would take His walks, there they would be, lying on the pavement, in the hope that as He passed by, He would heal them. Go up, then, sick Soul, to Christ's House! It is there that He meets with His people. Read His Word! It is there that He blesses them by applying sweet promises to them. Observe His ordinances. Do not neglect them. Christ comes to Bethesda Pool, so lie by the water and wait till He arrives. If you cannot put in your foot, be where Christ comes. Thomas did not get the blessing, for He was not with the other disciples when the Master came to them. Stay not away from the House of God, poor seeking Soul—be there whenever the doors are opened, so that, when Jesus passes by, He may look on you and say, "Your sins are forgiven you."

And whatever else you do, when Christ passes by, cry after Him with all your might! Never be satisfied until you make Him stop. And if He should frown on you, seemingly for the moment, do not be silenced or stayed. If you are a little stirred by a sermon, pray over it—do not lose the auspicious moment. If you hear anything read which gives you some hope, lift up your heart in prayer at once! When the wind blows, then should the sails be set, and it may happen that God will give you Grace to reach the harbor's mouth and you may find the haven of perpetual rest. There was a man who was born blind and who longed to have his sight. As he sat by the roadway, one day, he was told that Jesus was passing by. And when he heard that, he cried after Him, "Jesus, You Son of David, have mercy on me!" The people wanted to hear Christ preach, so they tried to hush the poor man, but he cried again, "You Son of David, have mercy on me!" The Son of David turned not His head. He did not look upon the man, but continued His discourse. But still the man shouted, "Jesus, You Son of David, have mercy on me!"

And then Jesus stopped. The disciples ran to the poor man and said, "Be still, trouble not the Master." But he cried so much the more, "Jesus, You Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus at last asked him, "What will you that I should do unto you?" He answered, "Lord, that I might receive my sight." He received it "and followed Jesus in the way." Perhaps your doubts say to you, "Hush! Do not pray any more." Or Satan says, "Be still! Do not cry to Christ any more." Tell your doubts and fears, and the devil, too, that you will give Christ no rest till He turns His eyes upon you in love and heals your diseases. Cry aloud to Him, O you awakened Sinner, when He is passing by!

The next piece of advice I would give you is this—think very much of Christ. No way that I know of will bring you faith in Christ as well as thinking of Him. I would advise you, conscience-stricken Sinner, to spend an hour in meditation on Christ. You do not need to devote that time to meditation on yourself—you will get very little good from that— you may know beforehand that there is no hope for you in yourself. But spend an hour in meditation on Christ. Go, Beloved, to your most private place of seclusion. Sit down and picture Christ in the garden—think you see Him there,

sweating, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Then view Him standing in Pilate's Hall. Behold Him with His hands bound, His back streaming with blood! Then follow Him till you see Him coming to the hill called Calvary. Think you see Him hurled backwards and nailed to the Cross. Then let your imagination, or rather your faith, bring before you the Cross lifted up and dashed into its socket, when every bone of Christ was jerked out of joint. Look at Him. Look at His crown of thorns and watch the beaded drops of blood trickling down His cheeks—

"See from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down! Did ever such love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown! His dying crimson, like a robe, Spreads over His body on the tree, Then am I dead to all the globe, And all the globe is dead to me."

I know of no means, under God, so profitable for producing faith as thinking of Christ, for while you are looking at Him, you will say, "Blessed Jesus, did You die for sinners? Then, surely, my Soul, His death is sufficient for you." He is able to save unto the uttermost all those who trust in Him. You may think of a doctrine forever and get no good from it, if you are not already saved. But think of the Person of Christ and specially of His death, for that will bring you faith. Think of Him everywhere, wherever you go. Try to meditate on Him in all your leisure moments and then He will reveal Himself to you and give you peace.

None of us, not even the best of Christians, think and say enough of Christ. I went into a friend's house, one day, and he said to me, as a sort of hint, I suppose, "I have known So-and-So these 30 years, without hearing anything of his religion." I said, "You will not know me 30 minutes without hearing something of mine." It is a fact that many Christian people spend their Sunday afternoons in talking about other subjects and Jesus Christ is scarcely ever mentioned. As for poor ungodly worldlings, of course they neither say nor think anything of Him. But oh, you that know yourself to be a sinner, despise not the Man of Sorrows! Let His bleeding hands rest on you! Look at His pierced side and, looking, you shall live! Remember, it is only by looking to Christ that we shall be saved, not by doing anything ourselves.

This brings me to close by saying to every awakened sinner—If you would have peace with God, and have it now, venture on Christ. We must venture on Christ, and venture wholly, or else we can never be saved. Yet it is hardly right to say venture, for it is no venture—there is not a grain of chance in it. He that trusts Himself to Christ need never fear. "But," someone asks, "how am I to trust Christ? What do you mean by trusting in Christ?" Why, I mean just what I say—fully trust on what Christ did for the salvation of sinners. A Negro slave, when he was asked how he believed, said, "Massa, dis is how I believe—I fall flat down on de promise, I can't fall no lower." He had just the right idea about believing in Jesus. Believing is falling down on Christ and looking to Him to hold you up. I will illustrate it by an anecdote which I have often told. A boy at sea who was very fond of mounting to the masthead, one day climbed to the maintop, and could not get down. The sea was very rough and it was seen that, in a little while, the boy would fall on the deck and be dashed to pieces. His father saw but one way of saving his life. Seizing a speaking-trumpet, he shouted, "Boy, the next time the ship lurches, drop into the sea." The next time the ship lurched, the boy looked down and, not at all liking the idea of throwing himself into the sea, still clung to the mast. The father, who saw that the boy's strength would soon fail him, took a gun in his hand and cried out, "Boy, if you don't drop into the sea the next time the ship lurches, I'll shoot you!"

The boy knew his father meant it—and the next time the ship lurched, he leaped into the sea. It seemed liked certain destruction, but out went a dozen brawny arms and he was saved. The sinner, in the midst of the storm, thinks he must cling to the mast of his good works, and so be saved. Says the Gospel, "Let go your own works, and drop into the ocean of God's Grace." "No," says the sinner, "it is a long way between me and God's Grace. I will perish if I trust to that. I must have some other reliance." "If you have any other reliance than that, you are lost." Up comes the thundering Law of God and declares to the sinner that unless he gives up every dependence, he will be lost. Then follows the happy moment when the sinner says, "Dear Lord, I give up all my dependence, and cast myself on You. I take You, Jesus, to be my one objective in life, My only trust, the refuge of my soul."

Can any of you say that in your hearts? I know there are some of you who can, but are there any who could not say it when they came here, but who can say it now? Oh, I would rejoice if one such were brought to God! I am conscious that I have not preached to you as I desired, but if one such has been brought to believe and trust in the Savior, I rejoice, for thereby God will be glorified!

But, alas, for such of you as will go away and say, "The man has talked about salvation, but what does it matter to us?" You think you can afford to laugh at God and His Gospel today, but remember, men cannot afford to despise boats when their vessel is going down in a storm, although they may do so on land. Death is after you and will soon seize you—your pulse must soon cease to beat. Strong as you are, now, your bones are not made of brass, nor are your ribs of steel. Sooner or later you must lie on your lowly pallet and there breathe out your last. Or, if you are ever so rich, you must die on your curtained beds and must depart from all your enjoyment into everlasting punishment! You will find it hard work to laugh at Christ, then! You will find it dreadful work to scoff at religion, then, in that day when Death gets hold of you, and asks, "Will you laugh now, Scoffer?" "Ah," you will say, "I find it different from what I supposed. I cannot laugh now death is near me."

Take warning, then, before death comes! Take warning! He must be a poor ignorant man who does not insure his house before it is on fire and he must be the greatest of fools who thinks it unnecessary to seek the salvation of his soul till he comes to the last moment and is in peril of his life! May God give you thought and consideration, so that you may be led to flee from sin and fly to Jesus! And may God, the Everlasting Father, give you what I cannot—His Grace, which saves the soul and makes sinners into saints and lands them in Heaven!

I can only close by repeating the Words of the Gospel, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned." Having said this, if I had said no more, I would have preached Christ's Gospel to you. The Lord give you understanding in all things and help you to believe, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 72

Job 23,3-4 #700 - Order and Argument in Prayer

ORDER AND ARGUMENT IN PRAYER

NO. 700

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 15, 1866,

BY C.H. SPURGEON

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come

even to His seat! I would present my case before Him,

and fill my mouth with arguments."

Job 23:3-4.

IN Job's uttermost extremity he cried after the Lord. The longing desire

of an afflicted child of God is once more to see his Father's face. His first prayer is not, "Oh that I might be healed of the disease which now festers in every part of my body!" Nor even, "Oh that I might see my children restored from the jaws of the grave, and my property once more brought from the hand of the spoiler!" No, the first and uppermost cry is, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM—who is my God! That I might come even to His seat!"

God's children run home when the storm comes on. It is the Heavenborn instinct of a gracious soul to seek shelter from all ills beneath the wings of Jehovah. "He that has made his refuge God," might serve as the title of a true Believer. A hypocrite, when he feels that he has been afflicted by God, resents the infliction and, like a slave, would run from the master who has scourged him. But not so the true heir of Heaven! He kisses the hand which smote him and seeks shelter from the rod in the bosom of that very God who frowned upon him.

You will observe that the desire to commune with God is intensified by the failure of all other sources of consolation. When Job first saw his friends at a distance, he may have entertained a hope that their kindly counsel and compassionate tenderness would blunt the edge of his grief. But they had not long spoken before he cried out in bitterness, "Miserable comforters are you all!" They put salt into his wounds. They heaped fuel upon the flame of his sorrow. They added the gall of their upbraiding to the wormwood of his griefs.

In the sunshine of his smile they once had longed to sun themselves, and now they dare to cast shadows upon his reputation—most ungenerous and undeserved! Alas for a man when his wine cup mocks him with vinegar, and his pillow pricks him with thorns! The Patriarch turned away from his sorry friends and looked up to the celestial Throne, just as a traveler turns from his empty skin bottle and betakes himself with all speed to the well. He bids farewell to earth-born hopes, and

cries, "Oh that I knew where I might find my God!"

My Brethren, nothing teaches us so much the preciousness of the Creator as when we learn the emptiness of all besides. When you have been pierced through and through with the sentence, "Cursed is he that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm," then will you suck unutterable sweetness from the Divine assurance, "Blessed is he that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Turning away with bitter scorn from earth's hives, where you found no honey, but many sharp stings, you will rejoice in Him whose faithful Word is sweeter than honey or the honeycomb.

It is further observable that though a good man hastens to God in his trouble, and runs with all the more speed because of the unkindness of his fellow men, yet sometimes the gracious soul is left without the comfortable Presence of God. This is the worst of all grief! The text is one of Job's deep groans, far deeper than any which came from him on account of the loss of his children and his property: "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!" The worst of all losses is to lose the smile of my God. He now had a foretaste of the bitterness of his Redeemer's cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

God's Presence is always with His people in one sense, so far as secretly sustaining them is concerned, but His manifest Presence they do not always enjoy. Like the spouse in the Song, they seek their Beloved by night upon their bed. They seek Him but they find Him not. And though they wake and roam through the city they may not discover Him, and the question may be sadly asked again and again, "Saw you Him whom my soul loves?" You may be beloved of God, and yet have no consciousness of that love in your soul. You may be as dear to His heart as Jesus Christ Himself, and yet for a small moment He may forsake you—and in a little wrath He may hide Himself from you.

But, dear Friends, at such times the desire of the believing soul gathers yet greater intensity from the fact of God's light being withheld. Instead of saying with proud lip, "Well, if He leaves me I must do without Him. If I cannot have His comfortable Presence I must fight on as best may be," the soul says, "No, He is my very life! I must have my God. I perish, I sink in deep mire where there is no standing, and nothing but the arm of God can deliver me." The gracious soul addresses itself with a double zeal to find out God, and sends up its groans, its entreaties, its sobs and sighs to Heaven more frequently and fervently, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!"

Distance or labor are as nothing—if the soul only knew where to go she would soon overleap the distance. She makes no stipulation about mountains or rivers, but vows that if she knew where, she would go, even to His seat. My soul in her hunger would break through stone walls, or scale the battlements of Heaven to reach her God. And though there were seven Hells between me and Him, yet would I face the flame if I might reach Him—nothing daunted if I had but the prospect of at last standing in His Presence and feeling the delight of His love!

That seems to me to be the state of mind in which Job pronounced the words before us. But we cannot stop upon this point, for the object of this morning's discourse beckons us onward. It appears that Job's end, in desiring the Presence of God, was that he might pray to Him. He had prayed, but he wanted to pray as in God's Presence. He desired to plead as before one whom he knew would hear and help him. He longed to state his own case before the seat of the impartial Judge, before the very face of the all-wise God. He would appeal from the lower courts, where his

friends judged unrighteous judgment, to the Court of King's Bench—the High Court of Heaven.

There, said he, "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." In this latter verse Job teaches us how he meant to plead and intercede with God. He does, as it were, reveal the secrets of his closet, and unveils the art of prayer. We are here admitted into the guild of suppliants—we are shown the art and mystery of pleading. We have here taught to us the blessed handicraft and science of prayer—and if we can be bound apprentices to Job this morning, for the next hour, and can have a lesson from Job's Master—we may acquire no little skill in interceding with God.

There are two things here set forth as necessary in prayer—ordering of our cause, and filling our mouth with arguments. We shall speak of those two things, and then if we have rightly learned the lesson, a blessed result will follow.

I. First, IT IS NEEDFUL THAT OUR SUIT BE ORDERED BEFORE GOD. There is a vulgar notion that prayer is a very easy thing, a kind of common business that may be done anywhere, without care or effort. Some think that you have only to take a book down and get through a certain number of very excellent words, and you have prayed and may put the book up again. Others suppose that to use a book is superstitious, and that you ought rather to repeat extemporaneous sentences, sentences which come to your mind with a rush, like a herd of swine or a pack of hounds—and that when you have uttered them with some little attention to what you have said, you have prayed.

Now neither of these modes of prayer were adopted by ancient saints. They appear to have thought a great deal more seriously of prayer than many do nowadays. It seems to have been a mighty business with them, a long-practiced exercise in which some of them attained great eminence, and were thereby singularly blest. They reaped great harvests in the field of prayer, and found the Mercy Seat to be a mine of untold treasures. The ancient saints were accustomed, with Job, to order their cause before God.

That is to say, as a petitioner coming into Court does not come there without thought to state his case on the spur of the moment, but enters into the audience chamber with his suit well prepared, having moreover learned how he ought to behave himself in the presence of the great one to whom he is appealing. It is well to approach the seat of the King of kings as much as possible with premeditation and preparation, knowing what we are about, where we are standing, and what it is which we desire to obtain.

In times of peril and distress we may fly to God just as we are, as the dove enters the cleft of the rock, even though her plumes are ruffled. But in ordinary times we should not come with an unprepared spirit, even as a child comes not to his father in the morning till he has washed his face. See yonder priest—he has a sacrifice to offer, but he does not rush into the court of the priests and hack at the bullock with the first pole-axe upon which he can lay his hand. No, when he rises he washes his feet at the bronze laver. He puts on his garments, and adorns himself with his priestly vestments—then he comes to the altar with his victim properly divided according to the law. He is careful to do according to the command, even to such a simple matter as the placing of the fat, and the liver, and the kidneys, and he takes the blood in a bowl and pours it in an appropriate place at the foot of the altar, not throwing it just as may occur to him, and kindles the

fire not with common flame, but with the sacred fire from off the altar.

Now this ritual is all replaced, but the truth which it taught remains the same—our spiritual sacrifices should be offered with holy carefulness. God forbid that our prayer should be a mere leaping out of one's bed and kneeling down, and saying anything that comes to hand! On the contrary, may we wait upon the Lord with holy fear and sacred awe. See how David prayed when God had blessed him—he went in before the Lord. Understand that—he did not stand outside at a distance, but he went in before the Lord and he sat down—for sitting is not a bad posture for prayer—let who will speak against it.

And sitting down quietly and calmly before the Lord, he then began to pray—but not until first he had thought over the Divine goodness, and so attained to the spirit of prayer. Then by the assistance of the Holy Spirit did he open his mouth. Oh that we more often sought the Lord in this style! Abraham may serve us as a pattern. He rose up early—here was his willingness. He went three days journey—here was his zeal. He left his servants at the foot of the hill—here was his privacy. He carried the wood and the fire with him—here was his preparation. And lastly he built the altar and laid the wood in order, and then took the knife—here was the devout carefulness of his worship.

David puts it, "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto You, and will look up"—which I have frequently explained to you to mean that he marshaled his thoughts like men of war, or that he aimed his prayers like arrows. He did not take the arrow and put it on the bowstring and shoot, and shoot, and shoot anywhere! After he had taken out the chosen shaft, and fitted it to the string, he took deliberate aim. He looked—looked well— at the white of the target. He kept his eyes fixed on it, directing his prayer—and then drew his bow with all his strength and let the arrow fly.

And then, when the shaft had left his hand, what does he say? "I will look up." He looked up to see where the arrow went, to see what effect it had—for he expected an answer to his prayers! He was not as many who scarcely think of their prayers after they have uttered them. David knew that he had an engagement before him which required all his mental powers. He marshaled up his faculties and went about the work in a workmanlike manner, as one who believed in it and meant to succeed. We should plow carefully and pray carefully. The better the work the more attention it deserves.

To be anxious in the shop and thoughtless in the closet is little less than blasphemy, for it is an insinuation that anything will do for God, but the world must have our best. If any ask what order should be observed in prayer, I am not about to give you a scheme, such as many have drawn out, in which adoration, confession, petition, intercession, and ascription are arranged in succession. I am not persuaded that any such order is of Divine authority. It is to no mere mechanical order I have been referring, for our prayers will be equally acceptable, and possibly equally proper, in any form.

There are specimens of prayers, in all shapes, in the Old and New Testament. The true spiritual order of prayer seems to me to consist in something more than mere arrangement. It is most fitting for us, first, to feel that we are doing something that is real—that we are about to address ourselves to God, whom we cannot see, but who is really present—whom we can neither touch nor hear, nor by our senses can apprehend, but who, nevertheless, is as truly with us as though

we were speaking to a friend of flesh and blood like ourselves.

Feeling the reality of God's Presence, our mind will be led by Divine Grace into an humble state. We shall feel like Abraham, when he said, "I have taken upon myself to speak unto God, I that am but dust and ashes." Consequently we shall not deliver ourselves of our prayer as boys repeating their lessons, as a mere matter of rote. Much less shall we speak as if we were rabbis instructing our pupils, or as I have heard some do, with the coarseness of a highwayman stopping a person on the road and demanding his purse of him! No, we shall be humble, yet bold petitioners, humbly importuning mercy through the Savior's blood. We shall not have the reserve of a slave but the loving reverence of a child, yet not an impudent, impertinent child, but a teachable, obedient child, honoring his Father, and therefore asking earnestly, but with deferential submission to his Father's will.

When I feel that I am in the Presence of God, and take my rightful position in that Presence, the next thing I shall want to recognize will be that I have no right to what I am seeking, and cannot expect to obtain it except as a gift of Divine Grace. And I must remember that God limits the channel through which He will give me mercy—He will give it to me through His dear Son, and only through His Son, Jesus Christ. Let me put myself, then, under the patronage of the great Redeemer. Let me feel that now it is no longer I that speak but Christ that speaks with me, and that while I plead, I plead His wounds, His life, His death, His blood—Himself. This is truly getting into order.

The next thing is to consider what I am to ask for. It is most proper, in prayer, to aim at great distinctness of supplication. There is much reason to complain of some public prayers, that those who offer them do not really ask God for anything. I must acknowledge I fear to having so prayed myself, and certainly to having heard many prayers of the kind in which I did not feel that anything was sought for from God—a great deal of very excellent doctrinal and experimental matter uttered, but little real petitioning—and that little in a nebulous kind of state, chaotic and unformed. But it seems to me that prayer should be distinct—the asking for something definitely and distinctly because the mind has realized its distinct need of such a thing—and therefore must plead for it.

It is well not to beat round the bush in prayer, but to come directly to the point. I like that prayer of Abraham's, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!" There is the name and the person prayed for, and the blessing desired, all put in a few words—"Ishmael might live before You!" Many persons would have used a roundabout expression of this kind, "Oh that our beloved offspring might be regarded with the favor which You bear to those who," etc. Say "Ishmael," if you mean "Ishmael." Put it in plain words before the Lord.

Some people cannot even pray for the minister without using such circular descriptives that you might think it were the parish usher, or somebody whom it did not do to mention too particularly. Why not be distinct, and say what we mean as well as mean what we say? Ordering our cause would bring us to greater distinctness of mind. It is not necessary, my dear Brethren, in the closet, to ask for every supposable good thing. It is not necessary to rehearse the catalog of every need that you may have, have had, can have, or shall have. Ask for what you now need, and, as a rule, keep to present need.

Ask for your daily bread—what you need now—ask for that. Ask for it plainly, as before God, who does not regard your fine expressions, and to whom your eloquence and oratory will be less than nothing and vanity. You are before the Lord! Let your words be few, but let your heart be fervent. You have not quite completed the ordering when you have asked for what you need through Jesus Christ. There should be a looking round the blessing which you desire, to see whether it is assuredly a fitting thing to ask. Some prayers would never be offered if men did but think. A little reflection would show to us that some things which we desire were better let alone.

We may, moreover, have a motive at the bottom of our desire which is not Christ-like—a selfish motive which forgets God's Glory and caters only for our own case and comfort. Now although we may ask for things which are for our profit, yet we must never let our profit interfere in any way with the Glory of God. There must be mingled with acceptable prayer the holy salt of submission to the Divine will. I like Luther's saying, "Lord, I will have my will of You at this time." "What?" you ask, "You like such an expression as that?" I do, because of the next clause, which was, "I will have my will, for I know that my will is Your will." That is well spoken, Luther! But without the last words it would have been wicked presumption!

When we are sure that what we ask for is for God's Glory, then, if we have power in prayer, we may say, "I will not let You go except you bless me." We may come to close dealings with God, and like Jacob with the Angel, we may even wrestle, and seek to give the Angel the fall sooner than be sent away without the benediction. But we must be quite clear, before we come to such terms as those, that what we are seeking is really for the Master's honor.

Put these three things together: the deep spirituality which recognizes prayer as being real conversation with the invisible God. Much distinctness which is the reality of prayer—asking for what we know we want, and with much fervency, believing the thing to be necessary—and therefore resolving to obtain it if it can be had by prayer. And above all these, complete submission—leaving it still with the Master's will. Commingle all these, and you have a clear idea of what it is to order your cause before the Lord.

Still, prayer itself is an art which only the Holy Spirit can teach us. He is the Giver of all prayer. Pray for prayer—pray till you can pray! Pray to be helped to pray, and give not up praying because you cannot pray—for it is when you think you cannot pray that you are most praying. And sometimes when you have no sort of comfort in your supplications, it is then that your heart, all broken and cast down, is really wrestling and truly prevailing with the Most High.

II. The second part of prayer is FILLING THE MOUTH WITH ARGUMENTS—not filling the mouth with many words nor good phrases, nor pretty expressions—but filling the mouth with arguments are the knocks of the rapper by which the gate is opened. Why are arguments to be used at all, is the first enquiry. The reply is, Certainly not because God is slow to give! Nor because we can change the Divine purpose. Nor because God needs to be informed of any circumstance with regard to ourselves or of anything in connection with the mercy asked!

Arguments to be used are for our own benefit, not for His. He requires for us to plead with Him, and to bring forth our strong reasons, as Isaiah said, because this will show that we feel the value of the mercy. When a man searches for arguments for a thing it is because he attaches importance to that which he is seeking. Again, our use of arguments teaches us the ground upon

which we obtain the blessing. If a man should come with the argument of his own merit, he would never succeed—the successful argument is always founded upon Divine Grace—and hence the soul so pleading is made to understand intensely that it is by Grace and by Grace alone that a sinner obtains anything of the Lord.

Besides, the use of arguments is intended to stir up our fervency. The man who uses one argument with God will get more force in using the next, and will use the next with still greater power, and the next with still more force. The best prayers I have ever heard in our Prayer Meetings have been those which have been most full of arguments. Sometimes my soul has been fairly melted down when I have listened to Brethren who have come before God feeling the mercy to be really needed, and that they must have it, for they first pleaded with God to give it for this reason, and then for a second, and then for a third, and then for a fourth and a fifth, until they have awakened the fervency of the entire assembly!

My Brethren, there is no need for prayer at all as far as God is concerned! But what a need there is for it on our own account! If we were not constrained to pray, I question whether we could even live as Christians. If God's mercies came to us unasked they would not be half so useful as they now are, when they have to be sought for—for now we get a double blessing—a blessing in the obtaining, and a blessing in the seeking! The very act of prayer is a blessing. To pray, is, as it were, to bathe one's self in a cool purling stream, and so to escape from the heat of earth's summer sun.

To pray is to mount on eagle's wings above the clouds and get into the clear Heaven where God dwells. To pray is to enter the treasure house of God and to enrich one's self out of an inexhaustible storehouse. To pray is to grasp Heaven in one's arms, to embrace the Deity within one's soul, and to feel one's body made a temple of the Holy Spirit! Apart from the answer, prayer is, in itself, a benediction. To pray, my Brothers and Sisters, is to cast off your burdens. It is to tear away your rags. It is to shake off your diseases! It is to be filled with spiritual vigor. It is to reach the highest point of Christian health! God give us to be much in the holy art of arguing with God in prayer!

The most interesting part of our subject remains. It is a very rapid summary and catalog of a few of the arguments which have been used with great success with God. I cannot give you a full list—that would require a treatise such as Master John Owen might produce! It is well in prayer to plead with Jehovah His attributes. Abraham did so when he laid hold upon God's justice. Sodom was to be pleaded for, and Abraham begins, "Perhaps there are fifty righteous within the city: will You also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from You to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from You. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Here the wrestling begins. It was a powerful argument by which the Patriarch grasped the Lord's left hand, and stopped it just when the thunderbolt was about to fall! But there came a reply to it. It was intimated to him that this would not spare the city, and you notice how the good man, when sorely pressed, retreated by inches, and at last, when he could no longer lay hold upon Justice, grasped God's right hand of Mercy, and that gave him a wondrous hold when he asked that if there were but ten righteous there the city might be spared. So you and I may take hold at any time upon the justice, the mercy, the faithfulness, the wisdom, the longsuffering, the tenderness of

God! And we shall find every attribute of the Most High to be, as it were, a great battering ram with which we may open the gates of Heaven.

Another mighty piece of ordinance in the battle of prayer is God's promise. When Jacob was on the other side of the brook Jabbok, and his brother Esau was coming with armed men, he pleaded with God not to suffer Esau to destroy the mother and the children, and as a master reason he pleaded, "And You said, Surely I will do you good." Oh the force of that plea—he was holding God to His word: "You said." The attribute is a splendid horn of the altar to lay hold upon, but the promise, which has in it the attribute and something more, is yet a mightier holdfast. "You said."

Remember how David put it. After Nathan had spoken the promise, David said at the close of his prayer, "Do as You have said." That is a legitimate argument with every honest man. Has God said, and shall He not do it? "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Shall not He be true? Shall He not keep His word? Shall not every word that comes out of His mouth stand fast and be fulfilled? Solomon, at the opening of the temple, used this same mighty plea. He pleads with God to remember the word which He had spoken to his father David, and to bless that place.

When a man gives a promissory note his honor is engaged. He signs his hand and he must discharge it when the due time comes, or else he loses credit. It shall never be said that God dishonors His notes. The credit of the Most High never was impeached, and never shall be! He is punctual to the moment! He never is before His time, but He never is behind it. You shall search this Book through, and you shall compare it with the experience of God's people, and the two tally from the first to the last! Many a hoary Patriarch has said with Joshua in his old age, "Not one good thing has failed of all that the Lord God has promised: all has come to pass."

My Brothers and Sisters, if you have a Divine promise, you need not plead it with an "if" in it—you may plead with certainty. If for the mercy which you are now asking, you have God's solemnly pledged word, there will scarcely be any room for the caution about submission to His will. You know His will—that will is in the promise—plead it! Do not give Him rest until He fulfills it. He meant to fulfill it or else He would not have given it. God does not give His word merely to quiet our noise and to keep us hopeful for awhile, with the intention of putting us off at last. When He speaks, He speaks because He means to act.

A third argument to be used is that employed by Moses—the great name of God. How mightily did he argue with God on one occasion upon this ground! "What will You do for Your great name? The Egyptians will say, Because the Lord could not bring them into the land, therefore He slew them in the wilderness." There are some occasions when the name of God is very closely tied up with the history of His people. Sometimes in reliance upon a Divine promise, a Believer will be led to take a certain course of action. Now, if the Lord should not be as good as His promise, not only is the Believer deceived, but the wicked world, looking on, would say, "Aha! Aha! Where is your God?"

Take the case of our respected brother, Mr. Muller, of Bristol. These many years he has declared that God hears prayer, and firm in that conviction he has gone on to build house after house for the maintenance of orphans. Now, I can very well conceive that if he were driven to a point of need of means for the maintenance of those thousand or two thousand children, he might very well use the plea, "What will You do for Your great name?" And you, in some severe trouble, when you have fairly received the promise, may say, "Lord, You have said, 'In six troubles I will be with you, and in

seven I will not forsake you.' I have told my friends and neighbors that I put my trust in You, and if You do not deliver me now, where is Your name? Arise, O God, and do this thing, lest Your honor be cast into the dust."

Coupled with this, we may employ the further argument of the hard things said by the revilers. It was well done of Hezekiah, when he took Rabshakeh's letter and spread it before the Lord. Will that help him? It is full of blasphemy, will that help him? "Where are the gods of Arphad and Sepharvaim? Where are the gods of the cities which I have overthrown? Let not Hezekiah deceive you, saying that Jehovah will deliver you." Does that have any effect? Oh yes! It was a blessed thing that Rabshakeh wrote that letter, for it provoked the Lord to help His people.

Sometimes the child of God can rejoice when he sees his enemies get thoroughly out of temper and take to reviling. "Now," he says, "they have reviled the Lord Himself! Not me alone have they assailed, but the Most High Himself." Now it is no longer the poor insignificant Hezekiah with his little band of soldiers, but it is Jehovah, the King of angels, who has come to fight against Rabshakeh. Now what will you do, O boastful soldier of proud Sennacherib? Shall not you be utterly destroyed, since Jehovah Himself has come into the fray? All the progress that is made by Popery, all the wrong things said by speculative atheists and so on, should be, by Christians, used as an argument with God why He should help the Gospel.

"Lord, see how they reproach the Gospel of Jesus! Pluck Your right hand out of Your bosom! O God, they defy You! Antichrist thrusts itself into the place where Your Son once was honored, and from the very pulpits where the Gospel was once preached, Popery is now declared! Arise, O God, wake up Your zeal, let Your sacred passions burn! Your ancient foe again prevails! Behold the harlot of Babylon once more upon her scarlet-colored beast rides forth in triumph! Come, Jehovah! Come, Jehovah, and once again show what Your bare arm can do!" This is a legitimate mode of pleading with God, for His great name's sake.

So also may we plead the sorrows of His people. This is frequently done. Jeremiah is the great master of this art. He says, "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: their visage was blacker than a coal." "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" He talks of all their griefs and needs in the siege. He calls upon the Lord to look upon His suffering Zion, and before long his plaintive cries are heard!

Nothing is so eloquent with the father as his child's cry, but one thing is more mightier still, and that is a moan. When the child is so sick that it is past crying and lies moaning with that kind of moan which indicates extreme suffering and intense weakness, who can resist that moan? Ah, and when God's Israel shall be brought very low so that they can scarcely cry but only their moans are heard, then comes the Lord's time of deliverance, and He is sure to show that He loves His people!

Dear Friends, whenever you, also, are brought into the same condition, you may plead your moans, and when you see a Church brought very low, you may use her griefs as an argument why God should return and save the remnant of His people. Brothers and Sisters, it is good to plead the past with God. Ah, you experienced people of God, you know how to do this. Here is David's specimen of it: "You have been my help. Leave me not, neither forsake me." He pleads God's

mercy to him from his youth up. He speaks of being cast upon his God from his very birth, and then he pleads, "Now also, when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not."

Moses also, speaking with God, says, "You did bring this people up out of Egypt." As if he would say, "Do not leave Your work unfinished! You have begun to build, complete it! You have fought the first battle, Lord, end the campaign! Go on till You get a complete victory." How often have we cried in our trouble, "Lord, You did deliver me in such-and-such a sharp trial, when it seemed as if no help were near. You have never forsaken me yet. I have set up my Ebenezer in Your name. If You had intended to leave me, why have You showed me such things? Have You brought Your servant to this place to put him to shame?"

Brethren, we have to deal with an unchanging God who will do in the future what He has done in the past because He never turns from His purpose, and cannot be thwarted in His design. The past thus becomes a very mighty means of winning blessings from Him. We may even use our own unworthiness as an argument with God. "Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness." David in one place pleads thus: "Lord, have mercy upon my iniquity, for it is great." That is a very singular mode of reasoning, but being interpreted it means, "Lord, why should You go about doing little things? You are a great God, and here is a great sinner. Here is a fitness in me for the display of Your Grace. The greatness of my sin makes me a platform for the greatness of Your mercy. Let the greatness of Your love be seen in me."

Moses seems to have the same on his mind when he asks God to show His great power in sparing His sinful people. The power with which God restrains Himself is great, indeed. O Brothers and Sisters, there is such a thing as creeping down at the foot of the Throne, crouching low and crying, "O God, break me not—I am a bruised reed. Oh! Tread not on my little life, it is now but as the smoking flax. Will You hunt me? Will You come out, as David said, 'after a dead dog, after a flea'? Will you pursue me as a leaf that is blown in the tempest? Will you watch me, as Job said, as though I were a vast sea, or a great whale? No, but because I am so little, and because the greatness of Your mercy can be shown in one so insignificant and yet so vile, therefore, O God, have mercy upon me."

There was once an occasion when the very Godhead of Jehovah made a triumphant plea for the Prophet Elijah. On that august occasion when he had bid his adversaries see whether their god could answer them by fire, you can little guess the excitement there must have been that day in the Prophet's mind. With what stern sarcasm did he say, "Cry aloud! For he is a god! Either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or perhaps he sleeps and must be awakened." And as they cut themselves with knives and leaped upon the altar, oh the scorn with which that man of God must have looked down upon their impotent exertions, and their earnest but useless cries!

But think of how his heart must have palpitated, if it had not been for the strength of his faith, when he repaired the altar of God that was broken down and laid the wood in order, and killed the bullock! Hear him cry, "Pour water on it. You shall not suspect me of concealing fire! Pour water on the victim." When they had done so, he bids them, "Do it a second time." And they did it a second time. And then he says, "Do it a third time." And when it was all covered with water, soaked and saturated through, then he stands up and cries to God, "O God, let it be known that You only are God."

Here everything was put to the test. Jehovah's own existence was now put, as it were, at stake, before the eyes of men by this bold Prophet. And how well the Prophet was heard! Down came the fire and devoured not only the sacrifice, but even the wood and the stones—and even the very water that was in the trenches—for Jehovah God had answered His servant's prayer. We sometimes may do the same, and say unto Him, "Oh, by Your Deity, by Your existence, if, indeed, you are God, now show Yourself for the help of Your people!"

Lastly, the grand Christian argument is the sufferings, the death, the merit, the intercession of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I am afraid we do not understand what it is that we have at our command when we are allowed to plead with God for Christ's sake. I met with this thought the other day: it was somewhat new to me, but I believe it ought not to have been. When we ask God to hear us, pleading Christ's name, we usually mean, "O Lord, Your dear Son deserves this of You. Do this unto me because of what He merits."

But if we knew you well and you told us, "Sir, call at my office, and use my name, and say that they are to give you such a thing," I should go in and use your name, and I should obtain my request as a matter of right and a matter of necessity. This is virtually what Jesus Christ says to us. "If you need anything of God, all that the Father has belongs to Me—go and use My name." Suppose you should give a man your checkbook signed with your own name and left blank, to be filled up as he chose— that would be very nearly what Jesus has done in these words, "If you ask anything in My name, I will give it you."

If I had a good name at the bottom of the check, I should be sure that I should get it cashed when I went to the banker with it! So when you have got Christ's name, to whom the very justice of God has become a debtor, and whose merits have claims with the Most High—when you have Christ's name there is no need to speak with fear and trembling and bated breath! Oh, waver not and let not faith stagger! When you plead the name of Christ you plead that which shakes the gates of Hell, and which the hosts of Heaven obey—and God Himself feels the sacred power of that Divine plea!

Brethren, you would do better if you sometimes thought more in your prayers of Christ's griefs and groans. Bring before the Lord His wounds! Remind the Lord of His cries—make the groans of Jesus cry again from Gethsemane, and His blood speak again from that frozen Calvary! Speak out and tell the Lord that with such griefs, and cries, and groans to plead, you will not be denied! Such arguments as these will honor God.

III. If the Holy Spirit shall teach us how to order our cause, and how to fill our mouth with arguments, the result shall be that WE SHALL HAVE OUR MOUTH FILLED WITH PRAISES. The man who has his mouth full of arguments in prayer shall soon have his mouth full of benedictions in answer to prayer!

Dear Friend, you have your mouth full this morning, have you? What of? Full of complaining? Pray the Lord to rinse your mouth out of that black stuff, for it will little avail you, and it will be bitter in your heart one of these days. Oh, have your mouth full of prayer! Full of it! Full of arguments so that there is room for nothing else. Then come with this blessed mouthful and you shall soon go away with whatever you have asked of God. Only delight yourself in Him and He will give you the desire of your heart!

It is said—I know not how truly—that the explanation of the text, "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it," may be found in a very singular Oriental custom. It is said that not many years ago—I remember the circumstance being reported—the King of Persia ordered the chief of his nobility who had done something or other which greatly gratified him, to open his mouth, and when he had done so he began to put into his mouth pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, till he had filled it as full as it could hold, and then he bade him go his way. This is said to have been occasionally done in Oriental Courts towards great favorites.

Now certainly, whether that is an explanation of the text or not, it is an illustration of it. God says, "Open your mouth with arguments," and then He will fill it with mercies priceless, gems unspeakably valuable. Would not a man open his mouth wide when he had to have it filled in such a style? Surely the most simple-minded among you would be wise enough for that! Oh, let us, then, open wide our mouth when we have to plead with God! Our needs are great—let our pleading be great, and the supply shall be great, too!

You are not straitened in Him—you are straitened in your own heart! The Lord give you large mouths in prayer, great potency, not in the use of language, but in employing arguments. What I have been speaking to the Christian is applicable in great measure to the unconverted man, too. God give you to see the force of it, and to fly in humble prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ and to find eternal life in Him.

Portion Of Scripture Read Before Sermon—Numbers 14:1-21.

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Job 23,6 #108 - The Question of Fear and the Answe

THE QUESTION OF FEAR AND

THE ANSWER OF FAITH

NO. 108

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH EVENING, AUGUST 31, 1856,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

"Will He plead against me with His great power?

No but He would put strength in me."

Job 23:6.

I SHALL not, tonight, consider the connection of these words, or what was particularly intended by Job. I shall use them in, perhaps, another sense from that which he intended. No doubt Job meant to say that if God would allow him to argue his case before Him, it was his firm belief that God, so far from taking advantage of His superior strength in the controversy, would even strengthen him, that the controversy might be fair and that the judgment might be unbiased. "He would not plead against me with His great strength. No but He would put strength in me." We shall use the text, however, tonight, in another sense.

It is one of the sure marks of a lost and ruined state when we are careless and indifferent concerning God. One of the peculiar marks of those who are dead in sin is this—they are the wicked who forget God. God is not in all their thoughts. "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." The sinful man is always anxious to keep out of his mind the very thought of the Being, the Existence, or the Character of God. And as long as man is unregenerate, there will be nothing more abhorrent to his taste, or his feelings than anything which deals with the Divine Being. God, perhaps, as Creator, he may consider. But the God of the Bible, the Infinite Jehovah, judging righteously among the sons of men— condemning and acquitting—that God he has no taste for! He is not in all his thoughts, nor does he regard Him. And mark you, it is a blessed sign of the work of Grace in the heart when man begins to consider God. He is not far from God's heart who has meditations of God in his own heart. If we desire to seek after God, to know Him, to understand Him and to be at peace with Him, it is a sign that God has dealings with our soul, for otherwise we would still have hated His name and abhorred His Character. There are two things in my text, both of which have relation to the Divine Being. The first is, the question of fear—"Will He plead against me with His great power?" And the second is, the answer of faith—"No, but He will put strength in me." The fearful and the prayerful, who are afraid of sin and fear God, together with those who are faithful and believe in God are in a hopeful state! And hence, both the question of the one and the answer of the other have reference to the great Jehovah, our God, who is forever to be adored!

I. We shall consider, in the first place, tonight, THE INQUIRY OF FEAR. "Will He plead against me with His great power?" I shall consider this as a question asked by the convicted sinner. He is seeking salvation, but when he is bid to come before his God and find mercy, he is compelled by his intense anxiety to make the trembling inquiry, "Will He plead against me with His great power?"

1. And, first, I gather from this question the fact that a truly penitent man has a right idea of many of God's attributes. He does not understand them all, for instance he does not yet know God's great mercy. He does not yet understand His unbounded compassion. But as far as his knowledge of God extends, he has an extremely great view of Him. To him, the Everlasting Jehovah appears great in every attribute and action and supremely great in His Majesty. The poor worldling knows there is a God. But He is to him a little God. As for the justice of God, the mere worldly man scarcely ever thinks of it. He considers that there is a God, but he regards Him as a Being who has little enough respect for justice. Not so, however, the sinner. When God has once convicted him of his sin, he sees God as a great God, a God of great justice and of great power. Whoever may misunderstand God's great justice or God's great power, a convicted sinner never will! Ask him what he thinks of God's justice and he will tell you it is like the great mountains. It is high—he cannot attain unto it. "Ah," he says, "God's justice is very mighty. It must smite me. He must hurl an avalanche of woe upon my devoted head. Justice demands that He should punish me. I am so great a sinner that I cannot suppose He would ever pass by my transgression, my iniquity and my sin." It is all in vain for you to tell such a man that God is little in His justice. He replies, "No," most solemnly, "No." And you can most plainly read his earnestness in his visage, when he replies, "No." He replies, "I feel that God is just. I am even now consumed by His anger. By His wrath I am troubled." "Tell me God is not Just?" he says, "I know He is. I feel that within an hour or two Hell must swallow me up unless Divine Mercy delivers me. Unless Christ shall wash me in His blood, I feel I can never hope to stand among the ransomed." He has not that strange idea of God's justice that some of you have. You think sin is a trifle! You suppose that one brief prayer will wipe it all away! You dream that by attendance at your churches and at your chapels you will wash away your sins! You suppose that God, for some reason or other, will very easily forgive your sin. But you have not a right idea of God's justice! You have not learned that God never forgives until He has first punished—and that if He does forgive anyone—it is because He has punished Christ, first, in the place of that person! But he never forgives without first exacting the punishment. That would be an infringement on His justice. And shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? You have, many of you, lax enough ideas of the justice of the Divine Being. But not so the sinner who is laboring under a knowledge of sin!

An awakened soul feels that God is greatly powerful. Tell him that God is but a weak God and he will answer you—and shall I tell you what illustrations he will give you to prove that God is great in power? He will say, "Oh, Sir, God is great in power as well in justice. Look up yonder—can you not see in the dark past, when rebel angels sinned against God— they were so mighty that each one of them might have devastated Eden and shaken the earth? But God, with ease, hurled Satan and the rebel angels out of Heaven and drove them down to Hell." "Sir," says the sinner, "is He not mighty?" And then he will go on to tell you how God unbound the swaddling bands of the great ocean that it might leap upon the earth. And how He bade it swallow up the whole of mortal race, save those who were hidden in the ark. And the sinner says, with his eyes well near starting from their sockets—"Sir, does not this prove that He is great in power and will, by no means, acquit the

wicked?" And then he proceeds, "Look again at the Red Sea. Mark how Pharaoh was enticed into its depths and how the parted sea, that stood aloof for a while to give the Israelites an easy passage, embraced with eager joy, locked the adverse host within their arms and swallowed them up quickly!" And as he thinks he sees the Red Sea rolling over the slain, he exclaims, "Sir, God is great in power! I feel He must be, when I think of what He has done." And as if he had not finished his oration and would let us know the whole of the greatness of God's power, he continues his narration of the deeds of vengeance. "O Sir, remember, He must be great in power, for I know that He has dug a Hell which is deep and large, without bottom. He has made a Tophet—the pile thereof is fire and much wood and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, shall kindle it. Yes, beyond a doubt," groans the trembling soul, "He must be great in power! I feel He is and I feel more than that—I feel that Justice has provoked God's arm of power to smite me—and unless I am covered in that righteousness of Christ, I shall, before long, be dashed to pieces and utterly devoured by the fury of His wrath." The sinner, as far as the harsher attributes of God's Nature are concerned, when he is under conviction, has a very fair and a just idea of the Divine Being! Though, as I have remarked before, he does not yet understand the mercy and the infinite compassion of God towards His Covenant people. He has too harsh a view of God, dwelling only upon the darker side and not upon those attributes which shed a more cheering light upon the darkness of our misery. That is the first Truth which I glean from the text.

2. The second Truth which I gather from this question, "Will He plead against me with His great power?" is this—that the trembling sinner feels that every attribute of God is against him as a sinner. "Oh," he will say, "I look to God and I can see nothing in Him but a consuming fire! I look to His justice and I see it, with sword unsheathed, ready to smite me low! I look to His power and I behold it, like a mighty mountain, tottering to its fall to crush me! I look to His Immutability and I think I see stern justice written on its brow and I hear it cry, "Sinner, I will not save, I will condemn you." "I look to his faithfulness and I mark that all His threats are as much,, 'yes and amen,' as His promises. I look to His love but even His love frowns and accuses me, saying, 'you have slighted Me.' I look to His mercy but even His mercy launches out the thunderbolt with accusing voice, reminding me of my former hardness of heart and harshly chiding me thus, 'Go you to Justice and glean what you can, there. I, even I, am against you, for you have made Me angry!'"

Oh, trembling Penitent, where are you, tonight? Somewhere here, I know you are! Would to God there were many like you! I know you will agree with me in this statement, for you have a dread apprehension that every attribute of the Divine Being's Character is armed with fire and sword to destroy you! You see all His attributes like heavy pieces of ordnance, all pointed at you and ready to be discharged! Oh that you may find a refuge in Christ! And oh, you who never were convicted of sin, let me, for one moment, lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet. Know this—perhaps you laugh at it—that all God's attributes are against you if you are not in Christ! If you are not sheltered beneath the wings of Jesus, there is not one single glorious name of God, nor one celestial attribute which does not curse you! What would you think, if at your door, tonight, there should be planted great pieces of heavy cannon, all loaded, to be discharged against you? But do you know that where you sit, tonight, there are worse than heavy cannons to be discharged at you? Yes, I see them, I see them! There is God's justice and there is the Angel of Vengeance, standing with the match, ready to bid it hurl vengeance at you. There is His power. There is His bare arm, ready to break your bones and crush you into powder! There is His love, all blazing,

turned to hate because you rejected it. And there is His mercy, clad with mail, going forth like a warrior to overthrow you! What say you, O Sinner, tonight? Against you all of God's attributes are pointed! He has bent His bow and made it ready. The sword of the Lord has been bathed in Heaven. It is bright and sharp, it is furbished. How will you escape when a mighty arm shall bring it down upon you? Or how will you flee when He shall draw His bow and shoot his arrows at you and make you a mark for all the arrows of His vengeance? BEWARE, BEWARE, you that forget God, lest He tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver! For tear you in pieces He will—unless you shelter in the Rock of Ages and wash yourselves in the stream of His wondrous blood! Fly to Him, then, you chief of sinners, fly! But if you will not, know this—God is against you! He will plead against you with His great power unless you have our All-Glorious Jesus to be your Advocate.

3. And just one more hint. The sinner, when he is laboring on account of guilt, feels that God would be just if He were to "plead against him with His great power." "Oh," he says, "If I go to God in prayer, perhaps. instead of hearing me, He will crush me as I would a moth." What, Soul, would He be just if He did that? "Yes," says the sinner, "Just, supremely just. Perhaps if I strip myself of all my ornaments and, like a naked one, fly to Him—perhaps then He will lash me harder than before and I shall feel it all the worse for this, my nakedness." And will He be just, should the flagellation of His vengeance fall upon your shoulders? "Yes," he says, "Infallibly just." And should He smite you to the lowest Hell, would He be just? "Yes," says the penitent, "Just, Infinitely just. I would have no word to say against Him. I would feel that I deserved it all. My only question is not whether He would be just to do it, but will He do it?" "Will He plead against me with His great power?" This is the question of fear. Some here, perhaps, are asking that question—now let them hear the reply of Faith. God give them a good deliverance!

II. THE REPLY OF FAITH IS, "No." O sinner, hear that word, "No." There are sonnets condensed into it. "Will He plead against me with His great power?" "No, NO," say the saints in Heaven. "NO," say the faithful on earth. "NO," say the promises. "NO," unanimously exclaim the oracles of Scripture! NO, most emphatically, NO! He will not plead against you with His great power but He will put strength into you!

1. And here we make a similar remark to that with which we commenced the former part of the sermon, namely, this—the fearful soul has a very right view of God in many respects, but the faithful soul has a right view of God in all respects! He who has faith in God, knows more of God than he who only fears Him. He who believes God, understands God better than any man. Why, if I believe God, I can see all His attributes vindicated. I can see the wrath of Justice expiated by yonder bleeding Sufferer on the accursed tree! I can see His mercy and His justice joining hands with His wrath! I can see His power now turned on my behalf and no longer against me. I can see His faithfulness become the guardian of my soul instead of the slaughterer of my hopes! I can see all His attributes standing, each of them conjoined, each of them glorious, each of them lovely and all united in the work of man's salvation! He that fears God knows only half of God. He that believes God, knows all of God that He can know. And the more he believes God, the more he understands God, the more he comprehends His Glory, His Character, His Nature and His attributes.

2. The next thing is that the Believer, when he is brought into peace with God, does not tremble at the thought of God's power. He does not ask, "Will He plead against me with His great power?"

But he says, "No, that very power, once my terror and fear, is now my refuge and my hope, for He shall put that very power in me! I rejoice that God is Almighty, for He will lend me His Omnipotence—'He will put strength into me.'" Now, here is a great thought! If I had power to handle it, it would give me opportunity, indeed, to preach to you. But I cannot reach the heights of eloquence, I shall therefore simply exhibit the thought for a moment to you. The very power which would have damned my soul, saves my soul. The very power that would have crushed me, God puts into me so that the work of salvation may be accomplished. No, He will not use it to crush me, but He will put that very strength into me! Do you see, there, the Mighty One upon His Throne? Dread Sovereign, I see Your awful arm! What? Will You crush the sinner? Will You utterly destroy him with Your strength? "No," He says, "Come here, My Child." And if you go to His Almighty Throne, "There," He says, "that same arm which made you quake, see there, I give it to you! Go out and live. I have made you mighty as I am, to do My works. I will put strength into you. The same strength which would have broken you to pieces on the wheel shall now be put into you, that you may do mighty works!"

Now, I will show you how this great strength displays itself. Sometimes it goes out in prayer. Did you ever hear a man pray in whom God had put strength? You have heard some of us poor puny souls pray, I dare say, but have you ever heard a man pray who God had made into a giant? Oh, if you have, you will say it is a mighty thing to hear such a man in supplication! I have seen him as if he had seized the angel and would pull him down. I have seen him, now and then, slip in his wrestling. But, like a giant, he has recovered his footing and seemed, like Jacob, to hurl the angel to the ground! I have marked the man lay hold upon the Throne of Mercy and declare, "Lord, I will never let go, except You bless me." I have seen him, when Heaven's gates have been apparently barred, go up to them and say, "You gates, open wide in Jesus' name!" And I have seen the gates fly open before him, as if the man were God, Himself, for he is armed with God Almighty's strength! I have seen that man, in prayer, discover some great mountain in his way. And he prayed it down, until it became a very molehill. He has beaten the hills and made them like chaff, by the immensity of his might! Some of you think I am talking enthusiasm. But such cases have been and are now. Oh, to have heard Luther pray! Luther, you know, when Melancthon was dying, went to his deathbed and said, "Melancthon, you shall not die!" "Oh," said Melancthon, "I must die! It is a world of toil and trouble." "Melancthon," he said, "I have need of you and God's cause has need of you and as my name is Luther, you shall not die!" The physician said he would. Well, down went Luther on his knees and began to tug at Death. Old Death struggled mightily for Melancthon and he had got him well near on his shoulders. "Drop him," said Luther, "drop him, I need him!" "He," said Death, "he is my prey, I will take him!" "Down with him," said Luther, "down with him, Death, or I will wrestle with you!" And he seemed to take hold of the grim monster and hurl him to the ground! And he came off victorious, like an Orpheus, with his wife, up from the very shades of death! He had delivered Melancthon from death by prayer! "Oh," you say, "that is an extraordinary case." No, Beloved, not one-half as extraordinary as you dream. I have men and women here who have done the same in other cases. They have asked a thing of God and have had it. That have been to the Throne and showed a promise and said they would not come away without its fulfillment and have come back from God's Throne conquerors of the Almighty, for prayer moves the arm that moves the world! "Prayer is the sinew of God," said one, "it moves His arm." And so it is. Verily, in prayer, with the strength of the faithful heart, there is a beautiful fulfillment of the text, "He will put strength in me."

A second illustration. Not only in prayer but in duty. The man who has great faith in God and whom God has girded with strength, how gigantic does he become? Have you ever read of those great heroes who put to flight whole armies and scattered kings like the snow on Salmon? Have you ever read of those men that were fearless of foes and stalked onward before all their opposers, as if they would as soon die as live? I read, this day, of a case in the old Church of Scotland, before that King James who wished to force the black prelacy upon them. Andrew Melville and some of his associates were deputed to wait upon the king and, as they were going with a scroll ready written, they were warned to take care and return, for their lives were at stake. They paused a moment and Andrew said, "I am not afraid, thank God, nor feeble-spirited in the cause and message of Christ. Come what pleases God to send, our commission shall be executed." At these words the deputation took courage and went forward. On reaching the palace and having obtained an audience, they found his majesty attended by Lennox and Arran and several other lords, all of whom were English. They presented their remonstrance. Arran lifted it from the table and glancing over it, he then turned to the ministers and furiously demanded, "Who dares sign these treasonable articles?" "WE Dare," said Andrew Melville, "and will render our lives in the cause." Having thus spoken, he came forward to the table, took the pen, subscribed his name and was followed by his Brethren. Arran and Lennox were confounded. The king looked on in silence and the nobles in surprise. Thus did our good forefathers appear before kings and yet were not ashamed. "The proud had them greatly in derision, yet they declined not from the Law of God." Having thus discharged their duty, after a brief conference, the ministers were permitted to depart in peace. The king trembled more at them than if a whole army had been at his gates. And why was this? It was because God had put His own strength into them, to make them masters of their duty! And you have some such in your midst now. They may be despised, but God has made them like the lionlike men of David who would go down into the pit in the depth of winter and take the lion by the throat and slay him. We have some in our Churches—but a remnant, I admit—who are not afraid to serve their God! Like Abdiel, they are "faithful among the faithless found." We have some who are superior to the customs of the age and scorn to bow at mammon's knee—who will not use the trimming language of too many modern ministers but stand out for God's Gospel and the pure white banner of Christ—unstained and unsullied by the doctrines of men. Then are they mighty! Why they are mighty is because God has put strength in them!

Still, some say, I have dealt with extraordinary cases. Come then, now we will have a home-case, one of your own sort that will be like yourselves! Did you ever stand and take a view of Heaven? Have you discerned the hills which lie between your soul and Paradise? Have you counted the lions you have to fight, the giants to be slain and the rivers to be crossed? Did you ever notice the many temptations with which you must be beset, the trials you have to endure, the difficulties you have to overcome, the dangers you have to avoid? Did you ever take a bird's-eye view of Heaven and all the dangers which are thickly strewn along the path? And did you ever ask yourself this question, "How shall I, a poor feeble worm, ever get there?" Did you ever say within yourself, "I am not a match for all my foes, how shall I arrive at Paradise?" If you have ever asked this question, I will tell you what is the only answer for it—you must be girded with Almighty Strength or else you will never gain the victory! Easy your path may be, but it is too hard for your infantile strength without Almighty Power. Your path may be one of little temptation and of shallow trial. But you will be drowned in the floods, yet, unless Almighty Power preserves you. Mark me! However smooth your way, there is nothing short of the bare arm of Deity that can land any of you in Heaven! We

must have Divine strength, or else we shall never get there. And there is an illustration of these words—"No, but He will put His strength in me."

"And shall I hold on to the end?" says the Believer. Yes, you will, for God's strength is in you. "Shall I be able to bear such-and-such a trial?" Yes, you will. Cannot Omnipotence stem the torrent? And Omnipotence is in you! Like Ignatius of old, you are a God-bearer. You bear God about with you! Your heart is a Temple of the Holy Spirit and you shall yet overcome. "But can I ever stand firm in such-and-such an evil day?" Oh, yes you will, for He will put His strength in you. I was in company, some time ago, with some ministers. One of them observed, "Brother, if there were to be stakes in Smithfield again, I am afraid they would find very few to burn among us." "Well," I said, "I do not know anything about how you would burn. But this I know right well, that there always will be those who are ready to die for Christ." "Oh," he said, "but they are not the right sort of men." "Well," I said, "but do you think they are the Lord's children?" "Yes, I believe they are, but they are not the right sort." "Ah," I said, "but you would find them the right sort if they came to the test, every one of them! They have not yet got burning Grace! What would be the use of it?" We do not need the Grace till the stakes come. But we shall have burning Grace in burning moments. If now, tonight, a hundred of us were called to die for Christ, I believe there would not only be found a hundred but five hundred, that would march to death and sing all the way! Whenever I find faith, I believe that God will put strength into the man. And I never think anything to be impossible to a man with faith in God, while it is written, "He will put strength in me."

3. But now the last observation shall be, we shall all need this at the last—and it is a mercy for us that this is written, for never shall we require it, perhaps, more than then. O Believer, do you think you will be able to swim the Jordan with your own strength? Caesar could not swim the Tiber, equipped as he was. And do you hope to swim the Jordan with your flesh about you? No, you will sink, unless Jesus—as Aeneas did Anchises, from the flames of Rome, upon his shoulders—lifts you from Jordan and carries you across the stream—you will never be able to walk across the river! You will never be able to face that tyrant and smile in his face unless you have something more than mortal. You will need, then, to be belted about with the belt of Divinity, or else your loins will be loosed and your strength will fail you, when you need it most! Many a man has ventured to the Jordan in his own strength. But oh, how he has shrieked and howled, when the first wave has touched his feet! But never weakling went to death with God within him but he found himself mightier than the grave! Go on, Christian, for this is your promise. "He will put strength in me"—

Weak, though I am, yet through His might, I all things can perform."

Go on! Dread not God's power but rejoice at this—He will put His strength in you—He will not use His power to crush you.

Just one word and then, farewell. There is within reach of my voice, I am thoroughly convinced, one who is seeking Christ, whose only fear is this—"Sir, I would, but I cannot pray. I would, but I cannot believe. I would, but I cannot love. I would, but I cannot repent." Oh, hear this, Soul—"HE WILL PUT HIS STRENGTH IN YOU." Go home. And down on your knees, if you cannot pray, groan! If you cannot groan, weep! If you cannot weep, feel! If you cannot feel, feel because you cannot feel! For that is as far as many get. But stop there—mark you, stop there—and He will give you His blessing! Do not get up till you have got the blessing. Go there in all your weakness. If you do not feel it, say, "Lord, I do not feel as I ought to feel—but oh that I could! Lord, I cannot repent

as I would repent—oh that You would help me!" "Oh, Sir," you say, "but I could not go as far as that, for I don't think I have got a strong desire." Go and say, "Lord I would desire. Help me to desire." And then sit down and think of your lost estate. Think of your ruin and the remedy and think on that. And mark you, while you are on the way, the Lord will meet with you. Only believe this, that if you try Christ, He will never let you try in vain! Go and risk your soul on Christ, tonight, neck or nothing, Sinner! Go now, break or make! Go and say, "Lord, I know I must be damned if I have not Christ." Stay there and say, "If I perish, I perish only here." And I tell you, you will never perish! I am a bonds man for God—this head to the block if your soul goes to Hell if you pray sincerely and trust Christ! This neck to the gallows, again, I say, this neck to the rope and to the hangman's gallows, if Christ rejects you after you have earnestly sought Him! Only try that, I beseech you, poor Soul. "Oh," you say, "but I have not strength enough. I cannot do that." Well, poor Soul, crawl to the Mercy Seat and there lie flat, just as your are. You know that misery often speaks when it utters not a word. The poor cripple squats himself down in the street. He says nothing. There protrudes a ragged knee and there is a wounded hand. He says nothing. But with his hands folded on his breast he looks at every passerby. And though not a word is spoken, he wins more than if he daily drawled out his tale, or sung it along the street! So do you—sit like Bartimaeus by the wayside begging. And if you hear Him pass by, then cry, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me!" But if you can scarcely say that, sit there and exhibit your poor wounds. Tell the Lord your desperate condition. Strip your loathsome sores and let the Almighty see the venom. Turn out your heart and let the rank corruption be all inspected by the Almighty eyes. "And He has mercies rich and free." Who can tell poor Sinner, who can tell? He may look on you—

"Jesus died upon the tree And why, poor Sinner, not for thee? "His Sovereign Grace is rich and free, And why, poor Sinner, not for thee? Our Jesus loved and saved ME! Say why, poor Sinner, why not THEE?"

Only do this and if you are a sinner, hear this—"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." He will not, "Plead against you with His great power. No, He will put His strength in you!" The Lord dismiss you with His blessing!

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 23,8-10 #2732 - Believers Tested by Trials

BELIEVERS TESTED BY TRIALS

NO. 2732

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 23, 1901.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 17, 1880.

"Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot

perceive Him: on the left hand, where He works, but I cannot behold

Him: He hides Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him:

but He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me,

I shall come forth as gold."

Job 23:8-10.

JOB, as we noticed in our reading, was at that time in very deep distress. I commend this fact to the notice of any here who are very sorely tried. You may be the people of God and yet be in a terrible plight, for Job was a true servant of the Most High, yet he sat down among the ashes and scraped himself with a potsherd because he was covered with sore boils and, at the same time, he was reduced to absolute poverty. The path of sorrow has been trod by thousands of holy feet—you are not the first one who could sit down and say, "I am the man that has seen affliction." You were not the first tried one, you are not the only one and you will not be the last one. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." So let this be some comfort to you—that you are one of the Lord's suffering children, one of those who have to pass through rough roads and fiery places in the course of their pilgrimage to Heaven.

Job had to experience one trial which must have been very keen, indeed, for it was brought about by his three choice friends who were evidently men of mind and mark, for their speeches prove that they were by no means second-class men. Job would not have selected for his bosom friends any but those who were of high character, estimable in disposition, and able to converse with him upon high and lofty themes. Such, no doubt, those three men were and I expect that when Job saw them coming towards him, he looked for a store of comfort from them, imagining that they would at least sympathize with him and pour out such consolations as their own experience could suggest, in order that he might be somewhat relieved. But he was utterly disappointed—these

friends of his reasoned that there must be some extraordinary cause for such unusual distress as that into which Job had fallen. They had never seen wrong in him, but, then, he might be a very cunning man and so have concealed it from them.

Volume 47 1As long as they had known him, he seemed to be a generous, liberal soul, but, perhaps, after all, he was one of those who squeeze the uttermost farthing out of the poor. They could not read his heart, so they put the worst construction upon his sorrows and said, "Depend upon it, he is a hypocrite! We will apply caustic to him and so we will test him, and see whether he really is what he professes to be. We will rub salt into his wounds by bringing various charges against him." And they did so in a most horrible fashion. That is a cruel thing for anybody to do and one that cuts to the quick. Possibly, some people who used to court your company and would not let you go down the street without bowing to you—now that your circumstances are changed, do not recognize you. Or if they cannot help seeing you, they appear to have some distant recollection that, years ago, you were a casual acquaintance, or, perhaps, if they do speak in a kind, friendly way, though their words are smoother than butter, war is in their heart—though their words are softer than oil, yet are they drawn swords.

You must be a bad man because you have come down in the world—it cannot be that you are the respectable person they thought you were, or you would not have lost your estate, for, in the estimation of some folk, to be respectable means to have a certain amount of cash! The definition was once given, in a court of law that if a man kept a carriage and one horse, it was proven, by that fact, that he was respectable. That is the way of the world—respect and respectability depend upon so much money—but the moment that is gone, the scene changes. The man is the same—yes, he may be a better and a nobler man without the money than with it—but it is only noble men who think so. It is only right-minded persons who judge not by the coat or the purse, but who say, with Burns—

"A man's a man for a' that,"

whatever may be his condition. Character is the thing to which we ought to look—the man himself, and not merely his surroundings. But Job had to bear just that ignoble sort of scorn that some men seem to delight to pour upon the sorrows of others!

I want, first, to call your attention to Job's desire in the time of his trouble. It was his earnest desire to get to his God. Secondly, we will notice Job's distress because he could not find Him. "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him." And, thirdly, we will consider Job's consolation. "He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

I. First, then, notice JOB'S DESIRE IN THE TIME OF HIS TROUBLE. He wanted his God. He did not long to see Bildad, or Eliphaz, or Zo

phar, or any earthly friend—his cry was, "Oh, that I knew where I might find HIM! That I might come even to His seat!" This is one of the marks of a true child of God—that even when God smites him, he still longs for His Presence. If you get to the very back of all Job's calamities, you will see that God sent them, or, at least, permitted Satan to afflict him. "Yet," says Job, "I will not turn in anger against God because of this. 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' Let Him do what He will with me, I will still seek to get near to Him and this shall be my heart's desire, 'Oh that

I knew where I might find Him!'" An ungodly man, if he has made any pretense of fellowship with God in his days of prosperity, forsakes Him as soon as adversity comes. But the true child of God clings to his Father however roughly He may deal with him.

We are not held captive to God by a chain of sweets, nor are we bought with cupboard love, nor bribed in any other way to love Him, but now, because He first loved us, our heart has loved Him, and rested in Him—and if cross Providences and strange dealings come from the hand of the Most High, our cry shall not be, "Oh that we could get away from Him!" but, "Oh that we knew where we might find Him, that we might come even to His seat!" This is the mark of our regeneration and adoption—that, whatever happens, we still cling to our God!

For, beloved Friends, when a man is in trouble, if he can but get to God, in the first place, he is quite sure of justice. Men may condemn us falsely, but God never will. Our character may be cruelly slandered and, doubtless, there have been good men who have lived for years under false accusations—but God knows the way that we take. He will be the Advocate of His servants when their case is laid before the heavenly Court of King's Bench. We need not be afraid that the verdict will not be just—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

We also know that if we can get to God, we shall have an audience. Sometimes men will not hear us when we are pleading for justice. "I do not want to hear a word you have to say," says the man who is so prejudiced that he will not listen to our plea. But there is an ear that no prejudice ever sealed! There is a heart that is always sympathetic towards the griefs of a Believer. You are sure to be heard, Beloved, if you pour out your heart before the God that hears prayer! He will never be weary of your cries—they may be poor, broken utterances—but He takes the meaning of the sighs of His saints, He understands the language of their groans. Go, then, to God because you are sure of an audience.

What is more, in getting near to God, a man is sure to have strength. You notice how Job puts it—'"Will He plead against me with His great power? No, but He would put strength in me." When once we get to realize that God is with us, how strong we are! Then we can bear the burden of want or of pain, or even the sharp adder's tongue of slander. The man who has God with him is a very Samson—he may fling himself upon a troop of Philistines and smite them hip and thigh! He may lay hold of the pillars of their temple, rock them to and fro, and bring down the whole building upon them! I say not that we shall work miracles, but I do say that, as our days, so shall our strength be—

"I can do all things, or can bear All sufferings, if my Lord is there."

And, once more, he who gets to his God is sure of joy. There was never a soul that was right with God and that was unhappy in the Presence of God! Up yonder in Glory, how gladly they smile! How I would like to photograph their beaming faces! What a group that would be—of angel faces bathed in everlasting light and the faces of those redeemed from among men—all radiant with celestial joy! What gives them that gladness? It is because God is there that they are so happy—

"Not all the harps above Can make a heavenly place, If God His residence remove, Or but conceal His face."

Just as the sun makes the landscape bright and fair, so does the light of God's Countenance make all His people glad. It would not matter to a man whether he were in a dungeon or a palace if he had the constant Presence of God! I am not speaking at random when I make that assertion. Read the record of the martyr days of the Church and you will understand that the Presence of God caused His persecuted people to be the happiest in the whole world! No minstrels in royal halls ever sang so sweetly as did the prisoners of the Lord who were confined in deep, dark, underground dungeons where they could scarcely breathe. No, that is not all, for some have been happy even on the rack. Think of brave Lady Anne Askew sitting on the cold stones after the cursed inquisitors had torn her poor feeble frame almost limb from limb—and when they tempted her to turn from the faith, she answered—

"I am not she that lyst My anker to let fall For every dryslynge mist; My shippe's substancyal."

Some who were tortured, not accepting deliverance, declared, as in the case of Lawrence, that the gridiron was a bed of roses and that they never were so joyous as when their body was being consumed in the fire—every finger being like a lighted candle—for they were able, even then, to cry, "None but Christ! None but Christ!" It is amazing how the Presence of God seems to be a salve that kills all pain—an uplifting, like an angel's wing, that bears upward one who, without it, would be utterly crushed. The martyr is torn in pieces and full of agonies—and yet all his sufferings are transformed till they become sweet harmonies of intense delight because God is with him! Oh give me God, give me God, and I care not what you withhold from me! "Whom have I in Heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside You."

II. The brightness of the first part of my subject will help to make the second portion all the darker. We are now to consider JOB'S DISTRESS—the agony of a true child of God who cannot find his Father.

Your experiences are not all alike, Brothers and Sisters, and I do not want you to try to make them all alike. Some of you have very happy experiences and very little spiritual trial. I am glad it is so. I only hope you will not be superficial, or conceited, or censorious of others. But there are some who know the darker paths in the heavenly pilgrimage—and it is to those that I specially speak just now. Dear Friends, I pray you to remember that a man may be a true servant of God and even an eminent and distinguished servant of God like Job, and yet he may sometimes lose the light of God's Countenance and have to cry out, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" There are some special, superfine, hot-pressed Christians about, nowadays, who do not believe this. They say, "You ought to be joyous! You ought never to be depressed—you ought to be perfect!" All which is quite true, but it is a great deal easier to say so than to show how it is to be realized! And these Brothers and Sisters who talk as if it were a very simple matter, like counting your fingers, may someday find that it is more difficult than they think—as some of us have sometimes done.

Job could not find his God—this is apparently strange. He was a specially good man, one who did what he could for all around him—a very light in the city where he dwelt—a man famous in all the country, yet in great trouble—one might have thought that God would certainly comfort him! He has lost everything. Surely, now, the Lord will return to him and be gracious to him and, above all other times, he will now be cheered with the Presence of God! Yet it was not so. He was a man who valued the company of God and who cried, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" Yet he could not find Him. It is passing strange, or, at least, it appears to be so.

Yet notice, next, that it is essentially necessary to some trials that God should withdraw the light of His Countenance. Our Lord Jesus Christ, with all the woes that He endured, could not have been made perfect through sufferings unless He had learned to cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" When God means to smite any child of His with the rod, He cannot do it with a smile. Suppose a father is chastening his son and all the while is comforting him—where is the chastening? No, the very essence of the medicinal sorrow that is to do good to our souls will lie in our having to bewail the absence of the smile of God.

This is essential to our trial, but it is greatly perplexing. I do not know of anything that so troubles a Christian as when he does not know where his God is. "God is everywhere," says one. I know He is, but yet there is a special Presence which He manifests to His people and sometimes it seems to them as if He were nowhere at all. So Job exclaimed, "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him." Tried children of God, you have had this experience and it is very perplexing because, when you cannot find your God, you cannot make out why you are being troubled! An affliction that will talk is always a light one, but I dread most of all a dumb affliction that cannot tell me why it has come. When I look around it, and ask, "Why is this?" and I cannot get an answer, that is what plagues me much. And when you cannot find God, you do not know what to do, for, in losing Him, you have lost your Guide. You are in a maze and know not how to get out of it. You are like a man in a net—the more you pull this way or that—the more you tighten the bonds that hold you prisoner! Where you hoped to have relieved yourself, you only brought yourself into further difficulties in another direction—and this bewilderment is one of the worst of sorrows. The loss of God's Presence is also inexpressibly painful to a Believer. If you can live without God, I am afraid you will die without God. But if you cannot live without God, that proves that you are His, and you will bear me out in the assertion that this is the heaviest of mortal griefs—to feel that God has forsaken you and does not hear your prayer—no, does not even seem to help you to pray, so that you can only groan, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him! . . . Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him."

Then, dear Friends, in closing what I have to say about this dark side of the subject, let me remind you that it is marvelously awakening because the true child of God, when he finds that his Father has forsaken him for a while, gets to be terribly unhappy. Then he begins to cry and to seek after God. Look at Job—he hunts for God everywhere—forward, backward, on the left hand, on the right hand. He leaves no quarter unvisited. No part of the earth is left without being searched over that he might find his God. Nothing spreads a real Christian to his bearings and awakes all his faculties like the consciousness of his Lord's absence. Then he cries, "My God, where are You? I have lost the sense of Your Presence! I have missed the light of Your Countenance."

A man in such a case as this goes to the Prayer Meeting in the hope that other people's prayers may help to make his sad heart happy again. He reads his Bible, too, as he has not read it for months. You will also find him listening to the Gospel with the utmost eagerness and nothing but the Gospel will satisfy him. At one time, he could listen to that pleasant kind of talk that lulls the hearers to sleep, but now he needs a heartsearching ministry and a message that will go right into him and deal faithfully with him—and he is not content unless he gets it. Besides this, he is anxious to talk with Christian friends of riper experiences than his own and he deals seriously and earnestly with these eternal matters which, before, he perhaps trifled with as mere technicalities. You see a man who once lived in the light of God's Countenance and you will find him wretched,

indeed, when the light is gone. He must have his God.

III. Now, lastly, I want to speak, for a little while, concerning THE TRIED BELIEVER'S CONSOLATION. It is a very sweet consolation—"He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

God knows and understands all about His child. I do not know His way, but He knows mine. I am His child and my Father is leading me, though I cannot see Him, for all around me, it is so misty and dark. I can scarcely feel His hand that grasps my little palm, so I cry to Him, "Where are You, my Father? I cannot see my way. The next step before me threatens to plunge me into imminent peril. I know nothing, my Father, but You know." That is just where knowledge is of most use—it does not so much matter what you do not know so long as God knows, for He is your Guide. If the guide knows the way, the traveler under his care may be content to know but little. "He knows the way that I take." There is nothing about you, my Brother, which God does not perfectly understand. You are a riddle to yourself, but you are no riddle to Him. There are mysteries in your heart that you cannot explain, but He has the clue of every maze, the key of every secret drawer—and He knows how to get at the hidden springs of your spirit. He knows the trouble that you could not tell to your dearest friend, the grief you dare not whisper in any human ear!

I find that the Hebrew has this meaning, "He knows the way that is in me." God knows whether I am His child or not—whether I am sincere or not. While others are judging me harshly, He judges me truly—He knows what I really am. This is a sweet consolation! Take it to yourself, tried Believer.

Next, God approves of His child. The word, "know," often has the meaning of approval, and it has that sense here. Job says "God approves of the way that I take." When you are in trouble, it is a grand thing to be able to say, "I know that I have done that which is right in the sight of God, although it has brought me into great trial. 'My foot has held His steps, His way have I kept, and not declined.'" If you have a secret and sure sense of God's approval in the time of your sorrow, it will be a source of very great strengthening to your spirit.

But Job meant more than this. He meant that God was considering him—and helping him even then. The fact that He knows of our needs guarantees that He will supply them. You remember how our Lord Jesus Christ puts this Truth of God—"Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things." Does He know all about our need? It is all right then—the Head of the house knows the need of all the members of His family, and that is enough, for He never yet failed to supply all the needs of those who depend upon Him. When I need guidance, He will Himself be my Guide. He will supply me when I lack supplies. He will defend me when I need defense. He will give me all things that I really require. There is an old proverb that says, "Where God is, nothing is lacking," and it is blessedly true! Only remember that there is an ancient precept with a gracious promise attached to it, "Delight yourself, also, in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." Believe it, and obey it, and you shall find it true in your case.

Furthermore, when Job says, "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold," he comforts himself with the belief that God times and manages all things—that his present distresses are a trial by which God is testing him. A man who is like solid gold is not afraid to be tested. No

tradesman is afraid to put into the scales that which is full weight, for if it is weighed, it will be proved to be what he says it is. When the inspector of weights and measures comes round, the gentleman who does not like to see him is the man of short weights and incorrect scales. He who knows he is upright and sincere dares say even to the Lord, Himself, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my ways: and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." We do not profess to be perfect, but we dare claim to be sincere—and he who is sincere is not afraid of being tested and tried. Real gold is not afraid of the fire—why should it be? What has it to lose? So Job seems to say, "I know that God has put integrity within my spirit and now that He is testing me, He will not carry the test further than, by His Grace, I shall be able to bear."

Lastly, Job's comfort was that God secures the happy result of trial. He believed that when God had tried him, He would bring him forth as gold. Now, how does gold come out of the crucible? How does a true Christian come out of the darkness and obscurity of missing his God for a while? How does he come out like gold? In the Hebrew, the word has an allusion to the bright color of the gold, so, when a Christian is tried, is there not a bright color upon him? Even though he may have lost, for a while, the bright shining of God's Countenance, when that brightness returns, there is a luster about him which you cannot help seeing! He will speak of his God in a more impressive way than he ever spoke before. Examine the books that are most comforting to Believers and that satisfy their souls, and you will find that the men who wrote them were those who had been severely tried—and when they came out of the fire—there was a brilliance upon them which would not otherwise have been there. If you walk in darkness and see no light, believe that when God has tried you, you shall come forth with the brightness of newly-minted gold!

But brightness is of little value without preciousness—and the children of God grow more precious through their trials and, being precious, they become objects of desire. Men desire gold above almost everything else, yet the Lord has said, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir." There are some godly men whose company we court and some Christian women whose society, when they talk of spiritual things, is worth a Jew's eye to one that is in distress. Happy are they whom God has passed through the fire—who become precious and desirable when they come out of it!

And they become honorable, too. "When He has tried me," said Job, "even though my friends now despise me, when I come forth, they shall have different thoughts concerning me." They thought a great deal more of Job when God was angry with them and would not restore them to His favor until the Patriarch had prayed for them—than they thought of him when they went to find fault with him! And the day shall come to you, true child of God, when those who now persecute you and look down upon you, shall look up to you! Joseph may be cast into the pit by his brothers and sold into Egypt, but he shall yet sit on the throne—and all his father's sons shall bow before him!

Once more, you shall come out of the fire uninjured. It looks very hard to believe that a child of God should be tried by the loss of his Father's Presence and yet should come forth uninjured by the trial. Yet no gold is ever injured in the fire. Stoke the furnace as much as you may, let the blast be as strong as you will, thrust the ingot into the very center of the white heat, let it lie in the very heart of the flame—pile on more fuel, let another blast torment the coals till they become most vehement with heat—yet the gold is losing nothing, it may even be gaining. If it had any alloy

mingled with it, the alloy is separated from it by the fire—and to gain in purity is the greatest of gains. But the pure gold is not one drachma less! There is not a single particle of it that can be burnt. It is still there, all the better for the fiery trial to which it has been subjected! And you, dear child of God, whatever may befall you, shall come out of the fire quite uninjured. You are under a dark cloud just now, but you shall come out into brightness and you shall have lost nothing that was worth keeping! What is there that you can lose? When death comes, what will you lose?—

"Corruption, earth, and worms Shall but refine this flesh, Till my triumphant spirit comes To put it on afresh!"

When we put on our new clothes, this body that shall have passed through God's transforming hand—shall we be losers? No, we shall say, "What a difference! Is this my Sabbath garment? The old one was dark and dingy, dusty and defiled. This is whiter than any fuller could make it and brighter than the light!" You will scarcely know yourselves, my Brothers and Sisters! You will know other people, I daresay, but I think you will hardly recognize yourselves when once you have put on your new array. You cannot really lose anything by death! You will not lose the eyes you part with for a while, for, when Christ shall stand at the latter day, upon the earth, your eyes shall behold Him! You shall lose no faculty, no power, but you shall infinitely gain even by death itself—and that is the very worst of your enemies, so that you shall certainly gain by all the rest! Come then, pluck up courage and march boldly on! Fear no ghosts, for they are but specters—there is no reality about them!

Beloved, note well this closing word. God is here. You need not go forward to find Him, or backward to hunt after Him, or on the left to search for Him, or on the right to see Him. He is still with His people, as He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." "Fear not: for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you." Oh, seek Him, then, every one of you, and God bless you all, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Job 23:1-17; Job 24:1-25.

Always remember, dear Friends, that one of the great lessons of the Book of Job is this—that we may never judge a man's character by his condition. The best of men may have the most of suffering and of poverty, while the worst of men may prosper in everything. Do not imagine because a man suddenly becomes very poor or a great sufferer, that therefore he must be a great sinner—otherwise, you will often condemn the innocent, and you will, at the same time, be guilty of flattering the wicked. Job's friends had cruelly told him that he must be a hypocrite, or else he would not have lost his property and have been smitten with such a remarkable sickness. So he appeals to God against their unrighteous judgment.

Job 23:1-2. Then Job answered and said, Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. "Although my groaning is heavy, yet it is not so burdensome as my griefs might warrant."

3. Oh that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come even to His seat! "To His Judgment Seat, that I might plead my cause and vindicate my character even there."

4-6. I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me. Will He plead against me with His great power? "Being the great God, will He silence me by a display of His Omnipotence? Oh, no! He is too just to do that."

6. No; but He would put strength in me. "He would help me to argue my case. He would deal fairly with me. He would not be like you so-called friends of mine, who sit there and exult over my weakness and my griefs, and torture me with your cruel words."

7-10. There the righteous might dispute with Him; so should I be delivered forever from my Judge. Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He works, but I cannot behold Him: He hides Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him: but He knows the way that I take. "If I cannot find Him, or see Him, He can see me, and He knows all about me."

10. When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. This is beautiful faith on the part of Job. It is very easy for us to read these lines and to say, "No doubt, tried men do come out of the furnace purified like gold." But it is quite another thing to be in the crucible ourselves and to read such a passage as this by the light of the fire, and then to be able to say, "We know it is true, for we are proving its truth even now." This is the kind of Chapter that many a broken heart has to read by itself alone. Many a weeping eye has scanned these words of Job and truly blessed has that troubled one been who has been able to chime in with the sweet music of this verse—"He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

11. My foot has held fast to His steps, His way have I kept, and not declined. It is a great thing to be able to say that, as Job truly could, for we have the witness of the Spirit of God that Job was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." It was not selfrighteousness that made him speak as he did—he had the right to say it and he said it.

12, 13. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food. But He is of one mind, and who can turn Him? "His mind is made up to chasten me. He means to afflict me again and again, so what can I do but yield to His will?"

13. And what His soul desires, even that He does. There is, on Job's part, a reverential bowing before the Supreme Power—an acknowledgment of God's right to do with him as He wills.

14. For He performs the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with Him. "More arrows to pierce me, more sorrows to grieve me."

15-17. Therefore am I troubled at His Presence: when I consider, I am afraid of Him. For God makes my heart soft, and the Almighty troubles me: because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither has He covered the darkness from my face. He wished that he had died before those evil days had come upon him; and that is the way that a good man, an undoubted saint of God, is sometimes driven to speak. There are, perhaps, some who will say, "Then we don't want to be children of God if that is how they are tried." Ah, but that was only the sorrow of an hour. See

where Job is now! Think of what he was even a few days after he made this mournful complaint, when God had turned his sighing into singing, and his mourning into morning light! In the next Chapter, Job speaks of those who were the reverse of himself—wicked and ungodly men who, nevertheless, prospered in this life.

Job 24:1. Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know Him not see His days? "Why do they live so long? Why do they appear to have such prosperity?"

2-4. Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof. They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together. "They are hard-hearted enough to rob even poor widows and orphan children."

5. Behold, as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work. Like wild asses, their work consists in going forth to do mischief.

5. Rising betimes for a prey: the wilderness yields food for them and for their children. For there are some so hard that they would skin a flint, and out of the wilderness would manage to get food. Yet such hard oppressors of others sometimes seem to prosper for a while.

6-12. They reap everyone his corn in the field: and they gather the vintage of the wicked. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter. They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor. They cause him to go naked without clothing, and they take away the sheaf from the hungry; which make oil within their walls, and tread their winepresses, and suffer thirst. Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded cries out: yet God lays not folly to them. He lets them alone, leaves them to do as they please. So it seems, but this is not the Day of Judgment, and this is not the place of final retribution! Now and then God flashes forth His anger against some gross sinner or some national crime, but as for the most of men's sins, He bears with them till that tremendous day shall come which draws on apace, when He shall hang the heavens in sackcloth, and hold the last assize, and every man shall receive according to his works.

13-17. They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. The murderer rising with the light kills the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waits for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguises his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one knows them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death. These are the men who plunder secretly, who rob, yet cannot bear to be known as thieves.

18. He is swift as the waters; their portion is cursed in the earth. There was no curse upon Job, and no curse can come near the true child of God. His scanty portion is still blest. But the large portion of the ungodly is cursed even while he is on the earth!

18-20. He beholds not the way of the vineyards. Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so does the grave those which have sinned. The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him. What a sarcastic utterance! This man, who lorded it over others—how glad the worm shall

be to get at him! This fat worldling shall be a rich feast for the worms!

20. He shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree. It shall snap off and be brought to an ignominious end.

21-24. He preys on the barren that bears not: and does not good to the widow. But God draws the mighty away with His power: He rises up, but no man is sure of life. Though it be given him to be in safety, whereon he rests; yet His eyes are upon their ways. They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all others, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn. In the East, they generally reap their harvest by just taking off the tops of the ears of corn and leaving the straw. Thus will the wicked be cut off.

25. And if it is not so now, who will make me a liar, and make my speech worth nothing? Job challenges all men to contradict what he affirms—that the righteous may be greater sufferers, and the wicked may for a while prosper, but that God will, in the end, overthrow the ungodly and establish the righteous.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—73 (Part 2), 617, 631.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 75

Job 27,10 #985 - The Touchstone of Godly Sincerity

THE TOUCHSTONE OF GODLY SINCERITY

NO. 985

A SERMON

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Will he always call upon God?"

Job 27:10.

WHEN Job resumes his address in this chapter he appeals to God in a

very solemn matter as to the truth of all that he had spoken. No less vehemently does he assert his innocence of any signal crime, or his consciousness of any secret guile which could account for his being visited with extraordinary suffering. I do not know that his language necessarily implies any culpable self-righteousness. It appears to me, rather, that he had good cause to defend himself against the bitter insinuations of his unfriendly friends.

Possibly his tone was rash, but his meaning was right. He might well feel the justice of vindicating his character before men—but it was a pity if, in so doing, he seemed to utter a protest of complete purity in the sight of God. You may remember how Paul under equal, if not exactly similar provocation, tempered his speech and guarded against the danger of misconstruction. Thus he wrote to the Corinthians—"With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yes, I judge not my own self. For I know nothing by myself [or myself, as though he should say, 'My conscience does not accuse me of wrong'] yet am I not hereby justified."

But the two holy men are very like in one respect—for just as Paul, in the struggles of the spirit against the flesh faced the peril and mounted guard against it—"lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself shall be a castaway"—so Job lays bare before his own eyes, and points to the view of those who heard him the features of a hypocrite—lest by any means he should turn out to be such.

In terrible language he describes and denounces the hypocrite's flattering hope and withering doom. The suspicion that he himself could harbor a vain presence in his own breast, or would pretend to be what he was not was utterly abhorrent to Job's honest heart. He placed himself at the bar. He laid down the Law with rigor. He weighed his case with exactness. And so he forestalled his adversaries' verdict by judging himself that he might not be judged. Who, then, is this "wicked man," thus portrayed before us? And what are the first symptoms of his depravity?

We ask not the question idly, but in order that we take heed against the uprising of such an evil in ourselves—

"Beneath the saintly veil the votary of sin May lurk unseen. And to that eye alone Which penetrates the heart, may stand revealed."

The hypocrite is very often an exceedingly neat imitation of the Christian. To the common observer he is so good a counterfeit that he entirely escapes suspicion. Like base coins which are cunningly made, you can scarcely detect them by their ring. It is only by more searching tests that you are able to discover that they are not pure gold, the current coin of the realm.

It would be difficult to say how nearly any man might resemble a Christian and yet not be "in Christ a new creature." Or how closely he might imitate all the virtues and yet at the same time possess none of the fruits of the Spirit as before the judgment of a heart-searching God. In almost all deceptions there is a weak point somewhere. Never is a lying story told but, if you are keen enough, you may, from internal evidence, somewhere or other detect the flaw. Though Satan himself has been engaged in the manufacture of impostures for thousands of years, yet whether through the lack of skill on his part, or through the folly of his agents, he always leaves a weak point. His clattering statements are a little too strongly scented and smell of lies. And his mimic Christians are so overdone in one place, and slovenly in another, that their falsehood betrays itself.

Now, in discriminating between saints and hypocrites, one great testpoint is prayer. "Behold, he prays," was to the somewhat skeptical mind of Ananias demonstration enough that Paul was really converted. If he prays, it may be safely inferred that the breath of prayer arises from the life of faith. The process of spiritual quickening has at least begun. And so the hypocrite desires to possess that vital action. If the Christian prays, he will betake himself to the like exercise. If the Christian calls upon God, the deceiver takes care that he will likewise make mention of the name of the Lord.

And yet, between the prayer of the truly converted man and the prayer of the hypocrite there is a difference as radical as between life and death, although it is not apparent to everybody. No one, it may be, at first can be aware of it except the man himself, and sometimes even he scarcely perceives it. Many are deceived by the fine expressions, by the apparent warmth, and by the excellent natural disposition of the hypocrite. They think, when they hear him call upon God, that his supplications are sufficient evidence that he is truly a quickened child of God.

Prayer is always the telltale of spiritual life. If the prayer is not right— there is no Grace within. Slackened prayer indicates a decrease of Divine Grace. If prayer is stronger, you know the whole man is stronger. Prayer is as good a test of spiritual life and health as the pulse is of the condition of the human frame. Therefore I say the hypocrite imitates the action of prayer while he does not really possess the spirit of prayer.

Our text goes deeper than the surface and enquires into vital matters. Prayer is a test, but here is a test for the test—a trial even for prayer itself. "Will he always call upon God?" That is the point! He calls upon God now, and he appears to be intensely devout. He says he was converted in the late revival. He is very fervid in expression, and very forward in manner at present. But will it continue? Will it wear? Will it last? His prayerfulness has sprung up like Jonah's gourd in a night.

Will it perish in a night?

It is beautiful to look upon, like the early dew that glistens in the sunlight as though the morning had sown the earth with Oriental pearls. But will it pass away like that dew? Or will it always abide? "Will he always call upon God?" That is the point! O that each one of us may now search ourselves and see whether we have those attributes connected with our prayer which will prove us not to be hypocrites! Pray our search will not show that, on the contrary, we have those sad signs of base dissembling and reckless falsehoods which will before long show us to be dupes of Satan, impostors before Heaven. "Will he always call upon God?"

This question, simple as it is, I think involves several pertinent enquiries. The first point which it raises is that of CONSISTENCY. Is the prayer occasional, or is it constant? Is the exercise of devotion permanent and regular, or is it spasmodic and inconstant? Will this man call upon God in all seasons of prayer? There are certain times when it is most fit to pray, and a genuine Christian will and must pray at such periods. Will this hypocrite pray at all such times, or will he only select some of the seasons for prayer?

Will he only be found praying at certain times and in selected places? Will he always, in all fit times, be found drawing near to God? For instance, he prayed standing at the corners of the streets where he was seen of men—he prayed in the synagogue, where everybody could mark his fluency and his fervor—but will he pray at home? Will he enter into his closet and shut the door? Will he there speak to the Father who hears in secret? Will he there pour forth petitions as the natural outflow of his soul?

Will he walk the field at eventide, in lonely meditation, like Isaac, and pray there? Will he go to the housetop with Peter, and pray there? Will he seek his chamber as Daniel did, or the solitude of the garden as did our Lord? Or is he one who only prays in public—who has the gift of prayer rather than the spirit of prayer—who is fluent in utterance rather than fervent in feeling? Oh, but this—this is one of the surest of tests by which we may discern between the precious and the vile!

Public prayer is no evidence of piety! It is practiced by an abundance of hypocrites! But private prayer is a thing for which the hypocrite has no heart—and if he gives himself to it for a little time he soon finds it too hot and heavy a business for his soulless soul to persevere in—and he lets it drop. He will sooner perish than continue in private prayer. O for heart searching about this! Do I draw near to God alone? Do I pray when no eye sees, when no ear hears? Do I make a conscience of private prayer? Is it a delight to pray? For I may gather that if I never enjoy private prayer I am one of those hypocrites who will not always call upon God.

The true Christian will pray in business. He will pray in labor. He will pray in his ordinary calling—like sparks out of the chimney, short prayers fly up all day long from truly devout souls. It is not so with the mere pretender. The hypocrite prays at Prayer Meetings, and his voice is heard in the assembly—sometimes at tedious length. But will he pray with exclamatory prayer? Will he speak with God at the counter? Will he draw near to God in the field? Will he plead with his Lord in the busy street with noiseless pleadings?

When he finds that a difficultly has occurred in his daily life, will he, without saying a word, breathe his heart into the ear of God? Ah, no! Hypocrites know nothing of what it is to be always praying, to abide in the spirit of prayer. This is a choice part of Christian experience with which they do not

meddle. But be sure of this—where there is genuine religion within, it will be more or less habitual to the soul to pray. Some of us can say that to be asking blessings from God in brief, wordless prayers comes as natural to us as to eating, drinking, and breathing.

We never encounter a difficulty but by God's Grace we resolve it by appealing to the wisdom of God—never meet with any opposition but what we overcome it by leaning upon the power of God. To wait upon the Lord and speak with Him has become a habit with us—not because it is a duty—we have left legal bondage far behind—but because we cannot help it, our soul is inwardly constrained to do it. The nature within as naturally cries to God as a child cries after its mother.

The hypocrite prays in his fashion because it is a task allotted to him— the Christian because it is a part of his very life. This is an ever standing mark of distinction by which a man may discern himself. If your prayer is only for certain hours, and certain places, and certain times—beware lest it turn out to be an abomination before the Lord. The fungus forced by artificial heat is a far different thing from the rosy fruit of a healthy tree, and the unreal devotions of the unspiritual differ widely from the deep inward groanings of renewed hearts. If you pray by the almanac, observing days and weeks, you may well fear that your religion never came from the great Father of Lights with whom are no changing moons.

If you can pray by the clock, your religion is more mechanical than vital. The Christian does not fast because it is Lent. If his Lord reveals His face he cannot fast merely because a Church commands him. Neither can he, therefore, feast because it happens to be a festival on the calendar. The Spirit of God might make his soul to be feasting on Ash Wednesday, or his soul might be humbled within him at Easter. He cannot be regulated by the dominical letter and the new moons and days of the month. He is a spiritual character, and he leaves those who have no spiritual life to yield a specious conformity to such ecclesiastical regulations. His newborn nature spurns such childish bonds. The living soul prays evermore with groanings that cannot be uttered, and believingly rejoices evermore with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

A second point in debate is that of CONTINUANCE. "Will he always call upon God?" There are trying periods and sifting seasons. Those who hold on through these are the true Christians. Those who suspend prayer at these test intervals are false. Now times of joy and sorrow are equally critical seasons. Let us look at them in turn. Will the hypocrite call upon God in times of pleasure? No. If he indulges himself in what he calls pleasure, he dares not pray at night when he comes home. He goes to places where he would think it a degradation of prayer to think of praying.

The genuine Christian prays always, because if there is any spot where he dares not pray, just there he dares not be found. Or if there is any engagement about which he could not pray, it is an engagement that shall never ensnare him. Someone once proposed to write a brief formal prayer to be said by a pious young lady when attending a theater, and another to be repeated by a Christian gentleman when shuffling a pack of cards. There might as well be another form of prayer to be offered by a pious burglar when he is breaking into a home, or by a religious assassin when he is about to commit murder! There are things about which you cannot pray—they have nothing to do with prayer. Many tolerated amusements lead to outrages upon the morals of earth, and are an insult to the holiness of Heaven. Who could think of praying about them? Herein is the hypocrite discerned. He does that which he could not ask a blessing upon. Poor as is the

conscience he owns, he knows it is ridiculous to offer prayer concerning certain actions which, notwithstanding, he has the hardihood to perform.

The Christian avoids things which he could not pray about. And so he feels it a pleasure to pray always. Equally trying is the opposite condition of depression and sorrow. There, too, we try the question, "Will he always call upon God?" No. The hypocrite will not pray when in a desponding state. He breathed awhile the atmosphere of enthusiasm. His passions were stirred by the preacher and fermented by the contagious zeal of the solemn assembly. But now a damp cold mist obscures his view—chills his feelings—settles in his heart. Others are growing cold and he is among the first to freeze. He is down-hearted and discouraged. In a while, like King Saul, he succumbs to the evil spirit.

Were he a Christian, indeed, he would follow in the wake of David, and say—"Why are you cast down, O my Soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." But he has no heart to hope on in ill weather. He built up his hopes tastefully, and he admired the structure which was of his own piling. But the rain descended, the floods came, the winds blew, and down it all went. And therefore, being a hypocrite, he said within himself—"Now I have no enjoyment of religion—it has lost its novelty. I have worn out its delights. I have now no comfort from it. I will give it up."

Thus in the trying hour the deceiver is laid bare. Look at the real Christian when a storm bursts over him which shakes his confidence and spoils his joy—what does he do? He prays more than he ever did. When his mountain stood firm and he said, "I shall not be moved," he perhaps grew too slack in prayer. But now, when all God's waves and billows are going over him, and he hardly knows whether he is a child of God or not and questions whether he has any part or lot in the matter, he proves that all is right within by crying unto God in the bitterness of his soul, "O God, have mercy upon me, and deliver me from going down into the pit."

By God's Grace a Christian's despair makes him pray. It is a despair of self. A worldling's despair makes him rave against God and give up prayer. Mark then, how in the opposite seasons of joy and sorrow prayer is put into the crucible and tested. All our times of pleasure ought to be times of prayer. Job accounted his family festivities opportune for calling his children together for special devotion. No less should our periods of despondency become incentives to prayer! Every funeral knell should ring us to our knees. The hypocrite cannot keep the statutes and ordinances, but the true Christian follows them. The Christian is alike at home in seeking the Lord, calling upon His name, or asking counsel and guidance at His Mercy Seat—in any variety of experience—and every diversity of circumstance.

"Will he always call upon God?" Here is the question of CONSTANCY. Will he pray constantly? It seems to most men a very difficult thing to be praying always, to continue in prayer, to pray without ceasing. Yes. And herein, again, is there a great distinction between the living child of God and the mere pretender. The living child of God soon finds that it is not so much his duty to pray as his privilege, his joy—a necessity of his being. What moment is there when a Christian is safe without prayer?

Where is there a place where he would find himself secure if he ceased to pray? Just think of it! Every moment of my life I am dependent upon the will of God as to whether I shall draw another

breath or not. Nothing stands between me and death but the will of God. An angel's arm could not save me from the grave, if now the Lord willed me to depart. Solemn, then, is the Christian's position—ever standing by an open tomb. Should not dying men pray? We are always dying. As life is but a long dying, should it not be also a long praying? Should we not be incessantly acknowledging to God in prayer and praise the continuance of our being, which is due to His Grace?

Brothers and Sisters, every moment that we live we are receiving favors and benefits from God. There is never a minute in which we are not recipients of His bounty. We are likely to thank God for His mercies as if we thought they came at certain set times. So in truth they do—they are new every morning—great is His faithfulness! And they soothe us night by night, for His compassion fails not! There are mercies streaming on in one incessant flow. We never cease to need. He never ceases to supply. We want constant protection, and He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Lest any hurt us, He keeps us night and day. The river of God rolls on with undiminished volume and unimpeded velocity. How greatly does He enrich us! Should we not be ever careful to secure His gifts, to reap the harvest He provides, and as His people to take these good things from His gracious hands? But, oh, let us take heed to mingle prayer with all our thanksgiving lest He should curse the benefit over which we have asked no blessing. Lest He blight the crops of which we have dedicated to Him no first fruits—or smite us with the rod of His anger—while the food is yet in our mouths.

Our cravings know no abatement, our dependence on God knows no limit. Therefore our prayers should know no intermission. Speak of beggars—we are always beggars. Is it not better for us, then, to be regular pensioners than mere casuals? Whatever God has given us we are as needy still. We are always, if taken apart from Him, naked, poor, and miserable—altogether dependent upon Him—as well for the soul as for the body. Good thoughts, spiritual aspirations, holy Graces—yes, and for the breath of our nostrils and the bread of our mouths are we totally dependent upon God.

If we are always needing, we should be always pleading. Besides that, dear Friends, we are always in danger. We are in an enemy's country. Behind every bush there is a foe. We cannot reckon ourselves to be secure in any place. The world, the flesh and the devil constantly assail us. Arrows are shot from beneath us, and from around us—while the poison of our own corruption rankles within us. At any moment temptation may get the mastery over us, or we ourselves may go astray and be our own tempters. Storms may drive us, whirlpools suck us down, quicksands engulf us—and if none of these accomplish our shipwreck we may flounder of ourselves, or perish of spiritual dry rot. We need, then, each hour to watch, and each separate moment to pray, "Hold You me up, and I shall be safe." Are you wealthy? Pray God that your silver and your gold bring no spiritual plague with them! Do not let your money stick to your hands or your heart, for in proportion as it glues itself to you it poisons you. Pray God to sanctify your abundance so that you may know how to abound—a difficult piece of knowledge to attain.

Are you poor? Then ask to be kept from envy, from discontent and all the evils that haunt the narrow lanes of poverty. Pray that as you are each in danger, one way or another, you may all be kept hour by hour by the constant Grace of God. If we knew what poor, weak, helpless creatures

we are, we should not need to be told always to pray. We should wonder how we could think of living without prayer! How can I, whose legs are so feeble, try to walk—without leaning on my Father's hand? How can I, who am so sickly, wish to be a day without the Good Physician's care?

The hypocrite does not see this. He does not discern these perpetual needs and perpetual gifts, these perpetual dangers and perpetual preservations—not he. He thinks he has prayed enough when he has had his few minutes in the morning and his few minutes at night. He trots through his form of morning devotion just as he takes his morning wash, and has he not settled the business for the day? If at evening he says his prayers with the same regularity with which he puts on his slippers, is it not all he needs? He almost thinks that little turn at his devotions to be a weariness. As to his heart going up in prayer to God, he does not understand it. If he is spoken to concerning it, it sounds like an idle tale, or mere cant.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, "we ought always to pray, and not to faint," because we are always sinning. If I were not evermore sinning—if I could pause in that constant aberration of mind from the pure, the unselfish, the holy—perhaps I might suspend confession and relax supplication awhile. But if unholiness stains even my holy things—if in my best endeavors there is something of error, something of sin—ought I not to be continually crying to God for pardon and involving His Grace?

And are we not constantly liable to new temptations? May we not fall into grosser sins than we have up to now committed unless we are preserved by a power beyond our own? O pray perpetually—for you know not what temptations may assail you. Pray that you enter not into temptation. If perhaps in some favored moment we could imagine ourselves to have exhausted all the list of our needs. Were we enjoying complete pardon and full assurance—did we stand upon the mountain's brow bathing our foreheads in the sunlight of God's favor—if we had no fear, no care, no trouble of our own to harass us, yet we might not therefore cease to pray!

The interests of others, our kindred, our neighbors, our fellow creatures might—ah, MUST—then start up before us and claim that we should bear upon our breasts their memorial. Think of the sinners around you hardening in transgression! Some of them dying, seared with guilt or frenzied with despair! O Brethren, how could you cease to intercede for others—if it were possible, which it is not—that you should have no further need to supplicate for yourselves? The grand old cause which we have espoused, and the Christ who has espoused our cause—both these demand our prayers.

By the Truth of God whose banner waves above us! By the King's love who has ennobled us—to whose Person fires us this day with ardor for His Cross, and zeal for His Gospel—we are constrained to unwavering devotion! So spoke the Gospel of old, and so does the Spirit of God prompt us now. "Prayer also shall be made for Him continually. And daily shall He be praised." O that in our case the prediction might be verified, the promise fulfilled!

Not so the hypocrite—he will not have it on this fashion. Enough for him to have prayers on Sunday. Enough to get through family prayers at any rate, and if that does not please you, the morning prayer and the evening prayer shall be said by rote at the bedside—will not these suffice? Praying all day long? Why he considers that it would be almost as bad as Heaven, where they are singing without ceasing. So he turns on his heels, and says he will have none of it. Nor shall he!

For where God is, he shall not go. The Lord will tell him, "I never knew you: depart from me, you worker of iniquity."

"Will he always call upon God?" The question may be an enquiry as to IMPORTUNITY. Will the hypocrite pray importunately? He will do no such thing! I have heard farmers talk about the way to know a good horse. It will serve me to illustrate the way to tell a good Christian. Some horses, when they get into the traces, pull. And when they feel the load move they work with all their might. But if they tug and the load does not stir, they are not for drawing any longer. There is a breed of really good horses in Suffolk which will tug at a dead weight, and if they were harnessed to a post, they would pull till they dropped though nothing stirred.

It is so with a lively Christian. If he is seeking a great favor from God, he prays, whether he gets it or not, right on—he cannot take a denial. If he knows his petition to be according to God's will and promise, he pleads the blood of Jesus about it. And if he does not get an answer at once, he says, "My Soul, wait"—WAIT! A grand word—"wait only upon God. For my expectation is from Him."

As for the hypocrite, if he gets into a Church and there is a Prayer Meeting and he feels, "Well, there is a fire kindling and an excitement getting up"—ah, how that man can pray! The wagon is moving behind him, and he is very willing to pull. But the sincere Believer says, "I do not perceive any revival yet. I do not hear of many conversions. Never mind, we have prayed that God will glorify His dear Son—we will keep on praying. If the blessing does not come in one week, we will try three. If it does not come in three weeks, we will try three months. If it does not come in three months, we shall still keep on for three years.

"And if it does not come in three years, we will plead on for thirty years. And if it does not come then, we will say, 'Let Your work appear unto Your servants, and your Glory unto their children.' We will plead on until we die, and mingle with those who beheld the promise afar off. They were persuaded of it, prayed for it, and died believing it would be fulfilled." Such prayer would not be wasted breath. It is treasure put out to interest—seed sown for a future harvest. It is the aspiration of saints kindled by the Inspiration of God. The genuine Believer knows how to tug. Jacob, when he came to Jabbok, found that the angel was not easily to be conquered. He laid hold of Him, but the angel did not yield the blessing.

Something more must be done. Had Jacob been a hypocrite he would have let the angel loose at once, but being one of the Lord's own, he said, "I will not let You go, except You bless me." When the angel touched him in the hollow of his thigh and made the sinew shrink, had Jacob been a hypocrite he would have thought, "I have had enough of this already. I may be made to shrink all over. I cannot tell what may happen next. I will have no more of this midnight encounter with an unknown visitor. I will get me back to my tent."

But no. He meant to prevail, and though he felt the pain, Yet he said—

"With You all night I mean to stay, And wrestle till the break of day."

He did so and became a prince from that night. Will you take a denial from God? You shall have it! O importunate Christian, you are he whom God loves! Alas for those who only give, as it were, runaway knocks at the door of Heaven, like boys in the street that knock and run away—they shall never find the blessing. Oh, to continue in prayer! It is the very test of sincerity. That is why of the

hypocrite it is said, "Will he always call upon God?" A hypocrite leaves off praying in either case. He leaves off if he does not get what he asks for, as I have shown you. And he leaves off if he does get what he asks for. Has he asked to be recovered from sickness when ill? If he gets well, what cares he for praying again?

Did he pray that he might not die? Oh, what a long face he drew, and what drawling professions of repentance he groaned out! But when his health is regained, and his nerves braced—his spirits cheered, and his manly vigor has come back to him—where are his prayers? Where are the vows his soul made in anguish? He has forgotten them all. That he is a hypocrite is palpable, for he leaves off praying if he does not get heard— and if he does. There is no keeping this man up to God's statute or his own promise. He has not the heart for true devotion, and soon fails in the attempt to exercise it.

"Will He always call upon God?" Here is the trial of PERSEVERANCE. Will he always continue to pray in the future? Will he pray in years to come, as he now professes to do? I call to see him when he is very sick. The doctor gives a very poor account of him. His wife is weeping. All over the house there is great anxiety. I sit down by his bedside. I talk to him, and he says, "Oh, yes, yes, yes." He agrees with all I say, and he tells me he believes in Jesus. And when he can sit up, he cries, "God be merciful to me."

His dear friends are godly people. They feel so pleased. They look forward to his recovery, and reckon upon seeing him a new creature—a disciple of Christ. Besides, he has told them that when he gets up, his will be an earnest life of faith and obedience to the Lord. He will not be a mere professor—he means to throw his whole soul into the Master's service! Now look at him. He recovered. And when he broke forth from that sick chamber, and was able to dispense with the ministry of those gentle patient women who nursed him and prayed for him, what does the hypocrite do? Oh, he says he was a fool to think and speak as he did! He admits he was frightened, but he disclaims every pious expression as an infirmity of his distracted brain—the delirium of his malady—surely not the utterance of his reason! And he recants all his confessions like the atheist in Addison's "Spectator." Addison tells us that certain sailors heard that an atheist was on board their vessel—they did not know what an atheist was, but they thought it must be some odd fish. And when told it was a man who did not believe in God, they said, "Captain, it would be an uncommonly good thing to pitch him overboard."

Presently a storm comes on and the atheist is dreadfully sick and very fearful. There, on the deck, he is seen crying to God for mercy and whining like a child that he is afraid he will be lost and sink to Hell. This is the usual courage of atheism! But when the coward reached the shore he begged the gentlemen who heard him pray to think nothing of it, for indeed, he did not know what he was saying. He had, no doubt, uttered a great deal of nonsense. There are plenty of that sort—who pray in danger—but brag when they get clear of the storm. Hereby the hypocrite is discovered. Once take away from him the trouble and you do away with the motive for which he put on the cloak of religion.

He is like a boy's top which will spin as long as you whip it. The man will pray while he smarts, but not one whit longer. The hypocrite will pray today, in a society congenial for prayer, but he will discard prayer tomorrow when he gets laughed at for it in his business. Some old friend of his drops in, who has heard that he has been converted, and he begins to ridicule him. He asks him

whether he has really turned a Methodist? He makes some coarse remarks rather to the chagrin of our courageous friend, till he, who set out so boldly to Heaven with his prayers, feels quite small in the presence of the skeptic.

It he were right in heart he would not only have a proper answer to give to the mocker, but in all probability he would carry the war into the enemy's country and make his antagonist feel the folly of his sins and the insanity of his conduct in living without a God and without a Savior. The meet object of ridicule and contempt is the godless, the Christless man. The Christian need never be ashamed or lower his colors. The hypocrite may well blush and hide his head for if there is any creature that is contemptible, it is a man who has not his heart where he professes it to be.

Neither will such a one always call upon God if he gets into company where he is much flattered. He feels, then, that he has degraded himself somewhat by associating with such low, mean people as those who make up the Church of God. And if he prospers in business, then he considers that the people he once worshipped with are rather inferior to himself—he must go to the world's church—he must find a fashionable place where he can hear a gospel that is not for the poor and needy, but for those who have the key of aristocratic drawing-rooms and the select assemblies.

His principles—well, he is not very particular—he swallows them. Probably his nonconformity was a mistake. The verities which his fathers suffered martyrdom to defend, for which they were deprived of their possessions, driven as exiles from their country, or cast into prison, he flings away as though they were of no value whatever. Many have fallen from us through the temptations of prosperity who stood firmly enough under persecution and adversity. It is another form of the same test, "Will he always call upon God?"

Besides, if none of these things should occur, the man who is not savingly converted and a genuine Christian generally gives up his religion after a time because the novelty of it dies off. He is like the stony ground that received the seed, and because there was no depth of earth the sun could play upon it with great force, and up it sprang in great haste. But because there was no depth of earth, therefore it soon was scorched. So this man is easily impressible, feels quickly, and acts promptly under the influence of a highly emotional nature. Says he, "Yes, I will go to Heaven," as he inwardly responds to the appeal of some earnest minister.

He thinks he is converted, but we had better not be quite so sure as he is. "Wait a bit, wait a bit." He cools as fast as he was heated. Like thorns under a pot that crackle and blaze and die out, leaving but a handful of ashes, so is it with all his godliness. Before long he gets tired of religion, he cannot stay with it—what a weariness it is! If he perseveres awhile, it is no more pleasure to him than a pack is to a pack horse. He keeps on as a matter of formality—he has got into it and he does not see how to break away—but he likes it no better than an owl loves daylight. He holds on to his forms of prayer with no heart for prayer—and what a wretched thing that is!

I have known people who felt bound to keep up their respectability when they had little or no income. Their debts were always increasing, their respectability was always tottering, and the strain upon their dignity was exhausting their utmost resources. Such persons I have considered to be the poorest of the poor. An unhappy life they lead, they never feel at ease. But what an awful thing it is to have to keep up a spiritual respectability with no spiritual income—to overflow with gracious talk when there is no well of Living Water springing up within the soul—to be under the

obligation to pay court to the sanctuary while the heart is wandering on the mountain. To be bound to speak gracious words and yet possess no gracious thoughts to prompt their utterance.

O Man, you are one of the devil's double martyrs because you have to suffer for him here in the distaste and nausea of your hypocritical profession, and then you will be made to suffer hereafter also for having dared to insult God and ruin your soul by being insincere in your profession of faith in Jesus Christ! I may be coming close to home to some persons before me—I am certainly pressing my own conscience very severely. I suppose there is no one among us who does not feel that this is a very searching matter.

Well, dear Friends, if our hearts condemn us not, only then have we peace towards God. But if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. Let us confess to Him all past failures, and though we may not be conscious of hypocrisy (and I trust we are not so), yet, let us say, "Lord, search and try me, and know my ways. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the Way everlasting."

I was speaking with a gentleman last night, and I said to him, "You are a director of such a Life Assurance Company, are you not?" "Yes," he said. "Well," I said, "yours is a poor society, is it not?" "It is a very good one," he replied, "a very good one." "But it is very low down in the list." "What list is that?" "Why, the list that has been sent round by certain persons to let the public see the condition of the life assurance companies." "Well," said he, "where is it to be seen?" "Oh, never mind where it is to be seen—is it true?" "No, it is not true. Our Society stands well—admirably well." "How so?" "Well, you know such a man, he is an excellent actuary and a man of honor."

"Yes." "Well, when we employed him to go over our accounts, we said just this to him—'Take the figures, examine them thoroughly, sift our accounts, and tell us where the figures land. Tell us just that, neither less nor more. Do not shirk the truth in the slightest degree. If we are in a bankrupt state, tell us. If we are flourishing, tell us so.' " My friend has convinced me that his office is not what I feared it was. I have much confidence in any man's business when he wishes to know and to publish the unvarnished truth.

I have great confidence in the sincerity of any Christian man who says habitually and truthfully, "Lord, let me know the very worst of my case, whatever it is. Even if all my fair prospects and bright ideals should be but dreams—the fabric of a vision. If yonder prospect before me of green fields and flowing hills should be but an awful mirage, and on the morrow should change into the hot burning desert of an awful reality—so be it— only let me know the truth. Lead me in a plain path. Let me be sincere before You, O You heart-searching, rein-trying God!"

Let us, with such frank candor, such ingenuous simplicity come before the Lord. Let as many of us as fear the Lord and distrust ourselves take refuge in His Omniscience against the jealousies and suspicions which haunt our own breasts. And let us do better still—let us hasten anew to the Cross of Jesus and thus end our difficulties by accepting afresh the sinners' Savior. When I have a knot to untie as to my evidence of being a child of God, and I cannot untie it, I usually follow Alexander's example with the Gordian knot, and cut it.

How do I cut it? Why, in this way. Say, O Conscience, this is wrong, and thus is wrong. You say, O Satan, my faith is a delusion, my experience a fiction, my profession a lie. Be it so, then, I will not dispute it, I end that matter. If I am no saint, I am a sinner—there can be no doubt about that! The

devil himself is defied to question that. Then it is written that, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." And to sinners is the Gospel preached, "He that believes on Him is not condemned."

By His Grace I do believe on Him. If I never did before I will, by His Grace, now—and all my transgressions are therefore blotted out! And now, Lord, grant me Grace to begin again, and from this time forth let me live the life of faith, the life of prayer. Let me be one of those who will pray always. Let me be one of those who will pray when they are dying, having prayed all their lives. Prayer is our very life—ceasing prayer we cease to live! As long as we are here preserved in spiritual life we must pray. Lord, grant it may be so with each one here present, through the power of Your Spirit, and the merit of Jesus' blood. Amen, and Amen.

Portion of Scripture Read Before Sermon—Job 27:1-23

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Job 27,2 #2557 - A Vexed Soul Comforted

A VEXED SOUL COMFORTED

NO. 2557

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1898.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JANUARY 21, 1883.

"The Almighty has vexed my soul."

Job 27:2.

THE word, "who," was put into this verse by the translators, but it is not needed. It is better as I have read it to you, "The Almighty has vexed my soul." The marginal reading is, perhaps, a more exact translation of the original—"The Almighty has embittered my soul." From this we learn that a good man may have his soul vexed. He may not be able to preserve the serenity of his mind. We think and think rightly, that a Christian man should "glory in tribulations, also," and rise superior to all outward afflictions. But it is not always so with us. It is necessary, sometimes, that we should be "in heaviness through manifold temptations." Not only are the temptations needed for the trial of our faith, but it is even necessary that we should be in heaviness through them. I hardly imagine that the most quiet and restful Believers have always been unruffled. I can scarcely think that even those whose peace is like a river have always been made to flow on with calm and equable current. Even to rivers there are rapids and cataracts, and so, I think, in the most smoothly-flowing life, there surely must be breaks of distraction and of distress. At any rate, it was so with Job. His afflictions, aggravated by the accusations of his so-called friends, at last made the iron enter into his very soul and his spirit was so troubled that he cried, "The Almighty has embittered my soul!"

It is also clear, from our text, that a good man may trace the vexation of his soul distinctly to God. It was not merely that Job's former troubles had come from God, for he had borne up under them—when all he had was gone, he had still blessed the name of the Lord with holy serenity. But God had permitted these three eminent and distinguished men, mighty in speech, to come about him, to rub salt into his wounds, and so to increase his agony. At first, too, God did not seem to help him in the debate, although afterwards He answered all the accusations of Job's friends and put them to the rout. Yet, for a time, Job had to stand like a solitary champion against all three of them and, against young Elihu, too. So he looked up to Heaven and he said, "The Almighty has embit

Volume 44 1tered my soul. That is the end of the controversy. I can see from where all my troubles come."

Advancing a step further, we notice that in all this, Job did not rebel against God, or speak a word against Him. He swore by that very God who had vexed his soul. See how it stands here—"As God lives, who has taken away my judgment, and the Almighty, who has vexed my soul." He stood fast to it that this God was the true God. He called Him good, he believed Him to be almighty—it never occurred to Job to bring a railing accusation against God, or to start aside from his allegiance to Him. He is a truly brave man who can say with Job, "'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' Let God deal with me as He will, yet He is good and I will praise His name. What if He has vexed my soul? He has a right to vex me, so I will not kick against the pricks. Let Him grieve me, let Him put gall and wormwood into my cup if so it shall please Him, but still will I magnify His name, for He is good and only good." Here is the strength of the saints—here is the glory which God gets out of true Believers—that they cannot and will not be soured against their God!

Now go another step and notice that this embittering of Job's soul was intended for his good. The Patriarch was to have his wealth doubled and he, therefore, needed double Grace that he might be able to bear the burden. He was also to be a far holier man than he had been at the first. Perfect and upright as he seemed to be, he was to rise a stage higher. If his character had been deficient in anything, perhaps it was deficient in humility. Truly Job was no proud man, he was generous, kind and meek, but, possibly, he had a little too high a notion of his own character, so even that must be taken away from him. Other Divine Graces must be added to those he already possessed. He must have a tenderness of spirit which appears to have been lacking. He must become as gentle as a maid. As he had been firm as a man of war, consequently, this bitterness of soul was meant to help him towards perfection of character. When that end was accomplished, all the bitterness was turned into sweetness. God made the travail of his soul to be forgotten by reason of the joy that came of it. Job no longer thought of the dunghill and the potsherd, and the lost sheep, and the consumed camels—he only thought of the goodness of God who had restored everything to him, again, and given him back the dew of his youth and the freshness of his spirit.

Child of God, are you vexed and embittered in soul? Then bravely accept the trial as coming from your Father and say, "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Press on through the cloud which now lowers directly in your pathway—it may be with you as it was with the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, "they feared as they entered the cloud," yet in that cloud they saw their Master's Glory and they found it good to be there. Fear not, have confidence in God—all your sorrows shall yet end in joy and the thing which you deplore, today, shall be the subject of tomorrow's sweetest songs. The Egyptians whom you have seen today, you shall see no more forever. Therefore, be of good courage and let your hearts be strengthened.

I am going to take the text right away from its connection. Having explained it as it relates to Job and those like Job, I want to use it for the benefit of anyone else who can fitly use the expression, "The Almighty has vexed my soul." My sermon will be like an archer's arrow—God knows where the heart is at which I am aiming. I draw the bow at a venture—the Lord will direct the bolt between the joints of the harness of the one it is intended to strike.

I. First, I shall speak upon A PERSONAL FACT. Many a person has to say, "The Almighty has embittered my soul."

This happened to you, dear Friend, perhaps, through a series of very remarkable troubles. Few persons were happier than Job and few have found misfortunes tread so fast upon one another's heels. What were the troubles in your case? It may be that one child was taken away and then another—and yet a third. Or, perhaps, your infant was carried to the grave, to be soon followed by its dear mother, and you are left to mourn alone. Bereavement has followed bereavement with you until your very soul is embittered. Or it may be that there is one ill at home and you fear that precious life cannot be preserved—your cup seems full of trembling. Or, possibly, you have had a series of disasters in business such as you could not have foreseen or prevented. It seems, to you, indeed, as if no man was ever so unsuccessful—you have not prospered in anything. Wherever you have put your hand, it has been like the hoof of the Tartar's horse which turns the meadow into a desert—nothing goes well with you. Perhaps you have desired to be a man of learning. You have worked very hard and now your health is failing you, so that you cannot go through the examination for which you have been preparing. You would willingly die at your post if you had a hope of gaining the honor to which you aspire, but this is denied you. On the very doorstep of success, you are stopped. God seems to have embittered your life.

Or you of the tender heart have been disappointed and rejected, and your love has been thrown away. Or you of the energetic spirit have been foiled and driven back so many times that you perceive that your attempts are fruitless. Or you, a man of true integrity, have been cruelly slandered and you feel as if you could not bear up under the false charge that is in the air all around you. Ah, I know what that means! There are many like you, with whom the Almighty is dealing in all wisdom and goodness, as I shall have to show you.

It may be, however, that you have not had a succession of troubles, but you have had one trial constantly gnawing at your heart. It is only one, but that one you are half-ashamed to mention, for it seems so trifling when you try to tell it to another. But to you it is as when a wasp stings and continues to sting—it irritates and worries you. You try patience, but you have not much of that virtue. You seek to escape from the trouble, but it is always boring into your very heart. It is only some one little thing—not the devil, only a messenger of Satan, one of his errand boys, one of the small fry of trouble. You cannot make out how you can be so foolish as to let it worry you, but it does. If you rise up early, or if you sit up late, it is still there tormenting you. You cannot get rid of it and you cry, "The Almighty has embittered my soul." Time was when you would have laughed at such things and put them aside with a wave of your hand—but now they follow you into business, they are with you at the desk, they come home with you, they go to bed with you—and they worry you even in your dreams.

Perhaps I have not yet hit the mark with you, my Friend. It is neither a succession of troubles nor yet any one trouble. In fact, you have no trouble at all in the sense of which I have been speaking. Your business prospers, you are in fine health, your children are about you, everyone holds you in good esteem—yet your very soul is embittered. I hope that it has become saddened through a sense of sin. At one time you did not think that there was any fault to be found with you, but you have had a peep in the mirror of the Word, the Spirit of God holding the candle. You have had a glimpse of yourself, your inner life and your condition before God and, therefore, your soul is

vexed. Ah, many of us have gone through that experience and, wretched as it is, we congratulate you upon it! We are glad that it is so with you!

Is it more than a sense of sin? Is it a sense of wrath as well? Does it strike you that God is angry with you and has turned His hand against you? Does this seem to loosen the very joints of your bones? Ah, this is a dreadful state of heart, indeed—to feel God's hand day and night upon you till your moisture is turned into the drought of summer! Yet, again I congratulate you on it, for the pilgrim path to Heaven is by Weeping Cross—the road to joy and peace is by the way of a sense of sin and a sense of the Lord's anger!

It may be that this is not exactly your case, but you are restless and weary. Somehow you cannot be easy, you cannot be at peace. Someone recommended you go to a play, but it seemed such a dull piece of stupidity you came away worse than you went! Your doctor says that you must have a change of air. "Oh," you cry, "I have had 50 changes of air and I do not improve a bit!" You are even weary of that in which you once delighted. Your ordinary pursuits, which once satisfied you, now seem to be altogether stale, flat and unprofitable. The books that charmed your leisure have grown wearisome. The friends whose conversation once entranced you, now seem to talk but idle chit-chat and frivolity.

Besides all that, there is an undefined dread upon you. You cannot tell exactly what it is like, but you almost fear to fall asleep lest you should dream and dreaming should begin to feel the wrath to come. When you wake in the morning, you are sorry to find that you are where you are and you address yourself sadly to the day's business, saying, "Well, I will go on with it, but I have no joy in it at all. The Almighty has embittered my soul." This happens to hundreds and they do not know what it means, they cannot understand it—but I hope that I may be privileged to so explain it that some may have to say that never did a better thing happen to them than when they fell into this state—that never, in all their lives, did they take so blessed a turning as when they came down this dark lane and began to murmur, "The Almighty has embittered my soul."

II. From this personal fact of which I have spoken, I want to draw AN INSTRUCTIVE ARGUEMENT which has two edges.

The first is this. If the Almighty—note that word, "Almighty"—has vexed your soul as much as He has, how much more is He able to vex it? If He has embittered your life up to the present point and He is, indeed, almighty, what more of bitterness may He not yet give you? You may go from being very low in spirit to being yet more heavy even unto despair. You may even come to be like Bunyan's man in the iron cage, or like the demoniac wandering among the tombs! Remember what God has done in the case of some men and if He can do that on earth, what can He not do in Hell? If this world, which is the place of mercy, yet contains in it men so wretched that they would rather die than live, what must be the misery of those who linger in a state of eternal death—and yet from whom death forever flies? O my God, when my soul was broken as between the two great millstones of Your justice and Your wrath, how my spirit was alarmed! But if You could do this to me here, what could You not have done to me hereafter if I had passed out of this world into the next with unforgiven sin? I want everyone who is in sore soul-trouble to think over this solemn Truth of God and consider what God can yet do with him.

Now turn the argument the other way. If it is the Almighty who has troubled us, surely He can also comfort us. He that is strong to sink, is also strong to save. If He is almighty to embitter, He must also be almighty to sweeten. Draw, then, this comfortable conclusion—"I am not in such a state of misery that God cannot lift me right out of it into supreme joy." It is congenial to God's Nature to make His creatures happy. He delights not in their sorrow, but if, when He does make them sorrowful, He can make life unendurable—if His anger can fill a man with terror so that he fears his own steps and starts at his own shadow—if God can do that on the one hand, what can He not do on the other? He can turn our mourning into music! He can take off from us the ashes and the sackcloth and clothe us in beauty and delight! God can lift up your head, poor Mourner, sorrowing under sin and a fear of wrath. I tell you, God can at once forgive your sin, turn away all His wrath and give you a sense of perfect pardon—and with it a sense of his undying love! Oh, yes, that word, "Almighty," cuts both ways! It makes us tremble and so it kills our pride. But it also makes us hope and so it slays our despair. I put in that little piece of argument just by the way.

III. Now I come to my third point which is more directly in my road. And that is this. Here is A HEALTHFUL ENQUIRY for everyone whose soul has been vexed by God.

The enquiry is, first, is not God just in vexing my soul? Listen. Some of you have long vexed Him—you have grieved His Holy Spirit for years! Why, my dear Man, God called you when you were but a boy! Or very gently He drew you while you were yet a young man. You almost yielded to the importunity of a dying friend who is now in Heaven. Those were all gentle strokes, but you heeded them not—you would not return unto the Lord. And now, if He should see fit to lay His hand very heavily upon you and vex you in His hot displeasure, have you not first vexed Him? Have you not ill-used Him? If you would not come to Him in the light, it is very gracious of Him if He permits you to come in the dark. I do not wonder if He whips you to Himself, seeing that you would not come when, like a father beckoning a little child, He smiled at you and wooed you to Him.

I might say to others, if God brings you to Himself by a rough road, you must not wonder, for have not you many a time vexed your godly wife? When seeing friends who come to join the Church, I am often struck with the way in which converts have to confess that, in former days, they made it very hard for their families. There are some men who cannot speak without swearing—at the very name of Christ they begin to curse and to swear! They seem as if they hated their children for being good—and could not be too hard upon their wives because they try to be righteous in the sight of God. Well, if you vex God's people, you must not be surprised if He vexes you! He will give you a hard time of it, it may be, but if it ends in your salvation, I shall not need to pity you, however hard it may be for you! There is one thing more you may say to yourself, and that is, "It is much better to get to Heaven by a rough road than to go singing down to Hell. O my God, tear me in pieces, but save me! Let my conscience drive me to the very borders of despair if You will but give me the blood of Christ to quiet it. Only make sure work of my eternal salvation and I will not mind what I have to suffer!" I shall bless God for you, dear Friend, and you will bless God for yourself, too, if you are but brought to Him, even though you have to say, "The Almighty has vexed my soul."

Another point of enquiry is this—What can be God's design in vexing your soul? Surely He has a kind design in it all. God is never anything but good. Rest assured that He takes no delight in your

miseries—it is no pleasure to Him that you should sit, and sigh, and groan and cry. I mean that such an experience, in itself, affords Him no pleasure, but He has a design in it. What can that design be? May it not be, first, to make you think of Him? You forgot Him when the bread was plentiful upon the table, so He is going to try what a hungry belly will do for you when you would gladly fill it with the husks that the swine eat. You forgot Him when everything went merry as a marriage peal—it may be that you will remember Him, now that your children are dying, or your father is taken away! These trials are sent to remind you that there is a God. There are some men who go on by the space of 40 years, together, and whether there is a God or not, is a question which they do not care to answer. At least they live as if there were no God—they are practically atheists. This stroke has come that you may say, "Yes, there is a God, for I feel the rod that He holds in His hand. He is crushing me, He is grinding me to powder. I must think of Him." It may be, too, that He is sending this trial to let you know that He thinks of you. "Ah," you say, "I did not suppose that He thought of me. I thought that surely He had forgotten such an one as I am." But He does think of you. He has been thinking of you for many a day and calling and inviting you to Him—but you would neither listen nor obey—and now that He has come, He means to make you see that He loves you too well to let you be lost! You are having His blows right and left, to let you know that He thinks of you and will not let you perish. When God does not care for a man, He flings the reins onto His neck and says, "There! Let him go!" Now see how the horses tear away—you need not lash them— they will go as though they had wings and could fly! Leave a man to himself and his lusts drag him, post haste, to Hell. He pants to destroy himself! But when God loves a man, He pulls him up as you might pull your horse on to his haunches. He shall not do as he wills—the eternal God, in infinite mercy, will not let him! He tugs at the reins and makes the man feel that there is a mightier than he who will not let him ruin himself,

But who will restrain him from rushing to his destruction? Am I speaking to any who are in this plight? Let them not kick against God, but rather be grateful that He condescends thus to meddle with their sinful souls and check them in their mad career! I have spoken lately with some who were about to join this Church, who, if friends had said, five or six months ago, that they would have been sitting on that chair talking to me about their souls, would have cursed them to their faces! Yet they were obliged to come. The Lord had hold of them—they tried to break away, but He had them too firmly! They were caught by my Lord and Master as a good fisherman will catch a salmon, if once it takes his bait—he lets it run for a while and then pulls it up a bit, and then lets it go again. But he brings it to land at last—and I have had the pleasure of seeing many sinners thus safely caught by Christ! It may be, dear Friend, that the Almighty is vexing you to let you see that He loves you!

May it not be also for another reason—that He may wean you entirely from the world? He is making you loathe it. "Oh," you used to say, "I am a young man and I must see life!" Well, you have seen it, have you not? And do you not think that it is wonderfully like death and corruption? That which is called, "London life," is a foul, loathsome, crawling thing, fit only for the dunghill! Well, you have seen it, and you have had enough of it, have you not? Perhaps your very bones can tell what you gained by that kind of life. "Oh," you said, "but I must try the intoxicating cup!" Well, what did you think of it the morning after you tried it? "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contention? Who has babbling? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine—they that go to seek mixed wine." I saw a man of that kind in the

street, the other day. Once he was a most respectable man who could consort with others and be esteemed by them. Now he is dreadfully down at the heel. I think I saw a toe through each of his shoes and he looked like the wretched being that he is. He shuffled from place to place as if he did not wish to be seen—and he did not lift himself up until he got into the gin palace to take another draught of Hell-water— and then he seemed, for a minute, to be drawn straight again by that which made him crooked!

You know the man—is he here tonight? Dear Sir, have you not had sufficient strong drink? God has let you have enough of it that you may hate it from this hour and flee away from it, never to desire to go back to it again! I heard, at Boulogne, the story of a Frenchman who had been drinking heavily, and who threw himself into the harbor. Some sailors plunged in and rescued him. The man was on the deck of a ship, but in a minute he broke away from his keepers and jumped in again. It was not pleasant to be trying to save a madman, again and again, yet they did get him out and took him down below. But he rushed on deck and jumped in a third time. A man there said, "You leave him to me." So he jumped overboard and seized hold of him, put his head under the water and held him there. When he managed to get his head up, his rescuer gave him another ducking, and then another, till he just about filled him up with water. He said to himself, "I will sicken him of it, so that he will never jump in here again." He just diluted the eau-de-vie the man had taken and then he dragged him on board ship—and there was no fear of his jumping overboard any more! And I believe that, sometimes, the Lord acts like that with men. He did so with me—He made sin to be exceedingly bitter to my soul, till I loathed it—and it has often given me a trembling even to think of those sins that then were pleasurable to me. It is a blessed thing to be plucked out of the water and saved, once and for all, but a little of that sailor's style of sousing the drunkard—a little of those terrors and alarms that some of us felt is not lost! And when the Lord thus deals with sinners, it is with the design that they may never want to go back to those sins again. They have had their full of them and henceforth they will keep clear of them. It may be that the Almighty vexed some of you for this cause, that you might, from then on, hate sin with a perfect hatred.

Do you say, my Friend, that I have not been describing you? You are still a gentleman, an excellent well-to-do man? You have done nothing wrong in the way of vice, but still you cannot rest? No, and God grant that you never may rest till you come humbly to the Savior's feet, confess your sin and look to Him alone for salvation! Then you shall rest with that deep "peace which passes all understanding," which shall, "keep your heart and mind by Christ Jesus" forever and ever.

I think I hear someone say (and with that I will finish), "As the Almighty has vexed my soul; what had I better do? I thought, Sir, when I came in here that I was a castaway, but I see that I am the man you are looking after. I thought that I was too wretched to be saved, but now I perceive that it is to the wretched that you are preaching. It is for the mourning, the melancholy and the desponding. What had I better do?" Do? Go home and shut your door, and have an hour alone with yourself and God! You can afford that time—it is Sunday night and you do not need the time for anything else. That hour alone with God may be the crisis of your whole life—try it!

"And when I am alone with God, what had I better do?" Well, first, tell Him all your grief. Then tell Him all your sin—all you can remember. Hide nothing from Him! Lay it all, naked and bare, before

Him. Then ask Him to blot it all out, once and for all, for Jesus Christ's sake. Tell Him that you can never rest till you are at peace with Him. Tell Him that you accept His way of making peace, namely, by the blood of the Cross. Tell Him that you are now willing to trust His dear Son for everything and to accept salvation freely as the gift of Sovereign Grace. If you do so, you will rise from your knees a happy man and, what is more, a renewed man! I will stand bondsman for God about this matter. If there is this honest confession, this hearty prayer and this simple acceptance of Christ as your Savior, the days of your mourning are ended, the daylight of your spirit shall be beginning and I should not wonder if many of your present troubles come to an end! Certainly your heart-ache shall be ended and ended at once. Oh, that you would accept my Savior!

Sometimes, when I am thinking about my Hearers and my work, I seem to take God's part instead of yours, and to say, "O God, I have preached Christ to them. I have told them about Your dear Son and how Your fatherly heart parted with Him that He might die that men might live—yet they do not care for Him! They will not have Your Son. They will not accept the pardon that Jesus bought." If the Lord were to say to me, "Then never go and say another word to them, they have so insulted Me in refusing such a gift," I have at times felt as if I would say, "Lord, that is quite right. I do not want to have anything more to do with them as they treat You so shamefully." But we have not reached that point yet, so once more I put it to you—have you not delayed long enough? Have you not questioned long enough? Have you not turned away from the Savior long enough? And now that the arrows of God are sticking in you, will you not ask Him to draw them out? Will you not plead that the precious blood of Christ may be balm to heal your wounds?

Oh, come to Him! In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I beseech you, come! By amazing love and amazing pity, by wondrous Grace that abounds over sin, come and welcome! Jesus said, "He that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out." Then come to Him and come now! Blessed Spirit, draw them! Draw them now, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Job 27:1-23

Remember that Job's friends had accused him of having committed some great sin which would account for his great sorrows. The good man is naturally very indignant and he uses the strongest possible language to cast away from himself with horror the charges which they brought against him in the day of his grief. Verses 1-4. Moreover Job continued his parable and said, As God lives, who has taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who has vexed my soul; all the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. He felt that it would be wicked for him to confess to what he had never done—it would be deceit for him to acknowledge crimes which he had never committed. Therefore he most solemnly declares, by the living God, that he never will permit the lie to pass his lips. He had not transgressed against God in the way his friends insinuated and he would not admit that he had.

5. God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove my integrity from me. We are bound to keep to the truth. No man is permitted, with mock humility, to make himself out to be what he is not. Job was right, so far in standing up for the integrity of his character, for he was a man of such uprightness that even the devil could not find fault with him. He was such a holy man that God

could say to Satan, "Have you considered My servant, Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God and eschews evil?" And all that the devil could do was to insinuate that he had a selfish motive for his goodness. "Have not You made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Your hand, now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse You to Your face." Job was upright, yet we are never so right but what there is a mixture of wrong with our right! A man may very easily become selfrighteous when he is defending his own character. There may be a 1ack of admissions of faults unperceived. There may be a blindness to faults that ought to have been perceived—and something of that imperfection, doubtless, was in the Patriarch.

6. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live. There he went too far, for he had not yet seen God as he afterwards saw Him. Before man, there was nothing with which he needed to reproach himself. But how he changed his tone when God drew near to him! Then he said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear: but now my eyes see You. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." If we knew more of God, we would think less of ourselves. If those who consider themselves perfect, had any idea of what perfection is, their comeliness would be turned in them to corruption!

7, 8. Let my enemy be as the wicked, and he that rises up against me as the unrighteous. For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when God takes away his soul? That is a very solemn, searching question. If a man tries to play fast and loose with God, if he is a hypocrite, and if he should gain by his hypocrisy all that he tries to gain, namely, repute among men, "what is his hope when God takes away his soul?" Then, his hope is turned to horror, for he has to stand before Him who cannot be deceived, but who reads him through and through, and casts him away because he has dared to insult his Maker by attempting to deceive Omniscience. Oh, may you and I never play the hypocrite's part! There cannot be a more foolish thing and there cannot be a more wicked thing.

9. Will God hear his cry when trouble comes upon him? That is one of the tests of the hypocrite—"Will God hear his cry when trouble comes upon him?" Will the hypocrite cry to God at all? Will he not give up even his profession of religion when he loses his prosperity? And if he does cry, will God hear the double-tongued man?

10. Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God? These questions, while they condemn those who are hypocrites, are comforting to many a sincere heart. Dear Friend, do you delight yourself in God? Do you really admire Him, love Him and seek to glorify Him? Then you are no hypocrite, for no hypocrite ever found delight in religion and especially no hypocrite ever found delight in God Himself!

"Will he always call upon God?" No, there are certain times when he will cease to pray. Pleasure enchants him and he will not pray. Or, perhaps, he is so discouraged and despairing that he cannot pray. There are times when the hypocrite gives up praying, but the Christian cannot give it up—it is his vital breath—he must pray. No sorrow is so deep as to take him off it! No joy is so fascinating as to seduce him from prayer. But as for the hypocrite, "Will he always call upon God?" No, you may rest assured that he will not.

11. I will teach you by the hand of God. Or, better, as the margin runs, "I will teach you being in the hand of God." Being himself chastened and experiencing the teaching of God, Job says to his friends, "I will teach you."

11-14. That which is with the Almighty will I not conceal. Behold, all you yourselves have seen it; why then are you thus altogether vain? This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty. If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread. If God does not visit the hypocrite with punishment in his own person, it will certainly fall upon the next generation.

15-18. Those that remain of him shall be buried in death: and his widows shall not weep. Though he heaps up silver as the dust, and prepares raiment as the day; he may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver. He builds his house as a moth, and as a booth that the keeper makes. "He builds his house as a moth," which makes its home in the cloth and the servant's brush knocks it all out and destroys the moth's children, too. "And as a booth that the keeper makes." The hypocrite's house is no better than that little shanty which the keeper of a vineyard puts up with a few boughs or mats, to sit under it from the heat of the sun. God save us from being such poor builders as this! May we build a house that is founded on the Rock!

19. The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered: he opens his eyes, and he is not. He has grown rich by oppression, he has become great in the land by his hypocrisy, but he speedily goes down to the grave. God looks at him and he is gone.

20. Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest steals him away in the night. This is a parallel passage to that word of our Lord, "But he that hears, and does not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."

21. The east wind carries him away, and he departs and as a storm hurls him out of his place. These are your great ones, your proud ones, your strong men that accomplish nothing and would insure their own lives to a certainty for the next 20 years! Look how they go! Shadows are not more evanescent! A poor moth is not more easily crushed.

22. For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would gladly flee out of His hand. The man would escape from God if he could. It was Job's glory, as we read just now, that he was in God's hand. But the hypocrite would gladly flee out of God's hand, yet that is altogether impossible.

23. Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place. Such ignominy shall be poured upon the hypocrite at the last, that all mankind shall endorse the sentence of God which condemns him! And shame and everlasting contempt shall be his portion. The Lord save all of us from such an awful doom, for Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FR0M "OUR OWN HYMN B00K"—605, 592, 555.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 28,7-8 #2862 - The Way of Wisdom

THE WAY OF WISDOM

NO. 2862

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1903.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 28, 1872.

"There is a path which no fowl knows, and which the vulture's eyes

have not seen; the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor

the fierce lion passed by it."

Job 28:7-8.

IN this chapter Job is speaking of the hidden treasures that are to be found deep down in the bowels of the earth. The keen eyes of the vultures, though they see their prey afar off, have never seen the gold, silver and other precious metals which lie in the dark places of the earth. And the lions, especially the young lions hungering for their prey, though they will lie in wait in their lairs in the dens and caves of the earth, have never been able to descend into places as deep as those that are opened up by men who seek after gold and silver.

Yet further on in the chapter we notice that Job refers to the search after wisdom and that he seems to say that though men should explore the deep places of the earth with all the diligence of miners seeking gold and silver, though they should exert all their mental force as miners use all their muscular vigor—and though they should employ all the machinery within their reach, as men do who pierce through the rocks in search of precious treasure—yet it is not within the range of human labor and skill to attain unto wisdom. That can only be found by another and a higher method. It must come to us by Revelation from God, for we cannot find it by our own efforts. I believe, therefore, that I am justified in using the expressions which are found in my text in a spiritual sense, for I think that Job meant to teach us not only what is true of the treasures hidden in the earth, but also something concerning the path of wisdom which is altogether beyond the understanding of the most piercing eyes of reason or imagination.

I shall use the language of our text, first, in reference to the way of God which is, in the highest sense, the way of wisdom. And then, secondly, in reference to the path of the truly wise which is also, secondarily, the path of wisdom as far as mortal man can be wise—as far as he who is born of a woman can walk in the way of wisdom.

I. First, then, IN REFERENCE TO THE WAY OF GOD. His way in dealing with men is past our power to find out.

Think, first of all, of the way of God in relation to predestination and free agency. Many have failed to understand how everything, from the

Volume 49 1smallest event to the greatest, can be ordained and fixed—and yet how it can be equally true that man is a responsible being and that he acts freely, choosing the evil and rejecting the good. Many have tried to reconcile these two things and various schemes of theology have been formulated with the objective of bringing them into harmony. I do not believe that they are two parallel lines which can never meet, but I do believe that for all practical purposes, they are so nearly parallel that we might regard them as being so. They do meet, but only in the Infinite mind of God is there a converging point where they melt into one! As a matter of practical, everyday experience with each one of us, they continually melt into one, but, as far as all finite understanding goes, I do not believe that any created intellect can find where they meet! Only the Uncreated as yet knows this.

It would be a very simple thing to understand the predestination of God if men were clay in the hands of the potter and nothing more. That figure is rightly used in the Scriptures because it reveals one side of the Truth of God—if it contained the whole Truth, the difficulty that puzzles so many would entirely cease. But man is not only clay, he is a great deal more than that, for God has made him an intelligent being and given him understanding and judgment and, above all, will. Fallen and depraved, but still not destroyed, are our judgment, our understanding and our power to will. They are all under bondage, but they are still within us. If we were simply blocks of wood, like the beams and timbers in this building, it would be easy to understand how God could prearrange where we should be put and what purpose we should serve. But it is not easy. No, it is difficult! I venture to say that it is impossible for us to understand how predestination should come true in every jot and tittle, fix everything and yet that there should never be in the whole history of mankind a single violation of the will or a single use of constraint—other than fit and proper constraint—upon man so that he acts according to his own will, just as if there were no predestination whatever and yet, at the same time, the will of God is, in all respects, being carried out!

In order to get rid of this difficulty, there are some who deny either the one Truth or the other. Some seem to believe in a kind of free agency which virtually dethrones God, while others run to the opposite extreme by believing in a sort of fatalism which practically exonerates man from all blame. Both of these views are utterly false and I scarcely know which of the two is the more to be deprecated. We are bound to believe both sides of the Truth revealed in the Scriptures, so I admit that when a Calvinist says that all things happen according to the predestination of God, he speaks the Truth of God—and I am willing to be called a Calvinist. But when an Arminian says that when a man sins, the sin is his own, and that if he continues in sin and perishes, his eternal damnation will lie entirely at his own door, I believe that he, also, speaks the Truth of God—though I am not willing to be called an Arminian! The fact is, there is some Truth in both these systems of theology—the mischief is that, in order to make a human system appear to be complete, men ignore a certain Truth, which they do not know how to put into the scheme which they have formed and, very often, that very Truth, which they ignore, proves to be like the stone which the builders

rejected—one of the headstones of the corner—and their building suffers serious damage through its omission.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, if I could fully understand these two Truths of God and could clearly expound them to you. If I could prove to you that they are perfectly consistent with one another, I would be glad to do so and to escape the censures which some people constantly pour upon those who are trying to preach the whole of revealed Truth. But it is more than my soul is worth for me to attempt to alter and trim God's Truth so as to make it pleasing to men! I preach it as I find it in God's Word. I am not responsible for what is in the Book—I am only responsible for telling out what I find there, as it is taught to me by the Holy Spirit. But mark this—to the mind of God there is no difficulty concerning these two Truths, though there is, to us, so much mystery and perplexity! It is all simple enough to Him. He is Omnipotent in the world of mind as well as in the world of matter and He is Omniscient—He knows everything, He foresees everything—so that there are no difficulties to Him. I suppose that if it will add to our happiness in Heaven for us to understand this way of God, which as yet the vulture's eyes have never seen, He will reveal it to us. Yet it may be that even there it will be of no practical use for us to understand it, but it will be better for us, even throughout eternity, to still continue as little children at our Heavenly Father's feet, believing a great deal which, even there, we cannot comprehend.

Even in this life I am as pleased not to know what God does not tell me as I am to know what He reveals to me! At least, if I am not, I ought to be, for that is the condition of a true disciple of Christ—to be inquisitive up to the point in which His Lord is communicative, but to stop there and say—"If, my Master, You have anything to say to me, yet, in Your wisdom, You know that I cannot bear it now, my ears are closed while Your tongue is still, and my heart asks for no more when You tell me that You have revealed enough." Believe me, Brothers and Sisters, there is a path which God takes which you cannot yet understand. You may look and look, and look as with eagle's eyes, but you may blind those eyes by glaring at the sun. You may force your way, as with a lion's heart, into the deep mysteries of God, but you must beware lest you perish in the pit of controversy, or be taken, as in a net, in difficulties which you cannot break through doubting and enquiring man! Be satisfied that God is infinitely above you and that you can no more comprehend Him than your hand can hold the ocean, or your fingers grip the sun! If there were no mysteries in our holy faith, we might well believe that it was devised by men like ourselves, for, if men could fully understand it, men might have invented it. But as it is far beyond the comprehension of the mightiest human intellect, we recognize that it is the work of the Infinite God. Infinite must His Gospel and His Truth be because He is, Himself, Infinite! And dark and mysterious must His pathway sometimes be, though He, Himself, dwells in light that is insufferable to mortal eyes. Finely does John Milton put this thought in his apostrophe to God—

"Dark with excessive bright Your skirts appear."

Passing on to another illustration of the same great Truth, I remind you that God is equally beyond our understanding in the accomplishment of the designs of His Providence. There are ways of God, in dealing with the human race, which are very perplexing to the judgment of such poor mortals as we are. We try to study a piece of history and especially if it is a short piece of history, it appears to us all tangled and confused. A further research, over a longer period, will often explain what could not be understood in the shorter range of vision. But even history as a whole, from the

Creation and the Fall until now, contains many strange puzzles to a man who believes that God is, through it all, working out His own Glory and that a part of His Glory will consist in producing the highest amount of good to the greatest number of His creatures.

What a mass of mysteries meets us on the very threshold of human history! The serpent in the Garden—how and why came it to be there? And the devil in the serpent, why was there a devil at all? And the evil that made the angel into a devil, why was that permitted? And all the evil that has been since then—why has it not been destroyed? We cannot answer any of these queries. The Negro's question to the missionary, "If God is stronger than Satan, why does not He kill him," is another enquiry which we cannot answer. Depend upon it, if it were, on the whole, best that the devil should be killed, he would be killed. And if it had been, after all, most for God's Glory that there should be no evil, there would have been none. We do not know how and why certain things have happened and we must be content not to know unless God reveals it to us.

All through history God seems to be aiming at a certain mark, yet His arrow does not hit the target as far as you and I can judge. Often He appears to do as the rifleman does, who knows that if he sent the ball in a direct line to the target, he would miss it, so he makes allowance for certain deflections which will be caused by the force of attraction, by the wind and various other opposing influences, and aims accordingly. God often proves that the nearest way to attain His end is to go round about—so, when He means to cleanse a man, He sometimes allows Him to first get more foul! When He intends to clothe him, He first strips him naked. When He resolves to enrich him, He first makes him as poor as Lazarus at the rich man's gate! And, strange to say, when He means to make him alive, He kills him. God's modes of procedure, then, allow for deflection and every other kind of influence—and are not to be understood by us. If you take the whole range of history and look at it carefully, you will be obliged to feel that if God has been working there, as we are quite sure He has, ordering all things with consummate Wisdom, then His pathway through the world is one which no vulture's eyes have ever seen and which no lion or lion's whelp has ever traveled.

It may be that some of you are, at the present moment, complaining of a certain Providential dealing of God with regard to you and that you are thinking and saying that it must be an evil Providence. Yet it is, all the while, one of the best things that has ever happened to you. That over which you are now mourning will give you good cause for singing in a little while. Probably that tribulation which fetches most tears from our eyes here, will be among the subjects of our choicest song in the eternal realms of joy! We need not know and we cannot know what God is doing, but we may be quite sure that He does all things well.

Very much is this also the Truth in another respect, namely, in the methods of His Grace. God will certainly save His chosen people. He will bring Home all His lost children, but how strangely does He deal with some of them! His pathway in Grace no vulture's eyes have ever seen and no lion or lion's whelp has ever trodden. I have known Him allow a child of His to go into sin after sin before He has saved him. A godly mother has anxiously prayed that her boy might be converted, but he has not been. He has grown up to manhood and there has been much tender solicitude for him and many prayers on his behalf. Yet he has passed twenty, thirty, or 40 years in sin and has grown worse and worse. It did not seem as if all this could be according to God's Grace, yet it was, for, in the mysterious Providence of God, this man was brought low by sin, humbled by the iniquity which carried him into the far country and led him to waste his substance in riotous living, and then—and

not till then—did he come to God!

His mother had gone to Heaven, doubting whether her prayers for him would ever be heard. Others who were anxious about him slept amidst the gods of the valley, not knowing, except by faith, that their supplications for him would be heard. And that man, because he had gone so far in sin, became the greater monument of the power of Sovereign Grace, was the better able to tell others what God had done, was the more firmly bound to Christ, was the more ardent in Christ's service through the gratitude he felt and became, for God's purposes, a better instrument than he would have been if he had been brought in sooner!

John Bunyan, if he had not been among the chief of sinners, might never have been among the chief of saints. Had he never been what he was—one of the worst men in the village—he might never have preached as he did about "Jerusalem Sinners Saved," and might never have so boldly declared that the biggest sinners should receive the greatest mercy, and that God should be most glorified in their salvation!

I know that some people have turned this great Truth to an evil purpose, for he who looks at God's way and sees the greatness of His Grace, may, if he is wicked enough, draw the inference that he may continue in sin that Grace may abound. Paul tells us plainly what the doom of such men will be—"whose damnation is just." A child of God draws no such evil inference as that from God's mercy, but he says, "After such love as that, how can I sin against the Lord?" So, in saving men, God traverses a path which no fowl knows, which the vulture's eyes have not seen, and the lion or the lion's whelp has not trodden. God knows best how to time His gift of Grace or His postponement of Grace—He knows why He chooses this man at this time and that man at that time—so let Him do as seems good in His sight, for He always does right and unto His name be praise forever and ever! Now, Beloved, I am persuaded that this Truth may also be applied to the great things of God which are yet to come, in the latter days, and in the eternity of Glory. I do not often preach upon the Book of Revelation, nor upon the marvels that are to occur during the millennial period, or at the time of the ingathering of the Jews and so on. I will tell you the reason why I do not and I think it is a sufficient one, namely, that I do not understand these things. If I do not have clear views about these things, I will leave them alone until I have. I have often studied them and I have never found anything as easy as the refuting of every view I have heard or read about the future—nor anything so difficult as to invent a view which somebody else could not refute! There are some great Truths of God about the future that are clearly revealed, such as the Second Coming of Christ, the flooding of the world with the Gospel so that all flesh shall see the salvation of God, the ingathering of the Jews to Christ, if not to their own land, and so on. But as to the order of the various events and the putting together of the various pieces of the puzzle, I believe that my text is true that "there is a path which no fowl knows, and which the vulture's eyes have not seen; the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it."

It is not easy to tell what Paul means in that wonderful passage, "Then comes the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God even the Father...that God may be all in all." What new worlds may yet be created, what revolts there may be among fresh orders of creatures, how many orders of creatures there may yet be in the universe and how great and comprehensive the vast dominions of Jehovah may be, we do not, at present, know—but we shall know all that we need to know in due time! It is enough for us to now know that our Bible is true, that Jesus Christ is

our Savior and that we shall be with Him where He is and behold His Glory forever and ever!

Why is there all this mystery? Is it not because God is so great? We can never gauge His greatness by our measuring line or plummet. We get utterly lost whenever we begin to estimate God's unsearchable greatness! Some of you have, perhaps, studied a little astronomy. You have begun to hear or read about the millions and millions of miles which some of the fixed stars are away from us and yet, far beyond those, there may be others from which we are so distant that we are, comparatively speaking, quite near to those that now seem so far away! In trying to realize these wonders in the heavens, one feels as though the brain needed fresh faculties to enable it to grasp even that which the telescope reveals, yet all the starry worlds which human eyes have gazed upon through the most powerful glass yet made, may only be like some tiny cove or bay upon the seashore of a universe which to us must be utterly boundless. Yet that universe, which we conceive to be boundless, is all known to the God who created and sustains it! We are utterly lost in the contemplation of the greatness of God's works—then how can we imagine that we can ever understand God who is infinitely greater than the greatest of the works of His hands? Then, next, are not all these things mysteries to us because we are so little? I do not merely mean those of us who are feeble and poor, and ignorant—but I mean the great divines, the doctors of the Sorbonne, the members of our Royal Societies, our D.D.'s, LL.D.'s, and all our most learned men! All are fools compared with the wisdom of the Omniscient! All are feeble compared with the Almighty. I do not know how much a gnat understands, but I feel sure that a gnat understands a far larger proportion of what I know, than I can comprehend of what God knows. A fly on the dome of St. Paul's has a very imperfect idea of the greatness and glories of the cathedral, a still more incomplete idea of London and a far more inadequate idea of England. Even if the fly knew England thoroughly, he would need to learn much more to enable him to understand the world! And then there would be the sun and the sun itself is only like a tiny point of light compared with the greater worlds in God's universe. If the fly could comprehend all those worlds, he would still be no appreciable way towards understanding God!

If you knew all that was to be known about a number of marbles that I had given to my sons to play with, that would not prove that you knew all about me—so, if we could understand everything about all the worlds that God has made, it would not prove that we could understand God Himself! He is infinitely above our loftiest conception and we are just nothing at all in comparison with Him. You talk very loudly about your opinion, your thoughts and your conclusions. Ah, poor Souls, the chattering of sparrows in the street is as much worthy to be called wisdom as the predilections of the most learned men among you apart from anything that they have been taught by God the Holy Spirit! All the wisdom that they have which they have learned by themselves is but varnished folly and nothing more!

Moreover, dear Friends, the powers we possess are absolutely insignificant compared with God's. In trying to comprehend the Almighty, we are like a child with a thimble, seeking to tell the size of the sea. We cannot, at our utmost, hold more than a thimbleful and, besides that, our thimble leaks! The powers that we have are warped and spoiled by sin and sinful influence. When we come into this world, our powers are very far from being fully developed and, as they are being developed, somebody or other comes along and warps us with prejudice in our early youth. And as we grow older, we make other prejudices of our own so that what we might know, we sometimes do not care to know. Also, our scales in which we try to weigh God are not accurate.

Instead of being true, they are all out of gear and utterly unreliable as well as inadequate to such a task! Our faculties are so disordered and disarranged by all manner of surrounding circumstances that we cannot comprehend much about Him who is incomprehensible even to the loftiest created intelligence. And, besides this, we have such a little time in which to learn about God. A child, going to school for five minutes, knows as much about Greek as we do about God in 70 years, apart from what He pleases to teach us by His Spirit! Even with regard to God's dealings with His people, what mistakes they make in their judgments! No doubt, Protestantism in England was, upon the whole, greatly strengthened and more deeply rooted by the persecutions under cruel Queen Mary. Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," (which could not have been written had not the martyrs suffered and died), is still, next to the Bible, the great master-gun of Protestantism. Yet many of the Protestants who lived in Mary's day must have felt that God had made an awful mistake in allowing that woman to sit upon the throne and to do so much towards putting down the Gospel of Christ by fire, sword and imprisonment! Yet they made a great mistake in judging by the few years of Mary's reign. God was judging more justly by the whole history of the land for hundreds of years to come! There is not much more wisdom in man's judgment of God than in the flies' fabled judgment of an elephant. It is said that a senate of flies once determined to form a judgment concerning an elephant, so one of them settled on the great creature's ear and walked all round it and then said that an elephant was a long flabby mass of flesh of a certain shape. Another fly had settled on one of the huge legs of the animal and he said that an elephant was a tall column, something like the trunk of a cedar. One lit somewhere on the back and he said that an elephant was a great moving plain, a sort of animal table-land.

The flies could not agree upon any theory of what the creature was like. The fact was that none of them had any clear idea of the whole elephant, but only a partial notion concerning the portion that they could manage to see. So, all that we can do, if we have 50 years in which to study the Scriptures, is to get some imperfect idea of a part of the great Truth of God. Yet some talk as if they knew all about it—like a man who says that he knows all about the Continent because he once landed at Boulogne for a few minutes and then crossed the Channel again! Suppose that we have landed on the shores of knowledge and that we have been there for 50 years—what is that compared with eternity?

What shall I further say before I leave this point? First, let none of us despond because we do not know everything. Let no one say, "I am not God's child because my knowledge is so limited." A grain of Divine Grace is worth more than a ton of knowledge! If you have but a spark of true faith in Jesus Christ, it is better than a whole volcano full of worldly wisdom! Do not say, "I cannot be saved because I cannot understand all mysteries." Who but God can understand them? Be thankful that the way of salvation is not a mystery! It is this—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Are you puzzled about the Doctrine of Election? Do not ever fall into the mistake of imagining that nobody goes to Heaven but those who understand that great Truth! There are many there who disbelieved it while they were here below, though I think they rejoice in it now. It is not essential to salvation that you should understand that or any other difficult Doctrine of the Scriptures. Do you believe in Jesus as your Savior? Then go your way and rest assured that you will, in due time, find yourself in Heaven! Again, let us never arraign God before our bar. It is a horrible thing for any man ever to say, "Well, if God acts like that, I do not see the

justice of it." How dare you even hint that the Judge of all the earth is not just? He has said, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion," so do not you say, "It cannot be so." Is it so written in God's Word? Then it is so just because it is there! If God has said anything, it is not right for you to ask for an explanation of His reason for saying it, or to summon Him to your judgment seat. What impertinence this is! He must always do right—He cannot do wrong!

Some have staggered over the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment because they could not see how that could be consistent with God's goodness. I have only one question to ask concerning that or any other Doctrine. Does God reveal it in the Scriptures? Then I believe it and leave to Him the vindication of His own consistency! I am sure that He will not inflict a pain upon any creature which that creature does not deserve, that He will never cause any sorrow or misery which is not absolutely necessary and that He will glorify Himself by doing the right, the loving, the kind thing in the end. If we do not see it to be so, it will be none the less so because we are blind! The finger on the lips is the right attitude for us in the presence of things revealed by God, or worked by God! As David said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth because You did it." If You did it, O Lord, there is no question about the rightness of it, for You are supreme and You ought to be supreme! There is none like You for goodness, for love, for wisdom. Your will ought to be, so let it be done on earth, as it is Heaven, let it be done everywhere, for what You do is always best!

II. I have not much time left for the second part of my discourse which is IN REFERENCE TO THE TRULY WISE, that is, to those who are wise according to Job's declaration in the 28th verse of this Chapter—"Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Concerning their path, we may truly say that no fowl knows it, no vulture's eyes have seen it, no lion or lion's whelp has trodden it.

First, the entrance of the Christian into that path is beyond human knowledge. Who can explain what it is to be born-again? The very figure used by our Savior implies a mystery. Our introduction into this world is shrouded in mystery—so is our introduction into the spiritual world, the world of Divine Grace. You will never be able to explain, even though you have experienced it, how the Spirit of God creates a living soul, as it were, within the ribs of death. How He breathes into our soul the breath of spiritual life so that we who were enemies to God, become the newborn children in His family. This secret cannot be told by mortal man, for he does not know it—it is known only to God.

And, next, the walk of the Christian along that path as equally beyond human understanding. How shall I tell you what it is to walk by faith? I have sometimes had, before my mind's eye, as it were, a vision. I thought I saw a great staircase made of light. There appeared to be nothing solid or earthly about it. I was called to ascend this staircase. Beneath my feet there seemed to be nothing. Each step I stood upon appeared to be the last, yet I went on, on, on—up, up, up, till I was at a dizzy height and I thought that a voice said to me, "Look up." I could see no other step, but, as fast as I ascended one tier, I was told to go on—and fresh steps of light revealed themselves beneath my ascending feet. I trod upon the clouds and found them to be granite. It seemed to be thin air and mist—to mortal men it was nothing. They laughed at me for trusting to it, but, each time my foot went down upon the stair, I found it to be like the eternal hills that are never to be moved. When, in my vision, I had climbed, and climbed, and climbed till I seemed to look down upon the

stars, I still climbed on and I understood that this is walking by faith—going ever upward, seeing Him who is invisible, depending upon Him whom no mortal eye can see, but who is clearly recognized by our spiritual senses— grasped by the hand of faith, seen by the eye of faith, heard by the ear of faith—walking through a desert where there is no corn growing, yet daily gathering full supplies of heavenly manna—standing by a rock in which there is no water, yet seeing the living floods leap forth to refresh the weary soul. This is walking by faith and it is a great mystery.

I have known some, with eyes like a vulture's, who have said that they could live by reason. They always did that which they perceived to be best. They would never venture a step beyond where logic would lead them. Ah, Sirs, your bleared eyes which you think to be so keen, can never see the path of the Christian! Others have fancied that to work themselves up into a high state of excitement and enthusiasm is to lead a Christian life. Believe me, Sirs, your vulture eyes have not seen this God-made path! Faith is reasonable, in the highest sense, for it reasons upon the real Truth of God, whereas mere human reason only reasons upon the semblance of truth. Some, who have no more spiritual knowledge than a lion's whelps, have said, "All you have to do is to persuade yourself that you are one of God's elect and it is so." Ah, they know not the path of faith and they who follow their lead will go down to destruction!

Another says, "I feel much that is good within myself and I believe that I have strength enough and wisdom enough to find my way to Heaven." Ah, you may be strong as a fierce lion, but you know not the way of wisdom! That is the very opposite way to yours. We who walk by faith have nothing in ourselves to lean upon! Our very weakness is our strength because it drives us to the Almighty! We have nothing to rely upon except this—that it is written that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and we depend on Him and upon the oath and Covenant of God, the Covenant that has been sealed with the precious blood of Jesus—there we rest! There are many imitations of this faith, but the genuine article is as different from all the imitations of it as the true coin of the realm is from the counterfeit of the forger!

Once more, the Believer's trials are things which unrenewed men cannot comprehend. If some of us were to begin to tell the ungodly all about our spiritual conflicts, they would think us fools. If we were to describe to them our despair and our hope, our rejoicing and our depression, they would say, "You must be mad to have such experiences!" Just so—"there is a path which no fowl knows"—and no fool knows and no unsaved soul knows! Our desires, too, are beyond men's sight, and so are our struggles with doubt and our temptations and trials. Many a Believer has been another Hercules, slaying a dragon and cleansing the Augean stables, yet it is all unrecognized except by God—and by those who are themselves spiritual, for the path of Christian victory is one that the lion's whelp treads not.

So is it also with the Christian's joys. O Brothers and Sisters, I wish I had time to talk about them! I could not get to the end of that theme, for there are joys that we have in which our spirit is as cool and composed as at any other moment of our life, yet those joys fill us with holy rapture and sacred ecstasy till we feel that, whether in the body or out of the body, we cannot tell—only God knows! Then the head leans on the bosom of the Savior and the lips of Christ are set to our soul's lips and He kisses us with the kisses of His mouth and His love is better than wine! I know that worldly men say, "Give us gold and silver in abundance! Fill our barns and let our wine vats burst with new wine! Give us all the good things of earth and we will be content." It is so, I know, but as

for the Christian, he says, "Whom have I in Heaven but You and there is none upon earth that I desire beside You." When we have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us, we get into a way of joy which is as far above all human joy as the path of the eagle, soaring among the Alps is above that of the mole burrowing in the ground!

There are many other equally high things about the way of a Christian which I have not time to mention. I will just refer to two other things. One is the path of communion with Christ. We who believe in Jesus know what it is to walk with God. Yes, to walk with God, though He is a consuming fire! To walk with Christ though He is the Judge of the quick and the dead. I have been as conscious of the Presence of God as ever I have been of the presence of my child or of my friend. I have been as sure that I spoke with Christ and emptied out my soul into His soul, and then received His heart's love into my heart, as I have been sure of any event in my whole history! I know what it is to receive sympathy from Christian men, but I also know what it is to have the sympathy of my Lord! I speak not now of things that are only occasional and out of the ordinary course of our lives. To some of us, it has become a blessed habit to speak with Christ—to speak, not merely into His ear, but right down into His heart and to know that we have done so! And to act in a certain way because we have done so and to have no other motive for the action than the fact that we have put the case before the Lord and asked whether it was our duty to do this—and when we knew that it was, have risked everything because we were sure that God had bid us take the step! Oh, the blessedness of living with God! You cannot imitate it. You cannot get near it—it is unapproachable to unrenewed men! It "is a path which no fowl knows, and which the vulture's eyes have not seen."

And it is so, lastly, with regard to many a Christian's death. In this matter, also, "there is a path which the vulture's eyes have not seen." There are some of you who have heard with your ears, and seen with your eyes, the wondrous manifestations at the deaths of some who were dear to you in life and precious in death. Some of these have seen, in their departing moments, what no unaided human eye could ever have seen. And they have told us that they have heard words which it would not have been lawful for them to utter. And that they have enjoyed what it was impossible for human language ever to express. And while they have spoken, we have known that they spoke the truth, for the flash of their eye was supernatural and the calm of their spirit, amidst racking pain which naturally would depress, has been something sublime. We have felt, with regard to their deathbed, as Moses did with regard to the burning bush—humble was the pallet and humble was the patient who lay upon it—but, as the bush glowed with heavenly fire, that bed seemed to be bright with the Presence of Deity, for God was there with His children and Christ was there succoring the members of His mystical body! And we have marvelled, been astonished and have felt that we should take off our shoes, for the place whereon we stood was holy ground!

Those of us whose calling makes us familiar with the departure of Believers, have often felt that there was a path for dying saints which biographers could not describe, which language could not picture and of which memory has left but faint traces upon the tablets of our soul—but which, in itself, was something indescribable, unutterable, Divine! May God grant to all of us the Grace to know all this for ourselves! We can only know it by the illumination of the Divine Spirit, but that blessed Spirit illuminates all the souls that look to Jesus! Indeed, their looking to Jesus is one effect of the Divine Illumination which they have already in part received. Oh, that each heart here may "lay hold on eternal life" by laying hold on the Savior by faith, for then He will reveal to you the

great mystery that the unsaved cannot comprehend—and He will say to you, as He said to Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto you, but My Father which is in Heaven." The Lord bless you, Beloved Friends! For Christ's sake! Amen.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 78

Job 29,2 #51 - Comfort for the Desponding

COMFORT FOR THE DESPONDING

NO. 51

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, NOVEMBER 25, 1855,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.

"Oh that I were as in months past."

Job 29:2.

FOR the most part, the gracious Shepherd leads His people beside the still waters and makes them to lie down in green pastures. But at times they wander through a wilderness where there is no water and they find no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul faints within them and they cry unto the Lord in their trouble. Though many of His people live in almost constant joy and find that religion's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace, yet there are many who pass through fire and through water—men ride over their heads—they endure all manner of trouble and sorrow. The duty of the minister is to preach to different characters. Sometimes we admonish the confident, lest they should become presumptuous. Oftentimes we stir up the slumbering, lest they should sleep the sleep of death. Frequently we comfort the desponding and this is our duty this morning—or if not to comfort them, to give them some exhortation which may, by God's help, be the means of bringing them out of the sad condition into which they have fallen, so that they may not be obliged to cry out forever—"Oh that I were as in months past!"

At once to the subject. A complaint—its cause and cure. And then close up with an exhortation to stir up your pure minds, if you are in such a position.

I. First, there is a COMPLAINT. How many a Christian looks on the past with pleasure, on the future with dread and on the present with sorrow! There are many who look back upon the days that they have passed in the fear of the Lord as being the sweetest and the best they have ever had But as to the present, it is clad in a sable garb of gloom and dreariness. They could wish for their young days over, again, that they might live near to Jesus—for now they feel that they have wandered from Him, or that He has hidden His face from them and they cry out, "Oh that I were as in months past!"

1. Let us take distinct cases, one by one. The first is the case of a man who has lost the brightness of his evidences and is crying out, "Oh that I were as in months past!" Hear his soliloquy—"Oh that my past days could be recalled! Then I had no doubt of my salvation. If any man had asked for the reason of the hope that was in me, I could have answered with meekness and with fear. No doubt distressed me, no fear harassed me. I could say with Paul, 'I know whom I have believed,' and with Job, 'I know that my Redeemer lives—

My steady soul did fear no more Than solid rocks when billows roar.'

"I felt myself to be standing on the rock, Christ Jesus. I said—

'Let cares like a wild deluge come, And storms of sorrow fall! Surely I shall safely reach my home, My God, my Heaven, my All.'

"But ah, how changed it is, now! Where there was no cloud it is all cloud! Where I could read my 'title clear,' I tremble to read my damnation quite as clearly. I hoped that I trusted in Christ, but now the dark thought rises up that I was a hypocrite and had deceived myself and others. The most I can attain to, is—'I think I will hope in Him still. And if I may not be refreshed with the light of His Countenance, still, I will trust in the shadow of His wings. I feel that if I depart from Him, there is no other Savior. But oh, what thick darkness surrounds me! Like Paul of old, there have been days and nights wherein neither sun, nor moon nor stars have appeared. I have lost my roll in the Arbor of Ease. I cannot, now, take it out of my breast and read it to console me on my journey. And I fear that when I get to the end of the way, they will deny me entrance! I feel I came not in by the door to receive His Grace and know His love, but have been deceived. I have taken carnal fancies for the workings of the Spirit and have imputed what was but natural conviction to the work of God the Holy Spirit."

This is one phase and a very common one. You will meet many who are crying out like that—"Oh that I were as in months past!"

2. Another phase of this great complaint, which it also very frequent, is one under which we are lamenting—not so much because our evidences are withered as because we do not enjoy a perpetual peace of mind as to other matters. "Oh," says one, "Oh that I were as in months past. For then whatever troubles and trials came upon me were less than nothing. I had learned to sing—

'Father, I wait Your daily will, You shall divide my portion still. Give me on earth what seems to You best, Till death and Heaven reveal the rest.'

"I felt that I could give up everything for Him—that if He had taken away every mercy, I would have said—

'Yes, if You take them all away, Yet will I not repine! Before they were possessed by me, They were entirely Thine.'

"I knew no fear for the future. Like a child on its mother's breast, I slept securely. I said, 'Jehovah-Jireh, my God, will provide.' I put my business into His hands. I went to my daily labor like the little bird that wakes up in the morning and knows not where its breakfast is to come from, but sits on the branch, singing—

'Mortal, cease from toil and sorrow God provides for the morrow.'

"I could have trusted Him with my very life—with wife, with children— with everything! I could give all into His hands and say each morning, 'Lord, I have not a will of my own, or if I have one, still, Your will be done. Your wish shall be my wish. Your desire shall be my desire.' Oh that I were as in months past! How changed am I now! I begin fretting about my business. And if I lose now but a

five pound note, I am incessantly worried, whereas if it were a thousand, before, I could have thanked the God who took it away as easily as I could the God that gave it to me! How the least thing disturbs me. The least shadow of a doubt as to some calamity that may befall me rests on my soul like a thick cloud. I am perpetually self-willed, desiring always to have just what I wish. I cannot say I can resign all into His hands. There is a certain something I could not give up. Twined round my heart there is an evil plant, called, self-love. It has twisted its roots within the very nerves and sinews of my soul! There is something I love above my God. I cannot give up all, now. But, oh that I were as in months past! For then my mercies were real mercies, because they were God's mercies. Oh," he says, "that I were as in months past—I would not have to bear such trouble as I now have, for though the burden might have pressed heavily, I would have cast it on the Lord! Oh that I knew the heavenly science of taking the burdens off my own shoulders and laying them on the Rock that supports them all! Oh if I knew how to pour out my griefs and sorrows as I once did! I have been a fool, an arrant fool, a very fool, that I should have run away from that sweet confidence I once had in the Savior! I used to, then, go to His ear and tell Him all my griefs—

'My sorrows and my griefs I poured Into the bosom of my God. He helped me in the trying hour, He helped me bear the heavy load!'

"But now, I foolishly carry them, myself, and bear them in my own breast, Ah,—

'What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!'

"Would that they would return to me."

3. Another individual, perhaps, is speaking thus concerning his enjoyment in the House of God and the means of Grace. "Oh," says one, "in months past, when I went up to the House of God, how sweetly did I hear! Why, I sat with my ears open to catch the words as if it were an angel speaking. And when I listened, how at times did the tears come rolling down my cheeks! And how my eyes flashed when some brilliant utterance, full of joy to the Christian, awakened my soul! Oh how I would awake on the Sabbath morning and sing,

'Welcome, sweet day of rest, That saw the Lord arise! Welcome to this reviving breast, And these rejoicing eyes!'

"And when they sang in the House of God, whose voice was so fond as mine? When I retired from worship, it was with a light dread. I went to tell my friends and my neighbors what glorious news I had heard in the sanctuary. Those were sweet Sabbaths. And when the Prayer Meetings came round, how was I found in my places and the prayers were prayers, indeed, to my spirit! Whoever I heard preach, provided it was the Gospel, how did my soul feed and fatten under it! For I sat at a very banquet of joy! When I read the Scriptures, they were always illuminated and the Glory of God did gild the sacred page whenever I turned it over! When I bent my knees in prayer, I could pour my soul out before God and I loved the exercise! I felt that I could not be happy unless I spent my time upon my knees. I loved my God and my God loved me. But oh, now how changed! Oh that I were as in months past! I go up to God's House. It is the same voice that speaks, the same man I love so much, still addresses me. But I have no tears to shed. My heart has become hardened even under his ministry! I have few emotions of joy. I enter the House of God as a boy goes to school, without much love to it—and I go away without having my soul stirred. When I kneel down in secret prayer, the wheels are taken off my chariot and it drags very heavily. When I

strive to sing, all I can say is, 'I would, but cannot.' Oh that I were as in months past!— when the candle of the Lord shone round about me!"

I trust there are not many of you who can join in this. For I know you love to come up to the House of God. I love to preach to a people who feel the Word, who give signs of assent to it—men and women who can afford a tear, now and then, in a sermon—people whose blood seems to boil within them when they hear the Gospel! I don't think you understand much of the phase I am describing. But still, you may understand a little of it. The Word may not be quite as sweet and pleasant to you as it used to be. And then you may cry out—"Oh that I were as in months past!"

4. But I will tell you one point which perhaps may escape you. There are some of us who extremely lament that our conscience is not as tender as it used to be. And, therefore, does our soul cry in bitterness, "Oh that I were as in months past!" "When I first knew the Lord," you say, "I was almost afraid to put one foot before another, lest I should go astray. I always looked before I leaped. If there was a suspicion of sin about anything, I faithfully avoided it. It there was the slightest trace of the trail of the serpent on it, I turned from it at once! People called me a Puritan. I watched everything. I was afraid to speak and some practices that were really allowable, I utterly condemned. My conscience was so tender, I was like a sensitive plant. If touched by the hand of sin, my leaves curled up in a moment! I was so tender, I could not bear to be touched—it was like I had wounds all over me! And if anyone brushed against me, I cried out. I was afraid to do anything, lest I should sin against God. If I heard an oath, my bones shook within me. If I saw a man break the Sabbath, I trembled and was afraid. Wherever I went, the least whisper of sin startled me. It was like the voice of a demon when I heard a temptation and I said with violence, 'Get you behind me, Satan!' I could not endure sin. I ran away from it as from a serpent! I could not taste a drop of it. But oh that I were as in months past. It is true, by His Grace, I have not forsaken His ways. I have not quite forgotten His Law. It is true, I have not disgraced my character, I have not openly sinned before men and none but God knows my sin. But oh, my conscience is not what it once was! It did thunder, once, but it does not now. O Conscience! Conscience! You are gone too much to sleep! I have drugged you with a tincture of opium and you are slumbering when you ought to be speaking! You are a watchman. But you do not tell the hours of the night as you once did. O Conscience! Sometimes I heard your rattle in my ears and it startled me—now you sleep—and I go on to sin. It is but a little I have done—still, that little shows the way. Straws tell which way the wind blows. And I feel that my having committed one little sin evidences in what way my soul is inclined. Oh that I had a tender conscience again! Oh that I had not this rhinoceros conscience which is covered over with tough hide through which the bullets of the Law cannot pierce! Oh that I had a conscience such as I used to have! Oh that I were as in months past!"

5. One more form of this sad condition. There are some of us, dearly Beloved, who have not as much zeal for the Glory of God and the salvation of men as we used to have. Months ago, if we saw a soul going to destruction, our eyes were filled with tears in a moment! If we did but see a man inclined to sin, we rushed before him with tears in our eyes and wished to sacrifice ourselves to save him! We could not walk the street, but we must be giving somebody a tract, or reproving someone. We thought we must be forever speaking of the Lord Jesus. If there were any good to be done, we were always first and foremost in it—we desired by all means to save some and we did think at that time that we could give up ourselves to death—if we might but snatch a soul from Hell! So deep, so ardent was our love to our fellow men, that for the love we bore Christ's name,

we would have been content to be scoffed at, hissed at and persecuted by the whole world if we might have done any good in it! Our soul was burning with intense longing for souls and we considered all things else to be mean and worthless. But ah, now souls may be damned and there is not a tear! Sinners may sink into the scalding pit of Hell and not a groan. Thousands may be swept away each day and sink into bottomless woe and yet not an emotion! We can preach without tears. We can pray for them without our hearts. We can speak to them without feeling their necessities. We pass by the haunts of infamy—we wish the inmates better and that is all. Even our compassion has died out. Once we stood near the brink of Hell and we thought each day that we heard the yells and howls of the doomed spirits ringing in our ears. And then we said, "O God, help me to save my fellow men from going down to the pit of Hell!" But now we forget it all. We have little love to men. We have not half the zeal and energy we once had. Oh, if that is your state, dearly Beloved—if you can join in that, as your poor minister, alas, can do in some measure—then may we well say, "Oh that I were as in months past!"

II. But now we are about to take these different characters and tell you the CAUSE AND CURE.

1. One of the causes of this mournful state of things is defect in prayer. And of course the cure lies somewhere next door to the cause! You are saying, "Oh that I were as in months past!" Come, my Brothers and Sisters. We are going into the very root of the matter. One reason why it is not with you as in months past is this—you do not pray as you once did! Nothing brings such leanness into a man's soul as lack of prayer. It is well said that a neglected closet is the birthplace of all evil. All good is born in the closet—all good springs from it. There the Christian gets it. But if he neglects his closet, then all evil comes of it. No man can progress in Grace if he forsakes his closet. I care not how strong he may be in faith. It is said that fat men may, for a time, live on the flesh they have acquired. But there is not a Christian so full of flesh that he can live on old Grace! If he grows fat, he kicks, but he cannot live upon his fat. Those who are strong and mighty in themselves cannot exist without prayer! If a man should have the spiritual might of 50 of God's choicest Christians in himself, he must die if he did not continue to pray! My Brothers and Sisters, can you look back and say, "Three or four months ago my prayers were more regular, more constant, more earnest than they are now—now they are feeble, they are not sincere, they are not fervent, they are not earnest"? O Brothers and Sisters, do not ask anybody what is the cause of your grief! It is as plain as possible. You need not ask a question about it. There is the cause! And where is the remedy? Why, in more prayer! Beloved, it was little prayer that brought you down. It is great prayer that will lift you up! It was lack of prayer that brought you into poverty. It must be increase of prayer that will bring you again into riches! Where no oxen are, the crib is clean. There is nothing for men to eat where there are no oxen to plow. And where there are no prayers to plow the soil, you have little to feed upon. We must be more earnest in prayer! Oh, Beloved, might not the beam out of the wall cry against us? Our dusty closets might bear witness to our neglect of secret devotion. And that is the reason why it is not with us as in months past. My Friends—if you were to compare the Christian to a steam engine, you must make his prayers, fed by the Holy Spirit, to be the very fire which sustains his motion! Prayer is God's chosen vehicle of Grace and he is unwise who neglects it. Let me be doubly serious on this matter and let me give a home-thrust to some. Dear Friend, do you mean what you say and do you believe what you say—that neglect of prayer will bring your soul into a most hazardous condition? If so, I will say no more to you. For you will easily guess the remedy for your lamentable cry, "Oh that I were as in months past!" A certain merchant wishes

that he were as rich as he used to be—he is desirous to send his ships over to the gold country—to bring him home cargoes of gold. But lately never a ship has been out of port and, therefore, can he wonder that he has had no cargo of gold? So when a man prays, he sends a ship to Heaven and it comes back laden with gold! But if he leaves off supplication, then his ship is weather-bound and stays at home—and no wonder he comes to be a poor man!

2. Perhaps, again, you are saying, "Oh that I were as in months past!" Not so much from your own fault as from the fault of your minister. There is such a thing, my dear Friends, as our getting into a terribly bad condition through the ministry that we attend. Can it be expected that men should grow in Grace when they are never watered with the streams that make glad the city of our God? Can they be supposed to grow strong in the Lord Jesus when they do not feed on spiritual food? We know some who grumble, Sabbath after Sabbath, and say they cannot hear suchand-such a minister. Why don't you buy an ear-trumpet, then? "Ah, but I mean that I can't hear him to my soul's profit." Then do not go to hear him, if you have tried for a long while and don't get any profit! I always think that a man who grumbles as he goes out of Chapel ought not to be pitied, but whipped—for he can stay away if he likes and go where he will be pleased! There are plenty of places where the sheep may feed in their own manner—and everyone is bound to go where he gets the pasture most suited to his soul. But you are not bound to run away, directly, if your minister dies, as many of you did before you came here. You should not run away from the ship as directly the storm comes and the captain is gone and you find her not exactly seaworthy. Stand by her, begin caulking her—God will send you a captain—there will be fine weather, by-and-by, and all will be right. But very frequently a bad minister starves God's people into walking skeletons, so that you can see all their bones. And who wonders that they starve out their minister, when they get no food and no nutriment from his ministrations? This is a second reason why men frequently cry out, "Oh that I were as in months past!"

3. But there is still a better reason that will come more home to some of you. It is not so much the badness of the food, as the seldomness that you come to eat it. You know, my dear Friends, we find, every now and then, that there is a man who came twice a day to the House of God on the Sabbath. On the Monday night he was busy at work. But his apron was rolled up and if he could not be present all the while, he would come in at the end. On the Thursday evening he would, if possible, come to the sanctuary to hear a sermon from some Gospel minister and would sit up late at night and get up early in the morning to make up the time he had spent in these religious exercises. But by-and-by he thought, "I am working too hard. This is tiring. It is too far to walk." And so he gives up, first, one service and then another—and then begins to cry out, "Oh that I were as in months past!" Why, Brothers and Sisters you need not be amazing at it! The man does not eat so much as he used to do! Little and often is the way children should be fed, though I have given you a great deal this morning. Still, little and often is a very good rule. I do think, when people give up weekday services, unless it is utterly impracticable for them to attend them, farewell to religion! "Farewell to practical godliness," says Whitfield, "when men do not worship God on the weekday!" Weekday services are frequently the cream of all. God gives His people pails full of milk on the Sabbath, but He often skims off the cream for the weekday! If they stay away, is it any wonder that they have to say, "Oh, that I were as in months past"? I do not blame you, Beloved. I only wish to "stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance." A very plain fellow that is—is he not? Yes, he always tells you what he means and always intends to do so! Stand to

your colors, my men! Keep close to the standard if you would win the battle! And when there seems to be the slightest defection, it is simply our duty to exhort you, lest by any measure you depart from the soundness of your faith!

4. But frequently this complaint arises from idolatry. Many have given their hearts to something else besides God and have set their affections upon the things of earth instead of the things in Heaven. It is hard to love the world and love Christ. It is impossible—that is all. And it is hard not to love the creature. It is hard not to give yourself to earth. I had almost said, it is impossible not to do that. It is difficult and only God can enable us! He, alone, can keep us with our hearts fully set on Him. But mark—whenever we make a golden calf to worship—sooner or later it will come to this—we shall get our golden calf ground up and put into our water for us to drink and then we shall have to say, "He has made me drunk with wormwood." Never a man makes an idol for himself to worship, but it tumbles down on him and breaks some of his bones! There was never a man, yet, who departed to broken cisterns to find water, but instead, thereof, he found loathsome creatures therein and was bitterly deceived! God will have His people live on Him and on none else! If they live on anything else but Him, He will take care to give them of the waters of Mara, to embitter their drink and drive them to the Rock of purest streams. Oh, Beloved, let us take care that our hearts are wholly His, only Christ's, solely Christ's! If they are so, we shall not have to cry out, "Oh that I were as in months past!"

5. We scarcely need, however, detail any more reasons. We will add but one more and that is the most common one of all. We have, perhaps, become self-confident and self-righteous. If so, that is a reason why it is not with us as in months past. Ah, my Friends, that old rascal, selfrighteousness—you will never get rid of him as long as you live! The devil was well pictured under the form of a serpent because a serpent can creep in anywhere, though the smallest crevice. Self-righteousness is a serpent—for it will enter anywhere. If you try to serve your God, "What a fine fellow you are," says the devil. "Ah, don't you serve your God well! You are always preaching. You are a noble fellow." If you go to a Prayer Meeting, God gives you a little gift and you are able to pour out your heart. Presently there is a pat on the back from Satan. "Did not you pray sweetly? I know the Brethren will love you1 You are growing in Grace very much." If a temptation comes and you are able to resist it, "Ah," he says at once, "you are a true soldier of the Cross. Look at the enemy you have knocked down! You will have a bright crown, by-and-by. You are a brave fellow!" You go on trusting God implicitly. Satan says, "Your faith is very strong—no trial can overcome you—there is a weak Brother, he is not half as strong as you are!" Away you go and scold your weak Brother because he is not as big as you! And all the while, Satan is cheering you up and saying, "What a mighty warrior you are! So faithful—always trusting in God—you have not any self-righteousness." The minister preaches to the Pharisee—but the Pharisee is not fifty-ninth cousin to you! You are not at all self-righteous in your own opinion—but all the while you are the most self-righteous creature in existence! Ah, Beloved, just when we think ourselves humble, we are sure to be proud! And when we are groaning over our pride, we are generally the most humble! You may just read your own estimate backwards. Just when we imagine we are the worst, we are often the best. And when we conceive ourselves the best, we are often the worst. It is that vile self-righteousness who creeps into our souls and makes us murmur, "Oh that I were as in months past!" Your candle has got the wick of self-righteousness upon it. You need to have that replaced, and then you will burn all right. You are soaring too high! You require something that will

bring you down, again, to the feet of the Savior as a poor lost and guilty sinner—nothing at all. Then you will not cry any longer, "Oh that I were as in months past!"

III. And now, the closing up is to be an EXHORTATION. An exhortation, first of all, to consolation. One is saying, "Oh, I shall

never be happy again, I have lost the light of His Countenance. He has clean gone away from me and I shall perish." You remember in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, the description of the man shut up in the iron cage? One said to him, "Will you never come out of this cage?" "No, never." "Are you condemned forever?" "Yes, I am." "Why was this?" "Why I grieved the Spirit and He is gone. I once thought I loved Him, but I have treated Him lightly and He has departed. I went from the paths of righteousness, but now I am locked up here and cannot get out." Yes, but does John Bunyan tell you that the man never did get out? There have been some in that iron cage that have come out. There may be one here, this morning, who has been for a long while sitting in that iron cage, rattling the bars, trying to break them, trying to file them through with his own little might and strength. Oh, dear Friend, you will never file through the iron bars of that terrible cage! You will never escape by yourself. What must you do? You must begin to sing like the bird in the cage does. Then the kind Master will come and let you out. Cry to Him to deliver you! And though you cry and shout and He shuts out your prayer, He will hear you, by-and-by. And like Jonah, you shall exclaim in days to come, "Out of the belly of Hell I cried unto the Lord and He heard me." You will find the roll under the settle, although you have dropped it down the Hill of Difficulty. And when you have it, you will put it in your bosom, again, and hold it all the more tightly because you have lost it for a little season—

"Return, O wanderer, return, And seek an injured Father's face. Those warm desires that in you burn Were kindled by reclaiming Grace!"

And now another exhortation, not so much to console you as to stir you up more and more to seek to be what you ought to be. O Christian men and women, my Brothers and Sisters in the faith of Jesus Christ! How many there are of you who are content just to be saved and merely to enter Heaven. How many do we find who are saying, "Oh, if I can but just get in at the door—if I can simply be a child of God!" And they literally carry out their desires, for they are as little Christian as possible! They would have moderation in religion! But what is moderation in religion? It is a lie! It is a farce! Does a wife ask her husband to be moderately loving? Does a parent expect his child to be moderately obedient? Do you seek to have your servants moderately honest? No! Then how can you talk about being moderately religious? To be moderately religious is to be irreligious. To have a religion that does not enter into the very heart and influence the life is virtually to have no religion at all! I tremble, sometimes, when I think of some of you who are mere professors. You are content, you whitewashed sepulchers, because you are beautifully whitened! You rest satisfied, without looking at the morgue beneath! How many of you make clean the outside of the cup and platter. And because the Church can lay nothing to your charge and the world cannot accuse you, you think the outside of the cup will be sufficient. Take heed! Take heed! The Judge will look at the inside of the cup and platter one day. And if it is full of wickedness, He will break that platter and the fragments shall forever be cast about in the pit of Hell! Oh, may God give you Grace to desire to be real Christians! Waxen-winged professors! You can fly very well, here. But when, like Icarus, you fly upwards, the mighty Sun of Jesus Christ shall melt your wings and you shall fall into the pit

of destruction! Ah, gilded Christians, beautifully painted, varnished, polished— what will you do when you shall be found, at last, to have been worthless metal? When the wood, hay and stubble shall be buried and consumed, what will you do if you are not the genuine coin of Heaven? If you have not been molten in the furnace, if you have not been minted from on high? If you are not real gold, how shall you stand the fire in that "great and terrible Day of the Lord"? Ah, and there are some of you who can stand the fire, I trust. You are the children of God. But, Beloved, do I charge you wrongfully when I say that many of us know that we are the children of God, but we are content to be as little dwarf children. We are always crying out, "Oh that I were as in months past!" That is a mark of dwarfishness. If we are to do great things in the world, we must not often utter this cry! We must often be singing—

"I the chief of sinners am. But Jesus died for me,"

and with cheerful countenance we must be able to say that we "know whom we have believed." Do you wish to be useful? Do you desire to honor your Master? Do you long to carry a heavy crown to Heaven, that you may put it on the Savior's head? If you do—and I know you do—then seek above all things, that your soul may prosper and be in health—that your inner man may not be simply in a living state, but that you may be a tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth your fruit in your season, your leaf never withering and whatever you do, prospering! Ah, do you want to go to Heaven and wear a starless crown there—a crown that shall be a real crown, but that shall have no star upon it because no soul has been saved by you? Do you wish to sit in Heaven with garments of Christ's, but without one single jewel that God has given you for your wages here, below? Ah, no! I think you wish to go to Heaven in full dress and to enter into the fullness of the joy of the Lord! Five talents well improved, five cities. And let no man be satisfied with merely his one talent, but let him seek to put it out at interest. "For unto him that has, shall be given, and he shall have abundance."

And finally, to many of you what I have preached about has no interest whatever. Perhaps you may say, "Oh that I were as in months past! For then I was quite well and I was a jolly fellow! Then I could drink with the deepest drinker anywhere! Then I could run merrily into sin, but now I cannot. I have hurt my body. I have injured my mind. It is not with me as it used to be—I have spent all my money. I wish I were as I used to be!" Ah, poor Sinner, you have good reason to say, "Oh that I were as in months past!" But wait four or five months and then you will say it more emphatically and think even today better than that day! And the further you go on, the more you will wish to go back again. For the path to Hell is down, down, down, down—always down—and you will be always saying, "Oh that I were as in months past!" You will look back to the time when a mother's prayer blessed you and a father's reproof warned you— when you went to a Sunday school and sat upon your mother's knee, to hear her tell you of a Savior. And the longer the retrospect of goodness, the more that goodness will pain you! Ah, my Friends, you have need to go back, some of you. Remember how far you have fallen—how much you have departed. But oh, you need not turn back! Instead of looking back and crying, "Oh that I were as in months past," say something different! Say, "Oh that I were a new man in Christ Jesus!" It would not do for you to begin again in your present state. You would soon be as bad as you now are. But say, "Oh that I were a new man in Christ Jesus! Oh that I might begin a new life!" Some of you would like to begin a new life—some of you reprobates, who have gone far away! Well, poor mortal, you may! "How?" you say? Why, if you are a new man in Christ Jesus you will begin again! A Christian is as much a new

man as if he had been no man at all, before! The old creature is dethroned. He is a new creature, bornagain and starting on a new existence! Poor Soul! God can make you a new man! God, the Holy Spirit, can build a new house out of you, with neither stick nor stone of the old man in it! And He can give you a new heart, a new spirit, new pleasures, new happiness, new prospects and, at last, give you a new Heaven! "But," says one "I feel that I need these things, but may I have them?" Guess whether you may have them, when I tell you—"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." It does not say it is worthy of some acceptation, but it is worthy of all the acceptation you will ever give it! If you now say, "Jesus came into the world so save sinners, I believe He did! I know He did! He came to save me," you will find it, "worthy of all acceptation." You still say, "But will He save me?" I will give you another passage—"Whoever comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." "Ah, but I do not know whether I may come!" "Whoever," it says. "Him that comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." "Whoever will, let him come," it is written. Do you will? I only speak to such as will, who know their need of a Savior. Do you will? Then God, the Holy Spirit says, "Whoever will, let him come and take the Water of Life freely"—

"The feeble, the guilty, the weak, the forlorn, In coming to Jesus, shall not meet with scorn! But He will receive them and bless them and save From death and destruction, from Hell and the grave."

And He will lift them up to His Kingdom of glory. God so grant it! For His name's sake. Amen

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 29,2-4 #1011 - Job's Regret and Our Own

JOB'S REGRET AND OUR OWN

NO. 1011

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 17, 1871,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God

preserved me when His candle shined upon my head,

and when by His light I walked through darkness.

As I was in the days of my youth,

when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle."

Job 29:2-4.

IF Job here refers to the temporal prosperity which he had lost, we

cannot condemn him for his complaint, neither can we commend him. It is but the expression of a natural regret which would be felt by any man who had experienced such great reverses. But there is everywhere in the expressions which he uses such a strain of spirituality that we are inclined to believe that he had more reference to the condition of his heart than to the state of his property. His soul was depressed. He had lost the Light of God's countenance. His inward comforts were declining, his joy in the Lord was at a low ebb—this he regretted far more than anything besides. No doubt he deplored the departure of those prosperous days when, as he states it, his root was spread out by the waters and the dew lay all night upon his branch. But much more did he bemoan that the Lamp of the Lord no more shone upon his head, and the secret of God was not upon his tabernacle.

As his spiritual regrets are far more instructive to us than his natural ones, we will turn all our attention to them. We may, without violence, appropriate Job's words to ourselves. I fear that many of us can, with great propriety, take up our wailing and mourn for the days of our espousals—the happy days of our first love. I shall have to trouble you with many divisions this morning. But I shall be brief upon each one, and I hope that our thoughts may be led onward, and rendered practically serviceable to us, by the blessing of God's Spirit.

I. Let us begin by saying that regrets such as those expressed in the text are, and ought to be, very BITTER. If it is the loss of spiritual things that we regret, then may we say from the bottom of our hearts, "Oh that I were as in months past." It is a great thing for a man to be near to God. It is a

very choice privilege to be admitted into the inner circle of communion and to become God's familiar friend. Great as the privilege is, so great is the loss of it. No darkness is so dark as that which falls on eyes accustomed to the Light. The poor man who was always poor is scarcely poor— but he who has fallen from the summit of greatness into the depths of poverty is poor, indeed.

The man who has never enjoyed communion with God knows nothing of what it must be to lose it. But he who has once been pressed upon the Savior's bosom will mourn, as long as he lives, if he is deprived of the sacred enjoyment. The mercies which Job deplored in our text are no little ones. First, he complains that he had lost the consciousness of Divine preservation. He says, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me." There are days with Christians when they can see God's hand all around them, checking them in the first approaches of sin, and setting a hedge about all their ways. Their conscience is tender and the Spirit of God is obeyed by them. They are, therefore, kept in all their ways—the angels of God watching over them—lest they dash their foot against a stone.

But when they fall into laxity of spirit and walk at a distance from God, they are not so preserved. Though kept from final and total apostasy, yet they are not kept from very grievous sin, and, like Peter who followed afar off, they may be left to deny their Master, even with oaths and curses. If we have lost that conscious preservation of God which once covered us from every fiery dart—if we no longer abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and feel no longer that His Truth is our shield and buckler—we have lost a joy worth worlds, and we may well deplore it with anguish of heart.

Job had also lost Divine consolation, for he looks back with lamentation to the time when God's candle shone upon his head, when the sun of God's love was, as it were, in its zenith and cast no shadow—when he rejoiced without ceasing, and triumphed from morning to night in the God of his salvation. The joy of the Lord is our strength, the joy of the Lord is Israel's excellency. It is the Heaven of Heaven, it is Heaven even upon earth. And consequently, to lose it is a calamity indeed.

Once a person has been satisfied with favor and is full of the blessing of the Lord, will he be content to go into the dry and thirsty land and live far off from God? Will he not rather cry out with David, "My soul thirsts for God. When shall I come and appear before God?" Surely his agonizing prayer will be, "Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free Spirit." Love to God will never be content if His face is hidden. Until the curtain is drawn aside and the King's face is seen through the lattices, the true spouse will spend her life in sighing—mourning like a dove bereaved of its mate.

Moreover, Job deplored the loss of Divine illumination. "By His light," he says, "I walked through darkness." That is to say, perplexity ceased to be perplexity. God shed such a light upon the mysteries of Providence that where others missed their path, Job, made wise by Heaven, could find it. There have been times when, to our patient faith, all things have been plain. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." But if we walk far off from God, then, straightway, even the precious Truth of God is no more clear to us, and the dealings of God with us in Providence appear to be like a maze. He is wise as Solomon who walks with God—but he is a very fool who trusts his own understanding.

All the wit that we have gathered by observation and experience will not supply us with sufficiency of common sense if we turn away from God. Israel, without consulting God, made a league with her enemies. She thought the case most plain when she entered into hasty alliance with the Gibeonites. But she was duped by cunning because she asked not counsel of the Lord. In the simplest business we shall err if we seek not direction from the Lord. Yet, where matters are most complicated, we shall walk wisely if we wait for a voice from the oracle, and seek the good Shepherd's guidance.

We may bitterly lament, therefore, if we have lost the Holy Spirit's Light. If now the Lord answers us not, neither by His Word, nor by His Providence—if we wander alone, crying, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him"—we are in an evil case, and may well sigh for the days, when by His Light, we walked through darkness. Moreover, Job had lost Divine communion—so it seems, for he mourned the days of his youth—when the secret of God was upon his tabernacle. Who shall tell to another what the secret of God is?

Believing hearts know it, but they cannot frame to pronounce aright the words that could explain it, nor can they convey by language what the secret is. The Lord manifests Himself unto His people as He does not unto the world. We could not tell the love passages that there are between Believers and their Lord. Even when they are set to such sweet music as the Song of Solomon, carnal minds cannot discern their delights. They cannot plow with our heifer, and therefore they read not our riddle. As Paul in Heaven saw things which it were unlawful for a man to utter, so the Believer sees and enjoys, in communion with Christ, what it would not only be unlawful but impossible for him to tell to carnal men. Such pearls are not for swine. The spiritual discerns all things, but he, himself, is discerned of no man.

Now it is a high privilege, beyond all privileges to enter into familiar communion with the Most High. And the man who has once possessed it, and has lost it, has a more bitter cause for regret than if, being rich, he had lost his wealth. Or being famous, he had lost esteem. Or being in health, he were suddenly brought to the bed of languishing. No loss can equal the loss of You, my God! No eclipse is so black as the hiding of Your face! No storm is so fierce as the letting forth of Your indignation! It is grief upon grief to find that You are not with me as in the days of old!

Wherever, then, these regrets do exist, if the men's hearts are as they should be, they are not mere hypocritical or superficial expressions but they express the most bitter experiences of our human existence. "Oh that I were as in months past" is no sentimental sigh, but the voice of the innermost spirit in anguish, as one who has lost his first-born.

II. But, secondly, let me remind you that these regrets are NOT INEVITABLE. That is to say, it is not absolutely necessary that a Christian should ever feel them, or be compelled to express them. It has grown to be a tradition among us that every Christian must backslide in a measure, and that growth in Grace cannot be unbrokenly sustained. It is regarded by many as a law of Nature, that our first love must grow cold, and our early zeal must necessarily decline. I do not believe it for a moment!

"The path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day." And were we watchful and careful to live near to God, there is no reason why our spiritual life should not continuously make progress both in strength and beauty. There is no inherent necessity in the

Divine life, itself, compelling it to decline, for is it not written, "It shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life"? "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Grace is a living and incorruptible seed that lives and abides forever, and there is nowhere impressed upon the Divine life a law of pining and decay. If we do falter and faint in the onward path, it is our sin, and it is doubly sinful to forge excuses for it. It is not to be laid upon the back of some mysterious necessity of the new nature that it should be so, but it is to be brought as a charge against ourselves.

Nor do outward circumstances ever furnish a justification to us if we decline in Grace—for, under the worst conditions, Believers have grown in Grace. Deprived of the joys of Christian fellowship, and denied the comforts of the means of Grace, Believers have, nevertheless, been known to attain to a high-degree of likeness to Christ Jesus. Thrown into the midst of wicked companions, and forced to hear, like righteous Lot, the filthy conversation of the ungodly, yet Christians have shone all the brighter for the surrounding darkness and have been able to escape from a wicked and perverse generation. Certain is it that a man may be an eminent Christian and be among the poorest of the poor—poverty need not, therefore, make us depart from God.

And it is equally certain that a man may be rich, and for all that may walk with God and be distinguished for great Grace. There is no lawful position of which we may say, "It compels a man to decline in Grace." And, Brethren, there is no period of our life in which it is necessary for us to go back. The young Christian, with all the strength of his natural passions, can, by Grace, be strong and overcome the Wicked One. The Christian in middle life, surrounded with the world's cares, can prove that "this is the victory which overcomes the world, even our faith." The man immersed in business may still be baptized of the Holy Spirit. Assuredly, old age offers no excuse for decline—"they shall still bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright."

No, Brethren, as Christ said to His disciples when they would gladly have sent the multitude away to buy meat, "they need not depart," so would He say to the whole company of the Lord's people, "you need not depart." There is no compulsion for decline in Grace. Your sun need not stand still, your moon need not wane. If you cannot add a cubit to your spiritual stature, at any rate, it need not decrease. There are no reasons written in the book of your spiritual nature why you, as a Believer, should lose fellowship with God. And if you do so, take blame and shame to yourself—but do not ascribe it to necessity. Do not gratify your corruptions by supposing that they are licensed to prevail occasionally—neither vex your Graces by conceiving that they are doomed to inevitable defeat at a certain season. The spirit that is in us lusts to evil, but the Holy Spirit is able to subdue it, and will subdue it, if we yield ourselves to Him.

III. But, now, I am compelled to say that the regrets expressed in our test are exceedingly COMMON, and it is only here and there that we meet with a Believer who has not had cause to use them. It ought not to be so, but it is so. How grievously often will the pastor hear this among the bleating of the sheep—"Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me."—

"What peaceful hours I then enjoyed, How sweet their memory still. But they have left an aching void The world can never fill." The commonness of this lamentation may be somewhat accounted for by the universal tendency to undervalue the present and exaggerate the excellence of the past.

Have you ever noticed this in natural things? We are prone to cast a partial eye upon some imaginary "good old times." It is gone, and therefore it was good. It is here, and therefore it is dubious. In the middle of the summer we feel that the heat is so taxing that a frost would be the most delightful thing conceivable. We love, we say, the bracing air of winter. We are sure it is much healthier for us—yet, usually, when winter arrives, and the extreme cold sets in—we are all most anxious for the advent of spring, and we feel that somehow or other the frost is more trying to us than the heat.

Personally, I met with an illustration of this tendency the other day. I went down a steep cliff to the sea shore, and during the descent every step tried my weak knees and I felt that going down hill was the most difficult traveling in the world. Soon I had to return from the sands, and climb the steep path again. And, when I began to pant and puff with the difficult ascent, I changed my opinion and felt that I would a great deal sooner go down than come up! The fact is that whatever is with us we think to be the worse, and whatever was with us we conceive to be the better. We may, therefore, take some discount from our regrets. Perhaps were we more conscious of the benefit of the present state, and did we make less prominent the difficulty of it, we should not sigh to be as we were in months past.

Then, again, regrets may, in some cases, arise from a holy jealousy. The Christian, in whatever state he is, feels his own imperfection much, and laments his conscious shortcomings. Looking back, he observes with joy the work of Grace in his soul and does not, perhaps, so readily remember the then existing deficiencies of nature. Therefore he comes to think that the past was better than the present. He is afraid of backsliding and therefore he jealously fears that he is so. He is so anxious to live nearer to God, so dissatisfied with his present attainments—that he dares not believe that he advances—but fears that he has lost ground.

I know this in my own experience, for when lying sick I have frequently lamented that pain has distracted my mind and taken my attention off the Word of God. And I have longed for those seasons of health when I could read, meditate, and study with pleasure. But now that I have risen up from the sick bed, and am growing strong again, I frequently look back to the long nights and quiet days spent in my sick chamber and think that it was better with me then than now—for now I am apt to be cumbered with much serving—and then I was shut in with God. Many a man is really strong in Christ, but because he does not feel all the juvenile vivacity of his early days, he fears that ritual decrepitude has come upon him.

He is now far more solid and steadfast, if not quite so quick and impulsive. But, the good man, in his holy jealousy, marks most the excellencies of his juvenile piety and forgets that there were grave deficiencies in it! While in his present state, he notes the deficiencies and fears to hope that he possesses any excellencies. We are poor judges of our own condition, and usually err on one side or the other. All Graces may not flourish at the same time, and faults in one direction may be more than balanced by advantages in another. We may be deeper in humility if we are not higher in delight. We may not glitter so much, and yet there may be more real gold in us. The leaf may not be so green, but the fruit may be more ripe. The way may be rougher, and yet be nearer Heaven. Godly anxiety, then, may be the cause of many regrets which are, nevertheless, not warranted by any serious declension.

And, let me add that very often these regrets of ours about the past are not wise. It is impossible to draw a fair comparison between the various stages of Christian experience so as to give a judicious preference to one above another. Consider, as in a parable, the seasons of the year. There are many persons who, in the midst of the beauties of spring, say, "Ah, but how fitful is the weather! These March winds and April showers come and go by such fits and starts that nothing is to be depended upon. Give me the safer glories of summer." Yet, when they feel the heat of summer, and wipe the sweat from their brows, they say, "After all, with all the fullblow of beauty around us, we admire more the freshness, verdure, and vivacity of spring. The snowflake and the crocus coming forth as the advance guard of the army of flowers, have a superior charm about them."

Now it is idle to compare spring with summer. They differ and have each its beauties. We are in autumn now, and very likely, instead of prizing the peculiar treasures of autumn, some will despise the peaceful Sunday of the year, and mournfully compare yon fading leaves to funeral sermons replete with sadness. Some will contrast summer and autumn, and exalt one above another. Now, whoever shall claim precedence for any season shall have me for an opponent! They are all beautiful in their season, and each excels after its kind. Even thus it is wrong to compare the early zeal of the young Christian with the mature and mellow experience of the older Believer and make preferences. Each is beautiful according to its time.

You, dear young Friend, with your intense zeal, are to be commended and imitated. But very much of your fire I am afraid arises from novelty and you are not so strong as you are earnest. Like a newborn river, you are swift in current, but neither deep nor broad. And you, my more advanced Friend, who are much tried and buffeted—to you it is not easy to hold on your way under great inward struggles and severe depressions. But your deeper sense of weakness, your firmer grasp of Truth, your more intense fellowship with the Lord Jesus in His sufferings, your patience, and your steadfastness—are all lovely in the eyes of the Lord your God. Be thankful, each of you, for what you have, for by the Grace of God you are what you are.

After making all these deductions, however, I cannot conceive that they altogether account for the prevalence of these regrets. I am afraid the fact arises from the sad truth that many of us have actually deteriorated in Grace, have decayed in spirit, and degenerated in heart. Alas, in many cases old corruptions have fought desperately, and for awhile caused a partial relapse. Grace has become weak and sin has seized the occasion for attack so that for a time the battle is turned, and Israel's banner is trailed in the mire. With many professors, I am afraid, prayer is neglected, worldliness is uppermost, sin has come to the front, nature leads the van, and Grace and holiness are in the background. It should not be so, but I am afraid, ah, sadly afraid, it is. IV. I will more fully speak upon this matter under the fourth head. Since these regrets are exceedingly common, it is to be feared that in some cases they are very sadly NEEDFUL. Now, let the blast of the winnowing fan be felt through the congregation. Behold, the Lord Himself winnows this heap. Are there not many among us who once walked humbly with God, and near to Him, who have fallen into carnal security? Have we not taken it for granted that all is well with us, and are we not settled upon our lees like Moab of old? How little of heart-searching and selfexamination are practiced nowadays! How little inquiry as to whether the root of the matter is really in us! Woe unto those who take their safety for granted and sit down in God's House and say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we."

Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion! Of all enemies, one of the most to be dreaded is presumption. To be secure in Christ is a blessing—to be secure in ourselves is a curse. Where carnal security reigns, the Spirit of God withdraws. He is with the humble and contrite, but He is not with the proud and self-sufficient. My Brethren, are we all clear in this respect? Do not many of God's people also need to bemoan their worldliness? Once Christ was all with you, Brethren—is it so now? Once you despised the world, and despised alike its pleasures and its frowns. But now, my Brethren, are not the chains of worldly custom upon you? Are you not, many of you, enslaved by fashion, and eaten up with frivolity?

Do you not, some of you, run as greedily as worldlings after the questionable enjoyments of this present life? Ought these things be? Can they remain so and your souls enjoy the Lord's smile? "You cannot serve God and Mammon." "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You cannot be Christ's disciples, and be in fellowship with the ungodly. Come out from among them! Be you separate! Touch not the unclean thing! Then shall you know right joyfully that the Lord is a Father to you, and that you are His sons and daughters.

But, Brethren, have you gone unto Jesus without the camp, and do you abide there with Him? Is the line of your separation visible—yes, is it existing? Is there any separation at all? Is it not often the case that the professed people of God are mixed up with the sons of men so that you cannot discern the one from the other? If it is so with anyone of us, let him humble himself, and let him cry in bitterness, "Oh that I were as in months past." Brothers and Sisters, feel you the breath of the winnowing fan again? How is it with you as to private prayer? Are there not Believers, and we hope true Believers, too, who are lax in devotion? The morning prayer is brief, but alas, it is not fervent. The evening prayer is too often sleepy—cries to the Lord are few and far between—communion with Heaven is distant, suspended, almost non-existent in many cases.

Look into this, my Brethren. Let each man commune with his own heart and be still. Think not of others just now, but let each one consider his ways. How is it with your love to the souls of sinners? There was a time when you would have done anything to bring a man to Christ—when any exertion you could have put forth would have been made spontaneously—without the need of incessant exhortations. Are you as ready to speak for Jesus now as you once were? Do you watch to bring souls to Him? Does the tear tremble in your eye, now, as it once did for lost souls perishing without Christ? Alas, upon how many has a hardening influence operated!

Ah, and this is true even of us ministers. We have grown professional in our service, and now we preach like automatons, wound up for a sermon to run down when the discourse is over. We have little more care for the souls of men than if they were so much dirt. Trifles of criticism, fancies of speculation, or fopperies of oratory fascinate too many who should be wise to win smiles. God forgive us if we have fallen into so deplorable a state. Ah, and how many of God's people must confess that their conscience is not so tender now as it used be? The time was when if you said half a word amiss, you would hide away to weep over it. When, in business, if there had been a little mistake, and anything that might be construed as a want of integrity you would have felt ashamed for a week that such a thing had happened.

But now! Ah, professors hear this—some of you can be dishonest and speak words that border on lasciviousness, and be as others are, yet your heart does not smite you—instead you come to the Communion Table and feel you have a right to be there! You listen to the Word of God and take

comfort from it—when you should be ashamed and confounded! Let me enquire whether there are not many of us whose zeal is almost gone? We once loved the Savior intensely, and His cause we eagerly sought to serve. But now we take matters easily and do not travail in birth for souls. Some rich men were likely to give most freely to the cause of God, but now covetousness has palsied the hand of generosity. Even poor Christians are not always so ready with their two mites as they were in better days.

You were likely to labor, too, but that Sunday school class sees you no longer. No street preaching now. No tract distributing now—all forms of Christ's service you have renounced—you fancy you have done enough. Alas, poor Sluggard! Has the sun shone long enough? Has God given you your daily bread long enough? Oh, cease not working, Brethren, till God ceases to be merciful to you! "On, on, on!" "Forward, forward, forward," is the very motto of the Christian life. Let none of us talk of finality for we have not yet attained. Till life is over our zeal should still glow, and our labors for Christ should multiply.

Are there but other signs of declension that some of us might, with but a very slight examination, discover in ourselves? Is not brotherly love in many Christians very questionable? Have they not forgotten, altogether, the family ties which bind all Christians to one another? And with brotherly love has not love to the Gospel gone, too, so that now, with many, one doctrine is almost as good as another? If a man can talk well, and is an orator, they enjoy his ministry whether he advocates Truth or error. Once they could go to the little meeting house where Christianity was preached faithfully, though in an uncouth style. But now they must have the help of organs or they cannot praise God. And there must be millinery and genuflections or else they cannot pray to Him. And they must listen to oratory and elocution or else they cannot accept God's Word.

He is sickly who cannot dine without made dishes and spiced meats, but he is a healthy man of God who can eat Heaven's bread and Heaven's meat even when it is not served on a lordly dish. Might not many of us blush if we were to think how low our Graces are, how weak our faith, how few our good works and our gracious words with which we should bear testimony to His name? Yes, in thousands of cases Christians need not be stopped if they were to commence this mournful cry, "Oh that I were as in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle."

V. But, I must pass on to observe that these regrets, BY THEMSELVES, ARE USELESS. It is unprofitable to read these words of Job and say, "Just so, that is how I feel," and then continue in the same way. If a man has neglected his business, and so has lost his trade, it may mark a turn in his affairs when he says, "I wish I had been more industrious." But if he abides in the same sloth as before, of what use is his regret? If he shall fold his arms and say, "Oh that I had dug that plot of land! Oh that I had sown that field"—no harvest will come because of his lamentations!

Up, Man, up and labor or you will have the sluggard's reward—rags and poverty will still be your portion! If a man is in declining health. If drunkenness and riot have broken down his constitution, it may mark a salutary reform in his history if he confesses his former folly. But if his regrets end in mere expressions, will these heal him? I think not. So neither will a man affected by spiritual decline be restored by the mere fact of his knowing himself to be so. Let him go to the Beloved Physician, drink of the Waters of Life again, and receive the leaves of the tree which are for the healing of the nations. Inactive regrets are insincere. If a man really did lament that he had lost

communion with God, he would seek to regain it. If he does not seek to be restored, he is adding to all his former sins that of lying before God in uttering regrets that he does not feel in his soul.

I have known some, I fear, who even satisfied themselves with expressions of regrets. "Ah," they say, "I am a deeply experienced man, I can go where Job went. I can mourn and lament as Job did." Remember, many have been on Job's dunghill who knew nothing of Job's God—many have imitated David in his sins who never followed him in his repentance. They have gone from their sin into Hell by the way of presumption, whereas David went from it to Heaven by the road of repentance and forgiveness. Never let us merely, because we feel some uneasiness within, conclude that this suffices. If in the dead of the night you should hear thieves in your house, you would not congratulate yourself because you were awake to hear them. You would waive all such comfortable reflections till the rogues were driven out and your property was safe.

And so, when you know things are amiss with you, do not say, "I am satisfied, because I know it is so." Up, Men, and with all the strength that God's Holy Spirit can give you, strive to drive out these traitors from your bosom—for they are robbing your soul of her best treasures!

VI. Brothers and Sisters, these regrets, when they are necessary, are very HUMBLING. Meditate now for a minute. Think, Beloved, what was your position in your happiest times, in those days that are now past? Had you any love to spare, then? You were zealous—were you too zealous? You were gracious—were you too gracious? No, in our best estate we were very far short of what we ought to be, and yet we have gone back from even that! It was a poor attainment at the best—have we fallen even from that? During the time we have been going back, we ought to have gone forward. What enjoyments we have lost by our wanderings! What progress we have missed! As John Bunyan well puts it, when Christian fell asleep and lost his roll he had to go back for it. And he found it very hard going back, and, moreover, he had to go on again so that he had to traverse three times the road he needed only to have traveled once. And then he came in late at the gates of the palace Beautiful and was afraid of the lions, of which he would have had no fear had not the darkness set in. We know not what we lose, when we lose growth in Grace.

Alas, how much the Church has lost through us, for if the Christian becomes poor in Grace, he lessens the Church's wealth of Grace. We have a common treasury as a Church, and everyone who takes away his proportion from it robs the whole. Dear Brethren, how accountable are many of us for the low tone of religion in the world, especially those of us who occupy the foremost ranks! If Grace is at a low ebb with us, others say, "Well, look at So-and-So. I am as good as he." So much in the Church do we take the cue from one another that each one of us is in a measure responsible for the low state of the whole. Some of us are very quick to see the faults of others—may it not be that these faults are our own children?

Those who have little love to others generally discover that there is little love in the Church, and I notice that those who complain of the inconsistencies of others are usually the most inconsistent persons themselves. Shall I be a robber of my fellow Christians? Shall I be an injury to the cause of Christ? Shall I be a comfort unto sinners in their sin? Shall I rob Christ of His Glory—I, who was saved from such depths of sin—I, who have been favored with such enjoyments of His Presence—I, that have been on Tabor's top with Him, and seen Him transfigured—I, that have been in His banqueting house, and have drunk out of the flagons of His love—shall I be so devoid of Grace that I shall even injure His children and make His enemies to blaspheme? Wretch that I

am, to do this!

Smite your breast, my Brothers and Sisters, if such has been your sin! Go home and smite your breast again and ask God to smite it, till, with a broken heart, you cry repentantly for restoration! And then again go forth as a burning and a shining light to serve your Master better than before.

VII. These regrets, then, are humbling, and they may be made very PROFITABLE in many other ways. First, they show us what human nature is. Have we gone back so far? O, Brethren, we might have gone back to perdition! We would have done so if it had not been for the Grace of God. What a marvel it is that God has borne with our ill manners, when He might justly have laid the reins on our necks and suffered us to rush on in the road which we so often hankered after. See you not, dear Brethren, what a body of death we carry with us, and what a terrible power it possesses? When you see the mischief that corruption has already done, never trust yourself, but look for new Grace every day. Learn again to prize what spiritual blessings yet remain.

If you have such bitter regrets for what you have lost, hold fast what is still yours. Slip back no further, for if these slips have cost you so much, take heed that they do not ruin you. To continue presumptuous may be a proof that our profession is rotten throughout—only a holy jealousy can remove the suspicion of insincerity. Let your previous failings teach you to walk cautiously in the future. Be jealous, for you serve a jealous God. Since gray hairs may come upon you, here and there, and you may not know it, search, watch, try yourself day by day lest you relapse yet more. This should teach us to live by faith, since our best attainments fail us. We rejoice today, but we may mourn tomorrow.

What a mercy it is that our salvation does not depend on what we are or what we feel! Christ has finished our salvation—no man can destroy what He has completed. Our life is hid with Christ in God, and is safe there! None can pluck us out of Jehovah's hands. Since we so frequently run aground it is clear that we would be wrecked altogether if we went to sea in a legal vessel with Self for our pilot. Let us keep to the good ship of Free Grace, steered by immutable faithfulness—for none other can bring us to the desired haven. But oh, let that Free Grace fill us with ardent gratitude!

Since Christ has kept us, though we could not keep ourselves, let us bless His name, and, overwhelmed with obligations, let us rise with a solemn determination that we will serve Him better than we have ever done before. And may His blessed Spirit help us to make the determination a fact.

VIII. So, to close. These regrets OUGHT NOT TO BE CONTINUAL. They ought to be removed—decidedly removed—by an earnest effort, made in God's strength, to get back to the position which we occupied before, and to attain something better still. Dear Brothers and Sisters, if any of you desire now to come into the higher life, and to feel anew your first love, what shall I say to you? Go back to where you started! Do not stay discussing whether you are a Christian or not. Go to Christ as a poor guilty sinner. When the door to Heaven seems shut to me as a saint, I will get through it as a sinner, trusting in the precious blood of Jesus.

Come and stand again, as though all your sins were still on you, at the foot of the Cross, where still may be seen the dropping blood of the infinitely precious Atonement. Savior, I trust You again—guilty, more guilty than I was before, a sinful child of God, I trust You—"wash me

thoroughly from my iniquities, and purge me from my sin." You will never have your Graces revived unless you go to the Cross. Begin life again. The best air for a man to breathe when he is sickly is said to be that of his birthplace— it was at Calvary we were born! It is only at Calvary we can be restored when we are declining.

Do the first works. As a sinner, repair to the Savior and ask to be restored. Then, as a further means of health, search out the cause of your declension. Probably it was a neglect of private prayer. Where the disease began, there must the remedy be applied. Pray more earnestly, more frequently, more importunately. Or was it a neglect of hearing the Word? Were you enticed by novelty or cleverness away from a really searching and instructive ministry? Go back and feed on wholesome food again— perhaps that may cure the disease. Or have you been too grasping after the world? Brother, you loved God when you had but one shop! You have two, now, and are giving all your time and thoughts to business—and your soul is getting lean. Man alive! Strike off some of that business, for it is a bad business that makes your soul poor. I would not check industry or enterprise for a single moment. Let a man do all he can, but not at the expense of his soul! Push, but do not push down your soul. You may buy gold too dear, and may attain a high position in this world at a cost which you may have to rue all your days. Where the mischief began, there apply the remedy. And oh, I urge upon you, and most of all upon myself, do not make excuses for yourselves! Do not mitigate your faults—do not say it must be so. Do not compare yourselves among yourselves, or you will be unwise.

But to the perfect image of Christ let your hearts aspire! To the ardor of your Divine Redeemer who loved not Himself, but loved you. To the intense fervor of His Apostles who laid themselves upon the altar of God for His sake. For Christ's sake, and for yours, aspire to this, and may we as a Church live near to God, and grow in Grace! Then shall the Lord add to us daily of such as shall be saved.

There are some here who will say, "I do not comprehend this sermon—I have no cause to look back with regret. I have always been much the same as I am. I know nothing of religion." The day shall come when you will envy the least and most trembling Believer. To you careless, Christless sinners, the day shall come when you will cry to the rocks for mercy, and beg them to conceal you from the eyes of Him whom now you dare despise. I beseech you be not high minded, lift not up your horn on high, speak not so exceeding proud! Bow before the Christ of God, and ask Him to give you the new life. For even if that new life has declined and become sickly, it is better than the death in which you dwell. Go and seek Grace of Him who alone can give it, and He will grant it to you this day, for His infinite mercy's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Revelation 2, 3:1

6.

MR. SPURGEON takes occasion to inform his weekly readers that the

funds in hand for sustaining the orphans under his care at Stockwell are gradually diminishing and assistance will be very seasonable. About 200 fatherless boys are in the Orphanage.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Job 29,20 #1649 - Freshness

FRESHNESS

NO. 1649

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 16, 1882,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand."

Job 29:20.

"I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

Psalms 92:10.

THE first text tells us of the renown of Job and of the way in which the Providence of God continued to maintain the glory of his estate, his bodily health and his prosperity. He was for many days, months, years, continuously prospered of God. Everything to which he set his hand succeeded. God had set a hedge about him and all that he had, so that none broke through to molest him. He grew richer, he grew more influential, he had more honor in the sight of his fellow men each morning that he walked to the gate. In every way he was advanced from day to day and that throughout a long stretch of years. His glory was fresh in him. He did not achieve a hasty fame and then suddenly become forgotten. He did not blaze out like a meteor and then vanish into darkness, but he seemed to be continually fresh, vigorous, strong, energetic and successful.

He says that his bow was renewed in his hand, whereas a bow usually loses its force by use and is less able to shoot arrows after a little while and needs to lie still with a slack string—but it was by no means so with Job. He could send one arrow and then another and then another—and the bow seemed to gather strength by use! That is to say, he never seemed to be worn out in mind or body. Whatever he commenced was commenced with as great a freshness and zest as the last thing which he had accomplished and that had been commenced with the same energy as the first enterprise of his youth. However, this did not always last, for Job, in this chapter, is telling us of something that used to be—something that, the loss of, he very sorrowfully deplored—"my glory was fresh in me." He found himself suddenly stripped of riches and of honor and put last in the list instead of first, while his purposes and aims seemed all to miss their way—and he had no strength and no glory left in him. Now he had reached the winter of his discontent and those who, before, did him homage, became his assailants. So far as glory was concerned, he was forgotten as a dead man out of mind.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, this gives us a lesson that we must not put our trust in the stability of earthly things. It is said of the world that God has founded it upon the floods. How, then, can we

expect it to be substantial? Beneath yon moon, continually changing, what can we discover that abides the same? Where the very light of Heaven is waxing and waning, what is there but mutability? Change is written upon the face of all things. If, then, you have built your nest on high, reckon not too surely that you shall die in your nest—for the axe may fell the tree and bring it down at an untimely date. If your children are round about you in good health, be not too sure of them, for they may be carried to an early grave—and the parent may yet be childless.

If up to now you have been great in the esteem of men, think less than nothing of that, for the breath of popular applause is more fleeting than a vapor! It scarcely comes before it goes, and they who, yesterday, cried, "Hosanna," in the streets at your coming, may, before tomorrow's sun is set, be crying, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" They did that to the Master— marvel not if they do it to the servants! This is the respect that makes all mortal things inconsiderable to a wise man—he scarcely will put them among his treasures—for they melt before they are fairly counted, like a coinage of ice. They are but as the counters that a child plays with, having only an imaginary value. The things which are seen are shadows—the things invisible are the only substances. Reckon, then, at their fit price, this transient glory of wealth, health, or fame. Lay up treasure, "where neither moth nor rust does corrupt," and seek for stability in other things than these. Get the feet of yours joy upon the Rock of Ages and reckon all else to be but sand at its very best.

David, in the second text is talking, I think, about spiritual things, and he tells us with great joy that he should be anointed with fresh oil. He did not expect that his glory would depart, but he expected that it should be renewed. He did not reckon that the bow would lose its force in his hand, but that God would increase his strength from day to day. And if any of you, here, who are God's people have any fears about the future as to your soul matters—if you are alarmed with the fear that you will share the same lot which Job shared as to his temporal glory—I would remind you that Job, even in temporals, received at last twice as much as he had in his best. We must remember that God can turn His hand one way as well as another and brighten your prospects as well as darken them! Predict delight rather than despair. Even the lower springs shall continue to flow till you are beyond the need of them!

Just now it is about spiritual matters that I want to speak—and if you have a fear that you must necessarily decline in these—I would remind you of the words of David, "I shall be anointed with fresh oil" and, yet further on, of his other words, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, to show that the Lord is upright." Never fall into the notion that a spiritual falling off is inevitable—there need be nothing of the kind—you may be fresh as the dew even unto the end! The subject, tonight, will run in this way—First, the excellency of freshness—"My glory was fresh in me." Secondly, the fear of ill-departure. And, thirdly, the hope of is continuance, which hope is greatly encouraged by the words of our text—"I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

I. First, then, notice THE EXCELLENCY OF FRESHNESS. "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." David had been anointed, while still a youth, to be king over Israel. He was anointed, yet again, when he came to the kingdom. That outward anointing with actual oil was the testimony of God's choice and the emblem of David's authorization. Oftentimes, when his throne seemed precarious, God confirmed him in it and subdued the people under him. When his dominion became weak, God strengthened him and his servants and gave them great victories, so that, as a king, David was frequently anointed with fresh oil. David's royal brow was crowned with fresh laurels again

and again and his throne was settled and established by the hands of the Lord.

It was established, not with the same old stale anointing—a repetition of that which had lost its force—but with oil freshly pressed from the green olive, namely, with a new blessing and a fresh blessing from God's right hand, as I trust, you and I may be! Freshness is a most delightful thing if you see it in another. It is a charm in Nature. The other day, when the wind blew cold, someone said to me, "Yes, but how fresh the air is and how refreshing—how different from that heavy, muggy atmosphere in which we were half drowned and almost entirely suffocated but a few days ago." We need something fresh, and when we get it, we are freshened ourselves! How pleasant to go into the garden and see the spring flowers just peeping up. How agreeable to mark the rills, with their fresh water leaping down the hills after showers of rain. The young lambs in the meadows and larks in the sky are delightful because of their freshness. Everything that is fresh seems to have a charm about it to our minds.

But, dear Friends, spiritual freshness has a double charm! Sometimes we know what it is to have a freshness of soul, which is the dew from the Lord. You remember when first your flesh was as that of a new-born child? I mean when you were newly born again and first knew the Lord. How fresh everything was to you! The pardon of sin—how it sparkled! The righteousness of Christ—how brilliant! The idea of being a child of God— how novel and how delightful! To be joint-heir with Christ—how it almost startled you—it was such a new idea to your spirit! And oftentimes since then, when your soul has been in a lively condition, everything has been bright, charming, exhilarating—nothing flat, stale, unprofitable.

Even though you heard the same things said again and again, yet, because your soul was fresh, they came to you with unusual power. Your spiritual food, if you are healthy, is always fresh to you, like the manna in the wilderness which was never stored a single night except for the Sabbath—but fresh and fresh it fell—and Israel gathered it and fed upon it then and there. Oh, it is a blessed thing to have your soul in a fresh state, filled with the ever-flowing Living Water! It is glorious to find everything about you fresh and new through the teaching of the blessed Spirit, so that you go from strength to strength and, like a roe or a young hart, leap from hill to hill! If we are now in the possession of it, may we always keep that freshness of soul and never lose it.

How that freshness is seen in a man's devotions. Oh, I have heard some prayers that are really musty! I have heard them so often that I dread the old familiar sounds! Some hackneyed expressions I remember hearing when I was a boy. I even now hear the vain repetitions—old, worn-out, good-for-nothing rubbish expressions they were then—but they are still brought out by regular prayer-makers! Even where the words are new and original, you will hear men pray in such a style as to make you say to yourself, "That prayer came out of Noah's Ark." As far as that man is concerned, there is nothing at all in it of life, sap, or savor. It has been dead long ago and hung up to dry till not a particle of juice remains in it.

But, on the other hand, you hear a man pray who does pray—whose soul is fully in communion with God—and what life and freshness is there! It may be that his expressions are somewhat rough, but they touch you because they come from his heart. Some of the confessions and petitions are strange to you, perhaps, and yet you feel that they are such strangers as it behooves you to be joyous at once! You are glad that such words and thoughts have passed through your spirit and blessed you! You feel that you can pray with such persons. Their prayers will go to

Heaven, for they came from Heaven! God has inspired them and their originality is a part of the manual of the Spirit. I like to hear a Brother even stop and stammer because he cannot go on—his heart is too full and he cannot find words. Oh, but it is blessed to get a little freshness, even if it comes through a breakdown!

I suppose that those dear Friends who pray by the book of Common Prayer, somehow or other manage to put freshness into their prayers. I am always glad that they do, for it shows the vigor of their piety. As for me, I am such a poor, weak thing, that after I have repeated the same words about half-a-dozen times, they do me no good. I must use words that suit the time and suit the state of my heart—and suit my desires and suit my depressions or my joys—and suit my thankful or mournful heart! One seems to need in prayer something fresh, but when the prayer is old and worn—and seems to have been brushed and turned and very little made of it, after all—why, then it does not strike us, or impress us, or help us! I like to feel freshness even in singing a hymn. It may be that we know the words, but then we must put fresh heart into them and feel them over again as much as if we were the authors of them! Then they become a grand vehicle for our praises! How sweet to sing, as it were, a new song! It is a blessed thing to have a freshness about our devotions, be they private or public, exultant or repentant.

And so, dear Friends, it is well to have a freshness about our feelings. I know that we do not hope to be saved by our feelings—neither do we put feeling side by side with faith—yet I should be very sorry to be trusting and yet never feeling. Surely it would be a dead faith! It would be a strange thing to be a living child of God and to have no feelings. I will tell you about feelings as they strike me. Sometimes I have deplored the condition of my heart before God and thought my feelings to be the worst that could be. But what a foolish judge I have been, for in a week's time I have needed to have those despised feelings over, again, and thought that now, at last, I had fallen into a worse state than before. I am persuaded that we are very poor judges of the value of our own inward feelings, and, perhaps, when we are lowest in our own esteem we are really highest in the sight of God.

And when we feel as if we did not pray, we are praying, and the heart may be wrestling with God more when it fears that it does not pray than when you come down complacently out of yours closet and say, "I know that I have had a good time, for I feel perfectly self-satisfied." I long for the Truth of God in the inward parts and wisdom in the secret places of the soul. Anything is good which rids us of pretense! Oh to be broken into splinters by the hand of God! And for every grain of dust to cry out to Him! I believe this mode of praying often prospers beyond any other. At any rate, give me not stereotyped pretension to feeling, but fresh feeling. Whether it is joy or sorrow, let it be living feeling, fresh from the deep fountains of the heart! Whether it is exultation or depression, let it be true and not superficial or simulated! I hate the excitement which needs to be pumped up. There is a something delightful, to my mind, in coming to the Throne of Grace, weeping—a something delightful in coming to the Lord's Supper full of joy and gladness—to come to either place cold and dead is horrible! There is something delicious in knowing that what you feel is true and comes up from the very bottom of your soul. That it has a point and edge about it which proves how sincere it is. God keep us from stale feelings and may He give us freshness of emotion!

I believe, dear Friends, that there is a very great beauty and excellence in freshness of utterance. Do not hinder yourself from that. How I long for it as a preacher! When one has, day after day, to stand before the same assembly and to talk of the things of God, one dreads lest he should be so monotonous and full of repetition that even the things of God should come to be a weariness to God's own people! I have often thought that if some Brothers who are very careful to speak exceedingly well what they say, should be a little more careless and speak as it comes—letting their heart flow over at their lips spontaneously—then there would be a far greater freshness about their utterance than there is when every sentence smells of the lamp and reeks of midnight oil!

God forbid that we should say a word against the deep study and the profound research of God's Word, but still, we may get to be so much students that we scarcely speak like practical men who live among the people! By aiming at a very superior style, we may fall into a thoroughly inferior one and all our freshness may be gone. I like, for my part, the wild bird's note. Men get the bullfinch and teach it to sing a few notes—and then the piping bullfinch is greatly prized. But I have finches outside my window, any one of which will beat any finch in the world that only pipes a note or two, for they pipe much more melodiously, though they were never taught except by God and Nature! There is a range of sweetness about their wild notes that a tutored bird cannot reach. Nature, pure and unsophisticated, is the best instrument for Divine Grace.

I like to hear men speak of God as they have known Him, every man in his own order, and with his own voice. Coming fresh, perhaps, from the very haunts of sin, out of which free Grace has fetched them, let them speak like Israelites fresh from the brick kilns! Coming from the plow-tail or from the forge with all the equipment of their trade about them and speaking just as they are. Without pretending to be anything else than they are and telling of God's amazing love to them—not quoting the experience of others, but giving out their own—this will be their wisdom and strength! Oh, there is a freshness about that and a great power to catch the ear and to move the heart when God, the Holy Spirit, is present to bless it!

Now, you that have lately been converted, do not go and learn all the pretty phrases that we are accustomed to use. Do not go and sit down at the feet of your dear teacher in the class and feel that you must talk just like he. Strike out your own course. Be yourself! "But I would be odd," you say. All right—so is your pastor! You need not mind that. You will not be the only odd body about. Be encouraged by that! I think that a little of what people call oddness is just, after all, leaving God's work alone. All the trees that God makes are odd. The Dutchmen clip them round or make them into peacocks, but that style of gardening is not to our mind.

But some people say, "What a lovely tree!" I say, "What a horribly ugly thing it is." Why not let the tree grow as God would have it? Do not clip yourselves round or square, but keep your freshness! There will be no two Christians exactly alike if they do that. There should be a freshness, dear Friends, about our labor. We ought to serve the Lord, to-day, with just as much novelty in it as there was 10 years ago. I may even venture to say 30 years ago! Oh, I remember the seriousness with which I went out to preach the first half-dozen sermons I ever preached—and what a burden it was from the Lord! And how I did go at it with all my might? Very clumsily, but still with all my soul and spirit!

And do you remember when you began to teach the class, or began to take your tract district? Did you not pray over it? It seemed almost too good to be true that you should be trusted with doing

anything for your Lord and Master! And you did it, oh, so intensely and, therefore, you had God's blessing! You did it well, though you blundered a good deal, for all your heart was in it, your motive was pure and your faith was childlike. You blundered the right way, for you blundered with your heart and so blundered into other men's hearts! Your heart was serving God, even in the mistakes you made.

And now, perhaps, you can go round the district and you are pretty well half-asleep over it. And you can teach the class, but there is not the vigor, the force, the energy, the intense desire, the burden that there once was—perhaps not all the joy. You can stand up and preach, dear Brother, and you have got pretty well accustomed to it—and the people have got accustomed to it, too—and they can nearly go to sleep! And you can, too— preach asleep! It is an easy thing to do, if you once learn the wretched art. There is a kind of sleep-walking in preachers—they can talk in their sleep in a very precise way—much more wonderful than walking! You cannot say, "I sleep, but my heart wakes." The fact is that it is the other way around—"I wake, but my heart sleeps"—and it is a great pity when it comes to be so.

We should pray to God that we may do everything fresh, just as if we had never done it before, only doing it with all the improvements which experience will bring to us! Pray with your children, tonight, as if it were your first prayer with them! Speak with them about their souls as if you had never mentioned the subject before. Talk of Jesus as if you were telling new news! Why, aren't you? Is it not always glad tidings? Always news fresh from Heaven? May God grant us Grace that, when we come to be gray and when we totter with our staff for very age—we may still tell out the story, if with feebleness of utterance, yet with juvenility of heart— feeling that we are bringing forth fruit even to old age, for the Lord still anoints us with fresh oil!

So much for the beauty and excellence of freshness. It ought to run into everything.

II. Now, dear Friends, in the second place, I will dwell upon the fear of losing it—THE FEAR OF ITS DEPARTURE. I have heard some express the thought that perhaps the things of God might lose their freshness to us by our familiarity with them. I think that the very reverse will turn out to be the case if the familiarity is that of a sanctified heart. In other things, "familiarity breeds contempt," but in the things of God, familiarity breeds adoration. The man who does not read his Bible much is the man who has a scant esteem of it. But he that studies it both day and night is the very man who will be impressed by its infinitude of meaning till he will be ready to cry, like Jerome, "I adore the infinity of Scripture."

I know that he that prays most loves prayer most and he that is most occupied with the praises of God is the very person who wishes that he could praise God day and night without ceasing. These things grow on you. Hence I would have no man fear that familiarity with holy things can take away from their freshness and their beauty! You may drink at other wells till you are no longer thirsty, but, strange to say, this all thirstquenching water, nevertheless, produces a much deeper thirst after its own self. He that eats of the Bread of Heaven shall hunger for no other, but shall grow ravenous for it. His capacity for feeding upon it shall be increased by that which he has fed upon. And, whereas at first, the crumbs from under the table might have satisfied him when he knew himself to be but a dog, at last, when he knows himself to be a child of God, he wishes for everything that is set upon the table!—

"Less than Yourself will not suffice My comfort to restore."

He must have all that is to be had! Such is his desire. Dismiss, then, any fear from your minds about that.

When we first commenced to break bread on every first day of the week, I heard some say that they thought that the coming so often to the Table might take away the impressiveness of the holy feast. Well, I have scarcely ever missed a Sabbath, now, these 20 years, and I never was so impressed with the solemnity and the sweetness of the Master's Supper as I am now! I feel it to be fresher every time. When it was once a month, I had not half the enjoyment in it, and I think that where friends have the communion once a quarter, or once a year, as in some Churches, they really do not give the ordinance a fair opportunity to edify them. They do not fairly test the value of an ordinance which they so grossly neglect, as it seems to me. No, you may have more, and more, and more, and more of everything that Christ has instituted and ordained, especially more and more of Himself— and the more you have, the more freshness there will be! "Yes, but we have had a fear, sometimes, that there will be a lack of freshness about ourselves." Well, that fear is a very natural one. Let me tell you some points on which, I fear, we have good ground of alarm, for we do our best to rob ourselves of all life and freshness. Christian people can lose the freshness of themselves by imitating one another. By adopting as our model some one form of the Christian life other than that which is embodied in the Person of our Lord, we shall soon manufacture a set of paste gems, but the diamond flash and glory will be unknown. Many godly people have a very deep sense of their corruption and inward sin and this, together with sorrowful spirit, combines to make them a rather gloomy race. Often deeply taught in other respects, they fail to rejoice in the Lord.

Certain of these have formed a school and they have set up a standard and judge everybody to be a deceiver or a mere babe in Grace who cannot groan as deep down as they can. This is not wise. If you do that, you will lose your freshness, for you will forever be scattering your dust and ashes over all the joys of your life. Why should the children of the bride-chamber mourn while the Bridegroom is with them? Let us be happy while we may! There is another set of Brethren who are always glad and happy, for they are healthy and competently provided for. They think they are out of the way of temptation and so they believe that they are perfect—they also set up a standard and cut down everybody who cannot sing right up into the alto notes as high as they can! Well, you will get stale, too, Brothers and Sisters, whoever you may be, for self-laudation never keeps fresh long!

When we have heard about half-a-dozen brethren boasting that they are nearly perfect, it is about as much as some of us can stomach! I cannot stand above two of them without feeling my boxing propensities set in motion! Poor fools, how have they persuaded themselves to hope that selfpraise will be thought to be the height of piety? It is nauseous, even, to those of us who are prepared to make a measure of excuse for the fervid imaginations of the brethren! Drop into one particular groove and run in it—take up one line of things and stick to it—and you will very soon find yourself as far from freshness as a bit of leather which has been worked on an engine to revolve forever and ever in the same course! The beauty of real life lies much in its variety.

A Brother comes to me on Sunday morning sighing. Thank you, Brother, for that! I am glad that you are in that state, for that is where I am! And we can sympathize with each other. Perhaps

tomorrow I meet this same friend and he is full of joy and delight, and I say, "Thank you, Brother, I am glad to meet with somebody who is rejoicing in the Lord. You give me a lift. Now shall I be helped to rejoice in Him, too." Sometimes, in this pilgrimage to the Celestial City, I join company with a Brother worker who laments that he has many difficulties in dealing with poor sinners. I say to him, "I am glad of that, for I have more difficulties than you, but I see that I am not alone in my anxieties." Another I meet with says that he has been so happy in meeting with souls that have found the Lord and I reply, "Yes, and I am glad to see you, for I am happy, too, for I have met with many who have just found the Savior." These changes and ups and downs are like the delicious variations of the seasons—they are not always autumn, not always spring, not always winter, not always, even, the plenitude of summer. So with our souls, we are never so long in one place as to find monotony in life. No, the monotony is in death—the freshness is in life! These changes and varieties create a splendid freshness which we might not hope to have if we tied ourselves to one man's chariot and resolved that our experience should be uniformly like his. Another way of spoiling your freshness is by repression. The feebler sort of Christians dare not say, feel, or do, until they have asked their leader's permission. I have known a little village chapel in which, when the preacher had delivered a sermon, the people did not know whether he was sound or not till they had asked the principal deacon! Or they waited till they got outside and consulted a little knot of good old men and women who had to act as tasters for all the others and give a verdict as to the orthodoxy of the performance! A few good souls thought the sermon to be very sweet—the man seemed to be preaching the Gospel—but they did not like to commit themselves to the tune till they had got the key note. And when they had seen the Brother that led them all, then they knew! If he said that it was all right, why, then it was all right!

Now, dear Friend, if you feel that God is blessing you in any religious exercise, mind that you are blessed and let other people who do not like to be blessed go without it if they must. But as for you, be blessed when you can! Do not be ashamed to enjoy that which others despise. Sit down and quietly feast on the kernel while others are breaking their teeth over the shells. If you feel that you must sing, sing without stint! Why not? In the kitchen—in the parlor—sing! Never mind if remarks are made. Do not worldlings sing to their own liking—why shouldn't you? If sometimes you feel that you cannot sing, well, then, do not sing! Be yourself and be natural as Divine Grace makes you natural—that is the thing. Let your mind have freedom and do not feel as if you went about in fetters, bound to this and pledged to that!

In the living kingdom of the living God there is no rule that you groan at eight o'clock in the morning and sing at noon; that you sigh at half-past three and get the plenitude of the Spirit at a quarter past seven! Nothing of the kind! It is a free Spirit under whose power we dwell and He comes like the wind and goes like the wind—and acts according to His own pleasure. Lord, uphold me with "Your free Spirit." Do not repress Him. "Quench not the Spirit." Yield yourselves to His influences and if you feel inclined to shout, be brave enough to do so—and give the praise to God! This is a successful way of keeping up freshness—to be rid of repression and to be free before God.

If we want to keep up our freshness, however, the main thing is never to fall into neglect about our souls. Do you know what state the man is generally in when you are charmed by his freshness? Is he not in fine health? Some of my dear friends were known to call and see me when I was laid up some time ago—and I am afraid that they did not find much freshness about me, then! On the contrary, they heard much the same old story—weary nights and painful days. I hope I did not

display much impatience, but still, the tendency is to give a good deal of telling of what one has to endure! There is not much freshness about that.

But a man is fresh, generally, when he is well and everything is going right within his internal economy. Then he thinks fresh thoughts and uses fresh words, for all around him life is in its flowery age and sparkles like the morning! I am sure that it is so with the soul. When the soul is healthy—when you are feeding on the Bread of Heaven; when you are living near to God; when you are believing the promises and embracing them; when you are getting into the very sunlight of the Lord's fellowship—oh, it is then that fresh words and striking words not often heard will drop from you! Pearls will fall from your lips if those lips have been with Jesus, and He has kissed you with the kisses of His mouth! Do not neglect yourself, then! Let the fountain of the heart be right and then the freshness will speedily be seen.

I have shown you the things by which a man may lose his freshness— avoid them carefully. Those of you who are workers for God may have a fear that you will lose the freshness of yours utterances—a fear which haunts a good many of us. Now, that may happen to us by our own fault if there is a need of searching the Word of God; if there is a need of fresh acquisitions of sacred knowledge. And it may happen to us, again, if we are always gathering the thoughts of others and do not think, ourselves. Then we shall lose freshness and become mere dealers in second-hand observations. Many thoughtful Brothers and Sisters are afraid that they may lose it through age. It does happen to men, as they grow old, that much of the vivacity of youth departs. And we all know ministers who have lost much of their power to edify because their freshness and variety have gone. It is a sad thing that it should have to be so with any of us, but what a blessed thing it is if we can fall back upon that assurance, "I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

Nature decays, but Grace shall thrive. The Holy Spirit will renew our youth. The Grace of God can give us freshness after Nature has ceased to yield it. And it shall be a better freshness—not the dew of our youth, but the dew of the Spirit of the Lord! If Jesus Christ is preached, age becomes an important help in bearing testimony to His faithfulness and power to bless. I can imagine it to be the duty of the aged minister to retire from the prominent sphere where he has long been the preacher—and I hope in my own case I shall not occupy this pulpit an hour too long! But the man of God can find another pulpit—and when he has found it, I can suppose him often beginning his youth, again, as he tells out the story of the Cross and talks of Jesus—and proclaims the Doctrines of Grace again! He can begin in his country sphere much in the same way as he set out at the first. At any rate, he has always this to fall back upon," I shall be anointed with fresh oil." The Holy Spirit will abide with him continually and give him an anointing of freshness.

And so with you, dear Friends. You think, when you have done addressing the class, "Well, I am pretty well spun out. I shall never be able to get another address." Shall you not? Read that— "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." And you that go out preaching in the villages and often cry, "I do not know what I shall do for a sermon next Sunday," think of this and be consoled—"I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Fall back on that! If you are called to speak to the same people for any length of time, it will make the promise all the more dear to you, as you can plead it before God, "Lord, anoint Your servant with fresh oil." I pray that all of us in heart, soul, life, utterance and labor may always be kept fresh and may God grant that we do not backslide, for that would kill our freshness and put in the place of its sweet smell the foul odors of sin!

Oh to be holy, sweet and vigorous to the end! The Lord grant that we may make large drafts upon Himself for greater faith, greater love, and greater joy—then shall we have greater freshness! May we also be sustained from within by His blessed Spirit and so may our freshness continue to our dying day.

III. I close with the third point, which is this precious Word of God which gives us HOPE OF ITS RENEWAL. Let us not think that we must grow stale and heavenly things grow old with us, for, first, our God in whom we trust renews the face of the year. He is beginning His work, again, in the fair processes of Nature. The dreary winter has passed away. The time of the singing of birds is coming on and the sweet flowers are peeping out from their graves, enjoying a resurrection of' glory and beauty.

Now, this is the God whom we serve, and if we have been passing through our wintertime, let us look for our spring. If any of you have been growing cold of late—if any of you have grown stale and mechanical and have fallen into ruts—come, look up! Look up and pray the great Renewer to visit you—

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, With all Your quickening powers."

"He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." It will not take the Lord long to restore you. "His word runs very swiftly." He speaks even to ice and frost and by His word they pass away. He has but to will it and all the genial days of spring and summer come hastening on and the banner of harvest is waving. "Awake you that sleeps and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." Be hopeful! Be joyful! There are better days for you. Put your trust in God, who renews the face of the earth, and look for His Spirit to revive you.

Moreover, there is an excellent reason why you may expect to have all your freshness coming back—it is because Christ dwells in you! Do you not know it? Christ is formed in you the hope of Glory and, if so, your glory will be fresh about you, for He never grows stale. It is God that said of Him, "You have the dew of Your youth." Oh, the doctrine of the indwelling of Christ in the Believer—let us never forget it! As long as that is a Truth of God, there is always a hope for us. Then there is the other grand doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He dwells in you! If your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, shall He not always be to you a fountain of new life—a spring of fresh delights? Why, it must be so! The Holy Spirit is not exhausted. His power is not lessened in any degree whatever. He can make your face shine, again, and your tongue sing again! He can make your heart leap, again, with unspeakable joy!

Come, you that sit in the dust, begin to rejoice, for God the Spirit is still with you and shall be with you—the Comforter whom Christ has given— never to be taken away! Rejoice in Him and ask Him, now, in His mercy, to restore your soul, and He will do it! Oh, what a blessing it is to get right deep down into God's Word, for that Word is always new and the source of new thoughts in those who feed upon it! This is the Book of yesterday, today and forever—the Book which, though many of its verses were written thousands of years ago, is as new as though it were only written yesterday! From the mouth of God come the promises, at this moment, full of life and freshness and power! Come to it! It is all yours—every acre of this blessed land of Canaan is yours and will yield you corn and wine and oil!

There is not a star in the great firmament of Scripture but shines for you! There is not a text in all this mighty treasury of God but you may take it and spend it and live upon the produce! Therefore, while the Word of the Lord is so fresh and so full, it cannot be that you shall be stale in thought and conversation. You shall be anointed with fresh oil! God Himself is with you and He is always full! God Himself is with you and He is always living! God Himself is with you and He is always fresh—and He shall refresh your spirit! Why stay away? Come from all that is stale and flat and from all the dead past—and enter into eternal life where flowers forever bloom, fruits forever ripen—and the fresh springs forever flow!

Come and eat the new corn of the land and drink the new wine of the kingdom! And may the Lord make you glad in His House of Prayer for Jesus' sake! Amen.

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Job 30,23 #1922- Concerning Death

CONCERNING DEATH

NO. 1922

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 26, 1886,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For I know that You will bring me to death, and to the

house appointed for all living."

Job 30:23.

JOB suffered from a terrible sickness which filled him with pain both day and night. It is supposed that, in addition to his grievous eruptions upon the skin, he endured great difficulty in breathing. He says in the 18th verse, "By the great force of my disease is my garment changed: it binds me about as the collar of my coat." His clothes were soiled and clung to him. His skin was blackened and seemed to be tightened. He was like a man whose tunic strangles him—the collar of his garment seemed to be fast bound about his throat. Those who have suffered from it, know what distress is occasioned by this complaint, especially when they are also compelled to cry, "My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest." At such a time Job thought of death and, surely, if at any period in our lives we should consider our latter end, it is when the frail tent of our body begins to tremble because the cords are loosened and the curtain is torn!

It is the general custom with sick people to talk about "getting well" and those who visit them, even when they are gracious people, will see the tokens of death upon them and yet will speak as if they were hopeful of their recovery. I remember a father asking me when I prayed with a consumptive girl to be sure not to mention death. In such cases it would be far more sensible for the sick man to turn his thoughts towards eternity and stand prepared for the great change. When our God, by our affliction, calls upon us to number our days, let us not refuse to do so! I admire the wisdom of Job, that he does not shirk the subject of death, but dwells upon it as an appropriate topic, saying, "I know that You will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

Yet Job made a mistake in the hasty conclusion which he drew from his grievous affliction. Under depression of spirit he felt sure that he must very soon die. He feared that God would not relax the blows of His hands until his body became a ruin—and then he would have rest. But he did not die at that time. He was fully recovered and God gave him twice as much as he had before! A life of usefulness, happiness and honor lay before him and yet he had set up his own tombstone and reckoned himself a dead man. It is a pity for us to pretend to predict the future, for we certainly cannot see an inch before us. As it is idle with daydreams to fasci

Volume 32 1nate the heart into a groundless expectation, so is it equally foolish to increase the evil of the day by forebodings of tomorrow. Who knows what is to be? Therefore why should I wish to lift up the corner of the curtain and peer into what God has hidden? Some of those who have been most sure that they would soon die, have lived longer than others. A Prophet once prayed to die and yet he never saw death. From the lips of Elijah, who was to be caught up by a whirlwind into Heaven, it was a strange prayer— "Take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

It is the part of a brave man and especially of a believing man, neither to dread death nor to sigh for it—neither to fear it nor to court it. Possessing his soul in patience, he should not despair of life when harshly pressed and he should be always more eager to run his race well than to reach its end. It is no work of men of faith to predict their own deaths. These things are with God. How long we shall live on earth, we know not and need not wish to know. We have not the choosing of short or long life and if we had such choice, it would be wise to refer it back to our God. "Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit," is an admirable prayer for living as well as for dying saints. To wish to pry between the folded leaves of the Book of Destiny is to desire a questionable privilege—doubtless we live better because we cannot foresee the moment when this life shall reach its finis.

Job made a mistake as to the date of his death, but he made no mistake as to the fact itself. He spoke truly when he said, "I know that You will bring me to death." Some day or other, the Lord will call us from our home above ground to the house appointed for all living. I invite you, this morning, to consider this unquestioned Truth of God. Do you start back? Why do you do so? Is it not greatly wise to talk about our last hours? "We want a cheerful theme." Do you? Is not this a cheerful theme to you? It is solemn, but it ought also to be welcome to you! You say that you cannot stand the thought of death. Then you greatly need it! Your shrinking from it proves that you are not in a right state of mind, or else you would take it into due consideration without reluctance. That is a poor happiness which overlooks the most important of facts. I would not endure a peace which could only be maintained by thoughtlessness. You have something yet to learn if you are a Christian and yet are not prepared to die! You need to reach a higher state of Grace and attain to a firmer and more forceful faith. That you are as yet a babe in Grace is clear from your admission that to depart and be with Christ does not seem to be a better thing for you than to abide in the flesh!

Should it not be the business of this life to prepare for the next life and, in that respect, to prepare to die? But how can a man be prepared for that which he never thinks of? Do you mean to take a leap in the dark? If so, you are in an unhappy condition and I beseech you as you love your own soul to escape from such peril by the help of God's Holy Spirit!

"Oh," says one, "but I do not feel called upon to think of it." Why, the very season of the year calls you to it. Each fading leaf admonishes you. You will most surely have to die—why not think upon the inevitable? It is said that the ostrich buries its head in the sand and fancies itself secure when it can no longer see the hunter. I can hardly fancy that even a bird can be quite so foolish! And I beseech you do not enact such madness. If I do not think of death, yet death will think of me! If I will not go to death by meditation and consideration, death will come to me! Let me, then, meet it like a man and, to that end, let me look it in the face! Death comes into our houses and steals away our loved ones. Seldom do I enter this pulpit without missing some accustomed face from its

place. Never a week passes over this Church without some of our happy fellowship being caught away to the still happier fellowship above! This week a youthful member has melted away and her mourning parents are in our midst. We as a congregation are continually being summoned to remember our mortality and so, whether we will hear him or not, Death is preaching to us each time we assemble in this house! Does he come so often with God's message and shall we refuse to hear? No, let us lend a willing ear and heart and hear what God, the Lord, would say to us at this time!

Oh, you that are youngest, you that are most full of health and strength, I lovingly invite you not to put away this subject from you! Remember, the youngest may be taken away. Early in the life of my boys I took them to the old churchyard of Wimbledon and bade them measure some of the little graves within that enclosure—and they found several green hillocks which were shorter than themselves. I tried thus to impress upon their young minds the uncertainty of life. I would have every child remember that he is not too young to die. Let others know that they are not too strong to die. The stoutest trees of the forest are often the first to fall beneath the destroyer's axe. Paracelsus, the renowned physician of old time, prepared a medicine of which he said that if a man took it regularly, he would never die, except it were of extreme old age. Yet Paracelsus himself died a young man!

Those who think they have found the secret of immortality will yet learn that they are under a strong delusion. None of us can discover a spot where we are out of bow-shot of the last enemy and, therefore, it would be idiotic to refuse to think of it! A certain vainglorious French Duke forbade his attendants ever to mention death in his hearing and when his secretary read to him the words, "The late King of Spain," he turned upon him with contemptuous indignation and asked him what he meant by it. The poor secretary could only stammer out, "It is a title which they take." Yes, indeed, it is a title we shall all take and it will be well to note how it will befit us! The King of Terrors comes to kings, nor does he disdain to strip the pauper of his scanty flesh—to you, to me, to all he comes—let us all make ready for his sure approach.

I. First, then, very solemnly under the teaching of God's Spirit, I call your attention to a piece of PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE—"I know that You will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." A general Truth of God here receives a personal application.

Job knew that he should be brought to the grave because he perceived the universality of that fact in reference to others. He lived on the verge of an age when life was longer than now and yet the Patriarch had never known a person who had not, after a certain age, left this earthly stage. Cast your eyes over every land, glance from the pole to the equator and along to the other pole, and see if this is not the universal law, that man must be dissolved in death. "It is appointed unto men once to die." Only two men entered the next world without seeing death, but those two exceptions prove the rule. Another great exception is yet to come which I would never overlook. Perhaps the Lord Jesus Christ may personally come before we see death—and when He comes, we that are alive and remain shall not fall asleep—but even then "we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

This is the great exception to the rule and we cheerfully allow it to dwell upon our minds, but if the Master tarries, we, ourselves, shall not be exempt from the common rule. We must all die. Dust to

dust, ashes to ashes must be the last word for us among the sons of men. I hope nobody here is so foolish as to suppose that he shall live on and never be gathered with the great assembly in the house appointed for all living. Last week one poor fanatic who taught that she, herself, would never see corruption, was taken from the midst of her dupes to be laid in the sepulcher. A clergyman whom I well knew, lectured upon his having found the means of living here forever—but he, too, has gone over to the great majority. That we can avoid the grave is a dream, an idle dream, not worthy of a moment's controversy! All flesh shall see corruption in due time, if it is not changed at the Lord's coming. "What man is he that lives and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" In their myriads, the races of the past have subsided into the earth. In one endless harvest, death has reaped down all born of woman. Job knew that he, himself, should be brought to death because all others had been brought there.

He knew it, also, because he had considered the origin of mankind. In our text, the Hebrew expression would run somewhat thus—"I know that You will bring me to death." He had never died before, yet the expression is constantly used, as in the following passage—"You turn man to destruction and say, Return, you children of men." We were never in the grave before—how then can we return? Was it not said to Adam, "Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return?" We were taken out of the earth and it is only by a prolonged miracle that this dust of ours is kept from going back to its kindred—the day will come when our earth shall embrace its mother and so the body shall return to its original. If we had come from Heaven, we might dream that we should not die. If we had been cast in some celestial mold, as angels are, we might fancy that the grave would never encase us. But being of the earth, earthy, we must go back to earth! Job says, "I have said to corruption, You are my father: to the worm, You are my mother and my sister." Thus we have affinities which call us back to the dust. Job knew this and, therefore, seeing from where men came, he inferred—and inferred correctly—that he, himself, would return to the earth.

Further, Job had a recollection of man's sin and knew that all men are under condemnation on account of it. Does he not say that the grave is a "house appointed for all living?" It is appointed simply because of the penal sentence passed upon our first parent and, in him, upon the whole race. "Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return," was not for father Adam only, but for all the innumerable sons that come of his loins. "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." "In Adam all die." Our babes, who have not personally sinned, yet feel the blight of Adam's sin and wither in the bud. Our dear children who are nearing manhood and womanhood are cut down and gathered in their beauty. We, also, in the prime and flower of life, bow our heads before the killing wind of death. As for our Sires bending, each man, upon his staff, their posture salutes the tomb towards which they bend. A common fall and a common sin have brought on us universal death. Look on our vast cemeteries and say, "Who slew all these?" The only answer is, "Death came by sin and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

Once more, Job arrived at this personal knowledge through his own bodily feebleness. Perhaps he had not always said, "I know that You will bring me to death," but now, as he sits upon the dunghill and scrapes himself with the potsherd and writhes in anguish and is depressed in spirit, he realizes his own mortality. When the tent pole quivers in the storm and the covering flaps to and fro in the wind—and the whole structure threatens to dissolve in the tempest—then the tenant of the habitation, chilled to his marrow, needs not to be instructed that his home is frail. He knows it well enough. We need many touches of the rod of affliction before we really learn the undeniable

truth of our mortality. Every man, woman and child in this place should unite with me in saying, "I know that You will bring me to death." And yet it is highly probable that a large number of us do not know this to be so.

"It is a commonplace matter of fact which we all admit," cries one. I know it is so and yet in the very commonness of the truth there lies a temptation to overlook its personal application. We know this as though we knew it not! To many, it is not taken into the reckoning and it is not a factor in their being. They do not number their days so as to apply their hearts unto wisdom. That poet was half inspired who said, "All men count all men mortal but themselves." Is it not so with us? We do not really expect to die. We reckon that we shall live a very considerable time. Even those who are very aged still think that as a few others have lived to an extreme old age, so may they! I am afraid there are few who could say with a gracious soldier, "I thank God I fear not death. These 30 years together I never rose from my bed in the morning and reckoned upon living till night."

Those who die daily will die easily. Those who make themselves familiar with the tomb will find it transfigured into a bed—the morgue will become a couch. The man who rejoices in the Covenant of Grace is cheered by the fact that even death, itself, is comprehended among the things which belong to the Believer. I would to God we had learned this lesson. We should not, then, put death aside among the lumber, nor set it upon the shelf among the things which we never intend to use. Let us live as dying men among dying men and then we shall truly live! This will not make us unhappy, for surely no heir of Heaven will fret because he is not doomed to live here forever. It were a sad sentence if we were bound over to dwell in this poor world forever! Who among us would wish to realize in his own person the fabled life of the Wandering Jew, or even of Prester John? Who desires to go up and down among the sons of men for twice a thousand years?

If the Supreme should say, "Live here forever," it were a malediction rather than a benediction! To grow ripe and to be carried home like shocks of corn in their season—is not this a fit and fair thing? To labor through a blessed day and then, at nightfall, to go home and to receive the wages of Grace—is there anything dark and dismal about that? God forgive you that you ever thought so! If you are the Lord's own child, I invite you to look this Home-going in the face until you change your thought and see no more in it gloom and dread, but a very Heaven of hope and glory!

Suffer not my text to be a dirge, but turn it into a golden Psalm, as you say, "I know that You will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

II. Having thus discoursed upon a piece of personal knowledge, I now beg you to see in my text the shining of HOLY INTELLIGENCE. Perhaps, when I read the words in your hearing, you did not notice all they contain. Let me then point out to you certain hidden jewels. Job, even in his anguish, does not, for a moment, forget his God. He speaks of Him, here—"I know that You will bring me to death." He perceives that he will not die apart from God. He does not say his sore boils or his strangulation will bring him to death, but, "You will bring me to death." He does not trace his approaching death to chance, or to fate, or to second causes—no, he sees only the hand of the Lord! To Him belong both life and death. Say not that the wasting consumption took away your darling! Complain not that a fierce fever slew your father, but feel that the Lord, Himself, has done it! "It is the Lord, let Him do what seems Him good." Blame not the accident, neither complain of the pestilence, for Jehovah, Himself, gathers Home His own. He only will remove you and me. "I know that You will bring me to death." There is, to my heart, much delicious comfort in the

language before us!

I love that old-fashioned verse—

"Plagues and deaths around me fly. Till He bids I cannot die— Not a single shaft can hit Till the God of Love thinks fit."

In the midst of malaria and pestilence, we are safe with God. "Because you have made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, your habitation; there shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling." Beneath the shadow of Jehovah's wings we need not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flies by day, nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness. We are immortal till our work is done! Be you, therefore, quiet in the day of evil. Rest peacefully in the day of destruction—all things are ordered by wisdom and precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. No forces in the world are outside of His control. God suffers no foes to trespass on the domain of Providence. All things are ordained of God and specially are our deaths under the peculiar oversight of our exalted Lord and Savior! He lives and was dead— and bears the keys of death at His belt. He Himself shall guide us through death's iron gate. Surely what the Lord wills and what He, Himself, works, cannot be otherwise than acceptable to His chosen! Let us rejoice that in life and death we are in the Lord's hands.

The text seems to me to cover another sweet and comforting thought, namely, that God will be with us in death. "I know that You will bring me to death." He will bring us on our journey till He brings us to the journey's end—He, Himself, our Escort and our Leader. We shall have the Lord's company even to our dying hour—"You will bring me to death." He leads me even to those still waters which men so much fear. "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." Beloved, we live with God, do we not? Shall we not die with Him? Our life is one long holiday when the Lord Jesus keeps us company—will He leave us at the end? Because God is with us, we go forth with joy and are led forth with peace! The mountains and the hills break forth before us into singing and all the trees of the field clap their hands. Will they not be equally glad when we rise to our eternal reward? It is not living that is happiness, but living with God—it is not dying that will be wretchedness, but dying without God!

The child has to go to bed, but it does not cry if mother is going upstairs with it. It is quite dark, but what of that? The mother's eyes are lamps to the child. It is very lonely and still. Not so—the mother's arms are the child's company and her voice is its music. O Lord, when the hour comes for me to go to bed, I know that You will take me there and speak lovingly into my ear—therefore I cannot fear, but will even look forward to that hour of Your manifested love! You had not thought of that, had you? You have been afraid of death, but you cannot be so any longer if your Lord will bring you there in His arms of love. Dismiss all fear and calmly proceed on your way, though the shades thicken around you, for the Lord is your light and your salvation!

It may not be in the text, but it naturally follows from it, that if God brings us to death, He will bring us up again. Job, in another passage, declared that he was sure that God would vindicate His cause—"I know," he says, "that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Certain wise men who would expunge the very idea of a resurrection out of the Old Testament

have tried to make out that Job expected to be restored and vindicated in this life, but he evidently did not expect any such thing, for, according to the text, it is clear that he feared he would die at once! We gather from this verse, by a negative process of reasoning, that the living Redeemer and the vindication which was to be brought to him by that living Redeemer were matters of hope in another life after death! O Beloved, you and I know this Truth of God from many declarations of our Lord in His Divine Book. Though we die in one sense, yet in another we shall not die, but live! Though our bodies shall, for a little while, sleep in their lowly resting places, our souls shall be forever with the Lord. We shall spend an interval as unclothed spirits in the company of Him to whom we are united by vital bonds—and then the trumpet of the archangel shall summon our bodies from their sleeping places to be reunited with our souls! These bodies, the comrades of our warfare, shall be companions of our victory! "This mortal must put on immortality."

He who raised up Jesus shall also raise us up! We shall come forth from the land of the enemy in fullness of joy. Therefore we ought to take great comfort from the words of our text and be of good courage. We shall die—there is no discharge in this war. We shall die—let us not sit down like cowards and weep tears bitter with despair. We sorrow not as those that are without hope! Let us view our departure in the soft and mellow light which is shed upon it by the words, "You shall bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

III. I pass on to notice the QUIET EXPECTATION which breathes in this text. It is my prayer that we may enjoy the same restfulness. My dear Brothers and Sisters, the text is full of a calm stillness of hope. Job speaks of his death as a certainty, but speaks of it without regret. No, more than that, if you read the connection—it is with a smile of desire, with a flush of expectancy—"I know that You will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." Many men are unable to regard death with composure—they are disturbed and alarmed by the very hint of it.

I want to reason with those disciples of our Lord Jesus who are in bondage from fear of death. What are the times when men are able to speak of death quietly and happily? Sometimes they do so in periods of great bodily suffering. I have, on several occasions, felt everything like fear of dying taken from me simply by the process of weariness, for I could not wish to live any longer in such pain as I then endured—and I have no doubt that such an experience is common among sufferers from acute disorders. The sons and daughters of affliction are not only trained to wait the Lord's will, but they are even driven to desire to depart—they would sooner rest from so stern a struggle than continue the fierce conflict.

It is well that pain and anguish should cut the ropes which moor us to these earthly shores, that we may spread our sails for a voyage to the Better Land! Oh, what a place Heaven must be to those whose bones have worn through their skin through long lying upon the bed of anguish! What a change from the workhouse or the infirmary to the New Jerusalem! I have stood at the bedside of suffering saints where I could not but weep at the sight of their pains—what a transition from such agony to bliss! Track the glorious flight of the chosen one from yon weary couch to the crown, the harp, the palm branch and the King in His beauty! The bitter suffering of the body helps the Believer to look upon his translation as a thing to be desired. The growing infirmities of age work in the same way. Yonder venerable Sister has, at length, become quite deaf. Her great delight was to attend the House of God and she still comes, but the service is a dumb show to her—she cannot hear her pastor's voice which was once so sweet in her ears. Her eyes, after being helped with

more powerful glasses, are, at length, unable to read that dear old Bible which remained her sole solace when she could not hear. Her existence, now, is but half life—she cannot walk far—even in crossing the room, her limbs tremble. She is already half gone. Do you not think that she will now feel happy to quit life, even as a ripe apple easily leaves the tree? At any rate, there will be little strength with which to resist the plucking of Death's hands. It will be well when the spirit breaks away from the dilapidated hovel of the time-worn body and rises to the building of God—the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! Many of God's aged servants who have been spared to advanced years have come to look out for the setting of earth's sun without a fear of darkness. While they have seemed to have one foot in the grave, they have really had one foot in Heaven!

Beloved, without either falling into sickness, or aging into infirmity, we can reach this state of mind in another way—by being filled with an entire submission to the will of God. When the decree of God is our delight, we feel no abhorrence to anything which He appoints, either in life or in death. If we are living as Christians ought to live, we have denied our selfwill and we have accepted the Lord to be the Arbiter of all events, the absolute Ruler of our being. If your soul is truly married to Christ, you find your supreme bliss in the Bridegroom's will. Your cry is, "Your will be done!" This should be our ordinary condition in daily life and it is an admirable preparation for thinking of death with composure. Let me live, if God will be with me in life! Let me die, if He will be with me in death! So long as we are, "forever with the Lord," what matters where else we are? We will not further ask when or where—our when is "forever"—our where is "with the Lord." Delight in God is the cure for dread of death!

Next, I believe that great holiness sets us free from the love of this world and makes us ready to depart. By great holiness, I mean great horror of sin and great longing after perfect purity. When a man feels sin within him, he hates it and longs to be delivered from it. He loathes the sin that is around him and cries, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" Have you ever been cast in the midst of blasphemers? I am sure you have then sighed to be in Heaven. If you have been sickened by the drunkenness and debauchery of this city, you have cried, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away and be at rest." Did you not wish as much last year when the lid was being lifted from the reeking caldron of London's unnatural lust? I am sure I did. I sighed for a lodge in some vast wilderness where rumor of such villainy might never reach me again. In the midst of human sin, if the trumpet were sounded, "up and away," you would be glad to hear it so that you might speed to the fair land where sin and sorrow will never assail you again!

Another thing that will make us look at death with complacency is when we have a full assurance that we are in Christ and that, come what may, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Doubt your salvation and you may well be afraid to die. Let even a shadow of doubt fall on the clear mirror in which you see your loving Lord and you will be disquieted. If you can say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day," you cannot fear! What reason can you have for alarm? A Christian should go to his bed at night without an anxious care as to whether he shall wake up in this world or in the next. He should so live that nothing would need to be altered if his last hour should strike.

Let us imitate Mr. Wesley's calm anticipation of his end. A lady once asked Dr. Wesley, "Suppose that you knew you were to die at twelve o'clock tomorrow night, how would you spend the intervening time?" "How, Madam?" he replied, "why just as I intend to spend it now. I should preach this evening at Gloucester and again at five tomorrow morning. After that I should ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon and meet the society in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin's house, who expects to entertain me, converse and pray with the family as usual, retire to my room at ten o'clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to rest and wake up in Glory!"

Live in such a way that any day would make a suitable top stone for life! Live so that you need not change your mode of living, even if your sudden departure were immediately predicted to you! When you so live, you will look upon death without fear. We usually fear because we have cause for fear—when all is right we shall bid farewell to terror!

Let me add that there are times when our joys run high, when the big waves come rolling in from the Pacific of eternal bliss! Then we see the King in His beauty by the eye of faith and though it is but a dim vision, we are so charmed with it that our love of Him makes us impatient to behold Him face to face. Have you not sometimes felt that you could sit in this congregation and sing yourself away to everlasting bliss? These high days and holidays are not always with us. All the days of the week are not Sabbaths and all our halting places are not Elim. Brothers and Sisters, when we do play upon the high-sounding cymbals, then we are for joining the angelic chorus! When we feel Heaven within us and stand like the cherubim above the Mercy Seat with outstretched wings, then we do not dread the thought of speedy flight! "Now, Lord, why do I wait? My hope is in You." Yes, we even cry with Simeon, "Now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word." Brethren, we shall soon be on the wing! Then will we rise and sing and sing as we rise! We will ascend yon blue sky and, within the jeweled portal, we will spend eternity in praise!

I hope some of you are getting up, a bit, out of your notion that to think of death is gloomy work. I trust you will begin to view it with hope and confidence.

IV. I conclude by saying that this subject affords us SACRED INSTRUCTION. "I know that You will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." Brothers and Sisters, I shall not always have the privilege of coming here on the Sabbath to speak with you. Perhaps, before long, another voice will invite your attention and I shall be silent in the grave. Neither will you mingle in this throng which so happily gathers here—not much longer will you sit among those who frequent these lower courts. What then?

Let us prepare for death. Let us cleave to the Lord Jesus who is our All. Make your calling and election sure. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and believe intensely. Repent of sin and fly from it earnestly and with your whole heart.

Live diligently. Live while you live. Let every moment be spent as you will wish to have spent it when you survey life from your last pillow. Let us live unto God in Christ by the Holy Spirit. May the Lord quicken our pace by the thought that it is but a little while! A short day will not allow loitering. Do we not live too much as if we played at living? A man will preach a poor sermon if he thinks, "I shall preach for another 20 years." We must preach as though we never might preach again. You will teach that class very badly, this afternoon, if you have a notion that you can afford to be a little

slovenly since you can make up, in the future, for the neglects of the present. Drop no stitches. Do all your work at your best. Do a day's work in a day and have no balance of debt to carry over to tomorrow's account. Soon shall you and I stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ to give an account of the things done in the body—therefore let us live as in the light of that day of days, doing work which may bear that fierce light which beats about the Great White Throne.

Next to that, let us learn from the general assembly in the house appointed for all living to walk very humbly. A common tomb must accommodate us all in the end, therefore let us despise all pride of birth, rank, or wealth. There are no distinctions in the last Meeting House—the rich and the poor meet together and the slave is free from his master. I hate that pride which makes persons carry themselves as if they were more than mortal. "I have said, you are gods; but you shall die like men." A voice from the tombs proclaims a grim equality in death—

"Princes, this clay must be your bed, In spite of all your towers; The tall, the wise, the reverend head Must lie as low as ours."

Therefore speak no more so exceedingly proud. It is madness for dying men to boast! When Saladin lay a-dying he bade them take his winding sheet and carry it upon a lance through the camp, with the proclamation, "This is all that remains of the mighty Saladin, the conqueror of nations!" A lingerer in the graveyard will take up your skull, one day, and moralize upon it, little knowing how wise a man you were! None will then do you reverence. Therefore, be humble.

Be prompt, for life is brief. If your children are to be trained up in God's fear, begin with them today. If you are to win souls, continue at the holy labor without pause. You will soon be gone from all opportunity of doing good, therefore, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. When the Eastern emperors were crowned at Constantinople, it is said to have been a custom for the royal mason to set before his majesty a certain number of marble slabs, one of which he was to choose to be his tombstone. It was well for him to remember his funeral at his coronation! I bring before you, now, the unwritten marbles of life! Which will you have, holiness or sin, Christ or self? When you have chosen, you will begin to write the inscription upon it, for your life's works will be your memorial. God help us to be diligent in His business, for it is not long that we can be at it!

Men and women, project yourselves into eternity—get away from time— for you must soon be driven away from it. You are birds with wings, sit not on these boughs forever blinking in the dark like owls. Bestir yourselves and mount like eagles. Rise to the heights above the present. Life is a short day at its longest and when its sun goes down, it leaves you in eternity. Eternal woe or eternal joy will fill your undying spirit. Your indestructible self must swim in endless bliss or sink in fathomless misery! If you mean to be lost, count the cost and know what you are doing. If you have set your mind on sin and its consequences, do the deed deliberately and do not make a sport of it. Oh, Sirs, some of you will, one of these days, wake up as from an awful dream. Oh that you could foresee the scene which awaits you!

Those were strong words, but they were the words of Jesus—"And in Hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." These words reveal none of that pretty nonsense which some prattle about—"a larger hope"—yet Jesus spoke them and His hope was of the largest. He that loved you better than these philosophers love you, also said, "Beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed so that they which would pass from there to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us, that

would come from there." Our Lord put it very strongly. If you mean to dare the infernal terrors, I can do no less than ask you to know what you are doing. If you have chosen sin, you have chosen ruin! Begin to consider it and see whether it is worth while.

But if you have chosen Christ, mercy and eternal life and, if by faith these are yours, begin to enjoy them now! Rehearse the music of the skies. Taste the delights of fellowship with God even here! Rejoice in the victory which now overcomes the world, even our faith. You will be in the Glory Land before long and some of you much sooner than you think. So, as the sermon ends, under a sense of my own frailty, I bid you a sincere adieu. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away—fare you well.

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Job 30,25 #479 - Christian Sympathy

CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY

NO. 479

A SERMON FOR THE LANCASHIRE DISTRESS DELIVERED

ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 9, 1862,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? Was not

my soul grieved for the poor?"

Job 30:25.

IN endeavoring to justify the ways of God, Job's three friends came to the harsh conclusion that he would not have been so severely afflicted if he had not been such a great sinner. Among other accusations against the afflicted Patriarch, Eliphaz, the Temanite, had the cruelty to lay this at his door, "You have not given water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry."

Such a slander we may describe as "speaking wickedly for God," for in his ignorance of the great laws of Providence towards the saints in this life, the Temanite had uttered falsehood in order to account for the Divine procedure. God's own testimony of Job is that he was, "a perfect and an upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil." And certainly he could never have earned the character of "perfect" if he had been devoid of pity for the poor.

Richly did the three miserable comforters deserve the burning rebuke of their slandered friend, "You are forgers of lies, you are physicians of no value. O that you would altogether hold your peace, and it shall be your wisdom." Job, in his great indignation at the shameful accusation of unkindness to the needy, pours forth the following very solemn imprecation—"If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail. Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless have not eaten thereof.

"If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering. If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep. If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: then let my arms fall from my shoulder blades, and my arm be broken from the bone." Thus vehemently making a tremendous appeal to Heaven, he shakes off the slander into the fire as Paul shook the viper from his hand.

I trust there are many present who, if the like charges should be laid to their door, might as boldly deny it. Not in the same form of imprecation, for that is forbidden to the Christian man, but with all

the positiveness which can dwell in the, "Yes, yes, no, no" of the followers of Jesus. I trust that many of you can, in your measure, use the language of the man of Uz and say, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me. And when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy."

In the two questions of my text, Job claims something more than merely having helped the poor with gifts. He declares that he wept and grieved for them. His charity was of the heart. He considered their case, laid their sorrows to his own soul, and lent his eyes to weep, and his heart to mourn. "Did I not weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?"

Human sympathy is the subject of our present meditation, and I shall labor to excite in you those emotions which are the genuine result of sympathy when it is truly felt. Practical sympathy is my aim. I trust your liberality, at the end of the sermon, will prove that I have hit the center of my target. Human sympathy, then—its commendations, its hindrances, its sure fruits, and its special application to the case in hand this morning.

I. HUMAN SYMPATHY, ITS COMMENDATIONS: 1. We may say of it, first, that even nature dictates that man should feel

a sympathy for his kind. Humanity, had it remained in its unfallen estate, would have been one delightful household of brothers and sisters. If our first parents had never sinned, we should have been one unbroken family, the home of peace, the abode of love. The fact that, "God has made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth," would then have been a realized and established truth. No nationalities would have divided, or personal interests separated us.

Having one common Father, one loving God, one blissful Paradise, our lives would have been one long Heaven on earth of sweetly intermingled peace, love, joy, fellowship and purity. One can hardly indulge a conception of such a happy world without an intense regret that the Fall has made it all a dream—yet let us dream a moment of a world without a soldier, without a sword, or spear, or shield—a world without a prison, a magistrate, or a chain. A society in which none will wrong his fellow man, but each is anxious for the well-being of all. A race needing no exhortation to virtue, for virtue is its very life.

Let us dream of a land where love has knit all natures into unity, and breathed one soul into a thousand bodies! Alas, for us, when Adam fell, he not only violated his Maker's laws, but in the Fall he broke the unity of the race. And now we are isolated particles of manhood, instead of being what we should have been—members of one body—moved by one and the same spirit. The dream may vanish but we lose not our argument, for even in fallen humanity there are some palpitations of the one heart, some signs of the, "one blood." Flesh and blood are able to make the revelation that we were not made to live unto ourselves.

Fallen and debased as man is, and this pulpit is not prone to flatter human nature, yet we cannot but recognize the generous feeling towards the poor and suffering which exists in many an unregenerate heart. We have known men who have forgotten God, but who, nevertheless, do not forget the poor. Who despise their Maker's Laws, but yet have a heart that melts at a tale of woe. It were folly to dispute that some who deny the God that made them, have yet exhibited hearts of compassion to the poor and needy. When even publicans and harlots can exhibit sympathy, how

much more should it burn in the Christian heart? We should do more than others, or else we shall hear the Master say, "What thanks have you? For sinners also do even the same."

Called with a nobler calling, let us exhibit, as the result of our regenerate nature, a loftier compassion for the suffering sons of men. Many interesting incidents have been recorded by naturalists of sympathy among animals. The "dumb driven cattle" of our pastures, and the dogs of our streets have manifested commiseration towards a suffering one of their own species. And we are less than men, we are worse than brute beasts, if we can enjoy abundance without sharing our bread with the starving. Woe to us if we can be wrapped in comfort and refuse a garment to the shivering poor, or rest in our ceiled houses and yield no shelter to the homeless wanderer.

Brothers and Sisters, if Nature herself teaches you, why should I say more? You are not unnatural. You achieve already more than mere nature can demand. You do the greater, you will not fail in the less.

2. Further, we may remark that the absence of sympathy has always been thought of, in all countries and in all ages, as one of the most abominable of vices.

In old classic history, who are the men held up to everlasting curses? Are they not those who had no mercy on the poor? Each land has its legend of the proud noble who hoarded up his corn in the day of famine, and bade the perishing multitudes curse and die. And down to this day the name of such a wretch is quoted as a word of infamy. A man without a heart would be a beast more worthy of being hunted down than a tiger or a wolf. Men with little hearts and grasping ungenerous spirits—how heartily are they despised! If they wear the Christian garb they disgrace it!

The ordinary disciples of morality are ashamed of them, and I may add that even vice and immorality shun their company. The grinding, hardhearted man may gain the approbation of those who are like himself, and therefore applaud him for his prudence and discretion, but the big heart of the world has ever been sound enough on this matter to understand that there is no genuine virtue without liberality. One of the most damning of all vices which stamps a man as being thoroughly rotten to the core is that vice of selfishness which makes the wretch live and care only for his own personal aggrandizement and offer only a stony heart to the woes of his fellows. Brethren, I entertain no fear that you will ever win the badge of infamy which hangs about the neck of churls.

3. But I have better arguments to use with you. Sympathy is especially a Christian's duty. Consider what the Christian is, and you will say that if every other man were selfish, he would be disinterested. If there were nowhere else a heart that had sympathy for the needy, there would be one found in every Christian breast. The Christian is a king. It becomes not a king to be merely caring for himself. Was Alexander ever more royal than when his troops were suffering from thirst? A soldier offered him a bowl full of the precious liquid—he put it aside and said it was not fitting for a king to drink while his subjects were thirsty—and that he would share the sorrow with them.

O, Christian, whom God has made kings and princes, reign royally over your own selfishness, and act with the honorable liberality which becomes the royal seed of the universe! You are sent into the world to be saviors of others, but how shall you be so if you care only for yourselves? It is yours to be lights, and does not a light consume itself while it scatters its rays into the thick darkness? Is it not your office and privilege to have it said of you as of your Master—"He saved

others, himself he cannot save?"

The Christian's sympathy should ever be of the widest character because he serves a God of infinite love. When the precious stone of love is thrown by Divine Grace into the crystal pool of a renewed heart, it stirs the transparent life floods into ever widening circles of sympathy—the first ring has no very wide circumference. We love our own household. For he that cares not for his own household is worse than a heathen man and a publican. But mark the next concentric ring. We love the household of faith. "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the Brethren."

Look once more, for the ever-widening ring has reached the very limits of the lake, and included all men in its area! "Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks are to be made for all men." If any man shall think that we are not, "born for the universe," and should narrow our souls, I can only say that I have not so learned Christ and hope never to confine to a few the sympathy which I believe to be meant for mankind. To me, a follower of Jesus means a friend of man. A Christian is a philanthropist by profession, and generous by force of Grace. Wide as the reign of sorrow is the stretch of his love—and where he cannot help—he still pities.

4. Beloved, will you remember the blessed example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? For this, surely, will teach you not to live for self. "For you know the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty might be rich." His heart is made of tenderness, His heart melts with love. In all our afflictions He is afflicted. Since the day when He became flesh of our flesh, He has never hidden Himself from our sufferings. Our glorious Head is moved with all the sorrows which distress the members.

Crowned though He now is, He forgets not the thorns which once He wore. Amid the splendors of His regal state in Paradise, He is not unmindful of His children here below. Still is He persecuted when Saul persecutes the saints. Still are His Brethren as the apple of His eye and very near His heart. If you can find in Christ a grain of selfishness, consecrate yourselves unto your lusts and let Mammon be your God. If you can find in Christ a solitary atom of hardness of heart, or callousness of spirit, then justify yourselves, your thick hearts are as stones to the wailing of the desolate.

But if you profess to be followers of the Man of Nazareth, be full of compassion. He feeds the hungry lest they faint by the way. He binds up the broken in heart and heals all their wounds. He hears the cry of the needy, and precious shall their blood be in His sight. Therefore be also tender-hearted and also very affectionate the one toward the other.

5. Dear Friends, though this last reason will certainly be to a Christian heart the very best that can be urged, yet permit me to suggest another. Sympathy is essential to our usefulness. I know that a man in the ministry who cannot feel, ought to resign his office. We have heard some hold forth the Doctrines of Grace as if they were nauseous medicine and men were to be forced to drink them by hard words and violent abuse. We have always thought that such men did more harm than good, for while seeking to vindicate the letter, they evidently missed the spirit of the faith once delivered unto the saints.

Cold and impassive are some of our Divines—they utter the Truth of God as though it were no concern of theirs whether men received it or not. To such men, Heaven and Hell, death and eternity, are mere themes for oratory—not subjects for emotion. The man who will do good must

throw himself into his words. He must put his whole being into intense communion which the Truth of God which he utters. God's true minister cannot preach a sermon upon the ruin of man without feeling a deep amazement in his own spirit, because of the burden of the Lord. He cannot, on the other hand, unfold the joys of pardon and the love of Jesus without a leaping heart and rejoicing tongue.

The man who is devoid of love will be devoid of power, for sympathies are golden chains by which Christian orators draw men's ears and hearts to themselves and the truths they teach. "I preached," said one, "when I spoke of condemnation, as though I wore the chains about my own arm and heard them clanking in my ears." "And I," another might have said, "I preached of pardon bought with blood, as though I had myself just come up from the sacred fountain, having left my foulness all behind, and being girt about with the white linen which is the righteousness of the saints." If our hearers perceive that we do not really long for their good, that our preaching is but a matter of mere routine to be got through as so much irksome "duty," can we hope to win their hearts?

But when they feel that there is a roving heart within the preacher, then they give the more earnest heed to the things whereof we speak. You Sunday school teachers, you must have warm hearts or you will be of little use to your children. You street preachers, City Missionaries, Bible women, and tract distributors—you who in any way seek to serve our Lord—a heart, a heart, a heart, a tender heart, a flaming heart, a heart saturated with intense sympathy—when sanctified by the Holy Spirit, will give you success in your endeavors.

Name the men the wide world over who have been the most successful in bending multitudes to their own will, and they are the men who have the largest hearts. For good or evil, heart power is real power. The men whose hearts move with mighty pulsations like the piston of a steam engine, will soon move the wheels and drag along the ponderous load. We must have within us the engine of the heart throbbing mightily and continually. And then shall we draw the hearts of men with irresistible force. 6. Here I must supplement that thought with another: sympathy may often be the direct means of conversion. How do the Romanists craftily avail themselves of this! The loaves and fishes have always been used at Rome as an attraction to the multitude. Still the Sister of Mercy, with her basket on her arm, goes to the poor, or devotes herself to the sick—and in this we praise them. Were it the Gospel they had to teach, they could scarcely have found a wiser method for its propagation. And be it what it may which they have to disseminate, they certainly have not failed for lack of wisdom.

I would that we who have a purer faith could remember a little more the intimate connection between the body and the soul. Go to the poor man and tell him of the bread of Heaven, but first give him the bread of earth, for how shall he hear you with a starving body? Talk to him of the robe of Jesus' righteousness, but you will do it all the better when you have provided a garment with which he may cover his nakedness. It seems an idle tale to a poor man if you talk to him of spiritual things and cruelly refuse him help as to temporals. Sympathy, thus expressed, may be a mighty instrument for good.

And even without this, if you are too poor to be able to carry out the pecuniary part of benevolence, a kind word, a look, a sentence or two of sympathy in trouble, a little loving advice, or an exhortation to your neighbor to cast his burden on the Lord, may do much spiritual service. I do not

know, but I think if all our Church members were full of love, and would always deal kindly, there would be very few hearts that would long hold out, at least from hearing the Word. You ask a person to hear your preacher. But he knows that you are crotchety, short-tempered, illiberal— and he is not likely to think much of the Word which, as he thinks, has made you what you are.

But if, on the other hand, he sees your compassionate spirit, he will first be attracted to you, then next to what you have to say, and then you may lead him as with a thread and bring him to listen to the Truth of God as it is in Jesus. And who can tell but thus, through the sympathy of your tender heart, you may be the means of bringing him to Christ?

7. And I shall say here, that this sympathy is sure to be a great blessing to yourselves. If you want joy—joy that you may think upon at nights and live upon day after day, next to the joy of the Lord—which is our strength—is the joy of doing good. The selfish man thinks that he has the most enjoyment in laying out his wealth upon himself. Poor fool! His interest is vastly small compared with the immense return which generosity and liberality and sympathy bring to the man who exercises them. Be assured that we can know as much joy in another's joy as in our own joy.

Then, beside the joy it brings, there is experience. Experimental knowledge may be gained by it. I would not, of course, declare that a man can get experience without having trouble, himself. But the next best thing to it, is to bear other people's troubles. We may never have known what it is to want bread—but to see a saint who has been brought to the door of starvation—and yet has had his bread given, and his water sure, may be almost as useful. You and I may not be tortured with the pangs of sickness or the weakness of decay. But to climb some three pairs of stairs to a miserable back room, and watch a child of God patient in his tribulation—and to put ourselves by sympathy upon his bed, and suffer and smart with him—that may give us the next best thing to the experience, itself. I do think, Brethren, that some men may live twenty lives, and get the experience of twenty men—and the information and real good of twenty men's troubles—by having large hearts which can hold the sorrows of others. Oh, we cannot tell how much blessedness we might receive if we were more free to aid our fellows! "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Ask any man who has been to visit the sick, the poor and the needy, whether he has not come home more resigned to his own trials, and more satisfied with his own lot. We gave a shilling and received a casket of pearls, which dropped from the lips of the poor suffering one while he told of God's faithfulness, and the preciousness of the love of Christ. We are great losers when we know not these rich poor saints. If we would but trade with them, it were a blessed barter for us. Coral and pearl—let no mention be made of them in comparison with the priceless gems which we might receive if we had greater sympathy and fuller communion with the suffering sons and daughters of Jerusalem.

Thus have I said as much as may be fitting this morning in commendation of Christian sympathy.

II. We speak now of THE HINDRANCES TO CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY. Some say that there is very little Christian sympathy abroad. I do not believe them, except as regards themselves. I dare say they have measured other men's corn with their own bushels. When any say, "O, there is no love in the Church," I have always noticed that, without exception, they have no love themselves. On the other hand, we have heard others say, "What a blessed unity there is in the Church. When

we come to the Tabernacle it does us good to get such hearty shakes of the hand and to see such love in every Brother's eye." When they speak thus, I know the reason is that they carry fire in their own hearts, and then they think the Church warm, while the others carry lumps of ice in their hearts and they imagine that everybody must be cold.

1. One of the great impediments to Christian sympathy is our own intense selfishness. We are all selfish by nature, and it is a work of Divine Grace to break this thoroughly down, until we live to Christ, and not to self any longer. How often is the rich man tempted to think that his riches are his own. A certain lady being accosted by a beggar, asked charity of her. She gave him a shilling, saying, "Take that shilling. It is more than God ever gave me." The beggar said, "O, Madam but God has given you all your abundance." "No," she said, "I am right. God has only lent me what I have. All I have is a loan."

I would that all who are entrusted with this world's substance felt that it was only loaned out to them, and that they were stewards. Now, a steward, when he has orders to give a poor man a large sum of money, does not say, "Dear me, that will make me poor!" He never considered that which was entrusted to him, belonged to him, and so he gives it freely enough. So, remember, you have nothing of your own—especially you Christian men and women who have been bought with a price—you are in a double sense stewards unto God, and should act as such. Living to God, we should devote ourselves to the good of the race for Jesus' sake.

2. Another hindrance lies in the customs of our country. We still have among us too much of caste and custom. The exclusiveness of rank is not readily overcome. It is not so, I thank God, in this place of worship, but I have known many places of worship where there are tiers of Christian people. Layer on layer, who never associate with each other. In some places of worship they put up in conspicuous letters, "FREE SEATS FOR THE POOR." That is abominable! Then you have another class— respectable tradesmen, and though they sit at the same table with the Dons, and My Lord This or That, they never think for a moment of speaking to them.

When people come out of Church, what a gradation there is! Have I not seen in many a country village how, first of all, the squire goes out, and then the bailiff follows? And then all the poor people curtsey and bow to show their abject servitude and serfdom. And all this in a Christian land! In our Dissenting places of worship what stiffness there is! What rustling of the silks up one aisle, and what quietude of the cottons in another! When the members come together Lady So-and-So, who sits yonder, or Miss This, who sits there, will hardly recognize Nancy That, or Betsy Soand-So!

Now I feel as much pleased in associating with the poorest of God's saints as with those who are of a higher degree in this world, for I believe the happy fusion of all will promote the interests of all. It would vex my heart to see you grow into the stuck-up respectability of some of our fine congregations. Away forever with these castes and divisions! Let us maintain the family feeling and suffer nothing to violate it.

3. Much want of sympathy is produced by our ignorance of one another. We do not know the sufferings of our fellows. If I had brought the newspaper here today, and I had half a mind to do so, and had read you some extracts about the sufferings in Preston and Wigan and the various towns in Lancashire, you would have known much more about the distress than you do now. Or if, which

would do as well, you were to go next Monday with some City Missionary to the least East end, or St. Giles's, or some poor district this side of the water, you would say, "Dear me, I did not know that people really did suffer at this rate. I had no idea of it or I would have given more to the poor."

We need to be educated into the knowledge of our national poverty. We need to be taught and trained, to know more of what our fellow men can, and do suffer. Oh, if the Christian Church knew the immorality of London, she would cry aloud to God! If but for one night you could see the harlotry and infamy, if you could but once see the rascality of London gathered into one mass—your hearts would melt with woe and bitterness. And you would bow yourselves before God, and cry unto Him for this city as one that mourns for his only son, even for his first-born. 4. No doubt the abounding deception which exists among those who seek our help has checked much liberality. I think I can tell the moment a man opens his mouth to address me, when a man wants to beg of me. There is such a particular whine, and a sanctified unction, that the moment you hear it, you think, "I will give that man nothing. He is an old established beggar, and gets his living by it." Seeing, as I have, not scores, but hundreds of these beings, there is a tendency to get one's heart hard and callous and to say, "Oh, they are all deceivers."

But they are not all such. There is a vast amount of real distress of a private character, a suffering which will not cry nor moan. And I take it that it ought to be your business, and mine, to seek out these cases. Not to stop till they come to us, but to go to them. We must avoid, with a stern discretion, those ill cases which do but prey upon Christian charity. But we must also seek out the genuine sufferers and give them relief. Let none of these things, great obstacles though they are, hinder your sympathy today, for none of them exist in the matter which we shall have to plead this morning.

III. A few minutes upon THE FRUITS OF CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY: 1. The fruit of Christian sympathy will be seen in a kindly association

with all Christians—we shall not shun them nor pass them by.

2. It will be seen next, in a kindly encouragement of those who want aid, constantly being ready to give a word of good advice, and good cheer to the heart which is ready to faint. Dear Christian Friends, I think our experience is not so available as it might be for the good of others. In the olden times, they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard. You will find your Brethren often distressed in mind. You have passed through the same stage—conversation with them will help them to escape as you have done.

More especially is this conversation very valuable under the pangs of conviction. When a young man or woman has been awakened under the ministry, I charge you each, before God, you that have found peace in Christ, to watch the throes and agonies of the new birth and be at hand to take the little child and nurse it for Christ. The senior members of every Christian Church should consider themselves, as called by their very position, to look after the young. We have some such here. We want a few more. We want you mothers in Israel, especially, to be so sympathetic that you may no sooner hear that a soul is in distress than you are in distress, too, till you can have poured in the oil and the wine into their wounds.

I think this sympathy should be especially shown to any that backslide. There is a tendency to cut such off from the Church Book and then leave them. This should not be. We must look after that

which is out of the way. The shepherd must leave the ninety and nine sheep to go after the one which has gone astray. If you see one vacillating, be most careful there. If you detect in any a growing coldness, be the more anxious to foster that which remains, which is ready to die. Let a holy discipline and watchfulness be maintained over the entire Church, by the care and forethought of everyone for his next friend. Thus can you practically allow your Christian sympathy. 3. Show it, also, whenever you hear the good name of any called into doubt. Stand up for your Brethren. It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest, but there are some such birds. The moment they hear a word or a whisper against a Christian man, though a member of the same Church, "Report it! Report it!" they say—always pretending that they are very sorry—but all the while sucking it as a dainty morsel. The old proverb, you know, was, "We have done dinner. Clear the things away, and now let us sit down and wreck other men's characters."

I fear there are even some professing Christians who do that. This is not sympathy, but the malice of Satan—may God deliver you from it! Stand up for all that are your fellow soldiers—be jealous of the honor of the regiment in which you have enlisted.

4. But still there is no Christian sympathy in all this if it does not, when needed, prove itself by real gifts of our substance. Zealous words will not warm the cold. Delicate words will not feed the hungry. The most free speech will not set free the captive, or visit him in prison. The most adorned words will not clothe the naked. And the words that are most full of unction will not pour oil and wine into the wounds of the sick. Words! Words! Words! Chaff! Chaff!! Chaff!!! If there is no act there is no sympathy. "Whoso has this world's goods, and sees his brother has need, and shuts up his heart of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?"

Perhaps some of my hearers this morning will say that the text and the subject are appropriate to the occasion—but that they want some spiritual food. Well, you get that often, I trust, here. But I am persuaded that there are times when, if Christ were upon earth, He would dwell mainly upon these themes of practical Christianity. I read my Master's Sermon on the Mount, and what doctrine is there in it? It is all precept from beginning to end. And so shall my sermon be this morning. Not doctrine, but precept. For this I know—we want to see in the Christian world more of the practical carrying out of the loving benevolence of the Savior.

What do I care about the doctrines for which you fight, unless they produce in you the spirit of Christ? What do I care for your forms of faith, and your ceremonies, if all the while you are a Nabal, wickedly saying in your heart, "Shall I take my bread, and my water to give it unto these strangers?" Oh, let your faith be a living faith, lest, while you have the form of godliness, you deny the power thereof.

Time was, whenever a man met a Christian, he met a helper. "I shall starve!" said he, until he saw a Christian's face, and then he said, "Now shall I be aided." But some have thrown benevolence aside and imagine that these are old duties of a legal character. Legal, then, will I be, when, in my Master's name, again I say, "To do good and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices, God is well-pleased."

IV. I now conclude with an appeal for a special collection this morning. I ASK YOUR AID FOR THESE NEEDY ONES IN LANCASHIRE.

1. Remember, first, that their poverty is no fault of their own. They are not brought to it by excess of meats or drinks. They are not reduced to it by riot or disorder. It is not idleness. It is not a willful strike against the masters. It is utterly unavoidable. And here, therefore, is the right place for benevolence to display itself. The Egyptian hieroglyph for charity is very suggestive. It is a naked child giving honey to a bee which has lost its wings. Notice, it is a child—we should give in meekness. It is a naked child—we should give from pure motives and not for show.

It is a child feeding a bee. Not a drone, but one that will work. A bee that has lost its wings—one, therefore, which has lost its power to supply itself—a picture before you of those martyrs and confessors of industry whose cause I plead today. A bee that has lost its wings makes its appeal for a little honey to every childlike heart here today, and they who are true to God will not refuse their aid.

2. Remember, too, that the cause of this suffering is a national sin—the sin of slavery. We have not yet passed the third generation, and upon a nation God visits sin to the third and fourth generation. We have rid ourselves, at last, of this accursed stain so far as our present Government is concerned—we are therefore delivered from any fear in the future on that ground. But still, if slavery is now in America, we must remember that it would not have been there if it had not been carried there—and we are partners in guilt.

Moreover, there has been too much winking at slavery among the merchants of Manchester and Liverpool. There has not been that abhorrence of the evil which should have been, and therefore it is just in the Providence of God that when America is cut with the sword, we should be made to smart with the rod. If the Lord is pleased to smite our nation in one particular place, yet we must remember that it is meant for us all. Let us all bear the infliction as our tribulation, and let us cheerfully take up the burden, for it is but a little one compared with what our sins might have brought upon us.

Better far for us to have famine than war. From all civil war and all the desperate wickedness which it involves, good Lord deliver us. And if You smite us as You have done, it is better to fall into the hand of God than into the hand of man.

3. I must also refresh your memories, though you know it well, with the fact of the patient endurance of those who have been called to suffer. You have read of no burning of mills, no breaking open of baker's shops. You have heard no accusations brought against the aristocracy. You have heard of no great political movement for the upsetting of our institutions. There was never upon earth a nobler spectacle than that of these men suffering so frightfully with their wives and children, and yet enduring it so patiently.

They deserve to be helped. If ever there was a case in which human ears must be opened to hear the cry of woe, this is it. If you and I had our wives and children at home starving, and had nothing but the charity of the parish and the little relief of the committees, making only some oneand-fourpence or one-and-sixpence a head to live upon for a week, I am afraid we should begin to think that we could readjust the machinery of Government. Or it might happen that if we saw bread, and could not get it, we might break the window, or do some unrighteous act to take away another man's property sooner than see our children starve. They suffer well. They suffer well, Brethren. And we do not well unless we help them.

4. Moreover, remember how widely spread is this distress. I know too many of my dear Hearers are often brought to as great poverty as the operatives in Lancashire—but then you have a little help. Sometimes the Church can give it. At other times some friend, not quite so badly off as you are, will help you. But there, if a poor man wants a loaf, he cannot get it of the tradesman even on credit, for the tradesman has no power to give him credit. Nor can these people borrow from their neighbors, for where all are equally destitute, one cannot help the other. Even the Churches fail to do what they would wish to do.

In the case of one dear Brother, late a student in our college, to whom we constantly send supplies week by week, and who maintains a class of some forty young women—in answer to the cry of faith has found all the means, I hope to aid him by this collection of today. The distress is not only with the poor, now, but with those a little above them. And God only knows to what extent it must go unless in His gracious Providence He by some means or other, brings a supply of cotton that they may once again be at work.

5. Why need I urge you, my Hearers? I feel that you are ready now to assist these suffering ones. Let your own gratitude to God move you. Blessed be God that you have not this famine and lack of bread. Thank the Master that though times may be hard, and some may now and then complain, yet we have not to walk through our streets and see our factories shut up and miss the smoke which marks the daily toil that brings food to hungry mouths. We have not to know every habitation is a Bochim because the strong man bows down for lack of bread, and the faces of the children are wan, and the mothers weep, and even the breasts refuse the infant child its needed nourishment.

Give as God has prospered you. He that gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and the Lord shall remember him in his time of trouble. He that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ has everlasting life freely given him. Let him, therefore, freely give, even as he has freely received.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Job 32,7 #3283 - The Voices of Our Days

THE VOICES OF OUR DAYS

NO. 3283

A NEW YEAR'S SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 1912.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I said, Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom."

Job 32:7.

In the discussion between Job and his three friends, Elihu was present, but though by far the wisest man, he remained quiet. Sometimes a still tongue proves a wise head. In our text he gives his reason for refraining from speech. He felt inclined to deliver his mind, but being the younger man he modestly said, "These gray-headed men ought to know better than I. Perhaps if I speak, I shall display my ignorance and they will say, "Be silent, boy, and let your fathers teach you." Therefore he said to himself, "Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom."

Elihu had, however, been disappointed. His words plainly say that he had heard but little wisdom from the three ancients. And he added, "Great men are not always wise; neither do the aged understand judgment." He was not the only man who had been disappointed when looking to his seniors for wisdom, for it is a sorrowful truth that the lapse of years, apart from the Grace of God, will not make us wise. Though with the teaching of the Holy Spirit, every year's experience will make the Christian riper, yet without that teaching it is possible that each year may make a Christian not more ripe, but more rotten. Among all sinners the worst are those who have been longest at the trade and among saints he is not always the best who has lived long enough to grow cold. We have known some exhibit ripeness of experience in their very youth through Divine teaching and by growing on the sunny side of the wall of fellowship—while others who have been far longer on the tree are still sour because they hang out of the blessed sunlight of the Divine Presence in the cool shade of worldliness. You cannot measure a man's wisdom by the baldness of his head, or the grayness of his hair—and yet, if the Spirit of God were with us to sanctify each day's experience, it ought to be so—"Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom."

This, then, is our New Year's theme—the teaching of our years as they pass over our heads. What are we learning from them?

I. Our first remark shall be that DAYS HAVE A VOICE. Elihu said, "Days should speak." Every day, as a day, has its own lesson. "Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows

knowledge." The sun never breaks upon the earth without light of a superior order for those who have intelligence—especially for those who have the Holy Spirit. For instance, the mere fact of our beginning another day teaches us to adore the mercy which kept us alive when the image of death was on our faces during the night—an extraordinary mercy, indeed—for sleep is near akin to death, and waking is a rehearsal of the resurrection! When the day begins, it tells us that God has already provided us with mercies, for there are our garments ready to put on and there, too, is the morning meal. Each day in its freshness seems to hint that the Lord would have us attempt something new for Him, or push forward with that which we have already commenced, or draw nearer to Him than we have ever been before. The Lord calls us to learn more of Him, to become more like He, to drink more fully into His love and to show forth that love more clearly. Every hour of the day teaches us its own lesson and till the shadows fall, the voices speak to us if we have ears to hear. Night, too, has its teaching. Does it not bid us pray the Lord to draw a curtain over the day and hide the sin of it, even as He draws the curtain across the sky and makes it more easy for us to fall asleep? Do we not delight, as we go to our beds, to ask to be unclothed of all our sins, even as we are stripped of our garments? And should we not pray to be prepared to fall asleep and lie in our last bedchamber, till the everlasting morning breaks upon us and we put on our Glory robes? Did we but exercise sanctified thought, each day would bring its precious power of wisdom and make us better acquainted with the Lord.

What a message do our Sabbaths bring to us! To those who toil all the week long, the light of the Lord's-Day seems fairer and fresher than that of any other day. A person at Newcastle who had a house to let, took an applicant for it to the top of his house. He spoke of the distant prospect and added, "We can see Durham Cathedral on a Sunday." "On Sunday," said the listener, "and pray why not on a Monday?" "Why," he said, "because on the weekdays great furnaces and pits are pouring forth their smoke and we cannot see as far—indeed, we can scarcely see at all! But when the fires are out, our view is wide." Is not this a true symbol of our Sabbaths when we are in the Spirit? The smoke of the world no more clouds the heavens and we see almost up to the golden gates! Such days do speak, indeed, and tell of the rest which remains. They sing in our ears with soft and gentle voices and tell us that we shall not always need to bow like galley slaves, tugging at the oar of this world's work, but may even now look up to the place where our Home awaits us and the weary are at rest! These peaceful Lord's-Days call us away to the top of Shenir and Hermon, where we may view the land of our inheritance! They cry to us, "Come up higher!" They beckon us to commune with Him "whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with unspeakable joy and full of glory." All days speak, but Sabbaths speak best—they are orators for God! These resurrection days, these days of the Son of Man—these have angel voices. "He that has ears to hear, let him hear."

While each day speaks, some days have peculiar voices. Days of joy speak and bid us bless the Lord, and magnify His name. Days of sorrow speak and cry, "Arise and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted." Days of communion with God speak saying, "Abide with Me," and days of lost communion cry in warning, "Are the consolations of God small with you? Is there any secret thing with you?" Days of health say, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." And days of sickness say, "In the day of adversity, consider." Each day, whether bright or dim, clear or cloudy, festive or desolate, has its own tone and modulation and speaks its own message. Some of these days are great preachers and from them we have learned more than in

months before. Solemn days of decision when sins have been abandoned. Joyous days of manifestation when Christ has been precious. Triumphant days of victory in which God has been exalted—these speak, indeed—and like Prophets claim a hearing in the name of the Lord. Whether common or special, each day is to us a new page of sacred history, a new window into the Truth of God, another rest stop in the march to the Celestial City!

Here let us add that all our days have had a voice to us. There were youthful days and we thought they said, "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth"—and we listened all too eagerly—yet we misunderstood those voices. Had we hearkened to the end of their sermon, we would have heard them say, "But know you that for all these things God will bring you into judgment." To some of us, our youthful days were full of blessed teaching, for they called us to seek Him early in whom we have rejoiced and found our All-in-All. Days of middle life have a voice which we hear as we buckle on our harness for stern fight and find but little space for rest—and none for self-congratulation. What do these days say to us but "Work while it is day, for the night comes when no man can work"? Those gray hairs scattered upon our brows warn us that our sun will not remain at noon for long. I hear a voice which cries to me, "Quick! Quick! Quick! The night comes!" As to those later days, to which our text more pointedly alludes, they say to you, dear Brothers and Sisters who have reached them, "Make sure work for eternity. Hold time loosely. Lay hold on eternal life." The declining strength, the teeth long gone, the limbs trembling, the eyes needing glasses to aid them, the hair snowy with many winters—all these are messages of which the purport is—"Be you also ready, for the Bridegroom comes." Knowing our frailty, each day sounds in my ear the trumpet call, "Boot and saddle! Up and away! Linger no longer. Press on to the battle!"

One of the loveliest sights in the world is an aged Believer waiting for the summons to depart. There is a lovely freshness in the green blade. The bloom upon the ripening corn is also fair to look upon, but best of all we delight in the gold ears drooping down from the very weight of ripe

Volume 58 3ness, expectant of the sickle and the harvest home! We have some among us who are so lovely in their lives and heavenly in their conversation that they seem like shining ones who have lingered here a little late—they ought to be in Heaven, but in mercy to us they tarry here to let us see what the glorified are like! I have heard of stray sunbeams and these are such. It is well when our old age is such a voice from Heaven! But with the unconverted man or woman, how different are all things! To them we must tenderly but faithfully give warning. "You must soon die. The young may die, but you must—you know you must. Be wise, therefore, and prepare to meet your God." The eleventh hour with iron tongue calls to you— give heed to it, or you will have to hear it sound your condemnation forever!

"Hasten, Sinner, to be wise, Stay not for the morrow's sun— Longer wisdom you despise, Harder is she to be won. Hasten mercy to implore. Stay not for the morrow's sun Lest your season should be over Ere this evening's stage is run! Hasten, Sinner, to return, Stay not for the morrow's sun Lest your lamp should fail to burn Ere salvation's work is done! Hasten, Sinner, to be blest, Stay not for the morrow's sun Lest perdition you arrest Ere the morrow is begun."

Our days all have a voice and those which mark the different stages of our life and the flight of time have voices which demand special attention. Birthdays, as often as they come, have a chiding voice if we are lingering and loitering—and they also have a voice appealing to us for gratitude for

years of mercy past. They have a voice calling to us for more strenuous exertions and bidding us draw nearer to God than before. There is always a buoyancy and gladness about the first days of the year—they speak of thankfulness and call us to devote ourselves anew to God—and ask for new Grace to make the coming year more holy than the rest. The dying hours of the last day of the year are well kept as a watch, for by their fewness we see their precariousness. There are also last days to a life—and it will depend upon what that life is whether they will be rung out with joyous peals or knelled with despair.

Let days speak, then, for they have much to say to us! II. The next thing in our text is that INCREASING YEARS SHOULD

INCREASE OUR WISDOM—"multitude of years should teach wisdom." A man ought not to be at this moment as foolish as he was 12 months ago. He should be at least a little wiser. Christians ought to learn several things by the lapse of years. We ought to learn to trust less to ourselves. Self-confidence is one of the most common faults of the young—they judge themselves to be better than their fathers and capable of great things. Untried strength always appears to be greater than it is. For a man to trust himself in the beginning of his Christian career is very unwise, for Scripture warns him against it! But for him to trust himself after he has been 20 or 30 years a Christian is surely insanity, itself—a sin against common sense! If we have spent only a few years in the Christian life, we ought to have learned from slips, follies, failures, ignorance and mistakes that we are less than nothing! The college of experience has done nothing by way of instructing us if it has not taught us that we are weakness, itself. To rest upon yourself, or upon any particular virtue which you possess or upon any resolution which you have formed is vanity itself! Brothers and Sisters, has the spider's thread already failed you so many times and do you still call it a cable? Has reed after reed broken beneath you and do you still rest on them as though they were bars of iron? Are you an aged Christian and yet self-confident? Surely this cannot be!

Age should teach every man to place less and less confidence in his fellow men. I do not mean that we are to lose that legitimate confidence which we should place in our fellow Christians and in the moral integrity of those we have tried and proved. I refer to that carnal confidence which makes flesh its arm—this should be cured by age. When we begin the Christian life, we are like feeble plants needing a support. We cling to our minister and everything he says is Gospel, or we follow some superior person and place our admiring confidence in him. Alas, it often happened that helpers fail—and unless we have, in the meantime, learned to do without them, the consequences may be very serious! In the course of time, I think most Christians find their idols among men broken before their eyes. They at one time said, "If such a man were to fall, I should think that there was no truth in Christianity." But they have now learned better! God will not have us make idols of His saints or ministers—and years prove to us that those are cursed who trust in man—but he is blessed that trusts in the Lord!

We ought to learn, again, that there is no depending upon appearances. Have you not found, as far as you have now gone, that the direst calamity that ever overtook you was your greatest mercy? And have you not found that what you thought would have been a choice blessing had really been a terrible danger to you if it had been bestowed? You have judged the Lord according to your folly—by the outward manifestation of His Providence! Have you not now learned to believe in His tried fidelity and to trust Him at all times, let Him do what He may? In this, age

should instruct us. We ought not to be afraid because the day is cloudy but remember that if there were no clouds, there would be no rain—and if no rain, no harvests! Surely it is time that we had done judging each inch of time by itself and began to see things upon a broader scale! We

Volume 58 5would neither be too much depressed nor too exultant because of our immediate present condition if we knew that things are not what they seem.

Years should also teach us greater reliance upon the Divine faithfulness. It ought every day to be easier for a Christian to trust in God. The young Believer is like a young swimmer who, for the first time feels his feet off the bottom and scarcely knows what will become of him. But the old swimmer feels like a fish in its native element—he is not afraid of drowning. The little waves which in his boyhood he thought would swamp him, he takes no notice of whatever! And even if huge billows roll, he mounts them like a sea bird! Oh, it is a grand thing to be established in the faith, grounded and settled, so as to be able to say, "Therefore will we not fear, though the earth is removed." So it ought to be with us— "Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom."

And truly, dear Friends, we ought to attain a deeper insight into the things of God as every year rolls over our heads. The conversation of mature Christians is always very delightful. Young Christians sparkle, but old Christians are diamonds of the first water! You may get good fruit from a young and earnest Christian, but it lacks the mellowness and full flavor of the ripe Believer. I love to talk with aged Christians even when they are uneducated people. Many holy women may be met with among the poor of the Church who know a world of sound Divinity—and if you will but listen to them, you will be surprised. They do not deal in theories—they tell you matters of fact. They do not explain points like the schoolmen, but they illustrate their experience! They have been instructed by living near to God, by feeding upon His Truth, by lying in Jesus' bosom like the poor man's ewe lamb which did eat of his bread and drink of his cup—this makes men wise unto salvation and, in such cases, years sanctified by Divine Grace teach them wisdom!

I shall have to speak a long time if I have to show in what respects Christians ought to grow wiser. They ought to grow wiser with regard to themselves, to be more watchful against their besetting sins, more intent in that particular department of service for which they find themselves most qualified. They ought to be wiser towards Satan—more aware of his devices and of the times when he is likely to assail them. They ought to learn how to work better with others, to manage more easily people with odd tempers, to get on better with those who are under them, or with them, or above them. They should be learning how to deal with trembling sinners, with hard hearts and with tender consciences—with backsliders, with mourners and the like. In fact, in all things every year we ought to be more fully equipped and, under the blessing of God's Spirit, years should teach us wisdom!

Brothers and Sisters, if we are Christians, we ought to learn if we remember who it is that has been teaching us. It is the Holy Spirit Himself! If your boy goes to a school two or three years and does not make progress, you do not feel satisfied with the master. Now, you cannot, in this case blame the Teacher—then let the pupil take much of the blame to himself. "Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom," since the Holy Spirit dwells in us who are converted to God! Let us remember how sweetly He has taught us by means of the choicest mercies. They used to teach their children the alphabet, in the olden times, by giving them A B C on pieces of

gingerbread—and when the boy knew his letters, he ate the gingerbread for a reward! That is very much like the way in which we have been taught Doctrine—it has been sweet to us and we have learned it by feasting upon it! I know it has been so with me. The mercy of God has been a Divine Instructor to my soul. "Your gentleness," says one of old, "has made me great." With such sweet teaching, kind teaching—loving teaching, forbearing teaching—we ought to have learned something in all these years!

And then, sometimes, how sharply the Holy Spirit has taught us. I have heard say that boys do not learn so well now because the rod is so little used. I should not wonder, for in God's school the rod has never been put aside! Some of us do not go long without a stroke or two—if you have been very much tried and troubled, and yet have not learned, my dear Brother, my dear Sister—what can be done with you? What? With this smarting, with all this sickness, with all these losses and crosses and yet no profiting? O vine, with all this pruning, are there so few clusters? O land, with all this plowing and harrowing, is there so slender a harvest? Let us mourn before God that it should be so!

And let us remember, again, how much teaching we have had from the ministry under the blessing of God's Holy Spirit. I should not wonder if some Christians do not profit—their Sabbaths are very dreadful days to them. All the week they are hard at work and on Sunday there is nothing to feed upon in what they hear, so they come home from public worship dissatisfied and troubled. Now, if your souls have been fed—if you have often said, "Surely God was in this place and I knew it," and you have gone home with your souls fed with the finest of the wheat—should there not be some wisdom to show for it? Consider the position which some of you occupy as teachers of others, as heads of families and instructors. If you do not learn, how are you to teach? And if there is no learning with you, you cannot wonder if your scholars make no progress under your instructions! With God as our Teacher, if we do not learn, we cannot blame others if they do not learn from us who are but men and women! May God grant that instead of wasting time in frivolities, or "killing time," as the worldling calls it, we may seek to increase in the knowledge of God and in likeness to Jesus, so that every day we may be better heirs of Heaven!—

"So let our lips and lives express The holy Gospel we profess!

So let our works and virtues shine To prove the Doctrine all Divine! Thus shall we best proclaim abroad

Volume 58 7The honors of our Savior God, When His salvation reigns within, And Grace subdues the power of sin!"

III. My last word shall be a short one. And it is this—according to my text, THOSE WHO HAVE WISDOM SHOULD COMMUNICATE IT TO OTHERS.

"I said, Days should speak"—not be silent—"and multitude of years should teach wisdom." That is to say, those who have days and multitude of years should try to teach the younger folks what they know! Now, it is a fault with some of our Brothers and Sisters that they do not teach our young people enough. They are too quiet. I should not like them to die and go to Heaven without having told us all they knew. And yet, when a venerable saint is buried who has been very reticent in speech and has never used his pen, what a mint of teaching is buried with him! It always seems to me to be a pity that anything should be lost through the hand of death—it should rather be a gain!

There are some of us who have told people all we know and we are always repeating it, so that if we die, no secrets will sink into oblivion. But there are others of the opposite sort— a great deal goes into them—there must be a deal of wisdom in them for none ever comes out! Doubtless many Believers have been walking with God and enjoying the means of Grace for so long a time that they are quite able to teach others—but they are of small service to us because they are so retiring. I never like to see a Christian like an old-fashioned moneybox into which you put the money, but from which you cannot get it out again unless you break it! It ought not to be so. Does not our Savior tell us that the well of water in us is to become rivers of water streaming out from us? As we receive, we should give! The more we learn, the more we should teach—and if God teaches us, it is because He expects us to instruct others.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, I presume to speak to those who are older than I am. Try and teach somebody! Ask yourselves how did you learn what you know? You were taught. Return the blessing by teaching somebody else. You were taught. Did your mother teach you? Are you a mother? Then teach your children. Did you learn from your father? Then, Father, be not ungenerous to your family. Hand on the inheritance—what your faith gave you, pass on to your sons, that they may teach the same to their heirs! Or did you learn from a Sunday school teacher? Be a Sunday school teacher, yourself, and teach the rising generation. Remember that according as you have ability, you are a debtor to the Church of God by whose means you received the Truth of God—and to the Church of God pay back, in the shape of instrumentality, the teaching which you have received by teaching those around you!

Note, next, that you are bound to do it, for without this, the Truth of God cannot be propagated in the land. There is not a tree that stands at this moment leafless and bare in the winter's blast but has within itself preparation for casting its seed into the earth next year. Take off a bud and you will find concealed within it the flower and everything preparatory for the creation of another tree like itself when the fullness of time shall come! The violet and the foxglove in the hills are waiting for the time to cast seed abroad, that the species may be continued on the face of the earth, each after its kind. In like fashion should each Believer, by having known the Truth of God, secure a succession of the faithful among men. Are those of ripe years among us attending to this as they should?

Again, remember that the devil is always teaching and his servants are always busy! When the sons of Belial invent some new blasphemy, their lips ache to tell it! Let but a loose song be sung in any music hall in London and before many hours it will have a thousand voices occupied with it. The devil has his missionaries ready to teach iniquity wherever they go—and they neither lack for zeal nor courage! And shall Satan have such busy servants and Christ's cause languish for want of agents? God forbid! If you have learned a great Truth, go and tell it! If you have found out something that is fresh to you concerning the Lord and His love, do not wait till the morning light, but tell it at once! If you have found the Savior, tell about Him! Tell about Him! Tell about Him with all your might whenever you have opportunity! And spread abroad the gladsome news of His salvation! Remember that to tell others what you have known is often the very best way of deepening and increasing your own knowledge. Holy occupation is one of the most important things for our spiritual health. If you see a church sinking low, the last persons to leave that church are the Sunday school teachers and others who are practically occupied with serving God—and the first to go are those fluffy professors who are neither useful nor ornaments, but cling to a

church like dust to your coat! Very largely will you find that in proportion as you serve Christ, Christ will serve you—therefore seek you to feed His lambs—and He will feed you!

At the beginning of this year I would urge each one of you to say, "Cannot I make this year better than the last? Can I not pray more, believe more, love more, work more, give more and be more like Christ?" Was last year an improvement upon the previous one? Whether it was so or not, let this year be an advance upon last year! It ought to be, for it is a year which lies somewhat nearer Heaven than its predecessors! If you have lived up till now without a Savior—end that dangerous state! Listen to the Gospel message, "Believe and live." Ere New Year's Day is over, look unto Jesus Christ and be saved! He will have Glory and you shall have happiness—and thus shall you begin aright another year of our Lord—and His Holy Spirit will make it to you a year of Divine Grace!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Exodus 13:21-22; Exodus 14:1-31.

Volume 58 9We are going to read once more the familiar story of how the Lord relieved His people from the power of Egypt after He had brought them out of the house of bondage.

Exodus 13:21-22. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way: and by night, in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night from before the people.

Exodus 14:1-2 And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pi Hahiroth between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal Zephon: before it you shall encamp by the sea. It might have been sufficient for the pillar of cloud to move that way, but it was really such an extraordinary thing for the Lord to lead the people right down to the sea that He gave a special command as well as the movement of the cloud! That Moses himself might not be staggered by what would seem to him to be such strange guidance, the Lord tells him what to say to the people and then gives him this explanation—

3, 4. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness has shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh, and over all his host, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord. And they did so. Those four words, "And they did so," though they are very short and very simple words, express a great deal! Oh, that it might always be said of all of us whenever God commands us to do anything, "And they did so."

5. And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? Nothing but the Grace of God will truly humble men! These Egyptians had been crushed by terrible plagues into a false kind of humility, but they were soon as proud as ever! Nothing but the Omnipotent Grace of God can really subdue a proud and stubborn heart.

6-8. And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: and he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand. They were resolute and brave as long as they

realized that God was with them! And the Egyptians behind them were bold and proud although God was not with them! There were two high hands that day—the high hand of the proud, puny Pharaoh—and the high hand of the ever-blessed Omnipotent Jehovah!

9, 10. But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon and when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sorely afraid. Forgetting what God had done for them and promised to them, they became timid at the sight of their old masters! They knew the cruelty of the Egyptians in time of war, and their hearts failed them.

10. And the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. Ah, dear Friends, if they had cried to the Lord in true believing prayer, they would have been worthy of commendation—but they did not do so! They cried out unto the Lord in an unbelieving complaint, as the next verse plainly shows—

11, 12. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness. What cowards they were, and how fainthearted! Were these the people that were to conquer Canaan? Were these God's chosen people? Ah, judge them not, for you and I have often been quite as faint-hearted and quite as fickle as they were! May God forgive us as He again and again forgave them!

13-15. And Moses said unto the people, Fear you not, stand still and see the Salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you today: for the Egyptians, whom you have seen today, you shall see them again no more forever. The LORD shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace. And the LORD said unto Moses, Why do you cry unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward. [See Sermon #548, Volume 10—FORWARD! FOR

WARD! FORWARD!—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at

http://.] Moses was no doubt praying in his heart, though it is not recorded that he uttered any words in prayer—but it was not the time for prayer—it was the time for action! When people sometimes say, when they know their duty, "We will make it a matter of prayer," they generally mean that they will try to find some excuse for not doing it! You need not pray about any matter when you know what you ought to do— go and do it!

16-20. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get Me honor over Pharaoh, and over all his host, over his chariots, and over his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten Me honor over Pharaoh, over his chariots, and over his horsemen. And the Angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them: and the pillar of the cloud went before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night. God was like a wall of fire between them and their enemies—so that they had no cause for fear even though the Egyptians

were so near!

Volume 58 11 21-25. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea: and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians. And took of their chariot wheels, that they drove them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians. They were now in the midst of the sea between the two high walls of water, and before they could flee see what happened to them—

26-31. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its full depth when the morning appeared, and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the water returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the hosts of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptian dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the Lord, and His servant Moses. And well they might! Yet how soon they murmured both against the Lord and against Moses!

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 33,14-18 #2453 - A Hard Case

A HARD CASE

NO. 2453

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,

FEBRUARY 23, 1896.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 18, 1886.

"For God speaks once, yes twice, yet man perceives it not. In a

dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon

men, while slumbering on their beds; then He opens the

ears of men, and seals their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from

man. He keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his

life from perishing by the sword."

Job 33:14-18.

HOW persevering is Divine love! "God speaks once." I have heard many

a father say to his child, "Do not let me have to speak to you again." But the great Father has to speak again and when it is written, "God speaks once, yes twice, yet man perceives it not," we see how great is the stubbornness of the human heart! And we also see the gentleness of Divine love. When Elihu said, "God speaks once, yes twice," he meant that the Lord speaks repeatedly. Divine loving kindness has many voices. God often speaks to us in our childhood. Some of us hardly remember when first our Lord called us, as He called Samuel, saying, "Samuel, Samuel," and each for himself answered, "Here am I." We cannot forget the voices of our youth and boyhood—the messages that the Lord sent to us through loving parents and kind-hearted teachers, or the direct admonitions of the Holy Spirit. God spoke to us and spoke to us again, and spoke to us yet again—but we regarded not His voice. There are none so deaf as those who will not hear—and we were among those who would not hear even that voice to which Heaven and earth attend—that voice which even the dead will one day hear—when they that hear shall live!

Do we not admire the great patience of God with us? I am sure we ought to and if we do, it will make us repent of our negligence of the Divine voice, so that, henceforth, we shall say with David,

"When you said, Seek you My face; my heart said unto You." Note that, "my heart said unto You, Your face, Lord, will I seek." Oh, for the quick ear to catch the faintest sound of the Divine voice! Oh, for a ready heart, waiting for those tender condescending admonitions which the Lord is waiting to speak to us!

But God has voices which He uses in such a way that men must and shall hear. There is not only the patience of love, but there is also the Omnipotence of love. God does not merely attempt to make men hear, but He succeeds in doing it. When the splendor of His love makes bare His holy arm and He puts forth all His force, the unwilling heart is made

Volume 42 1willing in the day of His power—the rebel spirit is led in chains of love a willing captive to His conquering Lord!

I am now going to speak somewhat of that matter and, keeping to our text, I want to say, first, that man is very hard to influence for good. His ear has to be opened. His heart has to be broken off from its evil purposes. His pride has to be conquered. There are many things to be done before men are fully influenced to their eternal salvation. Then, secondly, God knows how to come at them. By day or by night, by voices heard when they are in the midst of their business, or, "in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, while slumbering on their beds; then He opens the ears of men and seals their instruction." Thirdly, thus the Lord accomplishes great purposes for men—"That He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword."

I. So, then, first, let us begin with what is a very humbling consideration, namely, that MAN IS VERY HARD TO INFLUENCE FOR GOOD.

This is true, now, and it always has been true since sin entered the world, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good that are accustomed to do evil." Still is the Savior's sad complaint most true of very many, "You will not come to Me, that you might have life." The noblest, the most tender, the most potent forces spend themselves in vain upon the heart of man! It is hard as the nether millstone. It is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." It does not seem, by nature, to be more amenable to heavenly influences than is the deaf adder to the voice of the charmers, for it will not listen, charm them ever so wisely.

According to the text, before God, Himself, can save men, He has to open their ears—"Then He opens the ears of men." What? Are men's ears stopped up?" Perhaps not their outward ears—there are comparatively few persons who are very deaf. The most of us can hear—we can hear the guineas jingle and are after them very soon! We can hear a complaint against our fellow men and repeat it very rapidly! We have very quick ears for some things that are not worth hearing. But towards God, men's ears are often stopped up! They are as if they had a film over them. As there is a veil over the heart and scales over the eyes, so is there a plug in the ear and none of us who preach the Word of the Lord can take out that plug, or get through man's ear to his heart! It is very sad that we should wear our lives away in constant thought of how to get and win men's attention. And yet, though we may succeed in exciting an apparent attention for the moment, what we have said has not penetrated the heart. We have hurled our javelin at behemoth and his scales have turned aside the shaft! We have done our best to awaken the conscience and to fix the Truth of God in the heart, but, if the arm of the Lord is not revealed, we have to go back

and cry with the Chief of the whole College of Preachers, "Who has believed our report?"

What is this plug that gets into men's ears? It is, of course, first of all, original sin—that taint of the blood which has spoiled every human faculty and has closed the ears from hearing even the voice of God, Himself. Man does not hear God's voice because he does not want to hear it. His will, his mind, his nature is altogether estranged from God.

This original sin engenders in men great carelessness about Divine things. How quickly they are awakened by talk about politics! With what attention they will listen to a lecture upon matters relating to their health, or upon the fastest method of making money! But when it comes to the soul and its eternal destiny in Heaven or Hell—when it is concerning the bleeding Savior and the loving Father and the gentle wooing Spirit—men think we are doting, talking fancies, telling dreams, and they pooh-pooh it all and cast it behind their backs! If it is a matter of any worth to them, they will possibly think of it tomorrow, but they scarcely imagine it is worth while to trouble themselves about it now. Their ears are stopped up by carelessness.

Often, too, there is another form of plug which is very hard to get out of the ear—that is, worldliness. "I am too busy to attend to religion! I am so engaged that I cannot spare time to hear about it. You do not know how fully my time is occupied. Why, even on Sunday I must look into my books and balance my accounts!" With such men the world is in their heart—it has filled it and taken possession of all their thoughts. God is not in all their thoughts because the world is there. I have been told that you can scarcely hear the great clock at St. Paul's strike in the middle of the day—the noise of the traffic is so great that many persons who live near have not known when it was noon. And I do not wonder at it. But you can hear the warning bell at dead of night—far away sounds the note that marks the hour because then the traffic is hushed. Alas, many men never get into that hush—they live in a noisy, clamorous, trafficking world—and this dulls and stops up their ears so that even though God, Himself, speaks, they do not hear His voice!

In some cases, the ear is stopped up by prejudice. Men do not hear the Gospel because they do not want to hear it—nor will they bring themselves to hear it. There is the preacher, for instance. They have heard such strange stories concerning him that they will not listen to him. The very people, too, who profess to love godliness—well, those who are prejudiced see faults in them—as if that were a reason why they should not, themselves, listen to the Gospel! But any excuse will suffice when you are not in earnest about anything. Yet it is a thousand pities that a man should be prejudiced against the salvation of his own soul! It would be a foolish thing for a man to prejudice himself into rage and beggary, but it is far worse when a man prejudices himself out of eternal life into everlasting woe! There are tens of thousands, yes, millions, who, from their education and surroundings and often from want of candor, would not listen to the Gospel though the angels themselves preached it! For some reason or other, they are prejudiced against angelic preaching and they would not listen to it, let it be what it might! It seems impossible, sometimes, to get a hearing with some men, even for our Lord, Himself. They have resolved, before they listen to Him, that He cannot be the Son of God. Nathanael's question, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" is on their lips in a moment! "Is it possible that we should derive any benefit from listening to the carpenter's Son?" So, in one way or another, their ear does not fulfill its true purpose, for it is stopped up by prejudice.

With a great many more, the ear seems to be doubly sealed up by unbelief. They will not believe that which God, Himself, has spoken. If they do not go the full length of renouncing belief in the Inspiration of Scripture, yet they might as well, for they do not read what the Scripture says! Or, if they do read, they read only to question and to cavil, to impose their own meaning upon the plain Words of God and so, in very truth, their ear is hermetically sealed with unbelief! Even HE—you know whom I mean—even He who was known to heal with a touch or a word, all who came to Him, could not do many mighty works in His own country because of the unbelief of the people—with such an evil power is unbelief girded! Oh, that God would save men from it! If they are to be saved, He must do it, for we cannot. When the ear is stopped up by unbelief, it matters not how wisely and how earnestly you proclaim the Truth of God—it will not affect the heart of the hearers.

So, Brothers and Sisters, I have shown you various ways in which the ear of man gets stopped up. It may also be stopped up by self-sufficiency. When a man has enough in himself to satisfy him, he wants nothing of Christ. When he fancies he can do everything himself, why does he need to cry to the strong for strength? Sometimes the ear gets stopped up with the love of sin. Our Lord Jesus said to the Jews who sought to slay Him, "How can you believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes from God only?" And I may say to others, "How can you who love the drunk's cup believe in Christ? How can you believe in Christ, you who are unfaithful to your wives, or you young men who follow after evil and wantonness in these polluted streets of ours?" How is it to be expected that the pure Gospel should be in favor with men who are given to uncleanness?

These things stop up men's ears so they say to the preacher, "If we attended to this Gospel, we could not go on in our sins and we would be disturbed in our conscience—therefore we will hear you another day concerning this matter." When the days of their dalliance are over and they have drained the cup of the world's pleasure and lust. When their bones are full of rottenness and their sins are dragging them fast to Hell—then, perhaps, they will turn to their God—but not now! Their ears are sealed with the love of sin and with a hardness of heart which makes them impenitent for their iniquities. O Sirs, do you not see how difficult it is to get at man's heart when you cannot even get through the gate that leads to it? Ear-gate is blocked up with mud and all the King's captains will fail to break a way through it unless the Prince Immanuel, Himself, shall come with the irresistible battering ram of His almighty Grace and break down that gate by the sheer force of His Omnipotent love!

Then there is another difficulty. If we get through the ear and the man is influenced to listen, his heart does not retain that which is good—he soon forgets it. Hence the text says of the Lord, "He opens the ears of men and seals their instruction." Oh, what defeats we have had! I mean we who are teachers and preachers from the pulpit, or you who give your instruction in the Sunday school class. Ah, we think the child, the man, the woman has learned that Truth of God at last, but it is as much as if we had written it on a blackboard—it is soon wiped out. "Oh, yes," we thought to ourselves, "we have put it so plainly, we have illustrated it so deftly, we have pressed it home so patiently and so earnestly that they can never forget it!" Alas, what we tried to write upon their minds is as if it were written upon water, or like the marks that a child makes upon the sand by the seashore which the next wave washes out!

How shall men be saved? We cannot impress them or, if we do impress them, how often it ends in nothing! See them stream into the Enquiry Room! Note their tears! Listen to the story of their repentance! Hear their confessions and declarations that they have found the Savior! Read the report in the papers—so many saved! But, within six months, where are they? Are they to be found in our churches? Are they working with the people of God? Some of them, for whom God be thanked, but, oh, how large a proportion have gone back, like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire! Would I not, therefore, have these special efforts to reach the unsaved? Of course I would— all the same, even, for what I have said. Whatever comes of it, our duty is one thing, the result of it is quite another! That which comes of it is often so disappointing that we are made to realize our own utter inability—and then we are made to rely alone upon God's all-sufficient ability! Unless He opens the ear, it is never opened! And unless He seals the instruction upon the heart, burning it into the conscience as with a hot iron, setting His own instruction manual upon the innermost core of the being—all that is done is soon undone and nothing is really done effectually!

Another difficulty must be noticed. That is, the purpose of so many men. Indeed, the secret purpose of all men—and from this purpose men have to be withdrawn. The purpose of most men is to seek after happiness. And their notion is that they will find it by having their own way. They have not found it yet—their own way has led them into much sorrow. They purposed to change, especially in one particular direction, but still to follow their own way in another fashion. They were, perhaps, too coarse—they will now be more polite. They were really outrageous in their sin—they will now be more decorous. They were, perhaps, going at too fast a pace—they will go a little slower, but in the same direction, still seeking the pleasures of the world, still desiring to please self. But to bow before God and confess their sin—they will have none of that! To turn from all their evil ways and to seek after perfect holiness—they will have none of that! To come to Christ and, in that coming, to be obedient to His supremacy and seek to follow His example, even as they hope to find pardon through His precious blood—they will not have that!

Their purpose is—well, perhaps, just at the last, when they cannot make any more out of the world, they will come in and cheat the devil in a mean and beggarly way—and try to sneak into Heaven by some back door if they can find one. After having given their lives to Satan, they will give their deaths to the Savior. That prayer of the meanest man mentioned in the whole Bible is one which I have often heard quoted with commendation. That wicked wretch of a Balaam, after hating God's people, doing them all the evil he could, and taking the reward for it, then prays, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" What an abominable request! For the man who had lived such a life as that to ask that he might die the death of the righteous was atrocious and showed the awful blackness of his wicked heart! O Sirs, one day you will have to come to Christ and yield yourselves to His sway! If you do not bow before the scepter of His mercy, you will be broken in pieces by the rod of His wrath!

The difficulty is to bring men to this submission, now, before it is too late. They have their own purpose and their own hope, and their own scheme—how can we get them away from them? He that will not be healed, who can heal him? He that is resolved to be sick, who can make him whole? He that will die, who shall keep him alive? The man that will not eat, how can you feed him? He that will not drink, how can you slake his thirst? O Sirs, this makes the difficulty of getting at men, that they are bent on mischief, they have set their faces like a flint, as if determined to go

down to Hell!

Yes, and there is one more thing which is, perhaps, the greatest barrier of all. It is not merely their deafness of ear, their stubbornness of spirit and their resoluteness of purpose, but it is their pride of heart. Oh, this is like granite! Where shall we find the diamond that can cut a thing so hard as man's pride? God can "hide pride from man," but we cannot! Man is so proud that he says that he has not sinned! Or, if he has sinned, he could not help it, poor creature that he is. Even if he has done wrong, he is no worse than his neighbors—and there are some beautiful traits of character about him—and these will furnish a sufficient covering for him! If he is told that he must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, he greatly prefers to believe in himself! He will not come, as the publican did, and cry, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Why should he? He is not such a sinner as the publican was! He would be washed, but he does not feel that he is foul enough. He would be purified from sin, but then he is not quite certain that he has any sin from which he needs to be purified! And so, while the sick find the Good Physician and are healed, these who fancy themselves to be in health die in their sins!

We can overcome almost anything but man's pride. You know the old story of dear Mr. Hervey who said to the godly farmer, "Ah, John, it is wonderful when God overcomes sinful self!" "Yes, Mr. Hervey," answered the farmer, "but it is a greater wonder when He overcomes righteous self." And so it is. It is easy for the Lord to save a sinner, but it is impossible for a self-righteous man to be saved until he is brought down from his fatal pride. I have heard of a lady who used to say that she could not bear to hear a certain style of preaching. "Why," she said, "according to that teaching, I have no advantage over the girls in the street! And there is no better Heaven for a lady like me than there is for one of them!" So they shut themselves out with a sin which is as great as the sin which they condemn—for he that sets up his rags in preference to the robes of Christ—he that prefers his own righteousness to the precious blood of the Only-Begotten—has insulted his God with an arrogance so terrible that no sin can equal it in blackness! God save us from that sin! It needs God to do so, for only He can "hide pride from man." II. Now, secondly, though man is hard to influence, GOD KNOWS HOW TO COME AT HIM and He does it in many ways.

According to the text, He sometimes does it, "in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men while slumbering on their beds." I have no doubt that many, many times, men's sleeping thoughts have been the beginnings of better things for them. You see, reason holds the helm of the vessel when we are awake and, as a consequence, it keeps conscience down in the hold and will not let him speak. But in our dreams, reason has left the helm and then, sometimes, conscience comes up and in his own wild way he begins to sound such an alarm that the man starts up in the night! His very hair stands on end with fear—a fear which might begin in a dream, but which was not, itself, a dream, for there was something real and substantial at the back of it. Did you ever notice how God awakened Nebuchadnezzar, that greatest man, perhaps, of his age? Why, in a dream! Then Nebuchadnezzar trembles and he sends for someone to interpret his dream. Many and many a man has dreamed of death, or dreamed of judgement—did you never have such a dream yourself? We do not attach any importance to dreams as prognostications or signs of our spiritual condition, but there can be no doubt that, frequently, conscience has been awake when the rest of the person has been asleep—and men have been startled in such a way that, when they did awake, they could not shake off the impression of their dreams.

God gets at other men in a different way, namely, by affliction, or by the death of others. What messengers of mercy afflictions have often been! The man has lost a dear baby on whom his heart's affection was set. Or, more often, still, some blessed little child who talked of Jesus and sang sweet hymns—and died with Heaven on its face—has been the means of getting at an ungodly father and an impenitent mother! No sermon reached them, but the little child-preacher touched them wondrously and, for months, perhaps for years, they could not shake off the impression. Some of you may remember other deaths. I will not harrow your feelings, but these death scenes have spoken loudly to you and you have not been able to forget them. God has opened your ear and I trust, also, that He has sealed His instruction upon your heart and that He has hidden pride from you and turned you from an evil purpose by means of personal afflictions or bereavements!

So have I known men awakened by strange Providences—by a fire, for instance, or by being in peril on board ship. Oh, how many have fallen on their knees when the vessel has begun to go down and before the lifeboat has been noticed! Bodily hunger, too, has brought some to hunger for Christ. And the result of their sin, when they have been in poverty, forlorn and lonely, and when nobody would associate with them because of their sin—perhaps even the plank bed and the hardiness of prison fare have brought them to seek their Savior and their God. God can get at men. Even the great leviathan, though no man can pierce him with a sword, has a weak place somewhere, where God can reach him. There is no sinner's heart so stout and stubborn but that, if God shall thrust at him, he shall soon find his heart melt like wax in the midst of his breast. The eternal God never yet came into contact with men, either in the way of Divine Grace or vengeance, but He made them feel that He was not a man like themselves, with whom they could wrestle and contend, but that He was infinitely greater than the very strongest of them.

If God does not come at men by strange Providences, how often He does it by singular words from the preacher! Oh, sometimes we have to say things which we never intended to say. They come to us and we do not know where they are going—and some who are not in the secret, ask, "Why did the preacher say that?" Sirs, if he studied mere propriety and wished to please all his hearers, he would not have said it! But he has said it and God has blessed it. Awkwardly as it was put, it was put in the right shape, according to God's own way of looking at things—and sinners were saved and God was glorified!

Then God has a way of coming to men's hearts by personal visitations, without dream, without speech, without voice. I have often heard one say, "It was many years since I had been to a place of worship, but when I rose in the morning, I felt a singular softness of spirit coming over me and I said, 'I think I shall go, today, to hear such-and-such a man, and see if there will not be a word for me.'" Another has said, "I was at my work and I cannot tell how it was, but I felt that I must stop a bit and go aside and begin to pray." I remember one who is, I believe, at this moment a member of this Church. He said, "I leaned against some iron railings, for I could hardly hold myself up. I never remember having any conviction of sin before, but I was suddenly struck with a sense of sin, I know not how nor why." God can bring men to Himself, so let us never despair of any!

When you are praying for people, believe that there are other agencies than yours at the back of all that you can say, or I can say, and the books can say, and Bibles can say! There is the Holy Spirit and it is a part of our creed of which we ought often to think—"I believe in the Holy Spirit."

Bring the sinner in prayer to the Holy Spirit and rest in this Truth of God, that God can come at him by some means or other. Perhaps He will reach him through you—can you not speak to him tonight? Try and get a word with some stranger here, in the Tabernacle. Speak an earnest, loving word about the Savior—and who knows?—the appointed time, the day of salvation for that soul may have come. God grant it!

III. My time has gone. I shall, therefore, ask you to listen to the outline of what I would have said upon the third point, and that is, WHEN GOD DOES GET AT MEN, HE ACCOMPLISHES GREAT PURPOSES.

His purpose is, first, to withdraw man from his own purpose. We have often admired the drawings of God—let us also admire the withdrawings of God—"That He may withdraw man from his purpose." Sometimes a man has purposed at a certain moment to commit a sin and God stops him from doing it. Perhaps if he had committed that one sin, the current of his life might have been turned so as never to be altered again. But God stopped him then and there. "Up to this point," He says, "you have gone, but you shall go no further. That is your last oath, your last bout of drunkenness, your last act of uncleanness. Stop!" It is the Lord who does this! He did it with some of us—He withdrew us from our purpose. He also withdraws men from their general purpose of continuing in sin. They purpose to procrastinate, but God purposes that they shall postpone the acceptance of Grace no longer. They purpose that they will go a little further in sin, but God stops them then and there.

I find the translation may be that God withdraws man from his work, from that which has been his life-work—from the whole run and tenor of his conversation, God withdraws him! A man goes out after having received the Word of the Lord and he is a different man from that hour. I remember one who kept a low public house and who heard the Word of God. He had no sooner heard it than when he reached home he smashed up his signboard with the first axe he could find and shut up the house, resolving that he would have no more to do with the evil traffic! There is many a man who has been just as decided and earnest as that. God has stopped him and withdrawn him from his purpose. Oh, there are some whose lives have been spent in infamy and, in an instant, God has made them forsake it all—and they have loathed themselves! The change has been so sudden, as well as so radical, that all about them have gazed, admired and wondered at what the Grace of God has worked! When the Lord visits a man's heart, He withdraws him from his purpose.

I have it impressed upon me to believe that there is some soul here that is to be withdrawn from his purpose at once. I do not know what purpose you had upon your heart this afternoon, nor what your purpose is about where you are going to spend tonight, but I beseech you, if it was a purpose of sin, stop at once! Heed the word of warning—go no further. If you have resolved tomorrow, or at any time during the week, that you will commit this or that sin, O Love Divine, turn the man and he shall be turned! Deal with him this moment, O God, according to Your glorious Godhead, not according to the fickleness of his will, but according to Your Almighty Grace! Change the lion into a lamb, the raven to a dove! Thus the Lord withdraws man from his purpose.

Then what else does God do? He hides pride from man. That is a very strange expression, certainly, to, "hide pride from man." Did none of you ever hide away a knife from a child? Have you never hidden away fruit from your little children when they have had enough and they would have

eaten more if they could find it? God often hides pride from men because if man can find anything to be proud of, he will be! Look at him, he is proud of his fine form! Look at that woman, how proud she is of her clothes, poor thing! One is proud of his ability, proud of his success, proud of his job, proud of his youth, proud of his old age, proud of what he never did, proud of what he did do but could not help doing! There is no one of us who has even a pennyworth of stuff to be proud of, whatever we may be! But unless God hides it all away, we go and find something and come strutting out just like our little children, when they say, "See my pretty coat?! See my new shoes?!"

Some of you mothers, in teaching your children to say that, bring them up to habits of pride. Well, they will only be like yourself—and that is the way with us all—we will be proud and he who has the least to be proud of is often prouder than all the rest! My Lord Mayor is not more proud of his badge and chain than many a crossing sweeper is of his ragged trousers! Pride can live upon a dunghill as well as upon a throne! But God will hide pride from us, till, if we look about, we cannot find it and cannot see any reason for being proud. I pray God to hide from all of us, self-righteous pride, and self-seeking pride, and self-glorifying pride— to lay us low at the foot of the Cross. Whenever I find anybody saying, "I have attained to a perfectly sanctified life, I have no sinful propensities, I, I, I, I."—Ah, yes, if God had really dealt with you, He would have clipped your I's down! They will not be half so straight in the back, and so tall, when God takes you in hand!

He hides pride from men. Some of the Lord's workers have grown so big that the least thing offends them—everything must be according to their own way, or they will have nothing to do with it. Oh, it will not do, Brothers and Sisters! If God is with us, He will hide pride from man. There is nothing He dislikes more than pride! What does He say of it? "The proud He knows afar off." That is as much as to say that He will not touch them with a pair of tongs! He knows enough of them at a distance, He does not want them near Him! When He deals with us in the way of Grace, He hides pride from man.

Then, lastly, He thus secures man's salvation from destruction. "He keeps back his soul from the Pit and his life from perishing by the sword." How wonderfully has God kept some of us back from what would have been our destruction if we had gone on! Perhaps I speak to some here who have had many hairbreadth escapes—should not they live to God? I recollect with what solemn awe I spoke to an officer who rode in the famous charge at Balaclava. It must be 20 years ago or more, I think, since I was with him, and he was telling me of that terrible ride when the saddles were emptying on every side, and he rode on, and rode back unharmed. I could not but lay my hand upon him with great earnestness and say, "Are you not God's man since He spared you so? Will you not live to His Glory and give your heart to Him?"

And I would say that to all of you who have been often in fevers, or who have been near the gates of death. If you have been preserved, for what purpose was it? Surely, that you might yield yourselves to God, for He has interposed on purpose that your life should not go down to the Pit! I hope, also, that He has the higher design that you, yourselves, with your truest life, should never go down into that Pit from which there is no escape. Oh, that He would deliver every man, woman and child, here, from the wrath to come! For, believe me, there is a wrath to come, a fire that burns and shall never be quenched! Oh, for that visitation of God that shall hide pride from us, and reveal a Savior to us, that shall withdraw us from our own purpose, to fulfill in us the Divine purpose! Then shall we be saved from going down into the Pit. The Lord enable us to believe in His dear

Son, Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Job 33:6-33.

This is part of the speech of young Elihu, who had listened with much patience, but also with great indignation, to the harsh speeches of Job's three friends and to Job's self-righteous answers. Verses 6, 7. Behold, I am according to your wish in God's stead; I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make you afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon you. Job had wished that he could argue his case with the Lord, Himself. If God would only withdraw the terror of His Presence from him, he would like to come even to His seat, and plead with Him. "Oh!" he said, "that there were one who would stand between me and God, that I might plead with Him!" "Here am I," answered Elihu, "I am the man you need. God has sent me. Now come and plead with me. There is no terror in me to make you afraid—neither have I a heavy hand to crush you."

8-10. Surely you have spoken in my hearing, and I have heard the voice of your words, saying I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, He finds occasions against me, He counts me for His enemy. Elihu puts the case very plainly. "There, Job, you have said that you are perfectly innocent and yet you are made to suffer. You have brought a charge against God, that He seeks occasion against you and treats you, who have always been His faithful friend, as though you were His enemy. You said"—

11, 12. He puts my feet in the stocks, He marks all my paths. Behold, in this you are not just: I will answer you, that God is greater than man. Here is the core of the whole matter. Whenever you and I begin to impugn the Justice of God, we ought to remember who we are and what He is! There is no comparison between us and the great God Over All, blessed forever! And for us to begin to charge Him with injustice, or unkindness is a desperately wicked action, of that we may be quite sure at the very outset.

13. Why do you strive against Him? For He gives not account of any of His matters. It is not for us to summon God to appear before us, as if He were our servant and we were His master, or to arraign Him before our judgment seat, and to sit there as if the Holy One of Israel were a felon who must answer for His crimes! It is high treason and blasphemy against the Most High for us to think of sitting in judgment upon Him! This was Paul's way of putting the matter when someone raised a question about the Divine Decree. Paul did not answer the objector, except by saying, "No, but, O man, who are you that replies against God?" Let the moth contend with the flame, let the wax fight with the fire, let the stubble strive with the whirlwind, but as for us who are less than nothing, let us have no disputes with God! The fact is, God's dealings with us have an objective—He treats us, sometimes, with stern severity for our own good. We cannot always see the end from the beginning, but God has an end, and a gracious end, too, in all His dealings with His people.

14-22. For God speaks once, yes twice, yet man perceives it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men while slumbering on their beds; then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is also chastened with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhors bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen and

his bones that were not seen stick out. Yes, his soul draws near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. Yet in all this God is dealing with man in love and mercy! Man is a strange creature. He will not go in the right way by being drawn, so full often he must be driven. There is a whip for a horse, a bridle for an ass, a rod for a fool's back—and we are such fools that we must often feel that rod and, sometimes, to a very painful extent till our soul draws near unto the grave and our life to the destroyers.

23, 24. If there is a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand to show unto man His uprightness then He is gracious to him, and says, Deliver him from going down to the Pit: I have found a ransom. Oh, what precious words! There is One with God, One of a thousand, the Chief among ten thousand, the Messenger of the Covenant, the Mediator between God and man, the Man, Christ Jesus! When He comes in and makes man to see God's wondrous mingling of justice and mercy, then God turns in Infinite Grace upon the starving, dying sinner and says, "Deliver him from going down to the Pit: I have found a ransom."

25-28. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: he shall pray unto God, and He will be favorable unto him: and he shall see His face with joy: for He will render unto man His righteousness. He looks upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it prompted me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the Pit, and his life shall see the light. Some Thursday nights ago, there strayed into this place one who had long hated God and who had openly expressed his hatred of Him. He was much prayed for by friends, but he was desperate in his wickedness. He little dreamed, when he left his home, that he would come into this place. But so he did and here in this house God met with him and renewed his heart and made him to rejoice in the God he once despised! Here was a fulfillment of this text and I pray that it may be fulfilled again, tonight!

29-33. Lo, all these things works God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the Pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living. Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold your peace and I will speak. If you have anything to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify you. If not, hearken unto me: hold your peace, and I shall teach you wisdom.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—126, 785, 63 (SONG III).

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 33,23-24 #905 - Footsteps of Mercy

FOOTSTEPS OF MERCY

NO. 905

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"If there is a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among

a thousand, to show unto men His uprightness: Then He

is gracious unto him and says, Deliver him from

going down to the Pit: I have found a ransom."

Job 33:23-24.

WHEN God has distinct and definite purposes of mercy towards an individual, He often begins with stern discipline and brings him low by affliction and sorrow. As the good farmer cuts down the trees and makes a clearance of the soil before he sows the grain and prepares for a harvest, so does our God cut down all our goodly cedars, our pleasures, and our pride in order that the heart may be afterwards plowed, broken, harrowed and made ready to receive the good seed of the Word. Elihu describes this preparatory breaking-up process as being brought about by sickness. It is often so—I doubt not that a sickbed is one of God's best orators to the sons of men.

But God is by no means restricted to any uniform method, nor is the experience of the redeemed precisely similar in its details though, notwithstanding all its diversities, it leads to one and the same result. Sometimes a storm at sea has brought men to their senses and aroused their conscience and so they have cried to the Lord in their trouble. At other times serious losses in business have brought men into such distress of mind that they have been driven to seek riches more enduring than silver and gold—a competence more to be relied on than the profits of trade or the stability of banks—and comfort more genuine and lasting than wealth.

Yes, and without either of these the Holy Spirit has not infrequently been pleased to convince men of their sin and reduce them to utter selfdespondency and abject self-abhorrence. This He has effected in such a way as neither sickness nor poverty could have done of themselves. He has brought the man very low, even to the gates of Hell. In his own apprehension the man has been lost and then it is that Mercy has commenced her work, her blessed work that shall open to him the gates of righteousness and bring the soul up to Heaven itself!

I hope there are some here present whom God has been preparing for His Divine Grace—to such there will be good tidings in the sermon! I shall not delay you, but proceed at once to deal with the text in the natural order it suggests, as the welcome facts are marshaled before us. Does it not tell

of a messenger—a message—a gracious disposition—a great deliverance—and an amazing ransom? I. When God has thus, in the way of Providence, prepared any human heart for a work of Divine Grace, one of the first means of blessing the chosen man is TO SEND HIM A MESSENGER. I suppose the passage before us may be primarily referred to Christian ministers, who become, through God the Holy Spirit, interpreters to men's souls. They should be men of a thousand, well taught. They should have high moral and spiritual qualifications. In fact, they should be the pick of mankind. When God sends a faithful Gospel messenger to a man, it is a sign of great love to that man's soul.

I ask no honor for ministers as men, but this I do ask, that when they preach to you the Gospel of Jesus Christ they shall be accepted as God's messengers and that their message, at least, shall be treated with the respect which God's Word demands. But I prefer to believe, with many expositors, that the full meaning of these words will never be found in ministers of mortal race. We must rather refer it to the Great Messenger of the Covenant, the Great Interpreter between God and man whose Presence to the sin-sick soul is a sure prophecy of mercy. Where God the Father sends His beloved Son to a man—where Christ comes to the man's conscience and talks with him, showing the credentials of a Savior and constraining the faith of the sinner—there it is that salvation is obviously intended by the Lord and will be effectually perfected in that man unto everlasting life.

With this view I proceed, regarding our Lord Jesus Christ as the herald of mercy. Mark well the titles, a Messenger, an Interpreter, One Among a Thousand. Is there any other than Jesus to whom they so fitly belong? Let us contemplate Him as a Messenger. That is just what Jesus Christ is. Now, a messenger comes not in his own name. He must be sent and it is a great comfort to know that Jesus Christ did not come to save men merely on His own account, but He came commissioned by the Father. He was sent of God. God has appointed Christ to be the Savior. Those who accept Christ and trust in Him accept the very Person God, Himself, has ordained. Christ is no amateur Savior, who comes without a commission. In His hands He bears the royal stamp of the Divine authority. O trembling Sinner! Trust Him whom God has trusted! Lay hold of Him whom God has appointed!

Another description that belongs to Him, as I believe, is an Interpreter. Jesus Christ is, indeed, a blessed Interpreter. An interpreter must understand two languages. Our Lord Jesus understands the language of God. Whatever are the great Truths of Divine intelligence and infinite wisdom—too high and mysterious for us to comprehend or even to discern, Christ fully understands them all! He knows how to speak with God as the fellow of God, co-equal and co-eternal with Him. His prayers are in God's language. He speaks to God's heart. He can make out the sighs and cries and tears of a poor sinner and He can take up the meaning and interpret them all to God. He understands the Divine language and thus He can communicate with God. Moreover, Jesus understands our language, for He is a Man like ourselves, touched with a feeling of our infirmities and smarting under our sicknesses. He can read whatever is in the heart of man, and so He can tell God the language of man and speak to man in the language of man what God would say to him. How happy we ought to be that there is so blessed a Daysman to put His hand upon us both—that He can be equal with God and yet can be Brother with poor simple men! The best of it is that our Lord is such an Interpreter that He can not only interpret to the ear but also to the heart and this is a great point.

I, perhaps, might be enabled to interpret a Scripture to your ears, but, O Beloved, when you have heard the letter you may miss the correct, heavenly and spiritual meaning. But our Lord can bring the Word home to your soul! He can tell you of God's mercy, not in words only, but with a sweet sense of mercy shed abroad in your heart. He can make the sinner feel the way of salvation as well as know it. He can make him rejoice in it as well as listen to it. He can lead him to accept it as well as to understand it. Oh, blessed Interpreter! You are mighty with God, so that the heart of God is affected with the woes and griefs of men! You are mighty with men so that the great love of God, which is an ocean without a bottom or a shore, is made intelligible to us! Our poor stony hearts are softened and the adamant is made to run like wax while the Divine Interpreter talks to our inmost souls!

This Messenger, then, this Interpreter, is He not "One Among a Thousand"? O peerless Jesus! Who among the sons of the mighty can be compared with You? Elihu may well be supposed to use a definite number when an indefinite is intended! What is one of a thousand, or one of ten thousand, when surely there is never the like of Christ between Heaven and Hell? All the range of the universe cannot find His equal—His equal as a Savior, as a Messenger—as an Interpreter! Oh, but those who know Him will tell you that no words can ever set forth His worth! Disciples of Jesus who have followed Him and held communion with Him for the space of 20 years and more will tell you that His preciousness grows upon them by acquaintance.

Whereas they thought Him sweet at first, they think Him sweetest and best of all now, the loveliest of all the lovely, the fairest of all the fair, the chief among 10,000, yes, and the altogether lovely! I tell you that if there were a thousand Saviors, I would have none but Christ! If the gods of the heathen and the saints of the papists could help them. If the ceremonies of our modern papists could save their souls instead of enslaving them, yet would we repudiate them! We would have nothing to do with them in whole or in part! We would still cling to Him who is the one Mediator between God and men, for He is the chief among 10,000 to our souls.

He is such a Savior that there is no other who can vie with Him. All rivalry must prove abortive, seeing that other foundation can no man lay. He is the door of Heaven, all the rest is hard wall and there is no passing through—a light from God and all other lights are darkness—very God come down to us in our flesh to save us and where shall you find the match of this? O cherubim and seraphim, what Savior could you devise that should emulate the only-begotten Son of God? O you angels, fairest among the goodly throng that salute Jehovah day and night with your ceaseless music, whom will you laud and magnify but Jesus in your jubilant worshipful songs?

As you survey the glorious company of the Apostles, the noble army of the martyrs and the radiant fellowship of the Church redeemed, will you chant any other name? Is He not in your esteem the chief among a thousand, the sole heritor of all blessing and praise? Accept Him, Sinner! Receive Him joyfully into your spirit for no one will ever woo you as this precious One, the chosen of God! Who, save Jesus, then, should be chosen and precious to your soul? It is a great sign of mercy whenever Christ comes to any sinner.

But how, you ask, can He come to a sinner? I will tell you. He has come to you now, to every one of you. Jesus comes in the preaching of the Gospel. There is never a Gospel sermon preached but it is, in fact, Jesus coming with open arms of love to receive the sinner. He comes to you in these Bibles and New Testaments of yours. Every one of those volumes that lie in your house is a

standing token of Christ's mission, whispering to him that has ears to hear that He is still ready to receive the sinner. And I trust He comes to some of you now, in the motions of the Holy Spirit upon your heart, saying to you, "Close in with Him. Reject Him no longer. Bow down your ear and listen to Him."

Lift up your eyes and look to Him, concerning whom we sang so truly just now—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One, There is life at this moment for you."

This is the first stage.

II. Now, secondly, wherever this Divine messenger comes, according to the text, HE REVEALS GOD'S UPRIGHTNESS. A lesson, let me assure you, of deep interest and paramount importance. The occasion on which it is taught is peculiarly impressive. You remember Elihu has been describing a man greatly afflicted, chastened with pain, wasted with disease, reduced to a skeleton and brought near to death. We have shown you that before the Lord Jesus Christ comes in mercy to deal with a soul, such tribulation is dealt out by God to break up the fallow ground of the heart. No marvel that the sufferer is appalled with tokens of judgment.

What message, then, can the Divine messenger bring more suitable or more refreshing than that which reveals to man the uprightness of God in having afflicted him? You think, perhaps, that God has been very hard with you. In your distraction you say, "How long I have been ill! How long I have been out of work and how long my wife has been afflicted! How many of my dear children have died? What strokes God has laid upon me without intermission!" Now shall new views spring up and comfortable thoughts arise. But who shall bridge the interval? When Christ comes to you as an Interpreter He will make you discern the wisdom and the love, and cause you to feel the pity and the tenderness of Him, who, as a Father rebukes you not in anger but in His dear Covenant love.

Instead of kicking against the pricks, you will say, "Ah, Lord, it is of Your mercy I am not consumed! I can see there is a hand of love in this. God would not let me go on in sin and wander into endless woe—You are blocking up my road—You are putting massive chains across the broad way to stop me. You are digging pits in my path that I may come to a pause and so I will turn back from this." Depend upon it, there is nothing more dreadful than a life that is happy in the commission of sin! If you have prosperity and all that your heart can wish while pursuing an evil course, tremble, for it is likely enough that God will give you up—you are having your portion in this life! O you Unconverted! Are any of you tried and troubled, vexed and disquieted? While I am sorry for your troubles, I hope God has designs of love towards you. If you look to Christ He will explain to you the heavenly moral of these earthly trials and show you the uprightness of God in dealing thus severely with His rebellious child.

Further than this, the Gospel of Christ explains to the sinner the uprightness of God in the doom of the impenitent, even if He sends him down to Hell. Oh, a man may find fault with Hell and say, "Will God consign men to the devouring fire? Will He destroy their souls? Will He damn men for their offenses?" But if once the Great Interpreter comes to you, you will wonder not that God should destroy men for sin, but that He has not destroyed you long ago! Oh, I could have argued with a bold front against eternal punishment till I knew what sin meant! And then I gave in at once and I wish that some of my Brothers and Sisters who seem to speak dubiously about the wrath of

God, could feel, as some of us have felt, the horror of great darkness that sin brings across a soul when it is made to feel the righteous ire that encompasses it!

There is no quibbling, then! The only cry is, "O my God, deliver me, for I deserve all Your wrath can bring upon me, and if You should strike me to destruction You will be justified when You judge and clear when you condemn." Mark you, it is a blessed thing when Christ brings a sinner to plead guilty—when he is quite willing to plead guilty and when, instead of railing at the justice of the sentence, he stands dumb with silence—feeling that God is upright and would not be upright if He did not thus condemn. There is hope, there is more than hope! There is confidence in our heart towards any sinner who is convinced of the uprightness of God in his present affliction, or in any other that God may please to send upon him— either in this life or in the life to come!

Ah, but this is learning to some profit for a man to see the uprightness of God in everything and then by contrast to bewail his own ignorance and foolishness! Mercy is surely come to you when you can think of God's holiness with reverence and upbraid yourself with bitter reproach for what an unholy creature you halve been. It is a rough wind, that north wind, but, O my Brothers and Sisters, what a healthy wind it is! It sweeps away the fevers of our pride and drives away the mists of our selfrighteousness. Self-righteous, indeed! Such wretches as we are, such offenders against God and Truth as we have been—for us to talk of goodness when we are altogether vile, for us to boast of something hopeful in us when the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint—this is sheer insanity!

When the Blessed Interpreter comes and deals graciously with the spirit, we confess that God is upright, but as for ourselves we have gone astray like lost sheep. We have done the things which we ought not to have done. We have left undone the things which we ought to have done and there is no health in us. Oh, those visions of God, how humiliating they are! Job, himself, made confession, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear. But now my eyes see You. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." This supplies us with the second stage in the experience of Divine mercy—Christ is recognized, the uprightness of God is revealed and understood.

III. The third stage is this—"THEN HE IS GRACIOUS UNTO HIM." God deals with convinced sinners in a way of Grace. Every word here is weighty. "Then He is gracious unto him." Mark the time—then! God is gracious to a man when Christ, having come to him as a Messenger and an Interpreter. He is led to discern his own sin and God's uprightness. When he is humble, then God shows Himself to be gracious. No debts are pronounced forgiven by the Great Master of All till they are acknowledged and no release from the pains of bankruptcy are granted until we feel that we have nothing with which to pay.

When a soul pleads total insolvency and is truly penniless, then there is free forgiveness. When men admit the justice of God if He should punish them, then, not till then, mercy comes in and the punishment is put away. It is not consistent with the holiness of God to pardon a sinner while he denies his guilt, or invents excuses to justify his crimes. Nor is it reasonable for a sinner to expect remission while he vaunts his selfrighteousness. How shall the hardness of a man's heart move the compassion of his judge? Come, poor Soul, fall on your knees! Confess that God is upright and then He will be gracious to you. The way as well as the time demands your notice. It is through the Messenger that God is gracious!

Then—that is when the Messenger comes. When Jesus interposes, then God is gracious. You shall never taste of Divine Grace except out of the golden cup of Christ's Atonement. It is into that golden cup that God has poured the infinity of His Grace. Drink of it, Sinner, by simply trusting in Christ. You cannot drink it in any other way. Narrowly observe what the text says, "Then He is gracious unto him." All salvation comes by way of Grace. The word "Grace" as used by us in its Latin form explains its own meaning. We speak of "Gratis"—a thing free from cost—like the prescription of a physician if given without fee, or the medicine supplied at the dispensary without charge. All God's mercy to a sinner is Gratis. He never sells, He always gives. He asks no payment. He acts from no motives raised or suggested by anything in us—but because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy and He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. Dear Heart, it is a blessing for you when you can see that nothing but Christ can serve your turn! When you have done with appealing to justice and all your knocks are at Mercy's door. O Sinner, you cannot be saved except by Divine Grace in the beginning, Divine Grace in the middle and Divine Grace in the end! What but Grace can pardon sins such as yours and mine? What but Grace could take such as we are and make us God's children? What but Grace could snatch us from Hell and lift us up to Heaven?

When the man is humbled and Christ is revealed to him, then it is that God deals graciously with the man and then it is that the man knows he has found Divine Grace in the eyes of the Lord. And I like the thought that it does not say God ever leaves off being gracious to that man. Where we do not read that God ceases, we may believe that He continues! Does He once deal graciously with a sinner? He will always be gracious to that sinner! Never will He change. That sinner once blessed, shall be blessed through life and blessed in death and blessed in eternity through the sovereign, overflowing, immutable Grace which is in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Well, we have come a long way. We have found the sinner sick and near to death. The Interpreter has come. He has shown him the uprightness of God, and given him an assurance of God's gracious disposition—now the sinner knows that Christ, alone, can save him.

IV. Let us proceed to the next stage—GOD DELIVERS THE SINNER. He says, "Deliver him from going down into the Pit." What shall we understand by this? Does it refer to "the grave," which is dug like a pit? Well, such an interpretation may harmonize with Elihu's discourse as he describes the man whose soul draws near to the grave and his life to the Destroyer. But when delivered from going down into the pit, his flesh shall be fresher than a child's, he shall return to the days of his youth. So the Psalmist celebrates the loving kindness of the Lord—"O Lord, You have brought up my soul from the grave. You have kept me that I should not go down into the pit."

What more shall we understand by the pit from which the soul is delivered? The pit is often used in Scripture as the emblem of great distress and misery. Captives in the East were frequently shut up in pits all night. So Isaiah says, "They shall be gathered together as prisoners are gathered in the pit and shall be shut up in the prison" (Isaiah 24:22). And again, in another place, "The captive exile hastens that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail" (Isaiah 51:14). There is a bondage of soul which involves depression of spirits and failing of heart that may well be likened to confinement in a pit from which there appears no way of escape.

But may we not understand still more by the pit? Alas, then, dear Friends, we sometimes read of the pit, when the word is pregnant with deeper meaning, even of the Pit that is bottomless, that

place of torment prepared for devils and lost souls! Oh, if there were time, what a picture we have before us! The Pit, the bottomless Pit—an awful representation, a horrible vision of the future wrath of God! The Pit—black, dark, descending down which the soul slips and slides and falls headlong! Going down into the Pit—what a dreadful expression! Not going down as miners do to seek for ore, but being hurled by the strong hand of the avenging angel downwards into the abyss!

There, on the verge of the precipice you are! Though not falling down that abyss yet, your feet have almost gone! Your steps have well-near slipped. At such a crisis the Mercy of God comes to the sinner's aid and cries in thrilling tones, "Deliver him!" It is not a mere shout of warning, it is a voice that has power in it. It is the clear silvery note of rescue and the man is delivered just as he is about to sink to rise no more! Kings and emperors, when they have condemned men to die, can exercise the prerogative of mercy. Let the royal mandate issue concerning a prisoner, "Deliver him," then the prison doors are opened, for the king's pardon has been given.

Just such a thing does God with condemned sinners when they bow down before Him and confess the righteousness of the sentence. Through Jesus Christ, the heavenly Messenger, He says, "Deliver him! Deliver him!" There is a legal pardon. The man is set free from the bonds of the jailer, instead of being given over to the hands of the executioner. Therefore he shall live in peace and joy. "Deliver him!" Perhaps the three significations of the pit I have alluded to may be combined in one dark picture. Sickness brings the sinner to the immediate prospect, not of death only, but of his endless doom. The sorrows and remorse of his soul produce, as it were, a foretaste of that anguish which knows no abatement. And soon Hell does yawn at his feet "a universe of death"—"worse than fables yet have reigned, or fear conceived."

How many witnesses we might call to speak to the truth of all this! Why, Elihu said, "Lo, all these things works God oftentimes with man." The anguish is real and the joy of rescue is real, likewise. Did not Hezekiah feel them both? The message came to him, "Thus says the Lord, set your house in order, for you shall die and not live." Then he prayed vehemently and he wept sorely. Afterwards the Word of the Lord came to him that his prayer was heard, that his tears were seen and that his life should be spared. And this is what he said—"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness. But You have in love to my soul delivered it from the Pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back."

What a shout of joy is that of David when he says, "He brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay and set my feet upon a rock and established my goings"! In like manner Jonah speaks, "You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God." Very memorable, too, is the sweet promise of God to the daughter of Zion, by the mouth of the Prophet Zechariah, "As for You, also, by the blood of Your Covenant I have sent forth Your prisoners out of the pit wherein is at water." Yes, my dear Friends, and I feel bound to say for myself, to the praise of my God—

"Your love was great, Your mercy free, Which from the Pit delivered me."

Well do I remember when the sentence went forth to my soul, "Deliver him!" The time did, indeed, seem long at first. I was years and years upon the brink of Hell—I mean in my own feeling. I was unhappy, I was desponding, I was despairing. I dreamed of Hell. My life was full of sorrow and wretchedness, believing that I was lost. But oh, the blessed Gospel of the God of Grace came to me at length with that soft voice, "Look unto Me and be you saved, all you ends of the earth!" With

it came a Sovereign Word, "Deliver him!" and I who was but a minute before as wretched as a soul could be, could have danced for very merriment of heart! And as the snow fell on my road home from the little house of prayer I thought every snowflake talked with me and told of the pardon I had found! I was white as the driven snow through the Grace of God.

Oh, that word, "Deliver him!" It so restrains the temptations of Satan and quells the strivings of conscience, that the poor soul has instantaneous liberty and rejoices with joy unspeakable! Mark you, my dear Friend, if ever you should look to Christ by simple faith and God should say, "Deliver him," that, "Deliver him" will last forever! God does not play fast and loose with sinners! If He pardons today He will not condemn tomorrow. He does not loose and then bind again. He opens and no man shuts. Once He says, "Deliver him," you may walk through all the earth and who shall lay anything to your charge? For who is he that can arrest you and cast you into prison against this, "Deliver him"?

There may have come into this place some great offender. It is impossible for me to discriminate among you, or single out any one of these thousands, but there may be here one of the very blackest class of sinners. To you Christ's Gospel has come! I hope you have been led to feel that you are guilty, to confess your sin, and to admit that you can only be saved through God's Grace and mercy. Well now, if you will but trust my Savior, the Lord Jesus, who once died on Calvary's Cross and now lives enthroned in Glory. If you will but trust Him now, the sentence shall come from the Truth of God, "Deliver him," or, "Deliver her from going down into the Pit."

Oh, there have been many outcasts in these very aisles who have found Grace and obtained remission of their sins! The harlot has heard the word, "Deliver her from going down to the Pit." The thief and the drunkard, too, though in their own conscience on the very brink of Hell, and all but sliding in, have heard it and they are here among the happy worshippers that praise God! Some of us who never fell into those fouler vices, though as depraved in our hearts as they, have heard that blessed sound and we are here to express our soul's desire that you all knew it! O that you all trusted Christ! O that you were all saved by that blessed mandate, "Deliver him from going down into the Pit"! V. The last thing is that GOD EXPLAINS TO THE SINNER WHOM HE DELIVERS THE REASON OF HIS DELIVERANCE. "Deliver him from going down into the Pit: I have found a ransom." "I have found a ransom"—a covering. Catch the thought. There are your sins like a putrid slough, reeking with corruption. They are black. Like a huge pool of blood they are scarlet. It is abhorrent to the pure eyes of God to look upon the heart that is a very reservoir of pollution. He must strike you if He looks at it. Listen—"I have found a covering." Christ comes in and covers it all. "Blessed is that man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

As the Mercy Seat covered the Law and was called a covering, so does the Atonement of Christ cover the perfect Law of God—and it puts out of God's sight every sin of all those who trust in Christ. But take the word as we get it in the English version—a ransom—that means a price. When a man was in debt, he used to be, according to the old law, put into prison. Well, how did he get his discharge? He came out if the debt was paid, of course, at once. So God says, "Deliver him: I have found a price, I have found a recompense, I have found a Substitute, I have found a ransom." The Lord Jesus Christ has suffered for us what God's wrath demanded of us—

"He bore, that we might never bear, His Father's righteous ire."

Christ stood in our place that we might go free! I have told you this grand old tale so many times in this house that sometimes as I am coming here I think to myself—"I can find no new metaphor to illustrate it and no new words to rouse the languid attention. They will tell me that I am always harping on the same string." Still, still, I must continue to expound and enforce this substitutionary suffering of Christ! I cannot help it. It is as much as my soul is worth to keep it back, for I am persuaded that it is the very essence of the Gospel—the vicarious suffering of Christ. At any rate, I have no Gospel to preach to you but this—that God has punished Christ instead of you that will believe on Christ and therefore He cannot punish you—you are clear. Christ has paid your debts! The receipt is given! You are liberated!

God has no claims upon you from His justice now—they are all discharged. Christ has discharged all your liabilities! "By Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses." Never listen, I entreat you, my dear Hearers, to the derisive sneer of the scorner as he attempts to cast discredit upon the righteousness of God in the imputation of your sins to the great Redeemer. I know that it is not in the power of skeptic, rationalist, Socinian, or infidel to bring forth one argument that can refute the plain testimony which abounds in the Scriptures. But they can and they do ask if our moral sense of rectitude is not shocked at inflicting punishment on the Innocent and bestowing rewards as well as pardon on the guilty.

Do they object to you that it were unjust on the part of God to make one Man suffer personally for another man's sin? Tell them if they better understood the doctrine, they would see that instead of outraging the morality of men, it manifests the righteousness of God! Tell them, as one of our most famous Puritans did, that the Redeemer and redeemed have such an intimate relation that what one does or suffers, the other may be accounted to do or suffer. It is no unrighteousness if the hands offend, for the head to be struck. Christ is our Head and we are His members. Tell them that He who suffered, the Just for the unjust, had power to lay down His life and power to take it again. His submission, therefore, was voluntary.

Tell them that He who bore our sins in His own body on the tree agreed and stipulated to bear our iniquities—the whole matter was settled in Covenant between the Father and the Son. Tell them once more that our Lord Jesus Christ counted the cost and estimated the recompense when He, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross. He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied—with honor and glory shall He be crowned. Because He humbled Himself, God also has highly exalted Him. And because He made Himself of no reputation, to Him is given a name which is above every name. Tell them His mediatorial Glory surpasses thought! Bid them cease their pitiless clamor and leave us to our joys. It is the sweetest music out of Heaven and it is the source of the music of Heaven. "I have found a ransom."

Christ's ransom for enslaved sinners is the world's good news. Tell it, then, and as you hear it let your hearts rejoice! You notice these words, "I have found a ransom." You did not find it for yourselves. You could not ever have discovered it, much less have brought it into the world. But God found it. The infinite wisdom of God was needed to find the way of salvation by a Substitute. "I have found a ransom." Now, since God has found it and God is satisfied with it, let me, chief of sinners though I am, find rest in this Divine satisfaction! Conscience says to me, "Well, but how can your sins be forgiven?" Again Conscience thunders, "Recollect such a day, such a night, such an act, such a blasphemy. Do you think Christ can wash such a devil as you?" I answer, "Well, if

God is satisfied, I am sure I will be."

If you owe a debt, and your creditor takes the money of another and he is quite easy about it, why, Man, do not be uneasy about it! If he is satisfied you may be, and if God is content with Christ, so, poor Sinner, let you and I be satisfied, and let us begin to sing—

"I will praise You every day! Now Your anger's turned away, Comfortable thoughts arise From the bleeding Sacrifice. Jesus is become at length My salvation and my strength And His praises shall prolong, While I live, my pleasant song."

O bless the dear name of Him who suffered in your place! O take His ransom price! Look at it! Turn over every sacred drop of it in your memory and your gratitude! Be satisfied and more than satisfied! Rejoice and be exceedingly glad to be delivered from going down into the Pit! God has found an all-sufficient and a most blessed Ransom for your souls and therefore you are delivered!

What more can I say to you, my dear Hearers! I have told you the way of mercy and I have described to you the footsteps of mercy in the experience of those who have proved its saving efficacy. But I cannot bring Christ to your souls, or when Christ comes near unto you, as He does now in the ministry of His Gospel, I cannot make you open the doors of your hearts to receive Him. O you who do not believe and are yet in your sins, what more can I do for you than thus to cry aloud in your ears and proclaim to you the path of life?

This one thing I can do—I can stand here and break my heart to think that you refuse Him. But no, I cannot take leave of you thus. I must again beseech and entreat and implore you as you love your souls, turn not away from the Divine Messenger, from Jesus Christ the Friend of sinners! He asks no great thing of you! He bids you not pass through ceremonies that will take you days and months, but NOW, one believing glance at yonder Cross! One glance at Him who died there for sinners and it is done! Christ is honored! God is satisfied! You are saved!

Go your way and tell your friends what great things He has done for you, and God bless you. Amen.

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Chapter 86

Job 33,24 #2505 - Deliverence from the Pit

DELIVERANCE FROM THE PIT

NO. 2505

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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"Then He is gracious unto him, and says, Deliver him

from going down to the Pit: I have found a ransom."

Job 33:24.

LET it never be forgotten that in all that God does, He acts from good

reasons. You observe that the text, speaking of the sick man, represents God as saying, "Deliver him from going down to the Pit: I have found a ransom." If I understand the passage as relating solely to a sick man and take the words just on the natural common level where some place them, I would still say that the Lord, here, gives a reason why He suspends the operations of pain and disease and raises up the sufferer—"I have found a ransom." There is always a reason for every act of Grace which God performs for man. He acts sovereignly and, therefore, He is not bound to give any reason for His actions, but He always acts wisely and, therefore, He has a reason for so acting. Writing to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul says that God "works all things after the counsel of His own will." It is not an arbitrary will, but a will arising out of the wisdom and holiness of His Character. So God has a reason for raising men up from their sickness, but that reason is not found in them, but in Himself. The sick man does not give God a reason for restoring him, but God finds it, Himself. "I have found a ransom." Possibly, the man does not even know the reason for his restoration—he may be so blind of heart that he does not care to think whether there is any reason for it or not—but God finds a reason for His mercy and finds it entirely in Himself. He is gracious to whom He will be gracious and He has compassion on whom He will have compassion. So let each one of us think, "If I have been raised from sickness. If my life, which was almost gone, has been spared, I may not know why God has done it, but certainly He has done it in infinite wisdom and compassion. And it is only right for me to feel that a life which has been so remarkably prolonged ought to be entirely dedicated unto Him who has prolonged it."

Having begun my sermon with that thought, I shall take a deep dive and go to another and a fuller meaning of our text, if not more true than this which I have first mentioned. Beloved Friends, there is a higher restoration than recovery from bodily sickness! There is such a thing as sickness of the soul which is, in God's esteem, far worse than disease of body and, blessed be His name, there is

such a thing as recovery from soul-sickness even to those who are so far gone that they appear to be going down into the Pit! God can deal with sinners when they are on the

Volume 43 1very brink of Hell! He can deal in love with them when the soil slips from under their feet and they, themselves, are about to dash into that Pit that is bottomless. He can come in, even then, and rescue them to the praise of the glory of His Grace!

I. Now, coming to our text, I shall ask you, first, to look with me upon A MAN IN GREAT PERIL. That man is here tonight—let him look to himself and may God help him to see himself as a man in great peril! This is his peril—he is "going down to the Pit." That phrase describes his whole life—going down, down, down—and the end of that going down, unless the Lord shall deliver him, will be that, before long, he will go finally down into the Pit of destruction!

Notice, first, that this is a daily and common danger. In some respects this man in peril is a representative of each one of us. If we are unconverted, if we are unrenewed by Divine Grace, every one of us is in danger of going down into the Pit of woe! Think of it, there may be, my Friend, but a step between you and death! Only the other morning there was one, well known to many of us, who spoke with his Friends apparently in health. He retired from the room for a moment and they wondered where he was as he did not come back. They sought him out and found that he was dead! He was gone, as in a moment. Blessed be God, we have a sure and certain hope that though he has gone down into the grave—he could go no lower, for his soul was at once with his Savior—and out of that grave his body shall arise at the sounding of the last trumpet! But as for unconverted men and women, they may be in Hell before the clock ticks again! It is a terrible reflection, my unsaved Friend, to think how little there is between you and eternity. How thin is the wall! "Wall?"—Did I call it a wall? Rather let me say, how thin the gauze! "Gauze"—did I call it? There is no word in our own or any other language that can adequately express the nearness of eternity! We are here—and we are gone— gone into the Presence of God in a single instant! Gone to render to the Judge of All our last account! You are going, Friend, you are going down to the Pit unless Sovereign Mercy shall step in and prevent it!

Further, there are some who, of set purpose, are going down to the Pit. In this chapter, Elihu said of some that God sends sickness to them that He may withdraw them from their purpose. Some seem to be desperately bent on mischief, as if they were determined to ruin themselves. How often do we see it in the case of a young man who has been well brought up, when he comes into possession of his money and gets what he calls his liberty—nothing that he has learned in his youth appears to restrain him! No tearful admonitions are any check upon him—he appears to be resolved to destroy himself! We have known some cases of that kind and we know others now. Oh, if they were as determined to be right as they are resolved to be wrong, they might greatly help to turn the world upside down! But, alas, they seem to spare no expense to ensure their own destruction—they are in a dreadful hurry to be rid of all their property, to bring their body into a state of disease—and to bring their soul into a state of damnation! They cannot do enough to secure their own destruction! They even lay violent hands upon their own characters, as if they were insatiably at enmity with their own souls. Many of you know such people as I am describing and you know that they are going down to the Pit. By what are called amusements, by what are said to be pleasures— but which are really only groveling degradations of the soul to the worst purposes of the flesh—all these men are going down to the Pit. It is a dreadful state for anyone to

be in, yet I am even now addressing some who are in just such a condition—I feel sure that I am. May the description, brief as it is, be complete enough to let the sinner see himself as he really is—in imminent peril of going down into the Pit!

There are some, also, who are going down to the Pit through their pride. They are not doing anything positively vicious, but they are so good in their own estimation, or so indifferent to the claims of God, that they do not want to hear about salvation. They stand entirely in their own strength and they seem to defy the humbling Gospel of the Grace of God—they will not hear it—they say by their actions, if not in so many words, "Who is God that we should servo Him? What is death that we should have any fear concerning it? What is eternity that we should ever let our spirit be depressed at the thought of it?" If I were just now to try to describe the Day of Judgment and to picture the Great White Throne with the Judge of All sitting upon it, there are many in such a condition of heart that they would merely smile at it all and continue in their sin! A sinner may perish through pride just as easily as through any other sin. A man may, in his pride, hang himself on a gallows as high as that of Haman. And he will perish as surely as another who casts himself down into the Pit by some groveling loathsome sin.

There are others who feel some present apprehension of coming judgment. They are not your merry men and women who count it one of the wisest things to drive dull care away, for they are eaten up with care. They feel that they are going down to the Pit—I do not say that all have felt this apprehension as I did—but this is how it came to me. I knew that I was guilty. I knew that I had offended God. I knew that I had transgressed against light and knowledge and I did not know when God might call me to account. But I did know this—when I awoke in the morning, the first thought I had was that I had to deal with a justly angry God who might suddenly require my soul of me! Often, during the day, when I had a little time for quiet meditation, a great depression of spirit would come upon me because I felt that sin, sin, SIN had outlawed me from my God! I wondered that the earth bore up such a sinner as I was and that the heavens did not fall and crush me—and the stars in their courses did not fight against such a wretch as I felt myself to be. Then, indeed, did I seem as if I should go down to the Pit! If I fell asleep, I dreamt of that Pit, and if I woke, I seemed to wake only to endure the tortures of the never-dying worm of conscience that was perpetually gnawing at my heart!

I went to the House of God and heard what I supposed was the Gospel, but it was no Gospel to me. My soul abhorred all manner of meat—I could not lay hold upon a promise, or indulge a hope—and I felt that I was going down to the Pit. If anyone had asked me what would become of me, I would have answered, "I am going down to the Pit." If anyone had entreated me to hope that mercy might come to me, I would have refused to entertain such a hope, for I felt that I was going down to the Pit! Well, dear Friends, it was while I was in that dreadful state of mind that Infinite Mercy met with me and saved me! And I wish that I had, in my present congregation, many wounded, broken spirits. Many weary, heavyladen souls, for it is sweet work to preach the Gospel to such people!—

"A sinner is a sacred thing, The Holy Spirit has made him so"

—that is, a really convicted sinner, not a sham sinner, but one who acknowledges that the title belongs to him and says, "Put that label upon me, for that is what I am! I deserve the wrath of God and I feel as if the first spattering drops of the fiery tempest have already fallen upon me." This is

the man who sees a true description of himself in the words of our text, "going down to the Pit."

If you add to all this the fact that the man, as Elihu describes him, was suffering from a fatal sickness, so that he dreaded the actual nearness of death, you have, indeed, an unhappy case before you. See that young woman whom consumption has marked for its victim—it is not with her the thought that she shall go down to the Pit in 20 years' time, but her feet are already far on the road! Or, look at that young man who cannot delude himself with the idea that he will go down to the Pit at the end of threes-core years and ten, but who fears that he may not even live three-score days! He has a mortal malady within him that is dragging him down from all hope and joy—this dread fear has settled like a vampire upon his soul—that he is going down to the Pit! This is the man whom I want to point out, for he is somewhere in this building. God help him to listen while I say some words which, perhaps, will bring comfort to him in this state of peril in which he is at present found!

II. Now let us notice, in the second place, A NEW PRINCIPLE IN ACTION—"Then He is gracious unto him." What does that expression mean? That word, "gracious," has more music in it than all the oratorios of Handel, though they are the chief of earthly music.

"Then He is gracious unto him." What does that mean? Well, "gracious" means, first, free favor. It means that when this man is as full of sin as an egg is full of meat. When he is as black with iniquity as a foul chimney which hangs festooned with soot—it means even then God's favor shall come to him and look upon him just as he is in all his defilement and ill-desert—and God shall be gracious to him! Our text does not say, "God shall deal with him in justice. He shall charge, accuse, condemn and punish him." No, the message is, "He is gracious unto him." The Lord comes to this poor lost wretch and says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins: return unto Me, for I have redeemed you." The Lord comes to such guilty souls and just when they think that His next words will be, "Depart, you cursed," He says, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Now this is not what the man deserves—it is the very opposite of his deserts! He has no natural right to such treatment as this—it is the gift of Divine Sovereignty, not the purchase of man's merit. "He is gracious unto him." The prisoner is justly condemned to death, but the King is gracious and gives him a free pardon! The prisoner is ready to be executed, but there comes to him undeserved deliverance from all punishment, for the King's own Son has borne the penalty of all his iniquities! Does not this Truth of God make your mouths water, you who feel that you are going down to the Pit? I am sure it does, if you have ever known the bitterness of sin! "Oh," you say, "is there such a God as this?" Yes, there is! A God, "merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." "He delights in mercy." His compassions fail not, therefore we are not consumed!

That is the first meaning of Grace, that free and undeserved favor of God which forgives and blots out sin and iniquity.

But Grace has another meaning in Holy Scripture—it means saving interference— a certain Divine operation by which God works upon the wills and affections of men so as to change and renew them! When God is gracious to a man, He does something to that man as well as for that man. The Lord comes in the power of His Grace and takes out of the sinner's heart, the stone that was

there, and makes tender that heart which once was hard as the northern iron and steel. He comes and takes the iron sinew out of the neck and makes the obstinate man to be yielding and pliable. He comes and changes the affections so that the man hates what he once loved, and loves what he once hated. In a word, where the Grace of God comes, it makes a man to be born-again even when he is old, so that, spiritually speaking, his flesh becomes fresher than that of a little child. He begins life anew, for he is a new creature in Christ Jesus! All his past sin is blotted out and his future is brightening up into the full blaze of eternal glory!

Yet this is the very man whom I described just now as going down to the Pit! But the Lord has been gracious to him. He has said to him, "I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you." The Lord has said to him, "Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you. Go, and sin no more." Is not this a most comforting message? Note that the text says, "then." In the very extremity of his going down to the Pit, "then," when he has come almost to the last step down to that fearful gulf and a cruel hand seems pushing him down to eternal destruction, "then," at that moment, the Lord is gracious to him! Infinite pleasure flashes into his face, for the almighty loving kindness of God pulls him back from the Pit and sets his feet on a new track towards the land of Glory and the face of God above!

III. This brings me to my third point, which is concerning how this Grace operates. It operates by A WORD OF POWER.

This man was going down to the Pit, but God said, "Deliver him." To whom is this command spoken? It appears to be addressed to the messengers of Divine Justice. They have grasped the guilty man, they have bound him, they are taking him off to the place of death and well does he deserve to die—but the great King upon the Throne says to His ministers of justice, "Deliver him, let him go, deliver him from going down to the Pit." And, in an instant, his chains are snapped, his bonds drop off and the man is free—freed by the word of the King, Himself. No sheriff's officer can arrest him, now. None of all the police of the universe can lay a finger on him, now, for God has said to all of them, "Let him go. Deliver him from going down to the Pit." Here is a clean jail delivery for the prisoners of hope—they are set free by the mandate of the eternal God!

More than that, the man was not only bound by justice, but he was fettered by his sin. His sins held him captive and they were dragging him down to the Pit. There was drunkenness, for instance, which held him as in a vice, so that he could not stir hand or foot to set himself free. His thirst followed his drinking and his drinking followed his thirst—and then his thirst returned after his drinking till he brought himself to a delirium from which he could not possibly escape by his own power! Perhaps it was the foul-mouthed demon of blasphemy that held him in bondage, or the black demon of vice and licentiousness, but, whatever was the band by which the man was held, every hour kept putting about him a fresh and a stronger rope till he was bound, like Samson of old, to make sport for those who had him in captivity! But just as he seemed about to be dragged down to Hell, a voice came from the excellent Glory, "Deliver him from going down to the Pit"—and Infinite Mercy dragged off his evil habits, snapped his bands and set him free! Now the man no longer loved the lusts of the flesh and the passions of his body, but he was God's free man seeking to do only his Lord's will! And if God shall make you free, you shall be free, indeed! It is a grand thing to get rid of drunkenness—with all my heart I advise you to try total abstinence—but it is a better thing to get rid of all sin at once! I mean, the reigning power of every sin by yielding

yourself up to the supreme Grace of God who is able to work in you at such a rate that all sin shall be made detestable to you and you shall rise above it to the praise of the glory of His Grace.

Brothers and Sisters, I see this same man, in later life, attacked by his old sins. There is a certain, "Cutthroat Lane" on the way to Heaven. I have been down it, myself, and I am afraid I may have to go down it yet again. It is a place where the hedges meet and it is very dark—and it is also very miry and muddy—and when a man is slipping about and can hardly see his own hand, there are certain villains that come pouncing upon him, not with the highwayman's cry, "Your money or your life," but they seek to seize his treasure, his life and all that he has! At such a moment as that, it sometimes happens that the man puts his hand to his side to draw his sword, but he finds that it is gone! He determines to fight as best he can, but what can he do against such terrible odds when he is alone and unarmed? But oh, what a blessed thing it is for him, just then, to hear, as Bunyan says, the sound of a horse's hoof and to know that there is a patrol going down the King's Highway! And he cannot only hear the ring of His horse's hoofs, but he can hear the King's own voice, crying out from the Throne, itself, "Deliver him! Deliver him! Deliver him from going down to the Pit."

That voice you shall always hear, if you are a child of God, when you get into a fix, when you are brought into peril and trouble. God has given commandment to save you and you shall be saved—saved from yourself and from all the attacks of your old sins! Saved from the devil! Saved from evil company, for God has said it, "Deliver him from going down to the Pit." That deliverance of God is an eternal one, nor shall the infernal lion ever be able to rend one sheep or lamb that the Great Shepherd deigns to keep!

Now to come back to my own story. I remember when I felt that I was going down to the Pit and I cannot forget one blessed, blessed day. The snow-flakes fell thick and heavy that morning and I was going, according to my habit, to a certain very respectable place of worship where I should hear a very respectable minister who might have left me in my misery to this day. But it was too cold and the snow was too deep for me to go so far. So I turned into the little Primitive Methodist Chapel in Colchester and sat there feeling that I was going down to the Pit, although I was sitting in the House of God to hear the Gospel. The clock of mercy struck in Heaven the hour and moment of my deliverance, for the time had come! Thus had the eternal purpose of Jehovah decreed it! And when the preacher opened the Book and gave out his text, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else," and when he began to cry in simple terms, "Look! It is all you have to do! Look out of yourself and away from yourself, and look to Christ! Not to forms and ceremonies, or works, or feelings, but look to what Christ has done!" I did look and in that moment went out this word, "Deliver him from going down to the Pit," and I was delivered! For, as the moment before there was none more wretched than I was, so, within that second, there was none more joyous! It took no longer time than does the lightning-flash! It was done and never has it been undone! I looked and lived and leaped in joyful liberty as I beheld sin punished upon the great Substitute and put away forever from all those who will only trust Him!

That is what looking to Christ means—trusting in His One Great Sacrifice! O dear Friends, I do pray the Lord to speak in great Grace concerning some of you and to say, "Deliver him from going down to the Pit." You may think that when I speak like this, there is some of the excitement of

enthusiasm about my language, but I reckon that I talk cold icicles about a thing that is hotter than the furnace! Oh, the blessedness, the joy, the exquisite peace, the overflowing happiness of believing in Christ! If you know anything about the darkness, you are the very person to know something about the Light of God! If you know anything of sorrow for sin, you are the very man or woman to understand the joy of sin being put away! And it will be all done for you if you will but look to Jesus—if you will simply trust Him!

III. I finish by noticing that in this case God supplies us with His reason for delivering a soul and it is AN ARGUMENT OF LOVE—"Deliver him from going down to the Pit: I have found a ransom."

This is the only reason why any man shall be delivered from going down to the Pit—because God has found a ransom. There is no way of salvation but by the Ransom—all who are ever saved are saved by the Ransom. And if you, dear Friend, would be saved, it must be by the Ransom—and there is but one.

Observe that the text says, "I have found a ransom." This ransom is an invention of Divine Wisdom. I do not think it would ever have occurred to any mind but the mind of God, Himself, to save sinners by the substitutionary Sacrifice of Christ. The most astonishing novelty under Heaven is the old, old story of the Cross of Christ! That ever God should take upon Himself the sin of His own creatures, that, in order to be able to justly forgive, God, Himself, should bear the punishment which He must inflict for the creatures' sin—this is something marvelous to the last degree! The rebel sins and the King Himself suffers the penalty for the rebellion! The offender commits the trespass and the Judge bears the punishment! Such a plan was never heard of in human courts of law—or if it has ever been spoken of there, it was because, first of all, both the ears of him who heard it had been made to tingle while God revealed it out of His own heart. "I have found a ransom." Nobody would have thought of that way of the deliverance of a sinner from the pit of Hell through a ransom if God had not thought of it!

Notice, next, that God has not only invented a way of deliverance, but he has found a ransom. So that it is a gift of Divine Love. "Deliver him from going down to the Pit"—it does not say, "because there is a ransom," or, "I will accept one if he finds it, and brings it"—but the Lord, Himself, says, "I have found a ransom." It is the man who sinned, but it is God who found the ransom! It is the man who is going down to the Pit, but it is God who finds a ransom! Surely, if you have sold yourself to sin and Satan, you must find the ransom to get yourself set free, must you not? "No," says Sovereign Grace, "the man has sold himself into slavery, but I have found a ransom. I have broken the bonds from his neck and set him free by an immense price which I, Myself, have found—found it in My own bosom where My only-begotten and well-beloved Son was lying. I found it in Myself, for I have given up Myself to bleed and die for mortal men." Oh, this is wonderful Grace, indeed—that God should deliver and should deliver through a ransom—and should deliver through a ransom that He has, Himself, found!

And is there not something very wonderful in the assurance of this Truth of God? "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom." God does not say "There may be a ransom for the poor soul. Possibly I may find a ransom somewhere." No, He says, "I have found a ransom." Now, if a slave were in the bitterest of bondage, yet if his master said to him, "I have the ransom for you," that man must feel certain of his liberty because if he who held him in bondage has found a ransom, he certainly will hold him in bondage no longer! Sinner, do not doubt your deliverance, for

God has said it—"I have found a ransom." If you had only heard this sentence uttered by a mortal man, you might have questioned the truth of it, but when God Himself proclaims concerning him who is going down to the Pit, "I have found a ransom," then is the deliverance certain! Indeed, it is already accomplished! Therefore, go you free and rejoice in the liberty that God has given you!

To my mind, and with this thought I will finish, there is the ring of heavenly music in this message. "Deliver him from going down to the Pit: I have found a ransom." I suppose you never heard a man who had found a treasure cry out to let everyone know what he had found. Perhaps he would not mention it to anyone but his wife. When he wished to make her heart glad by sharing the fortune with her, he said to her, "I have found a treasure." But you may have heard a mother say, when her child had been lost in the woods, perhaps, and had been sought for by many, when at last she has discovered him, "I have found my boy!" Oh, it is wonderful, the joy of a mother's heart when she has found her child! But to me there is the sound of bells, there is the music of a marriage peal in this verse as God, looking on a sinner slipping down to Hell, says, "Deliver him from going down to the Pit: I have found a ransom." Almighty love seems to sing out with all her might and rocks, hills, and valleys suffice not to repeat the echo of the strain, "I have found, I have found, I have found a ransom!" This is God's "Eureka!" "I have found a ransom. I did not look for a ransom among the angels, for I knew they were too weak to furnish it. I looked not for it among the sons of men, for I knew it was not to be found there—they were too fallen and guilty. The sea said, 'It is not in me.' All creation cried, 'It is not in me.' But I looked on my Well-Beloved and I heard Him say, 'Lo, I come: in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Your will, O My God: yes, Your Law is within My heart.' I saw Him descend to earth and hide Himself in an Infant's form; I saw Him toiling on in holy servitude to My perfect Law; I saw Him give His hands to the nails, and His side to the spear. I heard Him cry, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' I bowed the ear of My Glory and I drank in His conquering cry, 'It is finished,' and then I, the Infinite, the Eternal, the Ever-Blessed, the Just, the Gracious, said, 'I have found a Ransom.'" Thus, the Lord rejoices over you and over me with singing as He cries, "I have found a Ransom!" How greatly did He rejoice over the finished work of His well-beloved Son! Therefore, sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth, for the Lord, Himself, delights in the message He delivers to us, "I have found a Ransom!"

Now, dear Hearts, if God has found a Ransom and speaks thus joyously about it, I do pray you to accept it. "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land." Receive Christ and you have the proof that God has received you. Only take Him—you have nothing else to do! Put out that empty hand of yours, black though it is, and receive in it the Pearl of Great Price, even the Christ of God, Himself! Receive Him, accept Him, believe Him, trust Him! That is all you have to do. Oh, will you not trust Him? Can you doubt Him? If God takes upon Himself our nature and in that nature, dies, I cannot only trust Him with my soul, but if I had all your souls within my body, and all the souls of the millions of London all gathered beneath this breast—and if I had besides that the souls of all the sinners who have ever lived, all compressed within this one frame—I could believe that the dying Christ could blot out all that mass of sin! I believe it and so confide in Him—will not you? Verily, if you will not believe, neither shall you be established! But he that believes shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end! May God add His own blessing, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Job 33:1-33.

This is a speech of young Elihu who had sat quietly listening to the taunting words of the three "candid Friends" of Job—and to the somewhat exasperated replies of the Patriarch. At last, the young man breaks the silence and, with some dignity, and quite sufficient self-content, he thus addresses himself to Job.

Verse 1. Therefore, Job, I pray you, hear my speeches and listen to all my words. "I am but a young man, but I speak because I cannot be quiet. An impulse moves me. I am as a vessel needing vent. I desire to speak impartially and, therefore, hear me, but hear all that I have to say. Do not listen merely here and there to a part of my speech, but hearken to all my words." Sometimes, it is very necessary to beg our hearers not to run away with only one sentence, or even with one sentiment. "Hear my speeches and listen to all my words," for there is a proportion in truth, and one truth has to be balanced with all the others. A statement may be all the better for being unguarded and more forcible because it stands alone—and yet it may need that another statement should be heard with it lest it should be misunderstood. Therefore the preacher also says to his hearer, "I pray you, hear my speeches and listen to all my words."

2. Behold, now I have opened my mouth, my tongue has spoken in my mouth. That is to say, "I speak with much solemnity, not as one who chatters without sense, or without due consideration, but I have opened my mouth deliberately, as one who has something to say—and I speak with my best powers of speech, as one who wishes to persuade those who hear him."

3. My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly. What a lesson this is to those of us who preach to others—that we speak out of the uprightness of our heart and feel that, however others may judge us, we are sincere before God in what we say! How necessary, also, is it, especially in these days, that we should speak plainly, so as to be easily understood! Some men never think clearly and, therefore, they never speak clearly. And, oftentimes, the darkness of a man's speech is only the result of the darkness of his mind—he has no clearly-defined notion of what he has to say. Let every young man who has to teach others resolve that this utterance of Elihu shall also be his, "My lips shall utter knowledge clearly."

4. The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life. That is to say, "I am as much the creature of God as these three old gentlemen are, these three wise Friends who have spoken so tartly. I am as much endowed with the Spirit of God as you are, O Job, and, therefore, I speak to you in His name." Should not this be a lesson to every one of us to try and do all that we can for God? Every Christian may say, "'The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life.' Therefore let me use my very existence, the life that is breathed into me, for that Almighty Creator who has made me what I am."

5. If you can answer me, set your words in order before me, stand up. He who speaks reason is ready to hear reason. It is only the unreasonable talker who will not allow others to have a word to say in reply. "If you can answer me," says Elihu to Job, "set your words in order before me, stand up." 6. Behold, I am, according to your wish, in God's place: I also am formed out of the day. Job had wished that someone would stand up and speak for God, someone without the terror that seemed inseparable from the Infinite, someone without the power of Omnipotence, someone who would be more nearly his equal, with whom he could debate the questions which perplexed him.

So Elihu says, "I am, according to your wish, in God's place: I also am formed out of the day."

7-11. Behold, my terror shall not make you afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon you. Surely you have spoken in my hearing and I have heard the voice of your words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, He finds occasions against me, He counts me for His enemy, He puts my feet in the stocks, He marks all my paths. Elihu did not make this excuse for Job because he had been slandered by his Friends and that his statement of innocence was not so much absolute towards God as it was defensive towards men. Still, there is no doubt that Job had gone too far in this direction. Perhaps for this very reason his troubles had come upon him, because he was, in a measure, self-righteous. In some small degree, at any rate, he may have prided himself upon his personal excellence. Elihu does well, therefore, in all faithfulness, to point out the blot in what Job had said.

12, 13. Behold, in this you are not just: I will answer you, that God is greater than man. Why do you strive against Him? For He gives not account of any of His matters. This man seems to have the very Spirit that rested upon the Apostle Paul when he was arguing with an objector against the Lord's way of working, "No but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why have You made me thus?" The greatness and grandeur of the Eternal should prevent our raising objections against anything that He does. Who are we, the moths of a moment, the creatures of an hour, that we should interrogate the Infinite and question our Maker? What He does must of necessity be right—though we cannot understand how it is so, we must believe it and meekly bow to the will of the Lord!

14-17. For God speaks once, yes twice, yet man perceives it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, in slumbering upon the bed; then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose and hide pride from man. It is always one great object of the Divine dealings to make and keep us humble. It is strange that creatures so insignificant as we are should be perpetually infected with the foul disease of pride—this form of mental scarlet fever continually breaks out in puny man and, therefore, God deals with him that He may "hide pride from man."

18, 19. He keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed and the multitude of his bones with strong pain. Pain of body is usually looked upon as a great evil and, doubtless, it is so in some respects, but it wraps up within itself great mercy. There are some who can scarcely be taught at all except through physical pain. And if it were possible to abolish sickness and suffering, where would men go in the wantonness of their strength? Does not this very affliction often chide man and bid him think—and cause him to return to his Maker, when, otherwise, he would be as thoughtless as the beasts that perish?

20-24. So that his life abhors bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen, stick out. Yes, his soul draws near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there is a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man His uprightness: then He is gracious unto him, and says, Deliver him from going down to the Pit: I have found a ransom. Happy is the messenger who comes with such a message as that! Such was the Prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah when the king was sick unto death. Such is the minister of God's Word when he comes with glad tidings of redemption and God,

through him, says of the spiritually sick man, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."

25-28. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: he shall pray unto God and He will be favorable unto him: and he shall see His face with joy: for He will render unto man His righteousness. He looks upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the Pit, and his life shall see the light. See the easy terms of God's love and mercy? The man does but confess that he has sinned— he admits that he has perverted the right, he confesses that he has gained no profit thereby—and God, seeing him in such a state of heart as this, delivers his soul from going down to the Pit, and his life shall see the light! What a gracious God we serve! How cruel to continue to offend Him when He is so ready to forgive!

29, 30. Lo, all these things works God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the Pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living. The chastisement of sickness and the flagellation of pain whip the sinner back to Him, who alone can save him! These are the black dogs of the Great Shepherd wherewith He brings back wandering sheep till they come again under His crook and He leads them into green pastures.

31-33. Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold your peace, and I will speak. If you have anything to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify you. If not, listen to me: hold your peace, and I shall teach you wisdom. May the Lord graciously apply to all our hearts this instructive portion of Old Testament Scripture! There is a message in it to each of us as well as to the Patriarch, Job, to whom it was specially addressed.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 33,29-30 #1101 - An Old-Fashioned Conversation

AN OLD-FASHIONED CONVERSION

NO. 1101

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 16, 1873,

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Lo, all these things works God oftentimes with man, To bring

back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living."

Job 33:29-30.

SOME people are wonderfully enamored of anything that is old. An old coin, an old picture, an old book, or even a piece of antique rubbish they will almost worship. The jingle of a rusty medal is music to them, and "auld nick-nackets" are as precious as diamonds. It is wonderful what a little mold and a few worm-holes will do in the way of increasing values! I confess I do not very greatly share in the feeling, at least it is no craze of mine but, nevertheless, all things being equal, antiquity has its charms. Old, old stories of the days far past, when time was young, have a special interest. They are as windows which permit us to gaze down the dim aisles of ages long gone by—we look through them with mingled curiosity and awe.

I am about, this morning, to speak to you concerning an old conversion. We shall rehearse an ancient story of the renewal and salvation of a soul. In our day we meet with professors who cry down everything of the present and cry up everything of the former days, which they call the good old times. Such persons talk much about old-fashioned conversions and hold in great admiration the lives of Believers of the old school. I shall, this morning, introduce you to an old-fashioned conversion and explain the way in which men were brought to God not only hundreds, but thousands of years ago. I suppose that Elihu delivered this description of conversion about the time of Moses, or at the period when Israel was in Egypt, for almost general consent appropriates one of those dates to the Book of Job.

The record we shall read this morning, and study carefully, refers to the very, very oldest of times. Let this fact give additional interest to our meditation—and if it does I am sure that we shall not lack for earnest attention, for the subject is of great intrinsic value. Kindly keep your Bibles open. We have already read the chapter, but it will be necessary to refer to it verse by verse.

I. The matter in hand is to compare an old-fashioned conversion with those of the present time. And the first note we shall strike is this—it is quite certain from the description given in this 33rd chapter of Job that THE SUBJECTS OF CONVERSION WERE SIMILAR and men in the far gone ages were precisely like men in these times. The passage tells us nothing about the stature of

men's' bodies, but as far as they were concerned spiritually the photograph which Elihu took is the portrait of many of those who are brought to Jesus now. Reading the passage over, we find that men in those times needed converting, for they were deaf to God's voice (verse 14). They were obstinate in evil purposes (verse 17) and puffed up with pride. They needed chastening to arouse them to thought and required sore distress to make them cry out for mercy (verses 19-22). They were very slow to say, "I have sinned," and were not at all inclined to prayer. Nothing but sharp discipline could bring them to their senses and even then they needed to be born-again. Men in those days were sinful and yet proud—sinful self and righteous self were both in power—it was one part of conversion to withdraw them from their purposes of sin and another part of their conversion to "hide pride" from them.

Though they were sinful, they thought that they were righteous, and though they were condemned by the Law of God they still entertained the fond hope that they should, by their own merits, obtain the favor of the Most High. They were then, as they are now, poor as poverty and yet proud of their wealth. They were Publicans in sin, and yet Pharisees in boasting. It appears that in those days God was accustomed to speak to men and to be disregarded by them. We are told that God spoke "once, yes, twice," and men perceived Him not. Their presumptuous slumbers were too deep to be broken by the call of love. Samuel said, "Here am I, for You did call me," but they slept on in defiance of the Lord.

O, how frequently does the Lord speak now to deaf ears! He calls and men refuse. He stretches out His hands and men do not regard Him. But they are desperately set upon their sins and sod in carnal security, therefore they do despite to His Grace and ruin their own souls! In those ancient times, when a man was converted, the Lord Himself must turn him—Omnipotence itself was necessary to divide man from his folly. God's speaking to the ear was not enough unless He followed it up with a powerful application to the heart. Man was too far gone to be healed by remedies less than Divine—he was utterly past hope unless Almighty love would come to the rescue!

Verily, the case is the same at this day and each man repeats his fellow. As the fish still bites at the bait, as the bird still flies into the snare, as the beast is still taken in the pit, so is man still the dupe of his sins and only the Lord can save him! Salvation was only worked by the gracious influences of God's Spirit in the days of Job—and it is only so accomplished at this present hour! Men were lost then as now! Men thought they were not lost then, and they are equally conceited now! Into the house of the Divine Physician the same class of persons enter as were welcomed and healed by Him ages ago. He has the same blind eyes and deaf ears to open—hearts still require to be transformed from stone to flesh—and leprosies to be exchanged for health by His Sovereign touch.

The Spirit from the four winds breathed on a valley covered with dry bones in the days of the fathers and He comes forth, still, to work upon the like scene of death. Man has not outgrown his sins! As it was in the beginning it is now and so it ever will be while that which is born of the flesh is flesh. As were the sires such are their sons, and such will our sons be in their turn—so that the process of conversion needs to be the same— and "all these things God works oftentimes with man." II. The second note we shall strike is this, that in those olden times THE WORKER OF CONVERSION WAS THE SAME—"all these things God works." The whole process is by Elihu

ascribed to God and every Christian can bear witness that the Lord is the great Worker now. He turns us and we are turned. We read in verse 14 that, at first, the Lord worked upon men by speaking to them, once, yes, twice—He also brought Truth home to their minds and instructed them and so changed their purposes and humbled their hearts. In the same manner the Lord works now.

Conversion is a change which concerns the mind, the affections, the spirit—it is not a physical manipulation as some foolish persons fancy— who appear to think that God converts men by force and turns them over as a man would roll a stone. The Lord operates upon men as men, not as blocks of wood! God speaks to them, instructs them, reveals Truth to them, encourages them to hope and graciously influences them for good. Man is left free, for, "God speaks once, yes, twice, yet man perceives it not," and yet in God's own wise and suitable manner, he is at length led to cry, "I have sinned and perverted that which is right and it profited me not."

But in those times, as now, it was necessary that God should do more than speak to the outer ear. He, therefore, came still nearer and by His Holy Spirit led men to really hear what He spoke. He did not leave men to their wills, neither did He trust their conversion to the eloquence of preachers, or to the cogency of arguments. But He Himself came and opened men's ears and pressed the Truth of God home upon their understandings and made it operative upon their entire nature. Man was so proud that no one else could humble him but God—and he was so willful, that no one could withdraw him from his purpose but the Lord, alone!

And the Lord, in condescension, did the deed and made the man obedient and humble. Indeed, the Lord is described in this chapter as the Mal. cause of all the work accomplished. Whereas a ransom was needed to deliver men from going down to the pit, it is the Lord's voice which cried, "I have found a Ransom." Whereas, even when the Ransom was found, men did not know it and would not receive it, it was God who sent a messenger, one of a thousand, to show unto man His uprightness and to proclaim the great provision made for restoring man to his primeval state. It is the Lord who delivers the soul from the pit, that man's life may see the light.

In this chapter it is God that visits, that speaks, chastens, instructs, enlightens, consoles, renews and saves—from first to last—God works all in all. Salvation is of the Lord, it is not of man, neither by man. Neither is it of the will of man, nor of the flesh, nor of blood, nor of birth, but of the will of God. The purpose of God and the power of God work salvation from first to last. What a blessing this is for us, for, if salvation were of ourselves, who among us would be saved? But He has "laid help upon One that is mighty." God is also our strength and our song, for He Himself has become our salvation. He who has begun the good work will carry it on. Christ is the Alpha. Christ is the Omega. Christ is the "Author and the Finisher of our faith." So we have two points in this ancient conversion in which it was just like our own—the same men to be operated upon and the same God to work the miracles of Grace.

III. The most interesting point to you will probably be the third—THE MEANS USED TO WORK CONVERSION IN THOSE DISTANT AGES WERE VERY MUCH THE SAME AS THOSE EMPLOYED NOW. There were differences in outward agencies, but the inward modus operandi was the same. There was a difference in the instruments, but the way of working was the same. Kindly turn to the chapter, at the 15th verse. You find there that God, first of all, spoke to men, but they regarded Him not, and then He spoke to them effectually by means of a dream—"In a dream,

in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, in slumbering upon the bed."

Now, this was an extraordinary means of Grace, seldom used now. In this the distant ages differ from the present. A dream, though it is, in itself, but the mirage of sleep, may be employed by God to arouse the mind towards eternal things. Dreams of death and judgment to come have frequently had a very alarming effect upon the conscience, while visions of celestial Glory have impressed the heart with desires after infinite bliss. As Dryden says of some men—

"In sleep they fearful precipices tread Or, shipwrecked, labor to some distant shore,"

so others have in their slumbers shivered at the gates of Hell, or even been tossed upon its fiery waves—and the thoughts consequent upon such dreams have, by God's Grace, occasionally been rendered permanently useful, though I fear it is not often so.

In the days of Elihu, however, dreams were much more frequently the way in which God spoke, for there were few messengers from God to interpret His mind—no openly declared Gospel and few assemblies for instruction by hearing the Word. And what is more, there was then no written Word of God. In those early times they had no Inspired books at all, so that, lacking the Bible and lacking the frequent ministrations of God's servants, the Lord was pleased to supply their deficiencies by speaking to men in the visions of the night. I say again, we must not expect the Lord to return to the general use of so feeble an agency now that He employs others which are far more effectual. It is much more profitable for you to have the Word in your houses which you can read at all times and to have God's ministers to proclaim clearly the Gospel of Jesus than it would be to be dependent upon visions of the night!

The means, therefore, outwardly, may have changed, but still, whether it is by the dream at night, or by the sermon on Sunday, the power is just the same—namely, the Word of God. God may speak to men in dreams and if so, He speaks to them nothing more and nothing different from what He speaks in the written Word. If any come to you and say, "I have dreamed this or that," and it is not in the Scriptures, away with their dreams! If anything should occur in your own mind in vision which is not already revealed in the Book of God, put it away, it is an idle fancy not to be regarded. Woe to that man whose religion is the baseless fabric of dreams—he will one day wake up to find that nothing short of realities can save him! We have the more sure word of testimony unto which we do well if you take heed as unto a light that shines in a dark place. Conversions, then, in the old times, used to be by the Word of God. It came in a different way, but it was the same Word and the same Truth. At this time faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God—and at bottom that was precisely the way in which faith came to men in those distant periods. Now, observe, that in addition to the external coming of the Word, it seems from the chapter before us in the 16th verse, that men were converted by having their ears opened by God. Alas, men's ears are still stopped up!

An old Puritan has mentioned seven forms of what he calls, "ear stoppers," which need to be taken out of the human ear. They are frequently blocked up by ignorance—they know not the importance and value of the Truth of God and, therefore they refuse to give earnest heed to it. Judging it to be an idle tale, they go their way to their farms and to their merchandise. Some ears are stopped up by unbelief—they have heard the glad tidings of salvation but they have not received it as an Infallible Revelation from Heaven, a message backed by Divine authority.

Skepticism and philosophy, falsely so called, barricade Eargate against the assaults of Emmanuel's captains so that even the great battering rams of the Gospel prove powerless to force an entrance. "He could not do many mighty works then because of their unbelief!"

Others ears are stopped up by impenitence—the hardness of the heart causes a deadness of the ear. You may discharge the great cannons of the Law in the ears of some men, but they will not stir. The thunders of God startle the wild beasts of the wood but impenitence is not moved thereby. The Gospel, itself, sounds upon such ears with no more effect than upon a marble statue—the groans of Calvary are nothing to them. Some ears are stopped by prejudice—they have made up their minds as to what the Gospel ought to be and they will not hear it as it is. They have set up for themselves a standard of what the Truth of God should be and that standard is a false one, for they have put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness.

Prejudices against the preacher, or against the denomination are but forms of the same evil—they make men to be as Ulysses was when his ears were sealed with wax, for they are even as deaf men. The entrance into many ears is also effectually barred by the love of sin. He who loves vice will not hear of repentance—the lover of pleasure detests holy mourning. The licentious think holiness to be another name for slavery. The man who finds delight in sin is a deaf adder whom the wisest charmer cannot charm—the poison of asps is under his tongue and he cannot renounce his deadly hate of a Gospel which rebukes his evil ways. It would be vain to teach cleanliness to the sow which wallows in the mire—it loves uncleanness and after uncleanness will it go.

Some ears are stopped through pride—the plain, unflattering, humbling Gospel of the sinner's Savior is not to their taste. The Gospel for lost sinners, they think, is not addressed to them, for they are almost good enough and are by no means worthy of any great blame, or in danger of any great punishment. When they acknowledge their sinnership in words they feel it not in their hearts, therefore they hear not the Truth of God in the love of it. If the Gospel-pipe could be tuned to notes of flattery, to praise the dignity of man, they would attend to its music—but a Gospel for vulgar sinners! How can their noble souls endure it? With their fine feathers all ruffled in disdain, they turn away in a rage.

Alas, how many ears are stopped through worldliness? If you stand in a street where the traffic is abundant—where the constant thunder of rumbling wheels creates a din—it would be difficult to preach so as to command an audience, for the abundant sound would prevent all hearing. And, to a great extent, the mass of mankind are just in that position as to the joyful sound of the Gospel—the rumbling of the wheels of commerce, the noise of trade and the cries of competition, the whirl of cares and the riot of pleasures—all these drown the persuasive voice of heavenly love so that men hear no more of it than they would hear a pin fall in the midst of a hurricane at sea. Only when God unstops the ear is the still small voice of Truth heard in the chambers of the heart.

Now it is clear to every thoughtful person that all these ear-stoppers existed in the olden times as well as now and therefore the same work of opening the passage to the heart was necessarily performed. Dreams did not convert sinners of the Patriarchal age, however vivid they might be. Nor did prophetic warnings by themselves arouse them—the hand of Him who created the ear was needed to cleanse and circumcise it before the Truth of God could find admission. Note the next sentence, He "seals their instruction." That was the means of conversion in the olden times. God brought the Truth down upon the soul as you press a seal upon wax—you bear upon the seal to

make the impression and even thus the power of God pressed home the Word.

Truth is heard by men, but they forget it unless the Holy Spirit takes the Truth and puts it home and lays His force upon it and then it makes a stamp upon the conscience, upon the memory, and upon the entire manhood. Perhaps, also, by sealing here is meant confirming. A thing is sealed when it is established by testimony and witness—under hand and seal, as we say. Now the Holy Spirit has a way of making Truth to become manifest to men and cogent upon their minds by bearing His witness with it, so that they cannot help feeling that it is true. He sets it in such a light that they cannot dispute it, but yield full consent to it, their conscience being overwhelmingly convinced.

Dear Friends, I pray God the Holy Spirit in this sense to seal home the Word we speak to each one of you, that from Hearers you may grow into Believers. I know you will remain Hearers, only, unless that sacred sealing shall take place, but let that come upon you and your soul will have the Gospel stamped into its very texture, never more to be effaced. If the Spirit of God thus seals you, you will be sealed, indeed! By sealing is also sometimes meant preserving and setting apart, as we seal up documents or treasures of great value that they may be secure. In this sense the Gospel needs sealing up in our hearts. We forget what we hear till God the Holy Spirit seals it in the soul and then it is pondered and treasured up in the heart—it becomes to us a goodly pearl, a Divine secret, a peculiar heritage. This sealing is a main point in conversion. What thousands of sermons many of you have heard, but the instruction has never been sealed to you and, therefore, you remain unsaved! I cannot bear to think of your unhappy case and I beseech those who love the Lord to pray that our discourses, or the sermons of someone else, or the Bible itself, may be sealed of the Lord upon these, my unhappy Hearers, that they may be converted and saved! O for the Lord's sealing hand upon men's hearts! Send, Lord, by whomever You will send, and by Your servant, also! Give the hearing ear and then engrave your Gospel upon an understanding heart. You are able to do this and in faith we seek it at Your hands, O Lord God of our salvation! In this manner men were converted in the olden times—ears were opened and hearts were sealed.

It appears, also, that the Lord, in those days, employed Providence as a help towards conversion—and that Providence was often of a very gentle kind, for it preserved men from death. Read the 18th verse—"He keeps back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword." Many a man has had the current of his life entirely changed by an escape from imminent peril. Solemn thoughts have taken possession of his formerly careless mind and he has said to himself, "Has God preserved me from this danger? Then let me be grateful to Him. He must have had a purpose in my preservation. Let me find out what it is and thankfully endeavor to answer to it."

Have any of you, my Hearers, escaped from shipwreck? Is there one here who has escaped from an accident upon the iron way? Are you one of a handful who were snatched from between the very jaws of death? Have you risen up from a fever which laid you very low? Are you now almost the only survivor of a family, all the members of which, except yourself, have been taken away by consumption, or some other hereditary disease? Are you a remarkable monument of sparing mercy? Then, I pray you, let the long-suffering of God lead you to repentance, for it has led many before you and it is intended that it should do the same for you!

Yield to the gentle pressure of loving kindness, even as the flowers that yield their perfumes to the sunshine do not need to be crushed and bruised like Oriental spice beneath the pestle. Tenderly does the Lord call you to Himself, and says, "I have spared you from the grave. I have also kept your guilty soul from going down to Hell. I have placed you, today, under the sound of the Gospel. I am, by My servant, calling upon you to turn unto Me and live. Will you not hear Me? You are still on praying ground and pleading terms with Me—will you not consider all this?" Thus God speaks now by actions, which speak more loudly than words, and it seems that in the same way He was known to speak to men in the days gone by, so that Providential circumstances were often the means of conversion.

But, further, it seems that, as Elihu puts it, sickness was a yet more effectual awakener in the common run of cases. Observe the 19th verse, "He is chastened, also, with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhors bread, and his soul dainty meat." Severe pain destroyed appetite and brought on extreme lassitude and distaste of life—but all this was sent in mercy to fetch the wanderer home. Yes, men get space for thought when they are shut up in the chamber of sickness. While the mill-wheel went on and on and on, they could not hear God speak, but when its hum is hushed the warning voice sounds forth clearly.

There in silence the patient tosses on the bed, wakeful at night and fearful by day. And then conscience lifts up its clamor and is heard—then, too, the Spirit of God seizes the opportunity to speak to an awakened conscience—and He convicts the man of sin. How much some of us owe to a bed of sickness! I do not desire for any unconverted person here that he should be ill, but if that would be the way to make him think, repent and believe, I could earnestly pray for it! I believe the Lord has often preached to men in hospitals who never heard Him in churches or chapels. Fever and cholera have been heard by those whom ministers could not reach.

If we could banish pain and sickness from the world, it may be we should be robbing Righteousness of two of her most impressive Evangelists. What Jonah was to Nineveh, sickness has been to many a man. Like Elijah, also, it has cried in the soul, "Choose you this day whom you will serve." Disease has been a grim orator for God and with an eloquence not to be resisted, it has made the hearts of men to bow before its message. If there are any here who have lately been thus afflicted, I would ask them whether God has blessed it to their souls.

I earnestly pray that they may not be hardened by it, for in that case there is fear that God will say, "Why should you be smitten anymore, you will revolt more and more!" and He may add, "I will let them alone, they are given unto idols. I have smitten them till their whole head is sick and their whole heart is faint. I have made them to be so near death's door, that from the crown of the head even to the foot they are all wounds and bruises through the chastening of My rod. I will give them up, and no more will I deal with them in a way of Grace." Great God have pity, still, and make Your chastisements effectual to their souls!

Now, note well that we do not assert that all persons who are saved are awakened by sickness—far from it! All that we are now taught is that many are so aroused and that such was the case in the instance described by Elihu. In addition to this sickness, the person whom God saved was even brought to be apprehensive of death—"Yes, his soul draws near unto the grave, and his life to the Destroyer." When a man is made to lie upon his bed on the brink of Hell and look into another world, that sight may be sacredly blessed to him. O, it is no small thing to peer into

eternity and to make out, amid the horrid gloom, no shape of hope but ghastly forms of hideous woe! To have behind one the memory of a mixspent life, to have above one an angry God, to have within one the aches of the body and the pangs of remorse and to have beneath one the bottomless pit, yawning with its lurid fires—what can be worse?

This side of Hell, what can be worse than the tortures of an awakened conscience? This has sometimes made men wake up from a life-slumber and compelled them to cry, "What must we do to be saved?" I wish that every man here, who has remained unmoved by gentler means, might have some such an experience! It were better for you to be saved so as by fire than not to be saved at all. But, now, notice that all this did not lead the person into comfort. Although he was impressed by the dream and sickness, and so on, yet the ministry of some God-sent ambassador was needed.

"If there is a messenger with him," that is a man sent of God—"an interpreter," one who can open up obscure things and translate God's mind into man's language—"one among a thousand," for a true preacher, expert in dealing with souls, "is a rare person" to show unto man his uprightness, "then He is gracious unto him." God could save souls without ministers, but He does not often do it. He could bring men to Jesus without the call from the lips of His sent servants, but as a general rule, conversion in the olden times needed the messenger and the interpreter, and it needs them still—"How shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent?"

I pray that many of you, dear Brothers, who know the Lord, may become preachers to others. That you may be such successful messengers of mercy to poor broken hearts that you may be to them picked and choice men like one out of a thousand! I entreat you to pray for me, also, that I may have a share and a large share, in this blessed employment, and that to many God may say through me, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a Ransom."

IV. Fourthly, and with too much brevity, THE OBJECTS AIMED AT IN THE OLD CONVERSIONS WERE JUST THE SAME as those that are aimed at now-a-days. Will you kindly look at the 17th verse? The first thing that God had to do with the man was to withdraw him from his purpose. He finds him set upon sin, upon rebellion, upon carnal pleasure, upon everything that is selfish and worldly—and conversion turns him away from such evil purposes—it was so then, it is so now. This turning of an obstinate will towards God and holiness is, however, no easy matter— to stay the sun in his course, or reverse the marches of the moon would not be a harder task.

The next object of the Divine work was to hide pride from man, for man will stick to self-righteousness as long as he can. Never does limpet adhere to its rock more firmly than a sinner to his own merits, although, indeed, he has none! Like the old Greek hero in the mythology, the natural man sits down upon the stone of self-esteem and Hercules, himself, cannot tear him from it. When he is vile even in outward character, he still fancies that there is some good thing in him and to that fancy he will tenaciously cling! So that it is a work of Divine power, an effort of the august Omnipotence of Heaven—to get a man away from his innate and desperate pride.

Beloved, another great object of conversion is to lead man to a confession of his sin. Hence we find it said in the 27th verse, "He looks upon man, and if any say I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, He will deliver his soul from going into the pit." Man hates

confession to his God, I mean humble, personal, hearty confession. He will go to a priest and answer all his filthy questions, but he will not confess to the Lord! He will gabble over words which he calls a "general confession," but true, heart-felt confession he shrinks from—he will not come to the publican's cry if he can help it. He will not say, frankly, from his heart, "I have sinned." He will not own or confess the perverseness of his nature and say, "I have perverted that which is right." Nor can you get him to admit the folly and stupidity of his sin, so as to say, "it profited me not."

But conversion brings him to his knees. Conversion pulls up the sluices of his soul and makes him pour out his confessions before the Most High. And when this is done, then salvation has come to the man's soul, for God desires man to put himself into the place of condemnation in order that He may be able to say to him, "I forgive you freely." The Lord shuts us up to hopelessness and helplessness in order that He may come as a God of Grace and display His abounding mercy. All our hope lies in Him and all other hopes are delusions. The great work in conversion is not to make people better, so that they may come to God on a good footing—it is to strip them completely and lay them low so that God may come to them when they are on a bad footing, or rather on no footing at all, but down in the dust at His feet.

The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost, but it needs God Himself to convince men that they are lost. And the Spirit's work of soul-humbling is just this—to get man to feel so diseased that he will accept the Physician—to get him to feel so poor that he will accept the charity of Heaven. To get him to know that he is so stripped that he will no longer be proud of his fig leaves, but will be willing to take the robe of righteousness which Christ has worked out. Conviction is sent to kill the man, to break him in pieces, to bury him, to let him know his own corruption—and all this as a preliminary to his quickening and restoration.

We must see the bones in the valley to be dead and dry, or we shall not hear the Voice out of the excellent Glory, saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'You dry bones live!'" May God in His mercy teach us what all this means and may we all experience an old-fashioned conversion!

V. Fifthly, the process of conversion in days of yore exactly resembled that which is worked in us now as to ITS SHADES. The shadowy side wore the same somber hues as now. First of all, the man refused to hear. God spoke once, yes twice, and man regarded Him not—here was obstinate rebellion. His heart was as an adamant stone. How true is that today! Then came the chastening till the man's bones were made to ache and he was full of misery. It is often the same now. I acknowledge that I was brought to God by agony of soul. I have often said from this pulpit that no man ever steers his boat towards the port of peace till he is driven there by stress of weather.

We never come to Christ till we feel we cannot do without Him. We must feel our poverty before we shall ever come and beg at the door of His mercy for help. The shades are the same, for the same imminence of danger which Elihu spoke of comes upon every sinner's consciousness, more or less, before he resorts to Jesus for refuge. The same bitter sense of sin still comes over men and the same wonder at their own folly in having continued in it. The same darkness still covers the sinner's pathway and the same inability to procure the light for himself. The same need of light from above, the same need of help from Him who is mighty to save. If any of you are passing, just now, through great darkness of soul because you have not yet come to the light—and God is revealing yourselves to yourselves—be comforted, for the same dark road has been traversed by many of the saints before you and it is a safe pathway, leading to comfort in Jesus Christ!

VI. But now, sixthly and very briefly, again, THE LIGHTS ARE THE SAME, even as the shades were the same. You will note in Elihu's description that the great source of all the light was this—"Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a Ransom." There is not a gleam of light in the case till you come to that Divine Word—and is it not so now? Did you ever get any comfort for your troubled souls until you were led to see the ransom found by God in Jesus Christ? Did you ever know the value of the Ransom for yourselves till God spoke it home to you—"Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a Ransom!"

This is the central point of the sinner's hope—a bleeding Savior paying our ransom price in drops of blood—the dying Son of God achieving our redemption by His own death! Oh, dear Souls, who are in the dark, if you want light, there is light nowhere but at the Cross! Do not look within for light—the only benefit of looking within is to be more and more convinced that all is dark as midnight apart front Jesus. Look within if you want to despair! But if you wish for hope, look yonder to Calvary's mountain, where the Son of God lays down His life that sinners may not die! Hear from Heaven the Voice which says, "I have found a Ransom." That is the only reason why God delivers you—not because He has seen any good thing in you, but because He has found a Ransom for you. Look where God looks and your comfort will begin.

Then this precious Gospel being announced to the sinner, the comfort of it enters his soul in the exercise of prayer—"He shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto Him." O, you can pray when you get to the Cross! Our prayers, before we see Christ, are poor poor things, but when we get to Calvary and see the utmost Ransom paid and the full atonement made, then prayer becomes the utterance of a child to a father and we feel quite sure it will speed. Next, it appears that the soul obtains comfort because God gave it His righteousness—"for He will render unto man His righteousness." That righteousness which God expected God bestows! That righteousness which man ought to have worked out but could not, Christ works out and God treats the believing man as if he were righteous, making him righteous in the righteousness of Christ! Here is another source of joy.

And then is the man led to a full confession of his sin. In the 27th verse the last cloud upon his spirit is blown away and he is at perfect peace. God was gracious to the man described by Elihu. God Himself became his light and his salvation and he came forth into joy and liberty. There is nothing more full of freshness and surprise than the joy of a new convert! Though thousands have felt it, yet each one, as he feels it, is himself amazed. I did really think, when God forgave me, that I was the most extraordinary instance of His Sovereign love that ever lived and that I should be bound even in Heaven, itself, to tell to others how God's infinite mercy had pardoned, in my case, the biggest sinner that ever was forgiven. Now, every saved soul is led to feel just that and to exult and rejoice, and magnify the Lord with extreme surprise because of His goodness!

It seems it was so in Job's day and it is so now! The old conversions are the conversions of the period—the shades are the same and the lights are the same.

VII. And last of all, which is the seventh point, THE RESULTS ARE THE SAME, for I think I hardly know a better description of the result of regeneration than that which is given in the 25th verse—"His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth." He who was an old wrinkled man in sin and looked yet older through his sorrow, becomes born-again! He starts upon a new career with a new life within him! The health which had departed from his soul

comes back! The spring of spiritual juvenility wells up in him because God has begotten him afresh and made him a new creature—"Old things have passed away, behold all things are become new!"

And with this change comes back joy. See the 26th verse—"He shall see His face with joy; for He will render unto man His righteousness." And the 30th verse—"To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living." So that the new spirit finds itself in a new world in which it goes forth with joy and is led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills break forth before it into singing and all the trees of the forest do clap their hands. It was so then—it is just the same now!

O that the same blessed thing may happen to many here present at this time! I have endeavored to give a description of conversion, that you may see what it is to be renewed in heart, but I shall have failed of my intention unless many a knee shall be bent to God with this prayer, "O Spirit of God, renew my nature, change my heart! Make my flesh to be fresher than a child's! Make me a new creature in Christ Jesus."

Time is passing—we are getting now almost one-fourth through another year and the year itself will soon fly away. I would speak to careless and thoughtless ones, again, and ask them, will it never be time to think upon these things? Will it never be time to consider your ways? Will it never be time to seek the Lord? You know not how near you are to the grave's brink. Do consider, I beseech you, and remember that the Lord waits to be gracious—that He delights in mercy and if you seek Him He will be found of you!

And this great conversion and regeneration, of which we have spoken at such length, shall be yours, and you shall see the face of God with joy even as they did of old! The Lord grant it to you for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

Psalms 32:1-11; Job 33:14-30.

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Chapter 88

Job 34,29 #737 - God--All in All

GOD—ALL IN ALL

NO. 737

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 24, 1867,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble? And when He hides His face, who then can behold Him?

Whether it is done against a nation, or against a man only."

Job 34:29.

WE commenced our special services with a sermon of encouragement, by which we were reminded of the rapid answer which Daniel received to his prayer, [Sermon #734—The Dawn of Revival, Or Prayer Speedily Answered] and were led to hope that the Lord intended, at the very commencement of our supplications, to send forth a commandment of mercy. Since then, God has done great things for us, of which we are glad. Few of you, probably, are aware of the numerous conversions which God has worked in this place during the past two weeks. We are not fond of publishing numbers, nor of making estimates, but it suffices you to know, and us to say, that the Lord has made bare His arm and led forth captive souls from the bondage of sin.

Many fathers and mothers here have had to weep for joy because their children have declared themselves to be on the Lord's side. Satan's kingdom has been weakened, and the armies of the Lord have been increased. There has been joy among the angels this week, and joy in the heart of the great Father—for many lost ones have been found! Let us give unto the Lord the glory which is due unto His name. Let us rejoice and be glad in the Lord!

And now, halting in the midst of our career, like an army with uplifted banners, resting on the wing like a lark when mounting towards Heaven, let us give a tongue to our gratitude, and sing aloud unto God our Strength. We cheerfully confess that neither our own arm nor our own strength can give us the victory! Unto Jehovah be all glory! Let us hear the voice which says, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord," and let each Believer here prostrate himself in reverence before the Throne of the great King, and thank Him with heart and soul for all the mercy and goodness which He has made to pass before us! With one united heart let us ascribe unto the Lord honor and glory, and dominion and power.

This grateful waiting upon the Lord will renew our strength in such a manner that though we run, we shall not be weary, and though we walk, and the walk is long and the road is rough, we shall not faint. Waiting upon the Lord does not give us a merely spasmodic energy with which we may

begin and continue for a little season, and then grow cold—but waiting upon the Lord gives a constant flow of vigor so that we go from strength to strength until in Zion we appear before God. This topic seemed to thrust itself upon me as most suitable for our consideration during our present special efforts. My intention is, as God shall help me, to magnify the name of the Lord our God by directing your devout attention to the fact that without the Lord there is nothing good, nothing strong, nothing effectual! But where He works nothing can stand against Him—no powers of evil can impede the workings of his royal hand. Our entire dependence upon God, who is our All in All—that is the thought of the morning—and that thought the text illustrates in two ways.

We are made to see the all-sufficiency of God to us, and our dependence upon Him—first, in His effectual working, "When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" Secondly, in His Sovereign withdrawals, "When He hides His face, who then can behold Him?" And, thirdly, we are reminded that this is true not only upon the small scale of the individual, but upon the great scale of nations, "Whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only."

I. First, then, the eye of Faith beholds the all-sufficiency of Jehovah, and our entire dependence upon Him, as she marks HIS EFFECTUAL WORKING. "When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" This unanswerable question may be illustrated by the Lord's works in Nature. The world was once a tumultuous chaos—fire and wind and vapor strove with one another—contention and confusion ruled the day. Who was there that could bring that heaving, foaming, boiling, raging mass into quietude and order? Who could transform that sea of molten lava into rock solid as granite, fit to become the foundations of a habitable globe?

Who could cool that boiling surface into an Eden where God might walk with man at the cool of the day? Who could calm that ocean of fire, lashed into terrific tempest by whirlwind and tornado, and make it into a terra firma, fixed and stable? The Holy Spirit brooded upon it, and by His mysterious energy before long He brought order out of confusion. And now this fair round world of ours, with all its matchless beauty of landscape and rolling flood, fixed and firm, has become a standing proof that when God gives quietness, none can disturb it!

Only let the great Preserver of men relax the command of quiet, and there are fierce forces in the interior of the earth sufficient to bring it back to its primeval chaos in an hour. But while His fiat is for peace, we fear no crash of matter and no wreck of worlds. Seed time and harvest, summer and winter, cold and heat do not cease. The economy of man's era remains beneath the calm radiance of sun and moon unmolested by the fear of returning chaos or the rebellion of terrific elements.

Passing on to the age of man we see the Lord in the day of His wrath pulling up the sluices of the great deep, and at the same moment bidding the clouds of Heaven discharge themselves so that the whole world became once again a colossal ruin. The proud waters went over the abodes of men and even the tops of the mountains were covered by the imperious billows! The Lord had but to will it, and the waters were eased from off the face of the earth and once again the dry land appeared while the world bloomed with joyous springs, blushed with fairest summers, and with glad ripening autumns, while over all, the Covenant bow was seen in the cloud—the token that the Lord had given quietness to the earth, and that none again should be able to disturb her.

Have the proud waters prevailed since that day? Has the sea dared to leave its appointed channel? Do not the waves in their greatest fury pause when they reach the boundary appointed

by the Most High? Tempest and storm obey the voice of the Lord who sits upon the flood, the Lord who sits King forever. Further down in history the Red Sea asks of us the same question, "When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" He led His people forth from Egypt's bondage, but Pharaoh said, "I will pursue. I will overtake. I will divide the spoil." He had, however, reckoned without the Lord of Hosts and when the pillar came between the two armies, turning its black dark side to Pharaoh's horsemen, and its side of brightness and of comfort to Israel's ranks, then there might have been heard a voice, "When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?"

When down into the depths of the sea the ransomed flock descended, the floods stood upright as a heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea. The rattling chariot was heard and the horse hoof sounded on the pebbly bed of the frightened sea. Will not Pharaoh break the peace of the chosen flock, and drive them back to slavery? Hark to the cracking of whips and the shouts of the horsemen! How is it now with Israel? Wait, O Unbelief, and see the salvation of God! When the mighty waters cover all the hosts of Egypt there comes up from the depths where sleep the proud warriors with the waves as their winding sheets, "When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?"

Glancing far on in history, and passing by a thousand cases which are all to the point, we only mention one more, namely, that of Sennacherib and his host. The marbles which are preserved to us, and have been excavated from the heaps of Nineveh, are more than sufficient proofs of the power and of the ferocity of the Assyrian monarch. He came even to Lachish, destroying the nations with fire and sword! And then he sent his Lieutenant, Rabshakeh, to Jerusalem, to overthrow it. Rabshakeh scarcely thought that little city to be worth the toils of battle! He thought to conquer it with his blasphemous tongue, and leave the sword in its scabbard. He thought to swallow it as a dog swallows his meat—to devour it as an ox eats grass. How scornfully, he asked: "Who is Jehovah?" How he boasted of the easy overthrow of the gods of the heathen.

"Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? And have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who are they among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" But the Lord had heard his blasphemies and answered the prayers of Hezekiah! And all the force of Assyria could not cast a single mound against Jerusalem, nor shoot an arrow there, but in the stillness of the night God put a hook into the enemy's nose and thrust a bridle between his jaws, and sent him back with shame to the place from where he came. "When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?"—

"There is a stream whose gentle flow Supplies the city of our God, Life, love, and joy, still gliding through, And watering our secure abode."

"Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: your eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down. Not one of the stakes there shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords there be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, where shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass there. For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King, He will save us. Your tackling is loosed. They could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail: then is the prey of a great spoil divided: the lame take the prey."

They that hoped to spoil Jerusalem are spoiled themselves, and the robbers who thought to destroy the peace of the Church of God have their own peace and their own lives taken from them. All history declares the Truth that when God determines to set a hedge around any people, it is not possible for any power, human or infernal, to break through that hedge. "I will be a wall of fire round about you, and a glory in your midst," is a blessed promise, which ensures quietness to those who dwell within its glorious protection.

1. We shall reflect upon this Truth of God as it applies, first, to God's people. My Beloved, if your gracious Lord shall give you quietness of mind, who, then, can cause you trouble? Some of us know what it is to walk in the light of Jehovah's countenance. Let us now bear our experimental witness to this fact. You have had, my dearly Beloved in the Lord, stern tribulations. You have seen wave after wave rolling up and threatening to go over you. And all these billows have gone over your head. You have been deserted by friends—they have been unfaithful.

You have lost kindred—you have wept over their tombs. You have lost property—your gold and silver have taken to themselves wings and fled away. You have been broken in health, and you have been broken in spirit, too. But, when the Lord has lifted up the light of His countenance upon you, were you not of the same mind as Habakkuk, that, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls," yet still you could rejoice in God? Beloved, a glimpse of our heavenly Father's face even sweetens affliction—

"The bitterest tears, If He smile but on them, Like dew in the sunshine, Grow diamond and gem."

We have found it sweet to be afflicted when we have enjoyed the Presence of God in it. And we have counted it all joy when we have fallen into many temptations because, in our hour of extremity and peril, the Savior has been unspeakably the more precious! In the absence of all other joys, the joy of the Lord has filled the soul to the brim. You know very well, dear Friends, that if the Lord is withdrawn, no comforts can make up for His absence. But if all earthly comforts are taken, you will not utter so much as a single murmuring word. If the Lord will but fill the vacuum with Himself, you will say, "Lord, I thank You that there was more room for You—more room for Your fullness—when the creature failed me."

Added to this, when the Lord gives quietness, slander cannot give us trouble. It has ever been the lot of God's people, the more they have served God the more falsely to be accused of men. And I doubt not, that when the dog is barking, he imagines that the good man who rides by is sorely troubled by the noise. And yet, if the Lord does but smile, it little matters though every tongue in the world should be set a-lying against us! And when every mouth should be black with curses, we may then say as David did—"They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city," and then he adds, "Let them return, and let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city."

So would the Christian give a license to those who slander him! If it were not for the sin of it on the part of his enemies, he could even rejoice to be evilly spoken of for Christ's sake, and count it all joy when he was shamefully treated for his Master's cause. The face of God sheds such a holy light into the soul that the clouds of slander cannot hide it. Yes, and at such times you may add to outward troubles and to the slanders of the wicked man, all the temptations of the devil. But if the

Lord gives quietness, though there were as many devils to attack us as there are stones in the pavement of the streets of London, we would walk over all their heads in unabated confidence.

Let Satanic temptations come. Let them fly about as thick as hailstones! If God but lifts up the shield, they shall be but as hailstones that rattle on the roof while the man is safe beneath. Perhaps you think Luther's expressions, when he speaks about the temptations of Satan, to be too highly drawn, and so they may be in your experience, but they were not in his. He stands as a monument, in his biography, of the power of the comforts of God to keep a man calm when all earth and all Hell are against him.

There was Luther. It did not matter that the enraged Pope issued a thousand bulls. That every priest gnashed his teeth at Luther. That most of men cried, "Away with him! It is not fit that he should live." What cared Luther any more for all they said than for the chirping of so many grasshoppers in the field, or the croaking of so many frogs in the pond? Let them say what they will, "if God gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" I know that I am now touching the experience of many of God's people, but I will go a little further. Even inbred sin, which is the worst of ills, will cause the Christian no trouble when the light of Jehovah's Countenance is clearly seen.

"Oh," says the soul, "I cried but yesterday, 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' And there I stopped. But now my God has whispered in my ear, 'You are Mine,' and I will not stop at that verse any longer, but I will go on to the next! 'I thank God, through Jesus Christ my Lord.' 'Thanks be unto God that gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' I will no longer look upon my enemies and say, 'They are many and strong,' but I will look to my strong Helper, 'and in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.' " "I am as a wonder unto many; but You are my strong refuge," said David. And so will the Christian say! Beset with all sorts of temptations from within, yet he overcomes through the blood of the Lamb. And God gives such a quietness in resting in the finished work of Jesus, and in the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit that, imperfect as we are, we yet have power by His might to seize the crown of righteousness and to be raised up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, even before the day of glory shall dawn, and the shadows of mortality flee away.

2. Beloved Friends, I thank God that my text is equally true of the seeking sinner. If the Lord shall be pleased to give you, poor troubled Heart, quietness this day in Christ, none can make trouble in your soul. What a mercy it is for you that God can give you peace and quietness! Some of you have been, during the last fortnight, much troubled. The arrows of God are sticking fast in you. Your very flesh faints as though it could not much longer bear the strain of your spiritual griefs. Now the Lord can bind you up. He will bind up the broken in heart, and heal their wounds. He can do it effectually, so effectually that no wound ever bleeds afresh after He has bound it up.

"Ah," you say, "but there is His Law, that dreadful Law of ten commands! I have broken that a thousand times." But if the Savior leads you to the Cross He will show you that He fulfilled the Law on your behalf— that you are not yourself under the Law any longer, but under Grace! The law is a taskmaster, but the taskmaster can only rule his own slaves. And when you believe in Jesus, you are no more a slave, but a child, and the taskmaster has no further power over you from now on and forever! To see the Law fulfilled by Christ—what a sight is that! It is a vision which gives such joy and Grace that you could stand where the seer of Horeb stood, and need not say as he did, "I do exceedingly fear and quake," but rather say, with our hymn-writer—

"Bold shall I stand in that great day, For who at all to my charge can lay? Fully absolved through Christ I am From sin's tremendous curse and blame."

"Yes, yes," you say, "well, I thank God for that, but my conscience, my conscience will never let me be in quietness." Oh, but my Master knows how to talk with your conscience. He can say to it, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins." He can take His precious blood, which is better than the balm of Gilead, and He can apply it to the wounds of your conscience. And as soon as Conscience feels the power of the blood, all its wounds close up directly, and the heart rejoices, saying, "If Jesus paid my debts, then paid they are! If Jesus died for me, then God will never make me, die, and Jesus, too, for payment He will never demand twice—first at my bleeding Surety's hands, and then at mine."

When Conscience enters into the wounds of Christ, how happy it is! It is like the dove that dwells in the cleft of the rock, and builds its nest there and sits all day uttering its soft turtle notes for very joy and gladness. O poor Heart, Mr. Conscience and you will shake hands well enough if you will stand at the foot of the Cross and do it. Conscience is a dreadful thunderer to a sinner unreconciled—but to a sinner who has seen the great Atonement, and felt the power of the blood, Conscience becomes a generous friend! And let me say, dear Friend, if the Lord gives you quietness so the Law and Conscience will be at peace with you, so will that Book of God be.

Some of you, whenever you turn the Bible over, can find nothing but threats in it. Each page cries out against you, "I bear a curse for you." Oh, but if you can only come to Jesus and rest in Him, then the page shall glisten with blessings, and glow with benedictions! You shall find that it utters peace to the men of peace, and good tidings of great joy to those who look alone to the Redeemer's blood. Still I think I see you shake your head and say sorrowfully, "Oh, but I shall never get much quietness at home, for I have ungodly friends and they tell me I am religion-mad."

Ah, my dear Friend, if the Lord gives you quietness, your ungodly friends will give you very little trouble, for you will have Grace to bear with them. If they shall revile you, you will turn their reviling into joy, thanking God that you are accounted worthy to be reviled for Jesus' sake. And in the midst of it you will sometimes take an opportunity of speaking a good word for your Master, and so be thankful that you are placed where you are needed. We ought to be glad to be cast as a pound of salt amid the corruption which salt destroys—and we should be thankful that we are set as a light in a dark place—where a lamp is most required.

In this light the persecuted Believer may even look upon his painful position as a desirable one, for the practical usefulness which it puts in his way. If Jesus Christ is your Companion, you may walk unharmed through Vanity Fair, if your path should lie through it, and you need not care for all the fools that pluck at your garment. Through a shower of mud it is safe and blessed traveling if Jesus is our Companion. I hope you are not one of those who would choose to walk with Him in silver slippers, and who would leave Him if He came in poverty and shame! If so, you do not know the love of Jesus at all. Through briars and thorns lies the path of love, and yet that thorny road is Paradise if Jesus does but tread it with us and permit us to lean upon His arm.

The more severe the troubles of life become, the higher shall your comforts rise if Jesus is with you. Tried soul, rest in Jesus! Only cast yourself on Him, confide entirely in Him, and you shall find that the peace which He gives you none can take from you.

3. Now this text, which thus belongs to the saint and to the seeking sinner, I think is equally true, on the larger scale, to the Christian Church. I could not omit saying this out of thankfulness to God for the quietness which He has for years been pleased to give to us as a Christian community. During thirteen years and more we have been knit together as one man, while we have lived to see certain sects that were "the one and only church"—that railed almost with the mouth of a Sanbahat and Tobiah at all other Christians as worldly schematics, while they themselves were Scriptural, immaculate, the "Brethren," the "Perfect Ones"— we have seen them torn to pieces till there is scarcely a remnant of them left, with all the elements within them of internal discord which will dash them yet more completely into shivers.

By the Grace of God we who, as a single Church, are almost as numerous as some of their parties, have been kept in holy peace and quietness, working incessantly for the cause of God without dissension and without strife. And though we are not free from ten thousand faults, yet I have often admired the goodness of God which has enabled us to hold with a hearty grip each other by the hand, and say, "We love each other for Jesus' sake, and for the Truth's sake, and hope each of us to live in each other's love till we die, wishing, if it were possible, to be buried side by side."

I do thank God for this, because I know there is more than enough of evil among us to plant a root of bitterness in our midst. We who bear office in the Church have the same nature as others, and therefore, naturally, every man of us would seek to have the supremacy, and every man, if left to himself, would also indulge an angry temper and find many reasons for differing from his Brother. We have all been offended often, and have as often offended others. We are as imperfect a band of men as might be found, but we are one.

We have each had to put up with the other, and to bear and forbear. And it does appear to me a wonder that so many imperfect people should get on so well for so long. I read over the door of our Tabernacle this text— "When the Lord gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" When some of our members were first taken into the Church, the pastor had a very suspicious character with them. It was said, "Well, if Mr. Spurgeon receives such a man who has been so great a trouble in our Church, then he will be the beginning of wars at the Tabernacle." But those very persons who came with that doubtful character have become the most zealous of our working community, and instead of differing and disagreeing, have felt that there is so much to do that it would be a pity to spend one grain of strength in quarrelling with other children of God!

How good it is to use our swords upon the devil and his allies, and not to blunt their edges upon our fellow Christians! Possibly, my Brethren, many of you do not sufficiently prize the peace which reigns in our Church. Ah, you would value it if you lost it! Oh, how would you prize it if strife and schism should come in! You would look back upon these happy days we have had together with intense regret, and say, "Lord, knit us together in unity again. Send us love to each other once more." In a Church, love is the essential element of happiness, and if any of you have violated it, or sinned against it, ask for Grace to repent of your mistake and let us "love one another with a pure heart fervently," walking in love, "as Christ also has loved us and gave Himself for us."

Let us have that fervent charity which is the perfect bond, abounding in our hearts yet more and more by Jesus Christ. I shall leave this first point when I have briefly drawn three lessons from it. "When the Lord gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" The first lesson is, those who have

peace should, this morning adore and bless God for it. O God, when we remember what our trouble was before we knew a Savior! When we recollect what the tempest was when You did hide Your face from us, we cannot but be glad, exceedingly glad, that now You speak kindly and favorably unto us!

You who will not thank God for peace deserve to hear war in your streets again. You who will not thank Him at the place of the drawing of water because the noise of the archers has ceased—you deserve to have your hearts again plowed up by the hosts of the enemy. Praise Him, then, my Brothers and Sisters! From your hearts praise Him! Secondly, be hopeful, you who are seeking peace, whether for others or for yourselves. Do not despair of any soul, however near to death and Hell it may be— God can make quietness even in the heart that is ready to die. Lastly, give up all other peace but that which the Lord gives to every Believer. If you have a quietness which God has not created, implore the Lord to break it! If you have a peace which did not come from Heaven, it is "peace, peace, where there is no peace," and the Lord deliver you from it.

II. Now let us turn to the second point. The all-sufficiency of God is seen, secondly, IN HIS SOVEREIGN WITHDRAWALS. God does sometimes hide His face from His people, and then, as His saints well know, nothing can enable them to behold Him or to be happy. You know God doctrinally, but what are the Doctrines of Grace to a soul when God hides His face? You may accept and hold fast the orthodox Gospel, but is the purest evangelical Truth anything but a cloud without rain unless the Lord Himself shall appear?

In vain, dear Friends, is all our experience to help us see God if He hides His face, for though we have tried and proved His faithfulness, yet if He does not continue to smile, we grow to be as unbelieving and as doubting as ever we were. At such times outward mercies are all in vain. Though today we can see God's hand in the loaf of bread and in the cup of cold water, yet if God hides His face, though there should be a stalled ox before us, and a feast fit for kings, yet we should not see our Father's love in them. Christian, you know well that if God takes Himself away and hides within His secret places, and speaks no more to you, neither earth nor all the sky can afford you one delight.

Now, Sinner, this is strikingly true in your case. If God shall be pleased to withdraw Himself from you, you cannot behold Him. If He should take the Gospel from you, what then? He may do it. He may send you across the seas as an emigrant. He may put you in some country village where there is no Gospel preaching. He may make you live in a situation where you cannot get out to hear a faithful Gospel preacher, and then what will you do? Still worse may it be with you! The Lord may let you continue under the ministry, and the ministry may be full of blessing to others, and yet be fruitless to you.

If God does but leave you to the corruptions of your own heart, dear Friend, it will be quite enough to secure your ruin. Then the tears of mothers, the counsels of friends, and the appeals of pastors shall all be powerless to touch your heart. The appeals of the Book of God, itself, shall never move your conscience—you will go headlong to your own destruction if God withdraws His face from you. Remember, my dear Hearer, this is possible! There is a point, we know not when, a place we know not where, where God may end your day of sensibility by saying, "I will let that sinner alone." Then the cloud shall rain no more rain upon your desert soul—no more seed shall be scattered upon the highway of your thankless heart.

Shall horses run upon a rock? Shall men plow there with oxen? If you will not repent, God will not always waste the Gospel ministry upon you. He shall let that Gospel become a "savor of death unto death" to you, till you loathe it yourself as you become a Sabbath-breaker, or give yourself up to doubt and sin. O Sinner, I long that you may feel how absolutely you are in the hands of God! Should the sun go down all the candles in the world cannot light up the landscape. And if God shall desert the soul, all human power must fail to give it comfort. What a mercy it is that the Lord has not deserted you as yet, that still does His good Spirit strive and dwell with the chief of sinners. Still the cry is heard, "Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

Yet I pray you remember that if you do harden your hearts, the Lord may do with you as He did with His people of old and swear in His wrath that you shall not enter into His rest. I have no doubt, dear Friends, that as this is true of the saint and the sinner, it is true of the Church. If God shall hide His face from a Church, who then can behold Him? Let me endeavor to set that Truth in two or three words before you. If we as a Church prove unfaithful—if we let go of our first love—if we do not plead in prayer, and seek the conversion of souls, God may take away His Presence from us as He has done from Churches that were once His Churches, but which are not now!

The traveler tells you that as he journeys through Asia Minor, he sees the ruins of those cities which once were the seven golden candlesticks, where the light of the Truth of God shone brightly. What will they now say of Thyatira? Where will they find Laodicea? These have passed away, and why not this Church? Look at Rome, once the glory of the Christian Church, her many ministers, and her power over the world for good—and now she is the place where Satan's seat is—and her synagogue is a synagogue of Hell! How is this? She fell! She departed from her integrity! She left her first love, and the Lord cast her away.

Thus will the Lord deal with us if thus we sin. You know that terrible passage—"Go you now unto My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel." God first of all had the tabernacle pitched at Shiloh, but Shiloh was defiled by the sin of Eli's sons. That tabernacle was taken away and Shiloh became a wilderness. So may this flourishing Church become. If justice should thus visit you, you may hold your Prayer Meetings— probably those will soon cease—but of what avail will your formal prayers be? You may get whom you will to preach, but what of that?

I know what you would do, if some of us were fallen asleep, and the faithful ones buried—if the Spirit of God were gone, you would say, "Well, we are still a large and influential congregation. We can afford to get a talented minister, money will do anything." And you would get the man of talents, and then you would want an organ and a choir, and many other pretty things which we now count it our joy to do without. Then, if such were the case, all these vain attempts at grandeur would be unsuccessful, and the Church would before long become a scorn and a hissing, or else a mere log upon the water.

Then it would be said," We must change the management," and there would be this change and that change. But if the Lord were gone, what could you do? By what means could you ever make this Church to revive again, or any other Church? Alas for the carnal, spasmodic efforts we have seen made in some Churches! Prayer Meetings badly attended. No conversions, but still they have said, "Well, it is imperative upon us to keep up a respectable appearance. We must collect the congregation by our singing, by our organ, or some other outward attraction." And angels

might have wept as they saw the folly of men who sought after anything except the Lord, who alone can make a house His temple—who alone can make a ministry to be a ministration of mercy. Without whose Presence the most solemn congregation is but as the herding of men in the market, and the most melodious songs but as the shouting of those who make merry at a marriage.

Without the Lord, our solemn days, our new moons, and our appointed feasts are an abomination such as His soul hates. May this Church ever feel her utter, entire, absolute dependence upon the Presence of her God, and may she never cease humbly to implore Him to forgive her many sins, but still to command His blessing to abide upon her.

III. The time is gone, but I want just to say these two or three words— namely that, depend upon it, THIS IS TRUE OF A NATION as well as of any one Church and of any one man. At this particular time, though there is perhaps more Christian effort made in England than has been made for many years, there is also probably as little of the Divine blessing resting upon that effort as ever was known. It is a melancholy fact that with all the wonderful increase of accommodations which have been made in London for the worship of God, there is absolutely a greater deficiency now, owing to the increase of the population—a greater deficiency in the means of Grace now than there ever was.

It is also a notorious fact that of the new Churches which have been erected, you might go into many of them and not find enough to make a respectable gathering in a vestry, so that, even though tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of pounds have been contributed for mere bricks and mortar, in connection with the Episcopalian Establishment, these have merely been a spurious addition to the spiritual supply, but not a real one! It is easy to raise money, but it is not easy to find men! And while it is easy to get an architect to build a Church, none but God Himself can find a minister who will reach the dense masses of our heathendom around us and compel them to come in and worship.

The lack of men is the great crying need of the age, and that need is sent to us because we do not pray to God enough to send us men! We do not pray for men, when God does send them, that they may be helped as they should, and consequently much of the Church's effort is thrown away. Beloved, I want to see something done in this London, and how is it to be done? There are thousands of Christians, tens of thousands of Christians in London, and yet the cause does not spread, or very slowly! What is the cause?

Jonah shook Nineveh from end to end, and yet a hundred thousand followers of Jesus cannot do it! Paul, marching along the Apian way at Rome, marked an era in Rome's history—and yet there are many ministers of Christ who thread our streets, and yet what are we all put together for real power? We do not seem to amount in this great city, all of us, to anything more than a mere chip in the porridge! We scarcely affect the population at all. Oh, it is strange, it is passing strange! For it is the Gospel which we preach! We know it is the Gospel, and some of us do try to preach it with all our might. But if God withholds His face, what can be done?

Yet, Brethren, this can be done—we will cry to the Lord until He reveals His face again. We will give Him no rest till He establishes and makes His Church a praise in the earth! O Christian men and women, if you could realize the situation! A city of three millions, not wholly given to idolatry,

but still very much given to sin—and we ourselves so weak in the midst of it! If we could but realize this position and then take hold upon the Omnipotent arm, and by an overcoming faith, such as only God could give to any one of us, believe it possible for the Lord Jesus to save this city! And then go forward boldly expecting Him to do it, we might see more than we have ever seen!

And now, what if I prophesy that we shall see it! What if I say that if God will but stir up His people everywhere for prayer, He will do a work in our day that shall make both the ears of him that hears it to tingle, not with horror, but with joy? He will yet let the world know that there is a God in Israel! Verily, that which hinders is our lack of faith, for if the Son of Man should descend among us, would He find faith on the earth? O unbelieving Church! O thankless generation! You are not straitened in God—you are straitened in your own hearts! And if you could but believe Him, and so prove Him by your faith, He would yet open the windows of Heaven and pour you out a blessing, such that you should not have room enough to receive!

This, then, is the matter, and we leave it with you. We are utterly dependent upon God—absolutely must we rest on Him. But this is as it should be, for it were better to trust in the Lord than to have confidence in man—better to trust in the Lord than to have confidence in princes. Through the blood of Jesus let us rest in Divine love and give the Lord no rest till He makes bare His arm in the midst of this land! May the Lord give His blessing to our words, for Jesus' sake.

. Adapted from The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

Chapter 89

Job 34,31-32 #1274 - For the Sick and Afflicted

FOR THE SICK AND AFFLICTED

NO. 1274

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement,

I will not offend any more: that which I see not teach You me:

if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

Job 34:31-32.

EVEN when addressing our fellow men there should be a flatness about

our speech. Therefore Solomon represents the preacher as seeking out acceptable words, or words meet for the occasion. When we approach those who are high in authority, this necessity becomes conspicuous and, therefore, men who are petitioners in the courts of princes are very careful to order their language aright. Much more, then, when we speak before the Lord ought we to consider, as the text does, the meetness of our words. Some language must never be uttered in the Divine Presence and even that which is allowed must be well weighed and set forth with solemn humbleness.

Hence Elihu does well to suggest in the text, language that is "meet to be said unto God." May our lips ever be kept as by a watchful sentinel, lest they suffer anything to pass through them dishonorable to the Most High. In the Divine Presence—and we are always there—it is incumbent upon us to set a double watch over every word that comes from our mouths. Remember that thought is speech before God. Thought is not speech to man, for men cannot read one another's thoughts until they are set forth by words or other outward signs, but God, who reads the heart, regards that as being speech which was never spoken. And He hears us say in our souls many things which were never uttered by our tongues.

Beloved, there are thoughts which are not meet to be thought before the Lord and it is well for us, especially those of us who are afflicted, to be very watchful over those thoughts, lest the Lord hear us say in our hearts things which will grieve His Spirit and provoke Him to jealousy. O saints of God, since you never think except in the immediate Presence of your heavenly Father, make every effort that your thoughts are pure, lest you sin in the secret chambers of your being and charge God foolishly. Elihu tells us what it would be proper for us to think and say, "It is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not teach You me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

We will use the text mainly at this time in reference to those who are being chastened and afterwards we shall see if there is not teaching in it, even to those who, at present, are not smarting under the rod. Thirdly, we shall find a word of our text to those who are not the children of God and, therefore, know nothing of the smarting rod of fatherly correction. Perhaps to them, also, God may speak through this text. O that His Holy Spirit may deign to do so! I. But first, dear Friends, let us commune together upon the text in its more natural application as addressed TO THE AFFLICTED. The instruction of the wise man is for them, especially, and there are three duties here prescribed for them, or rather three privileges suggested which they should pray the Holy Spirit to enable them to enjoy. The first lesson is, it is meet for them to accept the affliction which the Lord sends and to say to God, "I have borne chastisement." We notice that the word, "chastisement," is not actually in the Hebrew, though the Hebrew could not be well interpreted without supplying the word.

It might exactly and literally be translated, "I bear," or "I have borne." It is the softened heart saying to God, "I bear whatever You will put upon me. I have borne it, I still bear it and I will bear it—whatever You may ordain it to be. I submit myself entirely to You and accept the load with which You are pleased to give me." Now, we ought to do this, dear Friends, and we shall do it if we are right at heart. We should cheerfully submit because no affliction from which we suffer has come to us by chance. We are not left to the misery of believing that things happen of themselves and are independent of a Divinely controlling power.

We know that not a drop of bitter ever falls into our cup unless the wisdom of our heavenly Father has placed it there. We are not even left in a world governed by angels, or ruled by cherubim—we dwell where everything is ordered by God Himself. Shall we rebel against the Most High? Shall we not let Him do as seems good in His sight? Shall we not cover our lips in silence when we know that the evil is of the Lord? Shame upon us, if we are His children, if this is not the prevalent spirit of our mind—"It is the Lord, let Him do what seems good to Him."

Moreover, we should not only bear all things because the Lord ordains them, but because He orders all things for a wise, kind, benevolent purpose. He does not afflict willingly. He takes no delight in the sufferings of His children. Whenever adversity must come, it is always with a purpose and, if a purpose of God is to be subserved by my suffering, would I wish to escape from it? If His Glory will come of it, shall I not crave the honor of being the agent of His Glory, even though it is by lying passive and enduring in anguish?

Yes, Beloved, since we know that God can only grieve His regenerated creatures for some purpose of love, we should willingly accept whatever sorrow He pleases to put upon us. And besides, we have His assurance that all things work together for our good. Our trials are not merely sent with a good objective, but with an objective good towards ourselves, a design which is being answered by every twig of our heavenly father's rod. "The cup which our Father has given us, shall we not drink it?" It is healing medicine and not deadly poison, therefore let us put it to our lips without a murmur, yes, drink it to its very dregs, and say, "Not as I will, but as You will."

A constant submission to the Divine will should be the very atmosphere in which a Christian lives. He should put an earnest negative upon his self-will by crying, "Not my will." And then he should, with holy warmth, beseech the Lord to execute His purpose, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." He should throw the whole vigor of his soul into the Lord's will and exhibit more than submission,

namely, a devout acquiescence in whatever the Lord appoints. Beloved Friends, we must not be content with bearing what the Lord sends, with the coolness which says, "It must be and, therefore, I must put up with it." Such forced submission is far below a Christian—for many a heathen has attained it.

The stolid stoic accepted what predestination handed out to him and the Muslim still does the same. We must go beyond unfeeling submission. We must not so harden our hearts against affliction as not to be affected by it. That chastisement which does not make us smart has failed of its end. It is by the blueness of the wound, says Solomon, that the heart is made better! And if there is no real blueness—if it is merely a surface bruise—little good will come of it. "For a season we are in heaviness," says the Apostle, "through manifold trials," and not only the trial, but the heaviness which comes of it is necessary to us.

God would not have His children become like the ox or the ass, which present hard skins to hard blows, but He would have us tender and sensitive. There is such a thing as despising the chastening of the Lord by a defiant attitude which seems to challenge the Lord to draw a tear or fetch a sigh from us. Against this let us be on our guard! Neither, on the other hand, are we to receive affliction with a rebellious spirit. It is hard for us to kick against the pricks, like the ox which, when goaded, is irritated and strikes out and drives the iron into itself deeper than it went before. We can easily do this by complaining that God is too severe with us. In this spirit we may "take arms against a sea of troubles," but by opposing we shall not end them, but increase their raging.

By a proud murmuring spirit we only bring upon ourselves trial upon trial—"the Lord resists the proud," and a high spirit challenges His opposition. Neither, dear Friends, as believers in God, are we to despair under trouble, for that is not bearing the cross, but lying down under it. We are to take up our appointed burden and carry it, and not sit down in wicked sullenness and murmur that we can do no more. Some are in a very evil frame of mind, their moody spirits mutter that if God will be so severe with them they must yield to it, but they have lost all heart and all faith— and all they ask for is leave to die. A child of God must not repine. He has not yet "resisted unto blood, striving against sin," and, if he has, he should still say, "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him."

Since Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, never murmured, it ill becomes any of His followers to do so. We must, in patience, possess our souls. Perhaps you think it easier for me to say this than it would be to practice it. And yet, by Almighty Grace, a saint can bear to the utmost of bearing. To the utmost of suffering he can suffer. To the utmost of loss he can lose and even to the uttermost of death, itself, he can die daily and yet triumph through the Divine life! For God, who works in us to will and to do, is almighty and makes our weakness strong. The Christian, then, is not to treat the cross which God puts upon him in any such way as I have described, but he is to accept it humbly, looking up to God, and saying, "Much worse than this I might reckon to receive even as Your child, for the discipline of Your house requires the rod, and well might I expect to be chastened every morning." The child of God should feel that it is in very faithfulness that the Lord afflicts him and that every stroke has love in it. Anything over and above the lowest abyss of Hell is a great mercy to us. If we had to lie ill for 50 years and scarcely have a minute free from pain, yet since the Lord has pardoned our sins and accepted us in Christ Jesus, and made us His children, we should be grateful for every pang and still continue to bless the Lord upon our beds and sing His high praises in the midst of the fires. Humbly, therefore, as sinners deserving Divine wrath, we

are bound to accept the chastening of the Lord.

We should receive chastisement with meek submission, presenting ourselves to God that He may still do with us as He has dealt with us—not wishing to start aside to the right hand or to the left—asking Him, if it may be His will, to remove the load, to heal the pain, to deliver us from the bereavement and the like—but still always leaving ample margin for full resignation of spirit. The gold is not to rebel against the goldsmith, but should, at once, yield to be placed in the crucible and thrust into the fire. The wheat, as it lies upon the threshing floor, is not to have a will of its own, but to be willing to endure the strokes of the flail that the chaff may be separated from the precious corn.

We are not far off being purged from dross and cleansed from chaff when we are perfectly willing to undergo any process which the Divine Wisdom may appoint us. Self and sin are married and will never be divorced. And till our self-hood is crushed, the seed of sin will still have abundant vitality in it. But when it is, "not I," but, "Christ that lives in me," then have we come near to that mark to which God has called us and to which, by His Spirit, He is leading us. But we ought to go farther than this. We should accept chastisement cheerfully. It is a hard lesson, but a lesson which the Comforter is able to teach us—to be glad that God should have His way!

Do you know what it is, sometimes, to be very pleased to do what you do not like to do? I mean you would not have liked to do it, but you find that it pleases someone you love and straightway the irksome task becomes a pleasure? Have you not felt, sometimes, when one whom you very much esteem is sick and ill, that you would be glad enough to bear the pain, at least for a day or two, that you might give the suffering one a little rest? Would you not find a pleasure in being an invalid for a while to let your beloved one enjoy a season of health? Let the same motive, in a higher degree, sway your spirit! Try to feel, "If it pleases God, it pleases me. If, Lord, it is Your will, it shall be my will. Let the lashes of the scourge be multiplied, if so You shall be the more honored and I shall be permitted to bring You some degree of glory."

The cross becomes sweet when our health is so sweetened by the Spirit that our will runs parallel with the will of God. We should learn to say, in the language of Elihu, "I have borne, I do bear, I accept it all." To be as plastic clay on the potter's wheel, or as wax in the sculpture's hand should be our great desire. That is the first business of the sufferer. The next duty is to forsake the sin which may have occasioned the chastisement. "It is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement; I will not offend any more." There is a connection between sin and suffering in every case. It would be very wrong for us to suppose that every man who suffers is, therefore, more guilty than others—that was the mistake of Job's friends—a mistake too commonly made every day. But it is right for the sufferer, himself, to judge his own case by a standard which we may not use toward him. He should say, "Is there not some connection between this chastisement and sin that dwells in me?" And here he must not judge himself unrighteously, even for God, lest he plunge himself into unnecessary sorrow. There are afflictions which come from God, not on account of past sin, but to prevent sin in the future. There are also sharp pruning which are intended to make us bring forth more fruit—they are not sent because we have brought forth no fruit—but because we are fruitful branches and are worth pruning. "Every branch in Me that bears fruit He purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

There are, also, afflictions which are sent by way of test, trial and proof, both for God's Glory and for the manifestation of His power—as also for the comforting of others—that trembling saints may see how weak and feeble men can carry the heaviest cross for Christ's sake and can triumph under it. We are not to be sure that every sorrow comes to us because of any sin actually committed, yet it will be best for us to be more severe with ourselves than we should think of being with others. We should always ask, "Is there not some cause for this chastisement? May there not be something of which God would rid me of, or something which has grieved Him which has caused Him to grieve me?"

Brothers and Sisters, I charge you never be lenient with yourselves. The best of us are men at the best and at our best we have much to mourn over in the Presence of the Most High! It is good to be always dissatisfied with ourselves and press forward to something yet beyond—always praying that Christ's likeness may be completely formed in us. Thorns are often put in the nest that we may search for hidden evils. "Are the consolations of God small with you? Is there any secret thing with you?" Has there been a defeat at Ai? May there not be an Achan in the camp? Has not a traitor concealed, in some secret place, a goodly Babylonian garment and a wedge of gold? Does not trial give a hint that there may be something amiss?

Beloved, I ask myself and I ask you to look, now, not only to your outward character, but to your more private life and to your walk before God and see if there is not some flaw. Is there trouble in the family? Have you always acted towards the children and the servants as you should have done as a master and a father? Question yourself! The child is grieving you. Have you, good Mother, always been as prayerful about that child as you should have been? May not your child's conduct to you be a fair reflection of your own conduct towards your heavenly Father? I do not mention any of these things to increase your grief, but in order that you may put your finger on the evil which provokes the Lord God and may put it away.

Have there been losses in business? Are you sure, Brother, that when you were making money you always used it for God as you should? Were you a good steward? Did you give the Lord His full portion—the sacred tithe of all that you have? Or may you not have been too selfish—and may not that be the cause why you must now be reduced from wealth to comparative poverty? Is that so? Does the affliction scourge your body? Then has there been anything wrong with your habits? Has the flesh predominated over the spirit? Has there been a failure of the entire consecration of the vessel unto the Lord?

Does the trial occur in the person of some dear one? You may not be conscious of any wrong there, but still look, dear Friends! Search the whole of your conduct as the spies searched Canaan of old. If your sin is glaring, there is little need of a chastisement to point it out to you, for you ought to see it without that. But there may be a secret sin between you and your Lord for which He has sent you chastisement—and after this you must raise a hue and cry. You know I do not mean that the Lord is punishing you for sin as a judge punishes a criminal, for He will not do that since He has laid the punishment of sin upon Christ and Christ has borne it as a matter of punitive justice. He, as a Father, chastens His child, but never without a cause.

I am urging you to see whether there may not be some cause for the present painful discipline. Never fall into the mistake of some who suppose that sin in God's children is a trifle. Why, if there is any place where sin is horrible, it is in a child of God! Therefore the text puts it, "I will not offend

any more." Sin is an offensive thing to God. He cannot bear it. I should dislike a plague spot on anybody's face, but I should tremble to see it, most of all, upon my own child's face. Sin is more visible in a good man than in any other. I may drop a spot of ink upon a black handkerchief and never see it, but on a white one you will perceive it, directly, and see it the more because of the whiteness of the linen which it defiles.

You, child of God, know that just in proportion as you are sanctified— in proportion as you live near to God—sin will be grievous to the Most High. It is gloriously terrible to live near to God. I wonder if you understand me, all of you? To walk as a favored courtier with a monarch is a very delicate matter. Favorites have to pick their steps, for though they stand near a king, they well know how soon they may fall from their high position. We serve a jealous God! That is a wonderful question, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" God is that consuming fire! God is the everlasting burnings! Who among us shall dwell with Him?

The answer is, "He that has clean hands and a pure heart, he shall dwell on high. His place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks"—but it is only the man who is very jealous of himself who will be able to bear that fierce light which beams around the Throne of God—that devouring flame which God, Himself is! As said the Apostle—"Even our God is a consuming fire." Caesar's wife must not only be without fault, but she must be above suspicion. And such must be the character of the child of God who, like Moses, lives in the inner circle—who stands on the mountaintop—who knows what the peaks of Sinai mean and what it is to be 40 days in fellowship with the Most High.

Beloved Friends, I urge upon you a very close search into what the transgression may be which has brought correction upon you, for it may be, in you, an offense which would scarcely be sin in anybody else. Another person might fall into your fault as a sin of ignorance, but since you know better, the sin is all the blacker in you. The Lord will be sanctified in them that draw near to Him, but woe to them if they defile themselves.

The third lesson in the text to the afflicted clearly teaches them that it is their duty and privilege to ask for more light. The text says, "That which I see not teach You me. If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." Do you see the drift of this? It is the child of God awakened to look after the sin which the chastisement indicates—and since he cannot see all the evil that may be in himself—he turns to his God with this prayer, "What I see not teach You me." Beloved Friends, it may be that, in looking over your past life and searching through your heart, you do not see your sin, for perhaps it is where you do not suspect. You have been looking in another quarter. Your own opinion is that you are weak in one point, but possibly you are far weaker in the opposite direction.

In nothing do men make more mistakes than concerning their own characters. I have known a Brother confess that he was deficient in firmness, when, in my opinion, he was about as obstinate as any man I knew. Another man has said that he was always lacking in coolness, and yet I thought that if I needed to fill an ice-well, I had only to put him into it. Persons misjudge themselves. Unfeeling people say they are too sensitive and selfish persons imagine themselves to be victims to the good of others. So, it may be you have been looking in one quarter for the sin, while your fault lies in the opposite point of the compass. Pray, then, "Lord, search me and try me, and that which I see not teach You me."

Remember, Brothers and Sisters, that our worst sins may lurk under our holiest things. Oh, how these evils will hide away—not under the docks and nettles of the dunghill—not they, but under the lilies and the roses of the garden! In the cups of the flowers they lurk. They do not flit through our souls like devils with dragons' wings—they fly as angels of light with wings tinted as the rainbow! They come as sheep and a very fat sort they seem to be, but they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Watch, therefore, very carefully against the sins of your holy things. In our holy things we are nearer to God than at any other time and, therefore, such defilement soon brings upon us the stroke of our heavenly Father's rod.

Perhaps your sin is hidden away under something very dear to you. Jacob made a great search for the images—the teraphs which Laban worshipped. He could not find them. No, he did not like to disturb Rachel, and Laban did not like to disturb her, either—a favorite wife and daughter must not be inconvenienced. She may sit still on the camel's furniture, but she hides the images there! Even thus you do not like to search in a certain quarter of your nature—it is a very tender subject—something you feel very grieved about when anybody even hints at it! It is just there that the sin is harbored.

My Brothers and Sisters, let us be honest with the Lord. Let us really wish to know where we are wrong and heartily long to be set right. Do you think we all honestly want to know our errors? Are there not chapters of the Bible which we do not like to read? If there are—if any text has a quarrel with you, quarrel with yourself, but yield wholly to the Word of God. Is there any doctrine which you almost think is a Truth of God, but your friends do not believe it and they might, perhaps, think you heretical if you were to accept it—and therefore you dare not investigate any further? Oh, dear Friends, let us be rid of all such dishonesty! So much of it has got into the Church that many will not see things that are plain as a pikestaff. They will not see because the Truth of God might cost them too dearly!

They cover up and hide away some parts of Scripture, which it might be awkward for them to understand, because of their connection with a Church, or their standing in a certain circle. This is hateful and we need not wonder if God smites the man who allows himself in it! Be true, Brother! You cannot deceive God. Do not try it! Ask Him to search you through and through. Let your desire be, "Refining fire go through my heart with a mighty flame that shall devour everything like a lie, everything that is unholy, selfish, earthly, that I may be fully consecrated unto the Lord my God." This is the right way in which to treat our chastisements. "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more. That which I see not, teach You me."

"Alas," somebody says, "we cannot say that we will do no more iniquity." Yes, we can say it a great deal more easily than we can practice it and, therefore, it is a pity to say it except in the evangelical spirit, leaning entirely on the Divine strength. He who says, "I will do no more iniquity" has, then and there, perpetrated iniquity if he has vowed in his own strength, for he has exalted himself into the place of God by selfconfidence. Yet we must feel in our inmost hearts that we desire to depart from all iniquities. There must be an earnest and hearty intent that, as Paul shook off the viper into the fire, so will we, as God helps us, shake off the sin, whatever it may be, which brings us the trial or that causes the Lord to take away the light of His Countenance from us.

Oh, how earnestly would I urge my dear tried Brothers and Sisters to seek after this excellent fruit of affliction. May it come to every one of us according as the affliction comes, that we may never

miss the sweet fruit of this bitter tree! God bless you who are tried and support you under your griefs. But, above all, may He sanctify you through tribulation, for that is the main point—and it little matters how sharp the flames if you are purified by the fire.

II. And now, briefly, I am going to use the text for THOSE OF US WHO MAY NOT HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED. What does the text say to us if we are not afflicted? Does it not say this—"If the afflicted man is to say, 'I bear,' and to take up his yoke cheerfully, how cheerfully ought you and I to take up the daily yoke of our Christian labor"? Brother, Sister, do you ever grow weary? Does the Sunday school tax you too much? Is that Bible class becoming somewhat heaviness? That house-to-house visitation—has it become a drudgery? That distribution of tracts—is there a great sameness and tedium about it?

Now look, my Brothers and Sisters, look at yonder dear saint of God who has been, for months, upon his bed till the feathers have grown hard beneath him! He shifts from side to side but finds no ease—no sleep at night, no respite by day. Would you like to change places with him? Yet hear how he praises God amidst his many pains and abundant weaknesses and poverty! Do you prefer your lot to his? Well, then, in the name of everything that is good, accept your portion with joy and throw your soul into the Lord's service! The great Captain might say to you, "What? Tired of marching? I will send you back to the trenches and let you lie there till you feel sick at heart of your inactivity. "What? Weary of fighting? You shall be put into the hospital with broken bones and made to lie there and pine and see what you think of enforced inactivity."

If I have any message to give from my own bed of sickness it would be this—if you do not wish to be full of regrets when you are obliged to lie still, work while you can. If you desire to make a sick bed as soft as it can be, do not stuff it with the mournful reflection that you wasted time while you were in health and strength! People said to me years ago, "You will break your constitution down with preaching 10 times a week," and the like. Well, if I have done so, I am glad of it! I would do the same again! If I had 50 constitutions, I would rejoice to break them down in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ!

You young men that are strong, overcome the Wicked One and fight for the Lord while you can. You will never regret having done all that lies in you for our blessed Lord and Master! Crowd as much as you can into every day and postpone no work till tomorrow. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." We have yet another remark for those that are strong. Should not the favors of God lead us to search out our sins? Chastisement acts like a black finger to point out our failures— ought not the love of God to do the same with its hand glittering with jewels? Lord, do You give me good health? Lord, do You spare my wife and my children? Do You give me of substance enough and to spare? Then, Lord, is there anything about me that might grieve You? Do I harbor anything in my soul that might vex Your Spirit? Let Your love guide me that I may escape from these evils.

It is a sweet text—"I will guide you with My eyes. Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you." Your child only needs a glance of the eye and he runs to you. But your horse and mule will not do that—you must put a bit into their mouths and some of them must have very hard bits—and their mouths must be made very tender before they can be guided. You are men, do not be as the beasts are.

Yet some of God's own children are very brutish. They will not obey His Words and so their God has to give them blows, for He will have His children obey Him. If they will be drawn with cords of love, so shall they be, but if they will not, they shall be driven with the rod. If you make yourselves horses and mules, He will treat you like horses and mules, or you will have reason to think so! Perhaps the best way to prevent your becoming altogether mulish is to treat you as if you were a mule and so drive you out of it by letting you see the effect of your folly. Let our mercies act as a sweet medicine and then we shall not need bitter potions.

Once again. Do you not think that while enjoying God's mercy we should be anxious to be searched by the light of the love of God? Should we not wish to use the light of the Divine Countenance that we may discover all our sin and overcome it? I know some Christians who will not come to this point. They have an ugly temper and they say, "Well, you know, this is constitutional." Away forever with such wicked self-excusing! It is idle to say, "I cannot help it, it is my temperament." Your temperament will destroy you, as surely as you live, if the Grace of God does not destroy your temperament! If such excuses were permitted, there is no crime, however abominable, for which temperament might not be pleaded. Thieves, harlots, drunks, murderers might all set up this justification, for they all have their evil temperaments!

Do you find in the Law that any sin is excused upon the ground that it is "constitutional?" Do you find anything in the example of Christ, or in the precepts of the Gospel, to justify a man in saying, "I must be treated with indulgence, for my nature is so inclined to a certain sin that I cannot help yielding to it"? My Brother, you must not talk such nonsense! Your first business is to conquer the sin you love best! Against it all your efforts and all the Grace you can get must be leveled. Jericho must be first besieged, for it is the strongest fort of the enemy. And until it is taken nothing can be done.

I have generally noticed, in conversion, that the most complete change takes place in that very point in which the man was constitutionally most weak. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. "Well," cries one, "suppose I have a besetting sin, how can I help it?" I reply, if I knew that four fellows were going to beset me tonight on Clapham Common, I should take with me sufficient policemen to lock the fellows up. When a man knows that he has a besetting sin it is not for him to say, "It is a besetting sin and I cannot help it."

He must, on the other hand, call for heavenly assistance against these besetments. If you have besetting sins and you know it, fight with them and overcome them by the blood of the Lamb! By faith in Jesus Christ, besetting sins can be led captive and they must be led captive, for the child of God must overcome, even to the end! He is to be more than conqueror through Him that has loved Him. Let the love of God, then, lead you to search yourselves and say, "That which I see not teach You me. If I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

III. The last remark I have to make is to THE UNCONVERTED. Perhaps there are some here who are not the people of God and yet they are very happy and prosperous. They have all that heart can wish and as they hear me talk about God's children being chastened, they say, "I do not want to be one of them, if such is their portion." You would rather be what you are, would you? "Yes," you say. Listen! We will suppose that we have before us a prince of the blood who will one day be a king. He has been doing something wrong and his father has chastened him with the rod.

There stands the young prince with tears running down his cheeks. And over yonder is a street Arab who has no father that he knows of— certainly none that ever chastened him for his good. He may do what he likes—use any sort of language—steal, lie, swear if he likes, and no one will chasten him. He stands on his head or makes wheels in the streets, or rolls in the dirt, but no father ever holds a rod over him. He sees this little prince crying and he laughs at him, "You don't have the liberty I do! You are not allowed to stand on your head as I do! Your father wouldn't let you beg for coppers by the side of the omnibuses as I do! You don't sleep under an arch all night as I do! I would not be you to catch that thrashing! I would sooner be a street boy than a prince!"

Your little prince very soon wipes his eyes and answers, "Go along with you. Why, I would rather be chastened every day and be a prince and heir to a kingdom, than I would be you with all your fine liberty!" He looks down upon the ragged urchin with the greatest conceivable pity, even though he, himself, is smarting from the rod. Now, Sinners, that is just what we think of you and your freedom from heavenly discipline! When you are merriest and happiest, and full of your joy, we would not be you for the world! When you have been electrified by that splendid spectacle at the theater, or have enjoyed yourself so much in a licentious dance, or, perhaps, in something worse, we would not be as you are! Take us at our worst—when we are most sick, most desponding, most tried, most penitent before God—we would not exchange with you at your best!

Would we change with you for all your mirth and sinful hilarity? No, that we would not! Ask the old woman in the winter time who has only a couple of sticks to make a fire with and has nothing to live upon but what the tender mercy of the parish allows her. Ask her if she would change with Dives in his purple and fine linen! Look at her. She puts on an old red cloak to shelter her poor limbs, which are as full of rheumatism as they can be. The cupboard is bare, her poor husband lies in the churchyard and she has not a child to come and see her. Ah, there she is. You say, "She is a miserable object." Here is the young squire in his top boots, coming home from the hunt. He is standing in front of her. He might say to her, with all his large possessions and broad acres, "You would change with me, Mother, would you not?"

She knows his character, and she knows that he has no love for God, and no union to Christ and, therefore, she replies, "Change with you? No, that I would not for a thousand worlds!"

"Go you that boast of all your stores, And tell how bright they shine; Your heaps of glittering dust are yours,

But my Redeemer's mine."

I have yet another word for you that fear not God. I wish you would reflect, for a moment, what will become of you one of these days. God loves His dear children very much—He loves them so much that Jesus died to save them—and yet He does not spare them when they sin, but He chastens them with the rod of men. Now, if He does so with His children, what will He do with you who are His enemies? If judgement begins at the house of God—if when His anger does but gently smoke it is so hot—what will it be when the winds of Justice fan it to a furious flame? As when the fire sets the forests of the mountains burning, or as when the vast prairie becomes one sheet of fire, so shall it be in that dread day when God shall launch all His vengeance against the sins of the ungodly! I beseech you, think of this!

He spared not His own Son, but put Him to a cruel death upon the tree for the sins of others! Will He spare His enemies—think, you who have rebelled against Him and rejected His mercy—when He visits them for their own personal sins? "Beware, you that forget God, lest He tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you." One more thought, for I must not send you away with that terrible warning and no Gospel encouragement. Learn a lesson from the Lord's children. When His children are chastened, they submit—and when they submit they obtain peace. Sinner, I pray you, learn wisdom! And if you have been troubled of late, if you have had trials from God, yield to Him! Yield to Him!

Old Master Quarles gives a quaint picture of a man who is striking at an enemy with a flail. The person assaulted runs right into the striker's arms and so escapes the force of the stroke! And Quarles adds the remark, "The farther off, the heavier the blow." Sinner, run in, run into God's bosom tonight! Say, "I will arise and go unto my Father." God will not smite you if you come there. How can He? The Lord says, "Let him take hold of My strength." When that arm is lifted to scourge you, lay hold of it! Lay hold upon that arm of strength as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, for in Him, God has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the people!

Hang on the arm that otherwise might smite you! Trust in the Lord, Sinner, through Jesus Christ, the atoning Sacrifice, and you shall find peace with Him. Ask Him, with humble submission, to put away the sin that has made you suffer and has nearly cost you your soul. Pray Him to search you and find out the sin. Repent and believe the Gospel! Forsake evil and cling to the Savior, the great Physician who heals the disease of sin, and you shall live! Come, now, to your Father's home. Those rags, that hungry belly, those swine and filthy troughs, those citizens that would not help you, that blandest of all citizens, whose only kindness lay in degrading you lower than you were before—all these are sent to fetch you home.

Believe it, Soul, and say, "I will arise and go unto my Father, and will say unto Him, Father I have sinned." And while you are yet saying it, you shall have the kiss of His love, the embraces of His affection, the robe of His righteousness and the fatted calf of spiritual food! And there shall be merriment concerning you, both on earth and in Heaven! The Lord bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job 34:1-37.

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Chapter 90

Job 34,33 #2670 - Pride Catechized

PRIDE CATECHIZED

NO. 2670

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 15, 1900.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Should it be according to your mind? He will recompense it whether

you refuse, or whether you choose; and not I: therefore speak what you know."

Job 34:33.

DEAR FRIENDS, it is never wise to dispute with God. Let a man strive with his fellow, but not with his Maker. If we must discuss any point, let it be with imperfect beings like ourselves, but not with the Infallible and Infinitely wise God, for, in most of our discussions, these questions will come back to us, "Should it be according to your mind? Are you master? Is everyone to be subordinate to you?"

I am going to speak, this evening, to those who have a quarrel with God concerning the way of salvation. They are very unwise not to take salvation just as God brings it to them, but they do not. They have some difficulty or other, so they raise a dispute and they have been, perhaps for years, quibbling at the Savior whose Infinite goodness has provided a way of salvation exactly adapted to their needs. I am going to use Elihu's words and apply them to their case.

I. To begin at the beginning, here is, first, A QUESTION—"Should it be according to your mind?" You say that you are willing to find mercy, and that you are very teachable; but you object to the plan of salvation as it is revealed in the Scriptures.

First, then, what is it to which you object? Do you object to the very basis of the plan, namely, that God will forgive sin through the atoning Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His Son? I know that some do object to this— they cannot bear to hear about Atonement by blood, or justification by imputed righteousness. Others, who will not say that they object to Atonement, spirit away the very meaning of it! They cannot endure that glorious Doctrine of Substitution which is such a joy to us. Christ standing in the sinner's place and the sinner then standing in the place of Christ—Christ taking the sinner's sin and the sinner wearing Christ's righteousness—all this they absolutely reject! "No doubt Christ did some

Volume 46 1thing for sinners," they say, but they cannot define what He did and, as for the sin of any man being actually put away by Christ being punished in the place of the ungodly sinner, they

will not believe it!

Yet, that is God's plan of salvation, and some of us know, in our inmost hearts, that we never had peace until we accepted that plan of salvation, and that now, if it should be taken away from us, we would lose all the joy of existence and go back to the despair which, at one time, was so heavy upon us that we could sympathize with Job when be said, "My soul chooses strangling and death rather than my life." We could better afford that the sun should be quenched, that the moon should be darkened, that all springs should be dried, that the very air itself should disappear—we could better afford to die and rot in our graves than that we should lose our Savior and His atoning blood and justifying righteousness! Whatever you, Mr. Objector, may say about it, we say to you, "Should it be according to your mind?" Would you have Christ to die and yet not really secure salvation by His death? Could you invent a better plan, or even one half as good—

"So just to God, so safe for man"—

so consolatory to a wounded conscience, so constraining to gratitude when that conscience has been pacified? Would you, could you, propose anything one thousandth as good as God's plan of salvation? Even if you could, "should it be according to your mind?" Who are you, a guilty sinner, to despise the Savior's blood? If you had your just deserts, you would years ago have been in the lowest pit of Hell! Will you set aside the Cross of Christ and seek to put something else in the place of the crucified Redeemer?

But, possibly, you do not object to the Doctrine of Substitution, but your objection is to the way of salvation by faith. "I don't like that Doctrine of Justification by Faith," says one, "for I am sure that when it is preached, people will begin to think that there is no virtue in good works and that they may live as they like." I have often heard such a remark as yours, my Friend, but experience is dead against you! Whenever justification by faith has been uppermost in the preaching, the morals of the people have been purest and their spirituality has been brightest! But whenever the preachers have extolled the works and ceremonies of the Law, or the Arminianism which brings in something of trust in works, or human power, it is most certain that there has been a declension in point of morals, while religion itself has seemed almost ready to expire! You may go to those who preach up salvation by works to hear them talk, but you had better not go to see how they live—whereas those who preach justification by faith can boldly point to the multitudes who have accepted this Truth of God and whose godly lives prove the sanctifying power of the Doctrine!

But if you object to this Doctrine, how would you like to have it altered? "Oh, well, I would like to have some good feelings put in with faith." And how, then, would any man be saved? Can he command his own feelings? Those feelings come naturally enough after faith, but, if they are demanded without faith, how will they ever be presented to God? Besides, feelings would claim some credit if they were thus joined with faith. A man would be able to boast that he had felt his way to Heaven and he would have the same self-congratulatory spirit which we see in those who trust in works and ceremonies—and thus Christ would be robbed of His Glory as the sinner's Savior. Man would put his dirty hands upon the crown and place it upon his own head—but that must never be the case! You shall be saved if you trust the Savior, but if you do not like that way of salvation, you can never be saved! Why should the plan of salvation be changed for you? Is God to be tied down to act only as you please? Is He to alter His Gospel to suit the fancies of rebellious men? That must not be! There is no mistake about this matter—"He that believes not the Son shall

not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him." And our Lord, Himself, said, "He that believes not shall be damned." That is the only message for him if he continues in his unbelief—and it shall not be altered to suit the mind of any man that lives!

"Oh, but," some say, "we object to the requirements of the Gospel, especially to that verse where Christ says, 'You must be born again.' Where is the need of that? We were christened when we were children! We were confirmed as we grew older! We have taken the sacrament! We do not agree with that hard saying, 'You must be born again.'" They will not walk with Christ if He insists upon that condition. Moreover, He requires the giving up of all known sin, the hating of all sin—and the objector says, "But may I not retain my one darling sin? May I not keep my pet evil? I will give up all else, but that one I must have." And when men are told that wherever Christ comes, He makes a radical change—He casts out Satan and all his imps, drives them out by force and takes complete possession of the soul—they bar the door of their heart against the Savior, for they do not want such strong measures as His in their case.

Well, Sirs, as you say that Christ's requirements are not according to your mind, what would you like them to be? Do you wish to be allowed to continue taking what you call your little drop, which is powerful enough to make you reel across the street? Then there is somebody over yonder who would like to keep his adulteries. And another who would like to keep his petty thefts. And another who would like to keep on with his swearing and another who would like to retain his covetousness so that he could still grind the poor to powder and make money by crushing them! What sin is there, in the whole world, that would be put to death if men were left to pick and choose the Agag which each one wished to save? No! Christ came to save His people from their sins—not in them— and it is essential to salvation that sin should be repented of and, being repented of, should be renounced and that, by the help of God, we should lead a new life, under a new Master, serving from a new motive because the Grace of God has renewed our spirit!

"Should it be according to your mind?" No, certainly not, for, putting all reasons into one, it is not the slightest use for you to make any objection to the Gospel, for you will be lost if you do not accept it just as it is revealed in the Scriptures! Christ will never alter the Gospel one jot or tittle—not the cross of a "t" or the dot of an "i"—to please the biggest man that lives! "Oh, but, really, I am a man of education! Am I to be saved in the same way as the man who does not know A from B?" Precisely! There is no other way of salvation for you. There is not one gate for Doctors of Divinity and another for the poor and ignorant. "But I am a person of good character, a matronly woman. Am I to be saved just in the same way as a Magdalene?" Precisely the same! There is no other Savior for you than the one in whom Mary Magdalene delighted and trusted. "But, Sir, you do not surely mean to say that all these street Arabs are to go to Heaven in the same way as a man who has kept shop and been respectable all his life?" Yes, I do! All must go in exactly the same road. Queens and chimney sweeps must enter Heaven by the same gate, or not enter at all. There is but one name given among men whereby we must be saved! There is no other Savior but Christ Jesus the Lord! He suits every class of persons—big sinners and little ones, if there are any little sinners anywhere—all must come to Christ and at His feet confess their sin, for God's plan cannot be altered for anyone. My dear Sir, we are not going to have any enlargement, or rather, any mystification, of the plan of salvation to suit your profound mind! There will be no golden handles put to the doors of Heaven to suit you, my lord, with all your wealth and pride! No, no, no! Come to Christ, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and He will give you rest! But there is no other way

of obtaining rest of heart and conscience.

I have thus tried to mention a few of the objections which men make to God's plan of salvation. Now let me ask two or three questions. First, should not God have His way? Is it not intolerable that you and I should raise objections at all when the mercy of God, if it ever comes to us, is a pure gift of charity? God may well say to us, "Shall I not do as I will with My own?" There is no man living who has any absolute right to receive anything from God except destruction. That terrible doom we have all merited, but nothing beyond that. If we were shut up in prison and fed only dry bread, so long as we were out of Hell we would still be under obligation to God. If the Lord should choose to show mercy to only one man in the world, He has a perfect right to do so. If He chooses to give it to a few, or if He chooses to give it to all, He has the right to do so. He is absolutely Sovereign and these are the words that He would have everyone of us hear and heed—"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

The crown rights of the King of Kings must never be assailed! For us beggars to turn choosers and to dictate to God what He shall give to us— for us condemned criminals to begin to make bargains with God as to how He shall preserve our lives, if He chooses to do so—oh, this will never do! You know, dear Friends, that when we give even a trifling charity, we like to do it in our own way. I remember that one Christmastime a certain gentleman had given away a quantity of meat to many poor people. He had been so generous that he had given away all he had. The next morning a woman came to him, bringing back the piece of meat which she had received, which was meant for boiling—she said she wanted to have a piece for roasting. There was none left for changing, so she had to take what had been given to her or go without any at all. You are quite sure that the next year, that woman's name was put down among the first to have a Christmas gift, are you not? On the contrary, the gentleman said, "She will not be troubled next year, either with a boiling piece or a roasting piece from me. I will take good care of that." I think it was quite natural that he should say so, for our common proverb regards it as ingratitude when we "look a gift horse in the mouth." When anything comes to us entirely as a gift, it is not for us to quibble at it, but to accept it!

And this is specially true of God's great gift of salvation. O Lord, if You will but save me, save me Your way! If I may be delivered from this accursed sin of mine and made pure and holy, do it, Lord, after Your own gracious fashion! It is not for me to suggest any plan to You, but to leave myself entirely in Your hands and to let it be according to Your mind.

Further, is not God's way the best? The mind of God is so Infinitely great, good and wise, that it cannot be supposed that even if He left the plan of salvation to our option, we could choose anything half as good as what He decrees and appoints! Should He, for a single moment, hold His Sovereignty in abeyance and allow us to be kings and princes on our own account, what follies we would perpetrate! We would choose a way of salvation that would not honor God, nor destroy evil, nor even be good for our own selves! Some people would like a Heaven into which they could enter without being born again, but what kind of Heaven would that be? Some would like to have joy and peace without believing in Christ. Some would like to have eternal happiness, but still indulge their lusts. This would be an evil of the most awful kind! It is better that sin should bring to man infinite sorrow than that it should be linked with eternal enjoyment! The mischief of it is that it does get linked with enjoyment for a while by foolish men who forget what must come afterwards—but God has never joined these two things together—it is only wicked men who have

pretended to celebrate this unholy marriage! God proclaims a perpetual separation between sin and happiness and it is well that it should be so.

Now, to conclude this first part of our subject, suppose the plan of salvation should be according to any human mind, whose mind is to decide what it shall be? Yours? No, mine! And another says, "No, mine!" Our proverb rightly says, "Many men, many minds," and if we were to have salvation arranged according to the mind of each one of us, there would be a pretty quarrel before we left this place. You say, Friend, that it is to be according to your mind. But why not according to your neighbor's mind? If man's mind were to decide it, what should we have? Why, you would all contradict each other and there would be no plan of salvation at all if God did not settle it once and for all!

Then, besides, should it be according to your mind today? "Yes," you say, "I have made up my mind." But you will take your mind to pieces tomorrow—what little there is of it—and then you will put it together again the next day, and say, "I have made up my mind. I am a man of mind, you know." Ah, yes, we know you, Sir. There is a certain tribe of people about, nowadays, who call themselves "men of culture" and they sneer at everybody who does not go in for that kind of boasting. If they were really men of mind, they would never talk like that, for the man who has the most culture generally has enough to be a little modest and not to brag about what he is. Well, then, if salvation is to be according to man's mind, whose mind is to decide it, and on what day, and at what hour of the day is the verdict of that man's mind to be taken? It is vacillating, changing like the moon, never twice in the same mood on the same day—so salvation cannot be according to our mind—for it would be chaos! It would be destruction if that were the case.

II. Now, secondly, here is A WARNING. "He will recompense it, whether you refuse, or whether you choose." By this I understand that, whatever our will may be, God will carry out His own purpose. As surely as God is God, He will never be defeated in anything. He who is Omniscient and, therefore, sees the end from the beginning, is also Omnipotent and, therefore, can work His own will exactly as He chooses—He will never be baffled by the will of men. I believe in the free agency of man as much as anyone who lives, but I equally believe in the eternal purpose of God. If you ask, "How do you reconcile those beliefs?" I answer, "They have never yet been at variance, so there is no need to attempt to reconcile them. They are like two parallel lines which will run side by side forever—man responsible because he does what he wills, and God infinitely glorious, achieving His own purposes, not only in the world of dead, inert matter, but also through those who are free agents—without changing them in the least degree, leaving them just as free as they ever were, He yet, in every jot and tittle, performs the eternal purpose of His will."

I would also remind you that though you quibble at God's way of salvation, God will punish sin just the same. There is many a man who has said, "I will never believe that God will send men to Hell"—but he has gone there—and then he has changed his mind in a very remarkable and terrible fashion when it is too late! There are many who say, "It should be this, or it should not be that," but they do not ask, "What says the Scripture?" Yet that is the all-important point, for, whatever you may say as to what it should be or should not be, makes no difference to God! He will take less notice of you and your opinion than you do of a gnat or a fly that buzzes about you on a summer's evening. He is so infinitely great and good that any opposition you and I may think that we can raise against Him shall be less than nothing and vanity! Shall twigs contend with fire, or

wax with the flame? Shall nothing oppose itself to Omnipotence? Shall the creature of a day, that is and is not, attempt to wrestle with the Eternal? No, this cannot be! Therefore, God will have His way and He will punish sin!

And, further, my Friends, though you may object to God's way of salvation, others will be saved by it. Christ did not die in vain. He will rejoice in everyone whom He purchased with His blood. He will not lose one of the jewels that are to deck His crown forever. You may strive against His Kingdom, but that Kingdom will come when He pleases. The King eternal, immortal, invisible, shall surely reign forever and ever! And if your voice is not heard in the great Hallelujah chorus of Heaven, yet not one of its notes will be missing! Christ shall be glorified to the highest possible degree, whoever may oppose Him. It is well that those who object to God's plan of salvation should know these facts. That is how Christ treated objectors when He was upon the earth. When they murmured at what He told them, He did not tone down the unpalatable Truth. He did not say to them, "You are robbing me of My honor and glory, and I shall never prosper." He said, "No man can come to Me unless the Father, which has sent Me, draw him." On another occasion, He said, "You believe not because you are not of My sheep, as I said unto you." He did not humble Himself to them, but again proclaimed His own Truth in all its majesty and sublimity, that they might bow before Him and His message.

Just once more upon this point, let me say that God will certainly magnify His own name, whoever may oppose Him—"Whether you refuse, or whether you choose," shall make no difference to Him! His Grace comes like the dew, which tarries not for man, neither waits for the sons of men. Oftentimes, He is found of them that seek Him not and, to those who were not His people, He says, "You are My people," thus magnifying His own amazing Grace. Whoever may stand out against Him, He shall lack none of His honor and glory, world without end.

III. This brings us to the third part of our subject, on which I desire to say exactly what Elihu said, "and not I." We cannot be absolutely sure what these three words mean, but, if they mean what I think they do, they teach us a lesson which I have called A PROTEST.

Whenever you find anyone opposing God, say to yourself, "and not I." When there is any wrong thing being done, and it comes under your notice, say, "and not I." Take care that you go not with a multitude to do evil! Do not take upon your tongue just what others may be saying, but bear your individual protest against the evil. Even if you stand alone, say, "and not I."

What Elihu meant, I think, was this. Whoever opposes God should know that he is not dealing with a man like himself. If you hear a preacher make a statement, and you feel, "That is not the Word of the Lord," pray God to forgive him for his sin in saying it. But if he speaks with the sound of his Master's feet behind him and what he says is the Word of God, then do not trifle with it. If it is clearly a revealed Truth of God, it may grate against your feelings and set your teeth on edge, but what of that? You had better get your teeth and your feelings put right, for the Truth of God cannot be altered in order to please you! Someone says, "I cannot believe that statement, because it seems too shocking." That is just why I do believe it, for it does me good by shocking me. And if it is in God's Word, I am bound to accept it. "Oh," you say, "but something within me revolts against it." It is only natural it should do so, for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"—and it naturally cries out against the thing that is most surely true. The supreme majesty of God's Word is that before which we have to bow, and not the insignificant usurpers of our

inward feelings, fancies and whims. "Let God be true and every man a liar."

Elihu also means, I think, "I will not be responsible for the man who refuses God's Word. I will not stand in his place, or take the blame which is due him. He shall be recompensed, and not I, for I have spoken the Truth. I will not bear the responsibility of it. If men choose to refuse it, they must take the consequences—to the Lord alone they must stand or fall."

And, once more, Elihu means, "If you refuse God's Word, it is not I. I will not share in your rebellion against Him." Ah, my dear Hearers, there are some of you who think yourselves very intelligent, wise and thoughtful. And you imagine that you know a great deal more than I do and, therefore, you refuse to receive God's Word. Well, if you do so, I will not! I am determined about this matter and I say, with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah." And, mark you, by, "Jehovah," I mean the old Testament God! I have never seen Him superseded in His own Word, though some men profess that it is so. According to them, the God of the Hebrews was not the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, though Jesus never said so, but quite the reverse! The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob is He whom we worship this day—and His Character, as it is written out in full in the Old and New Testament—is that which we admire and delight in!

Others may have new gods, newly come up, which our fathers knew not, but not I. He who made the heavens and the earth. He who led forth His people out of Egypt and divided the sea, even the Red Sea. He whose mercy endures forever. The God who shines forth all along as the God of a covenanted people to whom He did reveal Himself, "this God is our God forever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death." Learned men may dispute as much as they like about Him, but we bow humbly at His feet. We question nothing that He does! We believe it to be right even when we do not understand it and it is our hope that others will do the same. But if they will not, it will not affect our own decision.

IV. Our last head is, A CHALLENGE AND AN INVITATION. If there are any who refuse the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for any

reason known only to themselves, we venture to ask them to say what it is—"Therefore speak what you know." It was not in Elihu's mind to tell Job to be silent and never open his mouth again. Speech is the glory of man, and freedom of speech, as far as concerns his fellow creatures, is the right of every man! It is far better that when there is a difficulty or an objection, it should be fairly stated, than that it should lie smothered up within the soul to breed untold mischief. Therefore, if you have an objection to God's Word, write it out and look at it. Or, if you care not to do that, state it, if not to your friend—if you prefer privacy—state it to yourself! Only bring it out and let it be known! But, at the same time, when you are speaking, "speak what you know."

Now, what do you really know of God? Little enough do the most of us know, but, still, I think we know enough to know that He is not the god of modern times whom some preach. One single night of frost will destroy millions upon millions of creatures that were happy and enjoyed life— and this is done by that God of whom we are often assured that He cannot possibly punish sin, or put men to pain. But He does it. Hear the cry of the poor seamen, when the storm tosses the great boat and drives it on the rocks. See how, everywhere, the Lord is a great God and terrible. Even though He condescends to be a Father to those of us who trust in Jesus Christ, His Son, and is gentle as a nurse to us, yet is He the God of thunder and of fire, the great and almighty God, the

King who will not be questioned by His subjects and who will not alter His arrangements to please their fancies!

It is well for us to speak of God as we have found Him. He has dealt kindly and graciously with us—"He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities"—else had we been cast away forever. We long that others may be able to speak of God in the same way—not saying what they would have Him to be, but what He has revealed Himself to be in nature, in Providence and especially in Grace. Let us all come humbly to His feet! He bids us look to His dear Son and so find peace and salvation. If we will not do so, there is nothing for us but to be driven from His Presence and from the glory of His power, world without end.

Will we dare to defy Him? Have we the impiety to do so? O God, humble us! Beneath the terror of Your majesty, the glory of Your righteousness and the supreme splendor of Your love, bow us down to accept Your Grace and to become Yours forever and ever! God grant that it may be so, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 34,33 #2834 - Conceit Rebuked

CONCEIT REBUKED

NO. 2834

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 17, 1903.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 5, 1877.

"Should it be according to your mind?"

Job 34:33.

ELIHU thought that Job had spoken too boastfully and that there was too much of self about him and, therefore, he reproved him by asking this question, "Should it be according to your mind?" It is a question which, in the original, has a great wealth of meaning in it and, as the language of the Book of Job is extremely ancient and very terse, it is not easy to get the fullness of Elihu's meaning. But it has been said that upon the whole, our translation not only gives the meaning of his enquiry, but also more of the meaning than can be conveyed in any other words, so that we may be perfectly satisfied with it and may pray God the Holy Spirit to apply it to us. And if we have grown to be high and mighty, and have begun to criticize the way of God in dealing with us, this question may come to us very sharply, "'Should it be according to your mind?' Should everything be arranged just to suit your whims and wishes? Should everything in the world be fashioned according to your taste and the whole globe revolve just to serve you and please your fancy? Should it be according to your mind?"'

There are four things I am going to say concerning our text. First I shall ask, Are there really any people in the world who think that everything should be according to their mind? Then, secondly, I shall enquire, what leads them to that notion? Thirdly, I shall try to show you what a mercy it is that they cannot have everything according to their mind. And then, fourthly, I shall urge you to keep this evil spirit in check, so that, henceforth, you will not wish that things should be according to your mind.

I. Our first question has a measure of astonishment about it. ARE THERE REALLY ANY PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WHO WOULD HAVE EVERYTHING ACCORDING TO THEIR MIND? Oh, yes, there are such people! I should not wonder if there are some of them here right now. In fact, I question whether we have not, all of us, at times, drunk very deeply into this naughty, haughty spirit. If we have done so, may we be speedily delivered from it!

First, there are some people who would have God, Himself, according to their mind. Now, as a matter of fact, all that I can know of God I must

Volume 49 1learn from God revealing Himself to me. I cannot discover Him by myself—He must unveil Himself to me—and that He has done in Holy Scripture. All that He intends us to know about Himself, He has revealed in the written Word and in the Incarnate Word, His ever-blessed Son. But there are some people who get their idea of God out of themselves. You may have heard of the German philosopher who evolved the idea of a camel out of his own consciousness—at least, so he said. I do not think it was much like a camel when he had evolved it, but there are many persons who try to evolve the idea of God out of their own consciousness. It cannot be, they say, that certain statements in the Bible are true because there is something or other, in their inner consciousness, that contradicts the Scriptural declarations. God, as they believe in Him, is what they think He ought to be, not what He really is. And there are some, in these days, who have even gone so far as to reject the Old Testament altogether because its teaching concerning God does not meet the approval of their very marvelous minds.

Practically, these people are idolaters, for an idolater is one who makes a god unto himself. The true worshipper of God—the accepted worshipper—is one who worships God as He is and as He reveals Himself in His Word. But there are many persons who make a god out of their own thoughts. The teachers of the modern school of theology work in a kind of god-factory. The people in some heathen lands make their gods out of mud, but these men make their gods out of their own thought, their imagination, their "intellect." That is what they call it, though I am not sure that it is that organ which is at work in this instance. But when a man makes a god of thought, he is just as much an idolater as if he had made a god of wood or of gold. The true God—the God of Scripture thus revealed Himself to His ancient people, "I am the Lord your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." This God is our God, "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," "the God of the whole earth He shall be called." Many a man refuses to accept this God as his, but I would like to ask him, "Should God be according to your mind?" That would be a strange god, indeed! Should He have no other attributes but such as you would give to Him? Should His Character and conduct be only such as you can comprehend and justify? Must there be nothing in Him that shall puzzle you? Are there to be no Divine deeps that shall be beyond the reach of your finite mind? Are there to be no heights beyond your power to soar?

That is what seems to be your notion and if there is anything that staggers you a little, you say, "I cannot believe it." If it were possible, you would eliminate from the Character of God everything that is stern and terrible—though these attributes clearly appertain to the Most High as He has been pleased to reveal Himself in Scripture. I beg you, dear Friends, never to attempt to mold the Character of God with the fingers of your own fancy! Worship Him just as He is, though you cannot comprehend Him. Believe in Him as He reveals Himself and never imagine that you could, by making any change in Him, effect an improvement in Him. By toning down His justice, you think that you are increasing His love and, by denying His righteous vengeance, you imagine that you are honoring His goodness. But, instead of doing so by the removal of these things which alarm and annoy you—if you could do so—you would take away part of God's grandeur and strength which make His goodness and His mercy to shine as brightly as they now do!

Leave God just as He is, remembering how He has said, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." The Infinite God must be past finding out by the creatures whom He has made. I confess that it is one of my greatest joys to find myself completely baffled when I am trying to comprehend the Character of God. Sometimes, when I have tried to preach upon the Deity of Christ, I have been fairly staggered under the burden of that stupendous Truth and I have felt the utter uselessness and poverty of human language to describe our great and terrible, yet loving Lord! And I have been glad to have it so, for, verily, God is altogether above our comprehension and none of us can speak of Him as He deserves to be spoken of! But never let us try in any way to diminish His glorious perfections.

A more common way of offending God and setting up our self-will, is by quarreling with His Providential dealings. If anyone here is doing so, let me ask, "Should it be according to your mind?" You look, sometimes, upon the arrangements of Providence on a great scale in reference to the nations of the earth. You see them at war with one another and you note how slow the progress of civil and religious liberty are and how few there are to rally in defense of right principles. Sometimes you get greatly distressed about the general state of affairs and you wish you could alter it—but the Lord looks down from His eternal Throne and He seems to say to you, "Should it be according to your mind?" The world was wisely ordered by God before we were born and it will be equally well ordered by Him after we are dead!

When Alexander Peden, the Covenanter, was dying, he sent for one of his brethren, a fellow-minister of the Word, James Renwick, and he bade him stand out in the room and turn his back to his departing friend. When he had done so, Peden said to him, "I have looked at you and I perceive that you are only a little man and you have but feeble shoulders and weak legs." "Yes," replied Renwick, "that is true, but why have you made that observation?" "Because," said Peden, "I perceive that you cannot, after all, carry the whole world upon your back—you are not made for any such work as that." And I may say of all of us who are here that we were not made to carry the world on our backs. Yet some of us attempt to play the part of Atlas and not only try to carry the world, but seek to set the Church right as well! We fancy that we can do that, poor worms that we are, but the Lord knows that we can do nothing of the kind. "He remembers that we are dust," though we are apt to forget it ourselves!

Well, Beloved, after all, "should it be according to your mind?" Will you, like Jonah, sit pining, mourning and complaining? Does not the Eternal Ruler understand the politics of nations and the best way of governing the world infinitely better than you do? Do not attempt to drive the horses of the sun—your puny hands are unfit for so tremendous a task as that. Leave all things with God! As long as they are ordered by Him, they are well ordered!

Probably, however, it is with the minor Providence that we more often quarrel when we are in an ill state of heart. You think that you would like to be rich, yet you are poor. "Should it be according to your mind?" You would have liked to be healthy and strong, but you are weak and sickly, or you have a suffering limb that troubles you and you sometimes think, "Mine is a very hard loss. I wish it could be changed." "Should it be according to your mind?" Should the fashioning of yourself and your circumstances have been left to you? What do you think? Possibly you have recently sustained a great loss in business and you cannot quite get over it. "Should it be according to your

mind?" Should Providential circumstances have been arranged otherwise so as to suit you? Should God have stopped the great machinery of the universe and put it out of gear in order to prevent you from losing a few pounds? "Should it be according to your mind?"

Perhaps it is worse than that—a dear child has been taken away just when he had become most closely entwined around your heart. You would gladly have kept him with you, but was it right that he should go, or right that he should stay? Come now, there is a difference of opinion between you and God—who is in the right? Should it be according to His mind, or according to your mind? "Ah," says someone else, "it is the mainstay of the home who has been taken away from us—the husband— the father of the family." Well, though it is so, again I ask concerning this bereavement, or any other trial that comes to you, "Should it be according to your mind?" It should be sufficient for you to know that the Lord has permitted it or actually performed it.

Should it be according to your mind, or according to His mind? It is not easy, I know, to submit without murmuring to all that happens to us. I am probably touching very tender places in many who, at divers times and seasons, have really felt that God, in His Providential dealings with them, had been unkind to them, or that, at least, He had been showing His kindness in a very strange way.

There are some who carry this difference between them and God into another sphere, for they do not approve of the Gospel as it is taught in the Bible. You know that the Gospel, as revealed in the New Testament, is so simple that a child can understand it. And you may go and teach it to the poorest and the most illiterate and many of them will leap at it, and grasp it at once! But there are others who think that it should be something which is much more difficult to understand, something which would need a higher order of intellect than the common people possess. Do you really think so, my dear Sir? "Should it be according to your mind?" Would you shut out the poor and the needy and the illiterate from the privileges of the Gospel—and keep them to yourself and to a few others who have been highly educated? Surely not! O Brothers and Sisters, if it were possible for us to preach a Gospel that we had made obscure, or which could only be comprehended by the elite of society, we would soon have cause to sadly deplore before God that we had lost that simple, blessed, plain way of instruction which the wayfaring man, though a fool, can understand, and in which he need not err!

Many try to bring down the Doctrines of Grace. They would get rid of Election if they could. Anything like the specialty of the Atonement of Christ they cannot bear! The sweet and blessed Doctrine of Effectual Calling they abhor and they would gladly make a Gospel of their own. But should they want to do so? Is it not your duty and mine, Brother, rather to try to find out what the Gospel really is than to seek to make it what we consider it ought to be? "Should it be according to your mind?" We have known some people take a text of Scripture and, because it did not square with the system in which they were brought up, they tried to cut it down to make it fit in with their notion! But, Sirs, is not the Gospel grander than any of our comprehension of it? Are there not in it great Truths of God that cannot be cut down to fit any system that the human mind can make? And ought we not to be thoroughly glad that it is so? For, surely, it is better that the Gospel should be according to God's mind than that it should be according to the mind of Toplady, or the mind of Wesley, or the mind of Calvin, or the mind of Arminius! The mind of God is greater than all the minds of men, so let all men leave the Gospel just as God has delivered it unto us.

Sometimes this difference comes up concerning the Church of Christ. Some people do not like God's order of Church membership and Church government—they would like to see the world welcomed inside the Church. They do not approve of the ordinances as they were instituted and observed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Believers' Baptism is peculiarly objectionable to them. Sometimes they disapprove of God's ministers— they pick holes in the most useful of them. This man ought to be so-andso, and that other man ought to be something else. I can only ask again, with regard to the whole matter, "Should it be according to your mind?" Are you to make the ministers and to teach them what they are to preach? Are they your servants or God's servants, and are they to deliver their message in your way or in God's way? Let the question be honestly considered and then, perhaps, much of the murmuring that is sometimes heard, and much of the discord that often arises among professing Christians would be cleared away. For, surely, these things should not be according to our mind, but we should let God appoint, equip and send forth His own servants just as He pleases—not as we please. Christ must decide everything concerning His own Church! He must be free to choose whom He likes to be members of it and to fashion His Church after His own model.

II. Now, secondly, we are to enquire—WHAT LEADS PEOPLE TO THINK THAT EVERYTHING SHOULD BE ACCORDING TO THEIR MIND?

My answer is, first, that there is a great deal of self-importance in such a notion. There are some people who seem to fancy that they are the center of the whole universe. The times are always bad if they do not prosper. If the earth does not so revolve as to bring grist to their mill, then the times must be out of joint. But who are you, dear Friend, that you should suppose that for you, the sun rises and sets? That for you seasons change and that God is to have respect to you and to nobody else? "Should it be according to your mind?" Then, if so, why not according to my mind, also? And why not according to the mind of another Brother? And why not according to the mind of yet another? But no, it is according to your mind that you would have it! Ah, does not this show what overweening importance we attach to ourselves? We are mere ants, creeping insects upon the bay-leaf of existence—here today and gone tomorrow—yet we suppose that all things are to be ordered for our special benefit and we quarrel with God if we suffer even a little inconvenience!

This notion also arises from self-conceit. We really seem to fancy that we could arrange things much better than they now are—we would not dare to plainly say so, much less would we be willing to put it in writing, but we talk and feel as if it were really so. If only we had had the ordering of things, we are quite sure that they would not have happened as they have done! But then, depend upon it, they would have happened wrongly if they had been other than they have been! "Should it be according to your mind?" No! Unless you are self-conceited enough to put your folly in comparison with the wisdom of God, you know that it should not be according to your mind!

Then there is the spirit of murmuring that so easily comes upon us. We have known some who really became slaves to that evil spirit. They complained of everything, nothing was right in their eyes. It was not possible, it seemed, even for God, Himself, to please them. "Should it be according to your mind?" How would it be possible to please one who is so changeable, so whimsical, so fanciful as you are? Poor simpleton, surely you cannot think that such a thing should be.

But, oftentimes, this quarrel arises from lack of faith in God. If we did but believe in Him, we would see that all things are ordered well. If we did but trust in God as a loving child trusts in its father, we would feel safe enough at all times and we would not want to have anything different from what it is. Have you ever heard of the woman who was in a great storm at sea and terribly frightened? She saw her husband, who was the captain of the ship, perfectly composed even while the vessel was tossed about by the mighty billows—but he could not calm her troubled heart. So he drew a sword from its scabbard and held it close to her breast. As he did so, he said to her, "Do you not tremble, my wife?" "No," she replied, "I am not in the least afraid." "But this sword is close to you." "I am not afraid of that," she said, "because it is in my husband's hand. "Well," he said, "is it not even so with this storm? Is it not in the hands of God? And if it is in His hands, why should we be alarmed?" So, if we have true faith in God, we shall accept whatever God sends us, and we shall not want to have things arranged according to our mind, but we shall quite agree with what His mind ordains.

So would it be, too, if you had more love to God, for love always agrees with that which its object delights in. So, dear Friends, when we come to love God with a perfect heart, we are glad for God to have His way with us. If He wills that we should be sick, we would not wish to be otherwise. If He wills that we should be poor, we are willing to be poor—and if He wills that we should pass through a sea of trial, we would not wish to have a drop less than His blessed will appoints.

III. But now, thirdly, WHAT A MERCY IT IS THAT THINGS ARE NOT ACCORDING TO OUR MIND! If they were, I wonder what sort of world we would live in?

If things were according to our mind, God's Glory would be obscured. He knows what will best glorify Him and He has been pleased to so arrange His Providential dealings with men that all shall glorify Him to the highest possible degree. And, Beloved, if we were to alter anything of this—if we could altar anything, it is evident that the Glory of God would not be so well promoted. So, "should it be according to your mind" that God would lose a measure of the Glory that is due unto His name? God forbid!

If it were according to our mind, others would often have to suffer. At any rate, if things were arranged according to the mind of some people, they would grind the poor in the dust and utterly crush them. If things were settled according to the mind of man, we would often be in a terrible plight. Did not David say to God, "Let us fall now into the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hands of man"? When God is most grieved with His people, He never deals with them in so harsh a manner as the ungodly would deal with them if they had them in their power. Let us trust in the Lord, my Brothers and Sisters, and thank Him that He does not allow things to be according to the mind of man, for it would be terrible, indeed, for us, then!

Here is another reflection. If things were according to our mind, we would have an awful responsibility resting upon us because we would feel that if anything went amiss, we would be the cause of it. If we had the choosing of our circumstances and the details of all that happened to us, we would straightway feel that we would be called to account for everything by our fellow men and by our own conscience. But now that it is according to the mind of God, you have no responsibility concerning it. If it is according to His will, it must be that which is right and that which is best! So let us bless His name that all things are left at His disposal.

If things were according to our mind, I am afraid our temptations would soon be greatly increased, for many who are poor would speedily become rich—and they do not know what the temptation of riches might be, nor the Grace they would need to resist it. And some, who are now sick and are praising God upon their sickbeds—if they were well, might find much of their spirituality departing and they might be thrown into a thousand troubles which they now escape in the quiet of their own room. Some of you are in a condition of life where you may not have many comforts, but, on the other hand, you are not subject to those trials which come to us who are prominent in public life. You can be sure you are in your right place if God put you there. "Should it be according to your mind?" If so, you would have more temptations and less Grace—more of the world, but less of your Lord. So thank Him that it is not according to your mind.

If it were according to our mind, we would seldom know our own mind. If a man could manage everything as he liked, he would not long like his own management. Unrenewed men, especially, are never satisfied. The way for a man to be happy is not to have his own will, but to sink his will in the will of God. Look at Solomon when he had his own way. As one time he gave all his thoughts to grand buildings—and when he had built his palaces he got quite tired, so he took to making gardens, aqueducts and fountains of water. When he had made them, he did not get much satisfaction out of them, so he got instruments of music and singing men and singing women, but he was soon tired of them. Then he took to study, but he said, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh." He had whatever he chose to have, yet it was all vanity and vexation of spirit to him! And he never had what filled his soul till he came to rest alone in his God, which, we trust, he did in his old age.

I do not know a more horrible endowment that a man could have than for God to say to him, "Everything shall be as you like to have it." He would probably be the most miserable and most dissatisfied person under Heaven! "Should it be according to your mind?" Ah, then sin would go uncorrected in you, for you would never have a mind to use the rod! Then your dross would remain, for you would never have a mind to be put into the furnace! Should all things go with you according to your own will, then your flesh would get the mastery over you and be pampered and indulged—you would be settled on your less, not emptied from vessel to vessel—and you would bring upon yourself unutterable woe! O Beloved, for this reason, also, it is a thousand mercies that things are not arranged according to the mind of even the best saint out of Heaven except when his mind is brought into full subjection to the will of God!

"Should it be according to your mind?" Then there would be universal strife. If this were the case, think what a terrible condition the Church of God and the world, too, would soon be brought into, because, as I have already hinted, if it were according to your mind, why should it not be according to my mind, or according to the mind of every other person? Then what chaos, what confusion there would be! How would the world be managed if you, I, and 50 others, each one with a different mind from all the rest, must have it according to our minds? It would mean that the King of Heaven must resign His Throne and give place to universal anarchy! It could not be—it would be impossible that such an arrangement should continue for an hour! We would have to go, in tears, before the Lord and cry to Him, "O Lord, come back and reign over us, for we cannot get on without You! Everything is going to destruction for need of an Almighty Will to manage it." Should it be according to your mind? "No, Lord never let it be so except when you have made my mind to be filled with Your mind and then it shall be well." "I always have my way," said a holy man. "How

is that?" asked one who heard him. And the good man replied, "Because God's way is my way." "I always have my will," said another, and he gave a similar explanation, "because it is my will that God should have His will." When God's will gets to be your will, then it may be according to your mind—but not till then—thank God, not till then!

IV. So now, in the last place, dear Friends, I am going to say to you, let us try, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, to CHECK THAT SPIRIT WHICH LEADS MEN TO THINK THAT ALL THINGS SHOULD BE ACCORDING TO THEIR MIND.

First, because it is impracticable. As I have already shown you, it is quite impossible that all things should be according to the mind of men so long as their mind is in its natural carnal state.

Again, it is unreasonable that it should be so. In a well-ordered house, whose will ought to be supreme? Should it not be the father's? Do you expect everything in your home to be ordered according to the will of your little boy? No, you know that you take a comprehensive view of all who are in the house and all their concerns—and you are better able to judge than he is, what is right. It would be very unreasonable for your child to say, "Everything is to be managed according to my will." If he were to talk like that, you would soon teach him better, I guarantee you—and it is unreasonable to imagine that the Lord should make your will to be the rule of His dispensations. Do not cultivate a spirit which you cannot justify by any sensible and reasonable arguments.

In the next place, it is un-Christlike. "Should it be according to your mind?" Why, if ever there was a Son of the great Father, according to whose mind things should be, it was our blessed Lord Jesus Christ! Yet what did He say? "Not as I will, but as You will." And as Jesus said, "Not as I will," is there one among us who shall dare to say, "Let it be as I will?" "Will you not join your Elder Brother in that sweet resignation of all desire to be the ruler in order that the great Father, who fills all things, may have His way? If you wish to have all things according to your mind, you are not like Christ—for in all things He did the Father's will and suffered the Father's will, too, and rejoiced in it. Let us pray the Holy Spirit to help us to do the same!

Once more, if we desire to have our own mind, it is atheistic, for a god without a controlling mind is no god. And a god whose will was not carried out would be no god. If you were to have your way in all things, you would be taking the place of God—do you not tremble at the very thought of it? His Throne ill becomes you. Would you—

"Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod, Rejudge His judgments, be the God of God"?

If you are truly converted, you shudder at the bare mention of such a thing as that! Yet, dear Sister, was not that the spirit in which you came into this House? Did you not feel, "The Lord has dealt very harshly with me. I can scarcely be reconciled to Him"? Oh, drop that rebellious spirit! You are but a poor, helpless creature, and He is God Over All! Let His supreme will sweetly rule your heart at this hour—and labor to get rid of that waywardness and that revolting from the Most High! I knew one who was in mourning many, many years for a child. And a good Quaker said to her, "Friend, have you not forgiven God yet?" There are some to whom we might put the same question. And we have heard of some who professed to be Christians, who, when they met with a very terrible reverse, said they could never understand it— really meaning that they could never acquiesce in the Divine Will about that loss. It must not be so with us. Whenever a child falls out with his father, the best thing he can do is to fall in again, for a sullen child who is angry with his

father, will have to come round if he has a wise father. The father will say to him, "My dear Boy, there is one of us who must change before we can be perfectly agreed. And I cannot, for I know I am in the right. It is you who must change and come round to my way of thinking." And if you have fallen out with God by willfulness and stubbornness, He cannot come round to you, but you will have to come back to Him. So yield to Him at once! Bow down before Him, your own Father in Heaven, who infinitely loves you! Do you mean to say that you will keep up the quarrel with Him? You began the dispute and you know that you are in the wrong and He is right, so say, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him." Or if you cannot say as much as that, at least do what Aaron did in his great bereavement, "Aaron held his peace," or what David did when he said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth because You did it." Oh, for that blessed silence which springs from acquiescence to the Divine Will!

I should like you to go further than that, however, and even to praise and bless the Lord for poverty, pain and bereavement. In Heaven, among the sweetest notes of your song will be those you sing over your trials here below. There was one who lost his eyesight, but he always praised God for that, for he said that he never saw till he was blind. I have heard of another who had lost a leg, and he said that he never stood on the Rock of Ages till he had that leg amputated. We, who are branches of the true vine, will have more of Christ's sharp pruning-knife than of anything else, but let us praise and bless God for it and henceforth labor, by the Spirit's Power, to chase out of our soul the idea that things should be according to our mind. Get away to your room and confess your willfulness and pride, dear Brother, if you have fallen into that sad state. Ask the Lord to make your soul even as a weaned child—

"Pleased with all the Lord provides Weaned from all the world besides."

I know that I have been speaking to some who do not love the Lord. I wonder what it is that keeps them where they now are—out of Christ? You want something to be changed, you say. Well, ask the Lord to change you, for that is the alteration that is needed. The plan of salvation does not quite suit you. Well, there will never be another. Does not Jesus Christ please you? God will never lay another foundation for a sinner to build his hopes upon, so you had better be pleased with God's way and build upon Christ Jesus, the sure Foundation Stone. We tell people, sometimes, that they had better not fall out with their living and I can tell you, Soul, that you had better not fall out with your salvation! God's way of saving you is the best conceivable way—and it is also the only way.

He says that whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. May the Eternal Spirit bring you to believe in the Lord Jesus now—and if you do so believe you shall be saved at once! But do not think that the plan of salvation will be altered to please you. It will not be made according to your mind. There is the Gospel—take it or leave it, but change it you cannot! May the Lord grant that you may accept it and rejoice in it for His dear Son's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Galatians 6:6-18.

Verses 6, 7. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teaches in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.

Paul puts that in connection with the support of those who are teachers of the Truth. And I have sometimes thought that in certain Churches where God's ministers have starved, it was not very surprising that the people should starve, too. They thought so little about the pastor that they left him in need, so it was not strange that, as they sowed little, they reaped little. One of these misers said that his religion did not cost him more than a shilling a year—and somebody replied that he thought it was a shilling wasted on a bad thing, for his poor religion was not worth even that small amount!

8. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. He shall reap what flesh turns to in due time—"he shall of the flesh reap corruption." What is the end of flesh? The fairest flesh that ever was molded from the most beauteous form ends in corruption! And if we live for the flesh, and sow to it, we shall reap "corruption."

8. But he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. He shall reap what the Spirit really is and what the Spirit really generates—"life everlasting." Of course if a man sows tares, he reaps tares. If he sows wheat, he reaps wheat. If we sow to the flesh, we reap corruption. If we sow to the Spirit, we shall "reap life everlasting."

9. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. It is a pity to faint just when the time is coming to reap, so, sow on, Brothers and Sisters, sow on!

10. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. Extend your love, your charity to all mankind. But let the center of that circle be in the home where God has placed you—in the home of His people—"especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

11. You see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand. I suppose that he meant, "See what big letters I have made. My eyes are weak, and so, when I do write a letter," says Paul, "in the dimness of this dungeon, with my poor weak eyes and my hands chained, I have to write text-hand and give it to you in large letters. Well," he says, "then carry it out in big letters. You see with what large letters I have written to you, now emphasize it all, take it as emphatic and carry it out with great diligence. As I have written this with my own hand and not used a secretary, I beseech you to pay the more attention to it, you Galatians who seem to be so bewitched that to deliver you from false doctrine and an evil spirit, I would even write a letter with my own blood if it were necessary."

12, 13. As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the Cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the Law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. "See," they say, "these Gentiles. We have converted them and we have got them circumcised. Is not that a wonderful thing?" No, not at all, for he says—

14. But God foretold that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. "I have ceased to care," says Paul, "about glorying in men and making other people glory in my converts. The world is dead to me, and I to it."

15-17. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the

Israel of God. From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. I have the marks of the whips upon my body. I am the branded slave of Jesus Christ. There is no getting the marks out of me. I cannot run away. I cannot deny that He is my Master and my Owner! "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

18. Brethren, the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. And that is our benediction to you. The Lord fulfill it to each one of you!

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 35,10 #2558 - Songs in the Night

SONGS IN THE NIGHT

NO. 2558

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1898.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.

"But none says, Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?"

Job 35:10.

ELIHU was a wise man, exceedingly wise, though not as wise as the All-Wise Jehovah, who sees light in the clouds and finds order in confusion. Hence Elihu, being much puzzled at beholding Job so afflicted, cast about him to find the cause of it and he very wisely hit upon one of the most likely reasons, although it did not happen to be the right one in Job's case. He said within himself, "Surely, if men are sorely tried and troubled, it is because while they think about their troubles and distress themselves about their fears, they do not say, 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?'" Elihu's reason is right in the majority of cases. The great cause of a Christian's distress, the reason of the depths of sorrow into which many Believers are plunged is simply this—that while they are looking about, on the right hand and on the left, to see how they may escape their troubles, they forget to look to the hills from where all real help comes—they do not say, "Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?"

We shall, however, leave that enquiry and dwell upon those sweet words, "God my Maker, who gives songs in the night." The world has its night. It seems necessary that it should have one. The sun shines by day and men go forth to their labors. But they grow weary and nightfall comes on, like a sweet gift from Heaven. The darkness draws the curtains and shuts out the light which might prevent our eyes from slumber. The sweet, calm stillness of the night permits us to rest upon the bed of ease and forget, awhile, our cares, until the morning sun appears and an angel puts his hand upon the curtain, opens it once again, touches our eyelids, and bids us rise and proceed to the labors of the day. Night is one of the greatest blessings men enjoy—we have many reasons to thank God for it. Yet night is to many a gloomy season. There is "the pestilence that walks in darkness." There is "the terror by night." There is the dread of robbers and of fell disease with all those fears that the timorous know when they have no light wherewith they can discern different objects. It is then they fancy that spiritual creatures walk the earth, though, if they knew rightly, they would find it to be true that—

"Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep,"

Volume 44 1and that at all times they are round about us, not more by night than by day.

Night is the season of terror and alarm to most men, yet even night has its songs. Have you ever stood by the seaside at night and heard the pebbles sing, and the waves chant God's praises? Or have you ever risen from your bed and thrown up the window of your chamber and listened? Listened to what? Silence—save now and then a murmuring sound which seems sweet music. And have you not fancied that you have heard the harps of gold playing in Heaven? Did you not conceive that yon stars—those eyes of God looking down on you—were also mouths of song and that every star was singing God's glory, singing as it shone its mighty Maker's well-deserved praise? Night has its songs! We need not much poetry in our spirit to catch the song of night and hear the spheres as they chant praises which are loud to the heart, though they are silent to the ear—the praises of the mighty God who bears up the unpillared arch of Heaven and moves the stars in their courses.

Man, too, like the great world in which he lives, must have his night. For it is true that man is like the world around him—he is himself a little world—he resembles the world in almost everything and if the world has its night, so has man. And many a night do we have—nights of sorrow, nights of persecution, nights of doubt, nights of bewilderment, nights of affliction, nights of anxiety, nights of ignorance, nights of all kinds which press upon our spirits and terrify our souls! But blessed be God, the Christian can say, "My God gives me songs in the night."

It is not necessary, I take it, to prove to you that Christians have nights, for if you are Christians, you will find that you have them and you will not need any proof, for nights will come quite often enough. I will, therefore, proceed at once to the subject and notice, with regard to songs in the night, first, their source—God gives them. Secondly, their matter—what do we sing about in the night? Thirdly, their excellence— they are hearty songs and they are sweet ones. And fourthly, their uses— their benefits to ourselves and others.

I. First, songs in the night—WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THEM? "God," says the text. Our "Maker, who gives songs in the night."

Any man can sing in the day. When the cup is full, man draws inspiration from it. When wealth rolls in abundance around him, any man can sing to the praise of a God who gives a plenteous harvest, or sends home a loaded argosy. It is easy enough for an Aeolian harp to whisper music when the winds blow—the difficulty is for music to come when no wind blows. It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight, but he is the skillful singer who can sing when there is not a ray of light by which to read. He sings from his heart and not from a book that he can see, because he has no means of reading, save from that inward book of his own living spirit from where notes of gratitude pour forth in songs of praise. No man can make a song in the night, himself. He may attempt it, but he will find how difficult it is. It is not natural to sing in trouble. "Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name," is a daylight song. But it was a Divine song which Habakkuk sang when, in the night, he said, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom," and so on, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." I think on the banks of the Red Sea, any man could have made a song like that of Moses, "The horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea." The difficulty would have been to compose a song before the Red Sea had been divided, and to sing it before Pharaoh's hosts had been drowned, while yet the darkness of doubt and fear was resting on Israel's hosts! Songs in the night come only from God—they are not in the

power of man!

But what does the text mean when it asserts that God gives songs in the night? We think we find two answers to the question. The first is that usually in the night of a Christian's experience, God is his only song. If it is daylight in my heart, I can sing songs touching my gifts, songs touching my sweet experiences, songs touching my duties, songs touching my labors. But let the night come, my gifts appear to have withered. My evidences, though they are there, are hidden. Now I have nothing left to sing of but my God. It is strange that when God gives His children mercies, they generally set their hearts more on the mercies than on the Giver of them! But when the night comes and He sweeps all the mercies away, then at once they each say, "Now, my God, I have nothing to sing of but You! I must come to You and to You, only. I had cisterns once—they were full of water and I drank from them—but now the created streams are dry. Sweet Lord, I desire no stream but Yourself, I drink from no fountain but from You." Yes, child of God, you know what I say, or, if you do not yet understand it, you will do so, by-and-by! It is in the night we sing of God and of God alone. Every string is tuned and every power has its tribute of song while we praise God and nothing else! We can sacrifice to ourselves in daylight—we only sacrifice to God by night. We can sing high praises to ourselves when all is joyful, but we cannot sing praise to any but our God when circumstances are untoward and Providences appear adverse. God alone can furnish us with songs in the night.

And yet again, not only does God give the song in the night because He is the only subject upon which we can sing, then, but because He is the only One who inspires songs in the night. Bring me a poor, melancholy, distressed child of God. I seek to tell him precious promises and whisper to him sweet words of comfort. He listens not to me—he is like the deaf adder, he heeds not the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely. Send him round to all the comforting divines and all the holy Barnabases who ever preached and they will do very little with him—they will not be able to squeeze a song out of him, do what they may! He is drinking gall and wormwood! He says, "O Lord, I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping." And comfort him as you may, it will be only a faint note or two of mournful resignation that you will get from him—you will evoke no Psalms of praise, no hallelujahs, no joyful sonnets.

But let God come to His child in the night, let Him whisper in his ear as he lies on his bed, and now you can see his eyes glisten in the night season. Do you not hear him say— "'Tis Paradise, if You are here! If You depart, 'tis Hell"?

I could not have cheered him—it is God that has done it—for God "gives songs in the night." It is marvelous, Brothers and Sisters, how one sweet Word of God will make many songs for Christians. One Word of God is like a piece of gold—the Christian is the gold-beater and he can hammer that promise out for whole weeks! I can say, myself, I have lived on one promise for weeks and needed no other. I had just simply to hammer the promise out into gold leaf and plate my whole existence with joy from it! The Christian gets his songs from God. God gives him inspiration and teaches him how to sing! "God my Maker, who gives songs in the night."

So, then, poor Christian, you need not go pumping up your poor heart to make it glad! Go to your Maker and ask Him to give you a song in the night, for you are a poor dry well. You have heard it said that when a pump is dry, you must pour water down it, first of all, and then you will get some up. So, Christian, when you are dry, go to your God! Ask Him to pour some joy down you and then

you will get more joy up from your own heart. Do not go to this comforter or that, for you will find them, after all, "Job's comforters." Go first and foremost to your Maker, for He is the great Composer of songs and Teacher of music—He it is who can teach you how to sing!

II. Thus we have dwelt upon the first point. Now let us turn to the second. WHAT IS GENERALLY THE MATTER CONTAINED IN A SONG IN THE NIGHT? What do we sing about?

Why, I think, when we sing by night, there are three things we sing about. Either we sing about the day that is over, or about the night, itself, or else about the morrow that is to come. Those are all sweet themes when God our Maker gives us songs in the night. In the midst of the night, the most usual method is for Christians to sing about the day that is over. The man says, "It is night now, but I can remember when it was daylight. Neither moon nor stars appear at present, but I remember when I saw the sun. I have no evidences just now, but there was a time when I could say, 'I know that my Redeemer lives.' I have my doubts and fears at this present moment, but it is not long since I could say with full assurance, 'I know that He shed His blood for me.' It may be darkness, now, but I know the promises were sweet. I know I had blessed seasons in His House. I am quite sure of this. I used to enjoy myself in the ways of the Lord and though now my path is strewn with thorns, I know it is the King's Highway. It was a way of pleasantness, once—it will be a way of pleasantness again. 'I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.'"

Christian, perhaps the best song you can sing, to cheer you in the night, is the song of yesterday! Remember, it was not always night with you—in fact, night is a new thing to you. Once you had a glad heart and a buoyant spirit. Once your eyes were full of fire. Once your feet were light. Once you could sing for very joy and ecstasy of heart. Well, then, remember that God who made you sing yesterday has not left you in the night! He is not a daylight God who cannot know His children in darkness, but He loves you now as much as ever! Though He has left you for a little while, it is to prove you, to make you trust Him more and love and serve Him more. Let me tell you some of the sweet things of which a Christian may make a song when it is night with him.

If we are going to sing of the things of yesterday, let us begin with what God did for us in times past. My Beloved Brothers and Sisters, you will find it a sweet subject for song, at times, to begin to sing of electing love and Covenant mercies. When you, yourself, are low, it is well to sing of the Fountainhead of mercy, of that blessed decree wherein you were ordained unto eternal life—and of that glorious Man who undertook your redemption—of that solemn Covenant signed, sealed and ratified in all things ordered well, of that everlasting love which, before the hoary mountains were begotten, or before the aged hills were children, chose you, loved you firmly, loved you fast, loved you well, loved you eternally! I tell you, Believer, if you can go back to the years of eternity—if you can, in your mind, run back to that period before the everlasting hills were fashioned, or the fountains of the great deep were scooped out—and if you can see your God inscribing your name in His eternal Book. If you can read in His loving heart eternal thoughts of love to you, you will find this a charming means of giving you songs in the night! There are no songs like those which come from electing love, no sonnets like those that are dictated by meditations on discriminating mercy!

Think, Christian, of the Eternal Covenant, and you will get a song in the night! But if you have not a voice tuned to so high a key as that, let me suggest some other mercies you may sing of—they are the mercies you have experienced. What? Can you not sing a little of that blessed hour when

Jesus met you, when, as a blind slave, you were sporting with death and He saw you and said, "Come, poor slave, come with Me"? Can you not sing of that rapturous moment when He snapped your fetters, dashed your chains to the earth and said, "'I am the Breaker. I am come to break your chains and set you free"? Though you are now ever so gloomy, can you forget that happy morning when, in the House of God, your voice was loud—almost as a seraph's voice, in praise, for you could sing, "I am forgiven! I am forgiven! A monument of Grace, a sinner saved by blood"? Go back, Brothers and Sisters—sing of that moment and then you will have a song in the night! Or, if you have almost forgotten that, then surely you have some precious milestone along the road of life that is not quite overgrown with moss, on which you can read some happy inscription of God's mercy towards you! What? Did you ever have a sickness like that which you are suffering now, and did He not raise you up from it? Were you ever poor, before, and did He not supply your needs? Were you ever in straits before, and did He not deliver you? Come, Brothers and Sisters! I beseech you—go to the river of your experience and pull up a few bulrushes and weave them into an ark wherein your infant faith may float safely on the stream! I bid you not forget what God has done for you.

What? Have you buried your diary? I beseech you, turn over the book of your remembrance. Can you not see some sweet Hill Mizar? Can you not think of some blessed hour when the Lord met with you at Hermon? Have you never been on the Delectable Mountains? Have you never been fetched from the den of lions? Have you never escaped the jaw of the lion and the claws of the bear? No? O, I know you have! Go back, then, a little way, to the mercies of the past—and though it is dark, now, light up the lamps of yesterday and they shall glitter through the darkness and you shall find that God has given you a song in the night!

"Yes!" says one, "but you know that when we are in the dark, we cannot see the mercies that God has given us. It is all very well for you to talk to us thus, but we cannot get hold of them." I remember an old experimental Christian speaking about the great pillars of our faith. He was a sailor and we were on board ship and there were sundry huge posts on the shore, to which the vessels were usually fastened by throwing a cable over them. After I had told him a great many promises, he said, "I know they are good promises, but I cannot get near enough to shore to throw my cable around them. That is the difficulty." Now it often happens that God's past mercies and loving kindnesses would be good sure posts to hold on to, but we have not faith enough to throw our cable around them, so we go slipping down the stream of unbelief, because we cannot stop ourselves by our former mercies.

I will, however, give you something over which I think you can throw your cable. If God has never been kind to you, one thing you surely know, and that is, He has been kind to others. Come, now, if you are in ever so great straits, surely there have been others in greater straits. What? Are you lower down than poor Jonah was when he went to the bottom of the mountains? Are you worse off than your Master when He had nowhere to lay His head? What? Do you conceive yourself to be the worst of the worst? Look at Job, scraping himself with a potsherd and sitting on a dunghill. Are you as low as he? Yet Job rose up and was richer than before! And out of the depths, Jonah came and preached the Word! And our Savior, Jesus, has mounted to His Throne!

O Christian, only think of what God has done for others! If you cannot remember that He has done anything for you, yet remember, I beseech you, what His usual rule is and do not judge my God

harshly! You remember when Benhadad was overcome and fled, his servants said to him, "Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Let us, I pray you, put on sackcloth on our loins, ropes upon our heads and go out to the king of Israel: perhaps he will save your life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, put ropes on their heads and said, Your servant Benhadad says, I pray you, let me live." What said the king? "Is he yet alive? He is my brother!" And truly, poor Soul, if you had never had a merciful God, yet others have had! The King of Kings is merciful! Go and try Him! If you are ever so low in your troubles, look to the hills from where comes your help. Others have had help from there and so may you!

Up might start hundreds of God's children and show us their hands full of comforts and mercies—and they could say, "The Lord gave us these without money and without price. And why should He not give to you, also, seeing that you, too, are the King's son?" Thus, Christian, you may get a song in the night out of other people if you cannot get a song from yourself. Never be ashamed of taking a leaf out of another man's experience book! If you can find no good leaf in your own, tear one out of someone else's! If you have no cause to be grateful to God in darkness, or cannot find cause in your own experience, go to someone else and, if you can, harp God's praise in the dark and, like the nightingale, sing His praises sweetly when all the world has gone to rest. Sing in the night of the mercies of yesterday!

But I think, Beloved, there is never so dark a night but there is something to sing about, even concerning that night. For there is one thing I am sure we can sing about, let the night be ever so dark, and that is, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." If we cannot sing very loudly, yet we can sing a little low tune, something like this, "He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." "Oh," says one, "I do not know where I shall get my dinner tomorrow! I am a poor wretch." So you may be, my dear Friend, but you are not so poor as you deserve to be! Do not be mightily offended about that. If you are, you are no child of God, for the child of God acknowledges that he has no right to the least of God's mercies, but that they come through the channel of Divine Grace alone. As long as I am out of Hell, I have no right to grumble. And if I were in Hell, I should have no right to complain, for I felt, when convinced of sin, that never creature deserved to go there more than I did. We have no cause to murmur—we can lift up our hands and say, "Night! You are dark, but you might have been darker. I am poor, but if I could not have been poorer, I might have been sick. I am poor and sick, yet I have some friends left. My lot cannot be so bad but it might have been worse."

Therefore, Christian, you will always have one thing to sing about, "Lord, I thank You it is not all darkness!" Besides, however dark the night is, there is always a star or moon. There is scarcely a night that we have, but there are just one or two little lamps burning in the sky and, however dark it may be, I think you may find some little comfort, some little joy, some little mercy left—and some little promise to cheer your spirit. The stars are not put out, are they? No, if you cannot see them, they are there, but I think one or two must be shining on you—therefore give God a song in the night! If you have only one star, bless God for that one, and perhaps He will make it two. And if you have only two stars, bless God twice for the two stars, and perhaps He will make them four. Try, then, if you cannot find a song in the night.

But, Beloved, there is another thing of which we can sing yet more sweetly, and that is we can sing of the day that is to come. Often I cheer myself with the thought of the coming of the Lord. We

preach now, perhaps, with little success. "The kingdoms of this world" have not yet "become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ." We are laboring, but we do not see the fruit of our labor. Well, what then? We shall not always labor in vain, or spend our strength for nothing! A day is coming when every minister of Christ shall speak with unction, when all the servants of God shall preach with power, and when colossal systems of heathenism shall tumble from their pedestals and mighty, gigantic delusions shall be scattered to the winds! The shout shall be heard, "Alleluia! Alleluia! The Lord God Omnipotent reigns." I look for that day—it is to the bright horizon of Christ's Second Coming that I turn my eyes! My anxious expectation is that the blessed Sun of Righteousness will soon arise with healing in His wings, that the oppressed shall be righted, that despotism shall be cut down, that liberty shall be established, that peace shall be made lasting and that the glorious liberty of the children of God shall be extended throughout the known world! Christian, if it is night with you, think of tomorrow! Cheer up your heart with the thought of the coming of your Lord! Be patient, for you know who has said, "Behold, I come quickly and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

One thought more upon this point. There is another sweet tomorrow of which we hope to sing in the night. Soon, Beloved, you and I shall lie on our dying bed and we shall not lack a song in the night even then! And I do not know where we shall get that song if we do not get it from the tomorrow. Kneeling by the bed of an apparently dying saint recently, I said, "Well, Sister, the Lord has been very precious to you. You can rejoice in His Covenant mercies and His past loving kindnesses." She put out her hand and said, "Ah, Sir, do not talk about them now! I need the sinner's Savior as much, now, as ever—it is not a saint's Savior I need, it is still a sinner's Savior that I need, for I am still a sinner." I found that I could not comfort her with the past, so I reminded her of the golden streets, of the gates of pearl, of the walls of jasper, of the harps of gold, of the songs of bliss. And then her eyes glistened as she said, "Yes, I shall be there soon. I shall see them, by-and-by," and then she seemed so glad. Ah, Believer, you may always cheer yourself with that thought! Your head may be crowned with thorny troubles now, but it shall wear a starry crown presently! Your hands may be filled with cares, but they shall soon grasp a harp—a harp full of music. Your garments may be soiled with dust, but they shall be white, by-and-by! Wait a little longer.

Ah, Beloved, how despicable our troubles and trials will seem when we look back upon them! Looking at them here in the present, they seem immense. But when we get to Heaven they will seem to us just nothing at all! We shall talk to one another about them in Heaven and find all the more to converse about, according as we have suffered more here below. Let us go on, therefore, and if the night is ever so dark, remember there is not a night that shall not have a morning! And that morning is to come, by-and-by. When sinners are lost in darkness, we shall lift up our eyes in everlasting light. Surely I need not dwell longer on this thought. There is matter enough for songs in the night in the past, the present and the future.

III. And now I want to tell you, very briefly, WHAT ARE THE EXCELLENCIES OF SONGS IN THE NIGHT ABOVE ALL OTHER SONGS.

In the first place, when you hear a man singing a song in the night—I mean in the night of trouble—you may be quite sure it is a hearty one. Many of you sing very heartily now. I wonder whether you would sing as loudly if there were a stake or two in Smithfield for all of you who dared

to do it? If you sang under pain and penalty, that would show your heart to be in your song. We can all sing very nicely, indeed, when everybody else sings—it is the easiest thing in the world to open our mouth and let the words come out. But when the devil puts his hand over our mouth, can we then sing? Can you say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him"? That is hearty singing! That is real song that springs up in the night!

Again, the song we sing in the night will be lasting. Many songs we hear our fellow creatures singing will not do to sing, by-and-by. They can now sing rollicking drinking songs, but they will not sing them when they come to die. No, but the Christian who can sing in the night will not have to leave off his song—he may keep on singing it forever! He may put his foot in Jordan's stream and continue his melody. He may wade through it and keep on singing until he is landed safe in Heaven! And when he is there, there need not be a pause in his strain, but in a nobler, sweeter song he may still continue singing the Savior's power to save!

Again, the songs we warble in the night are those that show we have real faith in God. Many men have just enough faith to trust God as far as Providence goes as they think right. But true faith can sing when its possessors cannot see! It can take hold of God when they cannot discern Him!

Songs in the night, too, prove that we have true courage. Many sing by day who are silent by night. They are afraid of thieves and robbers. But the Christian who sings in the night proves himself to be a courageous character. It is the bold Christian who can sing God's sonnets in the darkness.

He who can sing songs in the night proves, also, that he has true love to Christ. It is not love to Christ merely to praise Him while everybody else praises Him—to walk arm in arm with Him when He has the crown on His head is no great thing to do. To walk with Christ in rags, is something more. To believe in Christ when He is shrouded in darkness. To stick hard and fast by the Savior when all men speak ill of Him and forsake Him—that proves true faith and love. He who sings a song to Christ in the night, sings the best song in all the world, for he sings from the heart.

IV. I will not dwell further on the excellencies of night songs, but just, in the last place, SHOW YOU THEIR USE.

Well, Beloved, it is very useful to sing in the night of our troubles, first, because it will cheer ourselves. When some of you were boys, living in the country, and had some distance to go alone at night, do you not remember how you whistled and sang to keep your courage up? Well, what we do in the natural world, we ought to do in the spiritual! There is nothing like singing to keep up our spirits. When we have been in trouble, we have often thought ourselves to be well near overwhelmed with difficulty, so we have said, "Let us have a song." We have begun to sing and we have proved the truth of what Martin Luther says, "The devil cannot stand singing, he does not like music." It was so in King Saul's day—an evil spirit rested on him, but when David played his harp, the evil spirit left him. This is usually the case, and if we can begin to sing, we shall remove our fears.

I like to hear servants sometimes humming a tune at their work. I love to hear a plowman in the country singing as he goes along with his horses. Why not? You say he has no time to praise God, but if he can sing a song, surely he can sing a Psalm—it will take no more time! Singing is the best thing to purge ourselves of evil thoughts. Keep your mouth full of songs and you will often keep your heart full of praises—keep on singing as long as you can—you will find it a good method of

driving away your fears.

Sing in trouble, again, because God loves to hear His people sing in the night. At no time does God love His children's singing so well as when He has hidden His face from them and they are all in darkness. "Ah," says God, "that is true faith that can make them sing praises when I do not appear to them! I know there is faith in them that makes them lift up their hearts, even when I seem to withhold from them all My tender mercies and all My compassions." Sing then, Christian, for singing pleases God! In Heaven we read that the angels are employed in singing—be you employed in the same way—for by no better means can you gratify the Almighty One of Israel who stoops from His high Throne to observe us poor, feeble creatures of a day!

Sing, again, for another reason—because it will cheer your companions. If any of them are in the valley and in the darkness with you, it will be a great help to comfort them. John Bunyan tells us as Christian was going through the valley, he found it a dreadful place—horrible demons and hobgoblins were all about him—and poor Christian thought he must perish for certain. But just when his doubts were the strongest, he heard a sweet voice. He listened to it and he heard a man in front of him singing, "Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil." Now, that man did not know who was near him, but he was unwittingly cheering a pilgrim behind him! Christian, when you are in trouble, sing! You do not know who is near you. Sing—perhaps you will get a good companion by it. Sing! Perhaps there will be another heart cheered by your song. There is some broken spirit, it may be, that will be bound up by your sonnets. Sing! There is some poor distressed Brother, perhaps, shut up in the Castle of Despair, who, like King Richard, will hear your song inside the walls and sing to you—and you may be the means of getting him ransomed and released! Sing, Christian, wherever you go! Try, if you can, to wash your face every morning in a bath of praise. When you go down from your chamber, never look on man till you have first looked on your God—and when you have looked on Him, seek to come down with a face beaming with joy! Carry a smile, for you will cheer up many a poor, wayward pilgrim by it. And when you fast, Christian. When you have an aching heart, do not appear to men to fast—appear cheerful and happy! Anoint your head and wash your face—be happy for your Brothers and Sisters' sake—it will tend to cheer them up and help them through the valley.

One more reason, and I know it will be a good one for you. Try and sing in the night, Christian, for that is one of the best arguments in all the world in favor of your religion. Our divines, nowadays, spend a great deal of time in trying to prove the truth of Christianity to those who disbelieve it. I would like to have seen Paul trying that plan! Elymas the sorcerer withstood him—how did Paul treat him? He said, "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, you child of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" That is about all the politeness such men ought to have when they deny God's Truth! We start with this assumption—that the Bible is God's Word—but we are not going to prove God's Word. If you do not believe it, we will bid you, "Good-bye." We will not argue with you. Religion is not a thing merely for your intellect to prove the greatness of your own talent—it is a thing that demands your faith. As a messenger of Heaven, I demand that faith! If you do not choose to give it, on your own head be your doom!

O Christian, instead of disputing, let me tell you how to prove your religion! Live it out! Live it out! Give the external as well as the internal evidence! Give the external evidence of your own life. You are sick. There is your neighbor who laughs at religion. Let him come into your house. When he was sick, he said, "Oh, send for the doctor!" And there he was fretting, fuming and making all manner of noises. When you are sick, send for him, first—tell him that you are resigned to the Lord's will, that you will kiss the chastening rod, that you will take the cup and drink it, because your Father gives it. You need not make a boast of this, or it will lose all its power. But do it because you cannot help doing it. Your neighbor will say, "There is something in such a religion as that."

And when you come to the borders of the grave—your neighbor was there, once, and you heard how he shrieked and how frightened he was— give him your hand and say to him, "Ah, I have a Christ who is with me now. I have a religion that will make me sing in the night." Let him hear how you can sing, "Victory, victory, victory," through Him that loved you. I tell you, we may preach fifty thousand sermons to prove the Gospel, but we shall not prove it half as well as you will through singing in the night! Keep a cheerful face, keep a happy heart, keep a contented spirit, keep your eyes bright and your heart aloft—and you will prove Christianity better than all the Butlers, and all the wise men who ever lived! Give them the "analogy" of a holy life and then you will prove religion to them! Give them the "evidences" of internal piety, developed externally, and you will give the best possible proof of Christianity! Try and sing songs in the night, for they are so rare that if you can sing them, you will honor your God and bless your friends!

I have been all this while addressing the children of God. And now there is a sad turn that this subject must take. Just a word or so, and then I have done. There is a night coming in which there will be no songs of joy—a night when a song shall be sung of which misery shall be the subject, set to the music of wailing and gnashing of teeth. There is a night coming when woe, unutterable woe, shall be the theme of an awful, terrific miserere. There is a night coming for the poor soul—and unless he repents it will be a night wherein he will have to sigh, and cry, and moan, and groan forever! I hope I shall never preach a sermon without speaking to the ungodly, for oh, how I love them! Swearer, your mouth is black with oaths, now, and if you die, you must go on blaspheming throughout eternity—and be punished for it throughout eternity! But listen to me, blasphemer! Do you repent? Do you feel yourself to have sinned against God? Do you feel a desire to be saved? Listen! You may be saved! You may be saved! There is another. She has sinned enormously against God and she blushes even now while I mention her case. Do you repent of your sins? Then there is pardon for you! Remember Him who said, "Go, and sin no more."

Drunkard! But a little while ago you were reeling down the street and now you repent. Drunkard, there is hope for you! "Well," you say, "what shall I do to be saved?" Let me again tell you the old way of salvation. It is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." We can get no further than that, do what we will! This is the sum and substance of the Gospel. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." So says the Savior Himself. Do you ask, "What is it to believe?" Am I to tell you again? I cannot tell you except that it is to look to Christ. Do you see the Savior there? He is hanging on the Cross. There are His dear hands, pierced with nails, fastened to a tree as if they were waiting for your tardy footsteps because you would not come. Do you see His dear head there? It is hanging on His breast as if He would lean over and kiss your poor soul. Do you

see His blood, gushing from His head, His hands, His feet, His side? It is running after you because He well knew that you would never run after Him.

Sinner, to be saved, all you have to do is to look at that Man! Can you not do it now? "No," you say, "I do not believe that will save me." Ah, my poor Friend, try it, I beseech you, try it! And if you do not succeed when you have tried it, I will be bondsman for my Lord—here, take me, bind me and I will suffer your doom for you! This I will venture to say—if you cast yourself on Christ and He deserts you—I will be willing to go halves with you in all your misery and woe, for He will never do it. Never, never, NEVER—

"No sinner was ever empty sent back, Who came seeking mercy for Jesus' sake."

I beseech you, therefore, try Him and you shall not try Him in vain! You shall find Him "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." And you shall, by His Grace, be saved now—and saved forever!

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 35,10-11 #1511 - Questions Which Ought to Be A

QUESTIONS WHICH OUGHT TO BE ASKED

NO. 1511

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

(This was followed by a farewell address from his son, Thomas Spurgeon).

"But none says, Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night;

who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth and makes

us wiser than the fowls of Heaven?"

Job 35:10-11.

ELIHU perceived the great ones of the earth oppressing the needy and he traced their domineering tyranny to their forgetfulness of God—"None says, Where is God my Maker?" Surely, had they thought of God, they could not have acted so unjustly. Worse still, if I understand Elihu aright, he complained that even among the oppressed there was the same departure in heart from the Lord—they cried out by reason of the arm of the mighty, but unhappily they did not cry unto God their Maker, though He waits to be gracious unto all such and executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. Both with great and small, with oppressors and oppressed, there is one common fault in our nature which is described by the Apostle in Romans, "There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God." Until Divine Grace comes in and changes our nature, there is none that says, "Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?" This is a very grave fault, about which we shall speak for a few minutes and may the Holy Spirit bless the word.

I. And first, LET US THINK OVER THESE NEGLECTED QUESTIONS, beginning with, "Where is God my Maker?" There are four questions in the text, each of which reminds us of the folly of forgetting it. First, Where is God? Above all things in the world we ought to think of Him. Pope said, "The proper study of mankind is man," but it is far more true that the proper study of mankind is God. Let man study man in the second place, but God first. It is a sad thing that God is All in All, that we owe everything to Him and are under allegiance to Him and yet we neglect Him.

Some men think of every person but God. They have a place for everything else, but no place in their heart for God. They are most exact in the discharge of other relative duties and yet they forget their God! They would count themselves mean, indeed, if they did not pay every man his own and yet they rob God. They rob Him of His honor, to which they never give a thought. They rob Him of obedience, for His Law has no hold on them. They rob Him of His praise, for they are receiving daily at His hands and yet they yield no gratitude to their great Benefactor. "None says,

Where is God?"

My dear Hearer, do you stand convicted of this? Have you been walking up and down in this great house and never asked to see the King whose palace it is? Have you been rejoicing at this great feast and have you never asked to see your Host? Have you gone abroad through the various fields of Nature and have you never wished to know Him whose breath perfumes the flowers, whose pencil paints the clouds, whose smile makes sunlight and whose frown its storm? Oh, it is a strange, sad fact—God so near us and so necessary to us and yet not sought for!

The next point is, "None says, Where is God my Maker?" Oh, unthinking man! God made you! He fashioned your curious framework and put every bone in its place. He, as with needlework, embroidered each nerve and vein and sinew. He made this curious harp of twice ten thousand strings—wonderful it is that it has kept in tune so long—but only He could have maintained its harmony. He is your Maker! You are a mass of dust and you would crumble back to dust at this moment if He withdrew His preserving power—He but speaks and you dissolve into the earth on which you tread. Do you never think of your Maker? Have you not thought of Him without whom you could not think at all? Oh, strange perversity and insanity that a man should find himself thus curiously made and bearing within his own body that which will make him either a madman or a worshipper—and yet, for all that, he lives as if he had nothing to do with his Creator—"None says, Where is God my Maker?"

There is great force in the next sentence—"Who gives songs in the night." That is to say, God is our Comforter. Beloved Friends, you that know God, I am sure you will bear witness that though you have had very severe trials, you have always been sustained in them when God has been near you. Some of us have been sick—near death—but we have almost loved our suffering chamber and scarcely wished to come out of it, so bright has the room become with the Presence of God! Some of us here have known what it is to bury our dearest friends and others have been short of bread and forced to look up, each morning, for daily manna. But when your heavenly Father has been with you—speak, you children of God—have you not had joy and rejoicing and light in your dwellings?

When the night has been very dark, yet the fiery pillar has set the desert on a glow! No groans have made night hideous, but you have sung like nightingales amid the blackest shades when God has been with you. I can hardly tell you what joy, what confidence, what inward peace the Presence of God gives to a man! It will make him bear and dare, rest and wrestle, yield and yet conquer, die and yet live! It will be very sad, therefore, if we poor sufferers forget our God, our Comforter, our song-giver!

Two little boys were once speaking together about Elijah riding to Heaven in the chariot of fire. One of them said, "I think he had plenty of courage. I should have been afraid to ride in such a carriage as that." "Ah!" Ah!" said the other, "but I would not mind if God drove it." So do Christians say! They mind not if they are called to mount a chariot of fire if God drives it! We speak as honest men what we know and feel and we tell all our fellow men that as long as God is present with us, we really don't care what happens to us—whether we sorrow or whether we rejoice! We have learned to glory in tribulations, also, when God's own Presence cheers our souls. And then there is a fourth point. "None says, Where is God my Maker, who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the fowls of Heaven?" Here we are reminded that God is our

Instructor. God has given us intellect. It is not by accident, but by His gift that we are distinguished from the beasts and the fowls. Now, if animals do not turn to God, we do not wonder, but shall man forget Him? Strange to say, there has been no rebellion against God among the beasts or the birds. The beasts obey their God and bow their necks to man. There are no sinloving cattle or apostate fowls, but there are fallen men!

Think, O Man, it may have been better for you if you had been made a frog or a toad than to have lived a man if you should live and die without making peace with your Maker. You glory that you are not a beast—take heed that the beasts do not condemn you. You think yourself vastly better than the sparrow which lights upon your dwelling—take heed that you do better and rise to nobler things. I think if there were a choice in birds and souls dwelt in them, their singing would be as pure as it is now—they would scorn to sing loose and frivolous songs as men do! They would carol everlastingly sweet Psalms of praise to God.

I think if there were souls in any of the creatures they would devote themselves to God as surely as angels do. Why then, O Man, why is it that you, with your superior endowments, must be the sole rebel, the only creature of earthly mold that forgets the creating and instructing Lord? Four points are then before us. Man does not ask after his God, his Maker, his Comforter, his Instructor—is he not filled with a four-fold madness? How can he excuse himself?

II. Supposing you do not ask these questions. Let me remind you that THERE ARE QUESTIONS WHICH GOD WILL ASK OF YOU. When Adam had broken God's command, he did not say, "Where is God my Maker?" but the Lord did not, therefore, leave him alone! No, the Lord came out and a Voice, silvery with Divine Grace, but yet terrible with Divine Justice, rang through the trees, "Adam, where are you?" There will come such a Voice to you who have neglected God. Your Judge will inquire, "Where are you?" Though you hide in the top of Carmel, or dive with the crooked serpent into the depths of the sea, you will hear that Voice and you will be forced to answer!

Your dust, long scattered to the wind, will come together and your soul will enter into your body and you will be obliged to answer, "Here I am, for You did call me." Then you will hear the second question, "Why did you live and die without Me?" And such questions as these will come thick upon you, "What did I do that you should slight Me? Did I not give you innumerable mercies? Why did you never think of Me? Did I not put salvation before you? Did I not plead with you? Did I not entreat you to turn to Me? Why did you refuse Me? "You will have no answer to those questions and then there will come another question—ah, how I wish it would come to you while there is time to answer it—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

Tonight I put it to you that you may propose a way of escape if your imagination is equal to the task. You will be baffled even in trying to invent an escape, now—but how much more when your time of judgment really comes! If you neglect the salvation of God in Christ you cannot be saved. In the next world how will you answer that question—"How shall we escape?" You will ask the rocks to hide you, but they will refuse you that dread indulgence. You will beseech them to crush you, that you may no longer see the terrible face of the King upon the Throne, but even that shall be denied you. Oh, be wise and before you dare the wrath of the eternal King and dash upon the bosses of His buckler, turn and repent, for why will you die?

III. Now, if any seek an answer to the grave enquiries of the text and do sincerely ask, "Where is God my Maker?" let us GIVE THE ANSWERS. Where is God? He is everywhere! He is all around you now. If you want Him, here He is. He waits to be gracious to you. Where is God your Maker? He is within eyesight of you. You cannot see Him, but He sees you. He reads each thought and every motion of your spirit and records it, too. He is within earshot of you. Speak and He will hear you! Yes, whisper—no, you need not even form the words with your lips, just let the thought be in your soul He is so near you! For in Him you live and move and have your being—He knows what is in your heart before you know it yourself!

Where is your Comforter? He is ready with His "songs in the night." Where is your Instructor? He waits to make you wise unto salvation. "Where, then, may I meet Him?" asks one. You cannot meet Him—you must not attempt it—except through the Mediator. "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." If you come to Jesus you have come to God. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself; not imputing their trespasses unto them and has committed unto us the Word of reconciliation," which Word we preach. Believe in Jesus Christ and your God is with you! Trust your soul with Jesus Christ and you have found your Creator and you shall never again have to say, "Where is God my Maker?" for you shall live in Him and He shall live in you!

You have found your Comforter and you shall joy in Him, while He shall joy in you. You have also, in Christ Jesus, found your Instructor who shall guide you through life and bring you to perfection in yonder bright world above. For Christ's sake may the Holy Spirit use this little sermon as a short sword to slay your indifference!

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Chapter 94

Job 36,2 #1403 - God's Advocates Breaking Silence

GOD'S ADVOCATES BREAKING SILENCE

NO. 1403

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 17, 1878,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Suffer me a little and I will show you that I have

yet to speak on God's behalf."

Job 36:2.

ELIHU was sufficiently severe with Job, but as this arose from his honest conviction that Job had spoken amiss, we cannot blame him. The style of his address is, in some points, highly commendable. We admire the courtesy which moved him to say, "Suffer me a little." It shows some little consideration for his audience. It is to be feared that under our preaching our people suffer greatly and we do not sympathize with their sense of weariness—otherwise we might often apologize in the terms of Elihu, saying, "Suffer me a little." I admire Elihu's attempt at brevity. I call it an attempt, for I am not quite sure that he succeeded, for he filled two more chapters! Yet he said, "Suffer me a little" and thereby promised to make his oration as short as he could.

Some lengthy Divines, with their many divisions, their, "Finallies," and "Lastlies," and concluding observations, spin and spin and cause their congregations to suffer—and that not a little, but exceedingly much. It is well, when we have anything good to say, to use as few words as possible, for if brevity is not the garment of Divine Grace, it is the soul of wit, and all our wits should be set to work to put Gospel teaching into such a form that it will be the better received. Assuredly, short and pointed addresses are more likely to reach the heart than long and dreary sermons. If our preaching is so poor that the people suffer, it is better that they suffer little rather than much! And if our ministry is very rich and satisfying, it is better to send the people home longing than loathing.

We may also admire the prudence of Elihu in dividing his discourse into four or five portions. If you turn to the book of Job you will see that he has been speaking ever since the 32nd chapter and he has made at least three pauses. It may be that these filled up considerable intervals. His talk would have reached an unbearable length had he continued to speak on and on without a parenthesis of silence. But he stopped and gave his hearers space to breathe. Doubtless four sermonettes were better than one long discourse. Teachers and all those who seek to win the hearts of others, should imitate Elihu in this and not say too much at one time, for the spirit of the hearer may be willing, but his flesh is weak. Be wise and do not attempt to say everything at once!

Remember that there is such a thing as undoing by overdoing. Many of those whom we try to teach are like bottles with narrow necks—we must pour gently with a slender stream or we shall spill the Truth of God rather than convey it. Hungry children cannot eat a whole field of wheat! We must prepare the food and give them a loaf and even that will often be better if it is cut into slices and handed out a little at a time. Little and often in spiritual feeding is far better than much at long intervals. "Precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little" is the way in which Wisdom teaches her disciples. Often let the preacher or teacher pause, as Elihu did, and say to himself, if not to his hearers, "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

It is admirable in Elihu, also, that he knew what he was doing when he spoke. He says, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." He has a definite objective before him! His subject has been considered and his drift has been determined. "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Elihu felt the necessity of doing so. He had kept silent for a while, but after what he had heard spoken by the Patriarch's three friends, he came to the conclusion that, "Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment." The speeches of Job also had stirred his soul, for in his judgment, Job drank up scorning like water (Job 34:7). He felt that he must speak.

His swelling heart impelled him—woe was upon him if he kept silent and, therefore, he burst forth with the exclamation, "I am full of matter, the spirit within me compels me. Behold, my belly is as wine which has no vent! It is ready to burst like new bottles." He was forced to speak. Duty called him and impulse compelled him. There is nothing like emptying out your heart when it is full. It is wretched work to hear the noise of an empty barrel. It is good speaking when you say what must be said and give forth utterances which you cannot restrain. He who speaks from conscious necessity will speak with earnestness, readiness and power.

I suppose, too, that Elihu felt that he must continue to speak because he had once begun. "I have yet to speak," says he, "on God's behalf." He had started and could not come to a standstill all of a sudden. The theme which he had chosen, when once adopted, keeps its grip upon the soul—it holds the speaker spell-bound. Forgive us if we sometimes transgress the usual limits of time, for when we reach the height of our great argument we long to linger and are drawn on and drawn out beyond our first intentions, feeling that we have yet to speak on God's behalf. He who once begins to speak concerning his God feels that his heart intends a good matter and his tongue is as the pen of a ready writer. On such a theme, "Naphtali is a hind let loose—he gives goodly words."

Thus you see that Elihu spoke because he felt laid under a necessity to do so and I believe that the same necessity is laid upon many of us. While we muse, the fire burns—and we must speak with our tongue. It is evident that Elihu felt great responsibility in speaking on behalf of God, as who would not? It is no light thing to be called to advocate the cause of the King of kings! Therefore he was very thoughtful as to his speech and he says, "I will fetch my knowledge from afar and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker." It is not every sort of talk that is good enough to be used in pleading for the Lord our God—the best of the best is not so good as such a cause demands! Words should be fitly chosen and statements should be carefully weighed when we are pleading on behalf of God. It may well be a matter of prayer with us that all who speak for Jesus may feel the weight of their engagement and go about it in the deepest solemnity of spirit. Feeling how awesome is their work and calling, let us not fail to pray for them that they may be divinely helped and prospered! Let us speak unto the Lord on their behalf and say to our great Father—

"We plead for those who plead for Thee, Successful pleaders may they be."

Elihu surely felt it to be a high honor to be an advocate for God. What greater dignity can be bestowed upon us? He must have felt it an honor, for he spoke in tones of courage and confidence. He cried, "Behold, I am according to your wish in God's stead." No flattering speeches were on his tongue. How can any man flatter his fellows when he is called to speak in the name of God? He might fear that in so doing his Maker would take him away. Ill would it become an ambassador for Christ to demean his office by stooping to flatter the king's enemies! His business is to reflect honor upon the Prince who has bestowed honor upon him.

We know, also, that Elihu felt it to be a great privilege to speak on the behalf of God, for he declares, "I will speak, that I may be refreshed." O Beloved, when the Lord teaches you much of His love, you feel compelled to tell of it! That is a secret which is hard to keep and, blessed be the name of the Lord, we are both permitted and commanded to divulge it! Has He not said, whom we call Master and Lord, "That which you have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the housetops"? It is a delight to the renewed soul to speak concerning Christ as much as it is to a bird to sing! The faculty is given, the impulse is bestowed and we must exercise and indulge them both!

That I have yet to speak personally on God's behalf is to me a great joy. It is a delight in which few of you can fully sympathize because you may not have spoken so much as I have done, nor have been so long and dolorously silent. Glory be unto the Lord my God, once more my tongue is loosed and the opportunity to speak is given! I say it with unfeigned joy and perhaps with more joy than Elihu ever knew, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." [Brother Spurgeon had been ill and away from the Tabernacle, recuperating, for some time. See sermon #1396 in this volume, Reasons for Turning to the Lord.]

I hope, however, that all of you whose lives are spared, whose spheres of usefulness are enlarged, or who see new doors of utterance open to you, will, with joy, say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf," and that you will not hesitate to avail yourselves of the privilege to the fullest possible extent. What a host will go forth to publish the Gospel if you all feel that you must speak on God's behalf! How will Satan's kingdom be moved if you all do it with power from on high, the power of the Holy Spirit! In our text we have a duty set before us. First, let us think of it. Secondly, let us consider how to perform it. And thirdly, let us do it at once.

I. We have before us a privilege and a duty—"I have yet to speak on God's behalf." LET US THINK OF IT. Speech is the high prerogative of man. It is given to him, alone, of all earthly creatures. He is the one sole articulate voice for this lower world. Birds and beasts, fishes and creeping things, mountains and seas exhibit the praises of God, but they cannot express them. Man is the world's tongue—it were well if that tongue were always sanctified to the Divine service, for otherwise it misrepresents the universe for which it should be the interpreter. Of our text we note that the subject is sublime. "I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

Is it not a high calling and an exalted theme? The cause of God and Truth deserves seraphic eloquence. At first sight it seems as if it were needless to speak on behalf of God. He is so great that human opinion can be of no consequence to Him! He is so good that He doe not need defense. His claims are so clear—does He need that they should be pleaded? Alas, my Brothers

and Sisters, pleaders for God and advocates of His cause have always been needed since that evil day when He was slandered in Paradise and our first parents lifted disobedient hands to pluck the forbidden fruit. Though no voice is so sweet as the Divine, man is hardened against his God and it is the office of the whole Church with a thousand voices to be continually crying in the world's dull ears and speaking on the behalf of God. There is need, and growing need, that we should lift up our voices for our God and His Gospel!

Yet may we tremble as we enter upon the enterprise! Who shall fitly commend perfection? Who shall vindicate spotless purity? Who shall rightly tell of insulted justice, or who shall declare boundless love? The theme will exhaust every faculty when elevated to the highest degree and strengthened to its utmost possibility. To speak on God's behalf—this is a lofty argument, indeed, and yet we will not flinch from it, for it is natural that we should speak for Him to whom we owe everything! If we have a tongue at all, we ought to speak here—if silent upon all other themes, yet never should we be unwilling to speak for our God! The stones themselves might speak if we should hold our speech in such a cause. The theme might make slow speaking Moses wax as eloquent as his brother Aaron!

A God so good, so good to us, so good beyond all imagination deserves that we shake off our cowardice and speak out for Him manfully! Reflect, my Brothers who are called to speak on the behalf of God, that since He has provided an Advocate for you, you are bound to become advocates for Him! What a pleader has He set apart for you! It is Christ of whom we read, "Never man spoke like this Man." Our glorious Mediator stands forever pleading the causes of our souls and it is but natural and right, therefore, that His redeemed should, with all their hearts, plead His cause before the sons of men!

And yet there are few who speak on behalf of God. I mean more than perhaps you think. There are few who vindicate the honor of Jehovah and view matters from His Throne. Their eyes look elsewhere and not to the sacred Majesty of the Supreme Being. Many are the preachers of the Gospel, but still, I note but few who preach the Gospel on behalf of God. There are two aspects of the Gospel—the one which looks towards man and the other which looks towards God—he who preaches the Gospel only from its manward side is apt to forget its major part. He regards man with a pity and sympathy most fitting and proper, but, alas, too often he fails in sympathy with God and in distinct recognition of the claims and rights of the great Sovereign.

How seldom is Divine sovereignty spoken of! Man is looked upon as though he were a deserving creature and had a right to salvation. One would think, to hear some preachers, that God was under obligation to man, or, at least, that He had no will of His own, but had left man's will to be supreme! The Truth of God is that if all the race had been condemned, God would have been infinitely just! And if He spares one and not another, none can say to Him, "What are You doing?" His declaration is, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." I sympathize with man, but I have in my very soul an infinitely deeper sympathy with God. I am bound to love my neighbor as myself, but the still higher Law calls on me to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength!

Speaking on behalf of man may be carried so far that you come, at length, to look upon man's sin as his misfortune rather than his fault and to view the fact that sin is punished at all as a matter to be deplored. In some professed Christians their pity for the criminal has overcome their horror at

the crime! Eternal punishment is denied, not because the Scriptures are not plain enough on that point, but because man has become the god of man and everything must be toned down to suit the tender feelings of an age which excuses sin but denounces its penalties—which has no condemnation for the offense and spends its denunciations upon the Judge and His righteous sentence. By all means, have sympathies manward, but at the same time show some tenderness towards the dishonored Law and the insulted Lord!

Is justice a figment? Is there no necessity for Divine anger? Has mercy, itself, become a debt due to mankind? Do you see nothing horrible in sin? Is there no guilt in rejecting Christ and trampling on His blood? And is there none in closing the eyes even to the feebler light which streams from the visible works of God and reveals His power and Godhead? Few, I say, look at the matter in this light, and yet it should be the main business of every Believer "to speak on God's behalf." It becomes, therefore, all the more necessary that those who have been led to side with God and who feel their hearts drawn to adore and magnify and vindicate their glorious Lord, that they should count it a privilege to be spared to speak on the behalf of God.

I would silence no voice that speaks for man so far as it speaks truthfully, but oh for more voices to speak for God and maintain His crown rights! It seems that we vindicate His Law and the terrors of it, His Gospel and the sovereignty of it, His Nature and the completeness of it, His Providence and the wisdom of it, His redemption and the efficacy of it, His eternal purpose and the accomplishment of it. May this theme, though long silent, be sounded forth till its voice is heard in every street of Zion! Not the exaggeration of Divine Truth, but that Truth, itself, we desire to hear, and God grant we may live to hear it! May many a man of God be compelled to say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Let others plead what cause they will, it is ours with the greatest of poets, "To justify the ways of God to men."

While thinking over the work described in the text we would further remark that the call is personal—"I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Do we not, as Believers in Jesus, recognize ourselves in that little word, I? "I have yet to speak," though to now, a listener, as Elihu was while the elders gave, each one, his opinion. I, though silenced for a while, blessed be His name, have yet to speak on God's behalf! The harp has hung awhile upon the wall and pined in silence—but now the Chief Musician takes it down again and almost before He sweeps the chords, every string begins to thrill with delight at the thought that He will make them resound again! The cobweb and the dust suit not the lyre which for so many years has welcomed the sacred touch!

Have you been laid aside awhile, Brother or Sister? Then rejoice in the day of your restoration and say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." I, again, though not the wisest nor the best, have my testimony to bear even as Elihu did, who had, to then, given place to those whom he thought to be wiser than he. His words were, "I am young and you are very old. Therefore I was afraid and dared not show you my opinion. I said, Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man and the Inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding." And so, though esteeming himself to be least and, therefore, fitly coming last, he rose in his place and faithfully delivered his soul.

O you that are not eloquent, whose tongues will scarcely respond to your thoughts—nevertheless you have to speak in the name of the Lord in ways as forcible as uttered language! Take care that you do so and make no long delays, but look forward eagerly for times when you shall speak on

God's behalf after your own manner. The smallest bell in the steeple is needed to complete the chime and the tiniest bird in the forest would be missed if its notes were hushed! Therefore come forth, O least of all the brotherhood, for without your presence the Father's family is not complete! All voices are needed! No child of God may be silent!

You, too, who are conscious of great weakness and unworthiness, I invite you to say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf," for this man, Elihu, was a trembler like yourselves. In the 37th chapter he says, "At this, also, my heart trembles, and is moved out of his place." Nor did he feel that his abilities were equal to his subject, for in the 19th verse of the same chapter he breathed this prayer, "Teach us what we shall say unto Him; for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness." And yet, though conscious of his inability to handle the theme, and trembling under its power, he nevertheless rejoiced to feel that he must speak something—and he opened his mouth boldly in the name of the Lord!

Brother, work for God, whether you can or not! Power will increase as you use the little you possess. You will learn to speak more graciously as you proceed, if not more fluently and accurately. Therefore plunge into the middle of the matter, saying, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Glory be to God, the devil himself cannot silence the man whose mouth the Lord has opened and whose heart He has quickened by His Truth! He may be laid aside for many a day and it may seem to his fellow men that he is useless and worthless, but the hour will need the man and the man will seize the hour and speak so as to be heard! Only let your heart be ready and your spirit watchful and waiting—the time shall surely come when, though you are now a poor prattling babe, you shall speak like a man on God's behalf!

I think, dear Friends, I may now make a third remark, namely, that in the text the reminder is seasonable and may be addressed most rightly to many of us, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Does not this awaken you, O silent and sluggish soul? Have you been hidden among stuff all these days? Are you on the Lord's side but of a faint heart? Have you never found a tongue? Wake up, my Brother, and say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Is it not written, "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart and the tongue of the dumb sing"? How can you bear a life-long silence when, to me, even a few weeks become irksome? Our children need no encouragement to talk! Should the children of God be tongue-tied?

I have thought, lately, a great deal about Zacharias who was struck dumb, on account of his unbelief, while sacrificing in the temple, but was assured that in a few months he should speak again. How I watched, those weary weeks, until the day should come when my tongue should once more express my thoughts! How glad I was as the day drew near! Have you been shut up, Brother, so that you could not come forth? Then cheer yourself and look for the day when you will say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." This thought may justly occur to us after times of great deliverance. David had been seized by the Philistines and taken before king Abimelech—and had only escaped by feigning madness. No sooner was he safe than he said, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psalms 34:1).

Among the verses of that grateful song you read the following, "Come, you children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." He felt bound to tell the Lord's goodness both to old and young! When we are raised from deep distress we should never fail to say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." The same is true if you have been conscious of a grave fault and have received

forgiveness. Then, too, you have yet to speak on God's behalf and you may be very glad of it, for it will serve as a pledge of your forgiveness! Poor Peter might very naturally have remained quiet throughout the rest of his life after having denied his Master, but it must have cheered him to remember that the Lord had said beforehand, "When you are converted, strengthen your brethren." Moreover, he felt the certainty of his Lord's forgiving love when, by the sea of Galilee, in loving tones He said, "Feed My sheep." Do you wonder that on the day of Pentecost Peter felt a joy not to be expressed as he said to himself, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf. Even I, who once denied Him, am yet allowed to be His advocate and to proclaim His Grace"?

Beloved Friends, if any of you have been disappointed in your Christian work and are therefore cast down, I want you to take my text as a slogan. Have you fallen into the condition of the Prophet Jeremiah, of whom we read, "Then I said I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name"? Have you been despised and defamed, laughed at and rejected? And do you fear that you have done no good and that you are altogether unfit for the service? Do you therefore cry, "I will speak no more in the name of the Lord"? Mark, my Brother, you will not easily abide in silence, for your experience will soon be like that of the Prophet—"But His Word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." You will be obliged to speak! Yes, again and again you will be compelled to say, "I have yet to speak in the name of the Lord."

Perhaps you have been foolish like Jonah and have run away from the Lord's service—and now you have just escaped from the deeps with the sea slime upon you—and the tokens of the whale's belly about you. What then? Why, the first thing you have to do, almost before you brush your clothes, is to hasten to Nineveh and deliver your Lord's message, for you have yet to speak on God's behalf! Though you have once refused, you will be brought to do it and it will be well to yield at once and go boldly with this doctrine in your heart, "Salvation is of the Lord!" And with this message upon your tongue, "Repent and seek the Lord." If you go at once, your voice shall ring through the streets of Nineveh and the man with the salt-sea smell upon him shall be more revered in the streets of Nineveh than if he had come there perfumed from the courts of kings!

Take the text home as coming seasonably to many characters here. I cannot tell the exact condition of each Brother's and Sister's heart, and yet I think if I could read your inmost souls I should see the strongest reasons why this should be the soliloquy of each one, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Furthermore, while thinking this matter over, let us remark that this duty is a very solemn and difficult one. And, consequently, it deserves our best possible preparations. When a young barrister was chosen years ago, almost within the recollection of our older folks, to advocate the cause of a queen whose character had been questioned, I can imagine him sitting up late and rising early that he might study his brief and get the whole matter well into his mind and choose out good words with which to urge her suit.

I can conceive the trepidation with which he stood up in the Hall at Westminster to plead for one whom many in the nation regarded as an injured queen. But all that feeling of responsibility should be far outdone by everyone who has to speak for God! To rush from your bed to the pulpit to speak what first comes to hand seems to me to be next door to profanity! Even to talk to little children about Jesus without the slightest anxiety beforehand cannot be excused. We should not offer unto God that which costs us nothing! And if we stand up to plead for Him, surely it should not

be said that the first time we saw our brief was when we appeared in court!

No, fetch your words from far. Let them be gained by diving into the deeps of your own soul and into the depths of the Divine Word. Say to yourself, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf and I would do it with my utmost ability. O you powers of mind, be ready! But, above all, O power Divine, rest on me, for he that speaks for God should speak by God, or else he speaks in vain." If we have to speak for God we should certainly do it with all zeal and earnestness. A cold advocacy of the cause of God is next door to an attack upon it! To speak for God with careless air, with bated breath, or with affected tone is gravely unbecoming in a case where faith and fire should be the main attributes of the speaker. Let us throw ourselves into every word we utter for God even though we speak only to one poor ragged child.

At the same time, let us cultivate a constant promptness in this work. We should be ready to give an answer to him that asks us. We should be eager to seize opportunities! We should be on the watch for openings for advancing the great suit. Be always in trim for this great business! When you leave home, say to yourself, "I may have to speak for God in the omnibus, or in the workshop, in the parlor, or in the kitchen. I may have to speak on the behalf of God when least I expect it—let me have my heart in order for it." May the Holy Spirit enable you to do so. The mercy of the Lord to us never fails—so let our zeal to honor Him never cease!

Thus we have thought upon the subject and I trust are prepared to enquire into the way in which we can show our practical interest in it. I can only give brief hints and there is no need of more, for the work itself will open before you when you once get at it.

II. "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Let us now consider HOW IT IS TO BE DONE. A great number of Christians will do it best by manifesting holiness in their daily lives, by their common conversation being seasoned with salt and by taking such opportunities as the Providence of God puts in their way of speaking to their Redeemer's praise. "I have yet to speak on God's behalf" as the master of a family to my children and to my servants, as a mistress to my domestics, as a servant by my life, as a merchant in my trade. I have so to speak on God's behalf that those about me may see what religion is by watching my life.

Whatever my lot, condition, or occupation, I have a witness to bear, for those who never read the Bible may read me and those who never think of Christ may at least think of one of His disciples and see, in some degree, what the Master is by what the servant is. Let this objective tone and tune your lives, my Brothers and Sisters, and let the members of this Church, especially, bear in mind that they are bound, from morning to night, in all that they are and all that they do to be speaking on the behalf of God!

But, further, we are bound to do this by giving instruction. All of you who have been taught should also teach and I am sure there is a great need of instruction in this age—instruction, I mean, upon the things of God. We have probably more present need of instruction than of exhortation. We have many who exhort, but few who edify. Do, dear Friends, whether you teach in the Sunday school, or stand up at the corner of the street, or talk with friends and comrades, try to make known the name and Nature and attributes of God! Tell of His claims, the perfect righteousness demanded by His Law and the penalties due to disobedience. Speak on God's behalf of His Gospel's freeness, fullness and sureness. Speak on God's behalf concerning the doctrine of His

Providence and the great Truths of His Grace and Sovereignty. Do not let those around you die for lack of knowledge! Make the name of the Lord to be known as much as lies in you. All themes, if rightly regarded, point to God and are best seen when He is our Standard. There is a great need that we should be continually putting Gospel Truths in the sunlight of God, giving clear instruction to the sons of men in reference to the Character, the work, the purposes, the will, the supremacy of God in Christ Jesus—for the Lord, He is God, even He is God, alone, and the whole earth shall yet know this. For this end we have yet to speak on God's behalf.

Thirdly, there is another way of doing this, namely, by bearing personal testimony to what you have known and felt and experienced of the good things of God. This is a very powerful way of speaking on God's behalf. Tell of your own sense of sin worked in you by the Holy Spirit. Tell of your own delight in the pardoning blood. Tell of the power of prayer as proved by yourself. Tell of the reality of faith and the fidelity of God to His promises and illustrate these by your own history. Perhaps you are not doing this from alarm lest you should be thought egotistical. If Paul had never spoken of himself in his Epistles, we should have been great losers and I do not suppose that Paul would have been any the humbler for his silence.

It is a mock humility, it is a detestable humility, which robs God of His Glory because we are afraid somebody will criticize us if we spoke to His praise! Such a motive is sheer selfishness—it is base pride when a man, to make himself the better thought of, dares not say, "My God did this and that for me, this and that by me and unto Him be praise." Bear your testimony in your homes and tell your friends what great things God has done for you. Say among the heathen, "The Lord has done great things for us whereof we are glad." Be witnesses for the Lord in all companies!

Sometimes, too, we may have to bear our testimony by way of controversy. We are to contend earnestly for the faith. Have you not heard it said, "Why cannot a man preach his own views and let other people alone?" Yes, why didn't Luther do so? Why didn't he take the advice of Staupnitz when he said, "Go to your cell and pray and leave these matters to God and hold your tongue"? Where had been the Reformation if he had followed that sage advice? Could not Calvin have done so and studied the decrees of God by himself and have made no war on Rome? Where would have been the Church of the present day?

It is an easy way to save your skin, to believe what you believe and let other people alone. Martyrs at the stake and confessors in prison were fools on the hypothesis that controversy is wrong! No, it is a part of our religion to let no error alone, to draw the sword and fight the good fight, warring against the many false spirits which have come into the world! If you ever hear severe criticisms upon bold and strong speeches which assail error, do not join in those criticisms. If you do, I do not know that those who are the victims of your remarks will care much about it, but you will be fighting on the wrong side—and that is an important point for you to think of. If you are wise, you will let the Christian soldier war his warfare and, at the very least, not oppose. Surely, if error is to have liberty, the Truth of God ought not to be bound! Our "modern thought" men are the least liberal of all professors. Their bigotry outbigots all that has gone before! They have a warm side for every error, but the old-fashioned orthodox Gospel is sneered at, run down and caricatured. Well, here is the end of the matter—by God's Grace we have believed and what we have believed we hold fast—and this day, again, we lift up a banner because of the Truth of God and rejoice that we have yet to speak on God's behalf!

There is another way of speaking on God's behalf and that is by pleading with sinners, setting forth God's claims, urging them to accept God's gracious way of mercy, reminding them of God's right to our obedience and of the demand of His justice that sin should be punished. It is setting before them the Sovereignty of God so that they shall admit that they have no claims upon His goodness and urging them to yield to Him and accept the Grace which He so spontaneously gives.

You can all do something of this—I pray you do a great deal more. During the late special services many of you have been diligent in speaking to strangers in the pews—keep up the custom, Brothers and Sisters! You used to do it years ago—renew the habit. Your hearts are warm and your tongues have come into practice! Go on, I pray you, as you have begun. Say, each one, "I have permitted many to go in and out of the pew without a word for Christ, but it shall not be so again, for I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

III. My third head is, LET US DO IT, but I have no time to attempt it except in the briefest fashion. I have to speak on behalf of God to those among you who are utterly careless about Divine claims. How long will you provoke the Majesty of Heaven? Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth! The Lord has nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against Him! "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib, but you do not know Him and do not consider." Are you honest towards everybody but God? Will you consider everyone but your Maker? Do you cast an eye of love on all except the great Being who is Love itself?

Some of you have lived half a century and yet have neglected all the claims of your God. I beseech you remember that the time will come when He will reckon with you and call you to account. The talents committed to you have all been buried as yet—what will you say in that day when He shall call you to His bar? Oh, for God's sake, even if you leave out all considerations of your own eternal condition, by the common honesty which suggests that each one should have his own, I pray you turn your eyes to God and think upon His Christ!

I speak, again, on God's behalf to many who are undecided and this is my message—How long will you linger between two opinions? If God is God, serve Him! If Baal is God, serve him! It is time that you should put an end to these hesitations—that the equivocal life which you are now leading should close in one way or the other! You said years ago that you were almost persuaded! You are no better today—you are worse and will grow worse, still—and in the end you will perish in your sins unless you come to a dead halt, consider your ways, acquaint yourself with God and be at peace. Oh, I pray you hear the voice which cries to you to cease your wandering and return to your God!

I would speak to you new converts on the behalf of God just these few sentences. See to it that your conversion is true. Have no superficial religion. Pray God to plow you deep that there may be a sure harvest. Remember, if you get healed before you are wounded, it will serve no useful purpose. Many a surgeon has filmed a wound and found that he has done more hurt than good. You must be killed before you can be made alive! You must be stripped before you can be clothed. See to it that you repent as well as believe the Gospel, for a dry-eyed faith is not the faith of God's elect and will not save you. Repent and be converted! Let sin be abhorred, lamented and forsaken! Then, with the precious blood of Christ to make you clean, go on your way rejoicing!

O you new converts who are to be brought into the Church, I speak on God's behalf to you! I hope you will be better than your fathers, better far than some of us who have been a stiff-necked generation! I hope you will come in among us as plastic material which the Lord Jesus will mold according to His will. I trust you will come into the Church like firebrands, like coals of juniper which have a most vehement flame—that all of us may anew be set on fire! There are some of us—I will not say who—but each one may judge for himself, who are quite cold. O that their arctic hearts may become a torrid region! May the Lord warm the mass right through that we may praise and bless His name.

And now, to you Christians, I have yet to speak on the behalf of God. Is it necessary I should? Do you love the Lord? Do you really love Him? "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?" Mary, Hannah, do you, indeed, love your Lord? Then what manner of persons ought we to be? What lives should love prompt us to lead? Come, let us gird our garments about us and give ourselves up, once again, to His service, by whom we are brought near unto God. May the Holy Spirit come upon us in a sevenfold measure from this day forward, to the praise of the Glory of His name who gives us the great privilege of saying, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

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Job 36,2 #3543 - Speaking on God's Behalf

SPEAKING ON GOD'S BEHALF

NO. 3543

A SERMON

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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"I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

Job 36:2.

So said Elihu. And verily many of us might make the same resolve. We have tasted that the Lord is gracious. When first we came to Him laden with guilt and full of woes, we found Him ready to pardon—a God with whom there is plenteous redemption—

"Many days have passed since then, Many changes have we seen."

Still, we have the same tale to tell. God has been faithful to us under all circumstances! He has passed by our backslidings. He has been patient with all of our shortcomings and He has borne with our waywardness. To this day His kindness has not abated, His promise has not been forfeited and His Covenant is unbroken—it has never failed us. In bounden duty, yet with cheerful gratitude, we are compelled to say that the Lord is good and His mercy endures forever! On God's behalf, then, we will speak. Much reason have we to do so. While the world is scoffing or despising, while some are doubting and others are blaspheming. While idolatry and infidelity have their respective champions, we will offer our personal testimony in the teeth of all the Lord's adversaries. Blessed be His name, He is a faithful and true God, and if all the dwellers on earth should belie and forsake Him, His love binds us fast! We cannot, neither will we let our trust in Him be displaced or our witness to Him be silenced! It seems to me that the chief business of a Christian while here below is to speak on God's behalf. Why is he placed here? Lower ends or meaner objectives do not appear to me to resolve that question. Merely to work, to toil, to fulfill his days as a hireling, in common with the rest of his fellow creatures, were a poor account to give of a pilgrim bound to the heavenly city! Is he not allowed to tarry here that he may glorify his God by speaking on His behalf? Are we not, each one of us, appointed to linger in these lowlands that we may personally bear witness to what we have heard and seen, tasted and handled, tested and proved to be true of the good Word of Life? This sacred obligation may be very heart-searching to some of you. I am afraid there are dumb tongues that do not speak on God's behalf—and which of us can escape a sharp rebuke on this score? Those of us who do speak, speak not as we should—we are not always giving such evidence and bearing such witness as well becomes us on God's behalf.

I purpose this evening to mention some of the occasions on which we have yet to speak on God's behalf. Some prevalent excuses for silence. Some imperative reasons for bearing testimony. And some pointed suggestions to those who feel compelled to open their mouth boldly for the honor of God. To my mind, it seems obvious that—

I. THERE ARE CERTAIN OCCASIONS WHEN EVERY SAVED ONE SHOULD SPEAK ON GOD'S BEHALF.

Is it not peculiarly incumbent upon us immediately after we have found peace by putting our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? He that believes with his heart is bound, according to the Gospel rule, to confess also with his mouth. Have you heard the good tidings, the way of salvation, yourself—believed it and received the fullness of its blessing? Then you are forbidden to hide your light under a bushel! You are admonished to let it be seen by all that are in the house. You are not, as a coward, to conceal your allegiance to your Lord, but you are, as a warrior, to put on the King's livery, enter the ranks and join with the rest of His people. Is not this the message we are told to circulate, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved"? Should you not, therefore, avow your faith and confess your Lord in Baptism? Then, having believed His Word and obeyed His precept, take up His Cross as one who is dead and buried with Him in the outward type and symbol—to follow wherever He leads! This seems to me, as I read the Word of God, to have been the course with all the early Christians. They believed and were baptized. They did not postpone or procrastinate, but no sooner were they Christians than they confessed their Christianity in Baptism. And why is it not so now? Would God that His people would come back to the simple methods of the early Churches and feel that, being saved, their next business is to give the answer of a good conscience toward God, speaking thus on His behalf, and avowing themselves to be the Lord's people!

This is but a fitting preface to a life of testimony. The whole of a Christian's career should be vocal with spiritual power. By the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit within him, he should ring out, as it were, in silver notes, through all his conversation, both in the Church and in the world, a goodly, gracious, grateful testimony—"I have yet to speak on God's behalf. Even if I have spoken for the last 20 years, it becomes me yet to speak on God's behalf." I may be gray-headed, I may lean upon my staff, I may come near the bounds of man's short span on this poor stage, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Even when pillows hold up my aching head and when my flesh and my heart are failing—until the pulse of life shall flag and the power of speech shall fail—our witness to the sons of men must never falter, much less must it come to an ignoble end. "I have yet to speak." When first I knew Him I was compelled to speak. Would that every converted man was moved instantly to avow his Lord! But if we have anything to regret in the past, let us not be hesitant now. Say it, resolve it, yes, vow it! I have and I shall have yet to speak on God's behalf till speech shall fail me, till, dying, "I clasp my Savior in my arms, the antidote of death."

And oh, how specially bound the Christian is to speak on God's behalf when he is cast among ungodly men and women! There may be in the house where you live no lover of Jesus except yourself. Take care that your conversation makes the rest know that you have been with Jesus and have learned of Him! There is no other candle in the house—oh, put not the extinguisher on that one! You are the only salt—take care that you are sprinkled over the mass. Let the savor of your walk and conversation be diffused among your associates! At times the name of Christ will be

blasphemed, perhaps, in your presence. Or it may be unholy and even lewd conversation will assail your ears. It is for you to express your displeasure at anything which is displeasing to Him you serve! You must put in a word, though you do but feebly thrust it in edgeways, for the Christ whom ungodly tongues are slandering! You may not sit still and hear your best Friend evilly spoken of—that were ungrateful in the extreme! Well might He say, "Is this your kindness to your Friend?" Should you smile, they will think you are amused, but if you laugh with them over an unholy jest, they would say you enjoyed it! "You also were as one of them" was a charge made against a professor. Oh, let it never be laid against any of us! If we see our neighbor sin and rebuke him not when the opportunity offers, we become partakers in his sin. Remember this— on such occasions it is our bounden duty to speak on God's behalf!

Yet again, we meet with Brothers and Sisters in affliction. They are mourning and bemoaning themselves and their hardships. God's own people commonly find that in all their trials they are beset with temptations. How apt they are to speak unadvisedly because they think untowardly of the order of God's Providence and the manner of His love! I wish this ill condition of the heart and this bad habit of the lips were less prevalent than unhappily it is. They talk as if they served a hard Master and they murmur as if His Providence were peculiarly severe towards them. I beseech you, seize the propitious moment to speak on God's behalf! Daughter of poverty! You who have known the pinch of want, tell of the faithfulness of God that supported you! Child of pain! You who have tossed so long upon a bed of affliction, changing your posture over and over till your bones began to peep through your skin, tell, you patient sufferers—and there are many of you whose pangs are smart, whose wounds are incurable—tell how God has succored you! Be not silent, you who have gone through fire and water, the furnace and the flood! Testify, you fathers in the Church, and you mothers in Israel speak on God's behalf of the goodness, the guidance and the Grace you have had. Do not let the young recruits entertain hard thoughts of your Lord and Master! Tell them that the battle of life, stern though it is, does not baffle His counsel or His care. He who has upheld you will bear them through ten thousand billows, keep them alive in the midst of afflictions fiery as a furnace seven times heated—and even to the end will prove that He is their gracious God! You have yet to speak on God's behalf.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, some of you may not only have so to speak in the chambers where the afflicted are confined, and in the Sunday School where the little children come round your knee, and in your own families and workshops, but you may have a call to speak in the open streets, or in the pulpits of our sanctuaries. I pray you, then, if you have ability for such work in this day of blasphemy and rebuke, stand not back! I am persuaded that some of my Brothers look for greater talents, before they can speak for Christ, than they have a right to expect at the first. If none are permitted to speak on God's behalf but those who have ten talents, surely the Kingdom of God must be deeply indebted to the education and scholarship of learned men! But if I read this Word aright, it is not so. Rather has it pleased God to take weak and foolish things to confound the mighty and the wise. Therefore, let not the Brother of low degree keep back his testimony. If you can only say a few good words, say them! Who would withhold a few drops of moisture from the flowers in the garden because he had no plenteous streams at his command? Should every twinkling star cease its shining because it was not a sun, the night—how dark! The firmament—how bereft of its beauty! Did each drop of rain refuse to fall because it was but a drop, we would lack the goodly showers which cheer the thirsty soil! Do what you can if you cannot do

what you would, for you, even you, have yet to speak on God's behalf! And, perhaps, you have more talent than you think—a little exercise might bring out your latent powers. Men grow not up to man's estate in a week or a year. Rome was not built in a day. How can you expect to be qualified to serve your God with much success unless you are trained with drill and discipline? If you begin to walk, or even to crawl on all fours, you may afterwards learn to run. Be content to use such powers as you have to the utmost of your ability, for He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Do not reserve your strength, but consecrate all you have, "for He gives more Grace. " Diligently cultivate every faculty, knowing that He gives Grace upon Grace. "I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

I know not whether I am just now like the seraph who flew with a live coal, bearing it in the tongs from off the altar, to touch some lips, to put it to anyone's mouth, and say, "Lo, this has touched your lips." It may be so. Some child of God, up to now dumb, may be called henceforth to speak for his Master. If you now hear a voice saying, "Who will go for Us? Whom shall We send?" Let your answer be, "Here am I, send me." Respond, in the words of our text, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Turn we now to—

II. THOSE ARGUMENTS WHICH READILY SUGGEST THEMSELVES TO SOME MINDS FOR KEEPING SILENCE.

Have I yet to speak on God's behalf? "No," says one, "pardon me, but speaking out for God cannot be accounted essential to salvation. Are there not some who come, like Nicodemus, by night? May there not be many Believers in Jesus who have not the courage to speak out of the fullness of their heart? Why should not I be one of these secret Believers, and yet enter into Heaven?" You think to go to the Celestial City by a by-road, unseen and unnoticed, hoping to be safe at the last. Suppose it true that to avow your faith is not absolutely essential to salvation—I ask you if it is not absolutely essential to obedience? And I ask again if obedience is not essential to every Believer as a vindication of his faith? Though you may tell me that there are many secret Believers, I venture to affirm that you never knew one, or if you think you did, the secret must have been ill kept if you knew it! Obviously, if it was a genuine secret, it must have been beyond your understanding, or mine either, so we cannot fairly argue about it. And as we do not know that such a thing ever was, we have no fact to build upon. Surely to someone or other that gracious secret must have been made known, or what you tried to conceal someone would have found out. I should think if your Christian character and conduct were not palpable, your Christianity could scarcely be sterling! Who can conceal fire in his bosom? Will it not sooner or later break out? The more wicked the persons by whom you are surrounded, the more readily will they discover the difference between a Christian and themselves. You can scarcely conceal the Light of God—it must reveal itself. Why, therefore, should you attempt to hide it? Merely to do what is absolutely necessary for salvation is a mean, selfish thing! To be always thinking about whether this or that is necessary to your being saved—is this how you would show your allegiance to the Savior? Should the selfdenial of our blessed Lord and Master be requited with the selfishness of followers who are always muttering, "Cui bono? What profit can I make of His service?" Oh, that we may be delivered from such an ungenerous disposition! Knowing that Christ has done so much for us and feeling the compelling power of love, may we rejoice to serve Him, whether the service shall be grateful to our taste, or mortifying to our pride! And in so doing, we shall soon find that in keeping His Commandments there is great reward!

"But do you happen to be of a very retiring disposition?" A beautiful disposition that is, I have no doubt, and rare enough in some select circles to claim admiration, but undesirable, indeed, on some particular fields at some critical junctures. For a soldier, when the battle is raging, to be of a retiring disposition would be neither patriotic nor praiseworthy. Had this dainty temper been the Mal. virtue of the hosts from where British heroes leapt forth, the trumpet of fame had long since ceased to resound the deeds of prowess of which every Englishman is proud! A soldier of Christ may well be modest in estimating himself, but he had need be mighty in serving his Lord. If he is too modest to avow his Master, this shameless modesty betrays a cowardly spirit, at which his comrades well might shudder—

"Ashamed of Jesus? That dear Friend On whom my hopes of Heaven depend? No! When I blush, be this my shame, That I no more revere His name."

Ashamed of Jesus? Really, the words seem so harsh that they imply an insult! Yet this beautiful, retiring disposition, when translated out of the fine words in which you wrap it up, means nothing more nor less than a disloyalty which verges hard on treason! Ashamed of Jesus, who shed His blood for you? Ah, you must all confess that there is no violation of genuine modesty in avowing one's intense attachment and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ! This may be true retirement, after all, for you may renounce, thereby, the world's praises, repudiate her honors, bring upon yourself her loudest censure and be requited with the cold shoulder by your companions when you take up your cross and follow Him.

But have I not often heard persons says, "Why should I speak on God's behalf, when already some who do speak are hypocrites?" This seems to me a reason why you should speak twice as much in order to counteract their false testimony—and why you should speak with all the more carefulness and integrity, making their example a beacon, lest you fall into the same condemnation! If a friend of mine has an enemy who is a snake in the grass, pretending kindness while he is plotting mischief, am I, therefore, to say, "I will forsake my friend, and not acknowledge him, because another is a traitor to him"? Such reasoning would refute itself! Let us not, therefore, delude ourselves with its subtlety. The more hypocrites there are, the more need of honest men to grasp the banner of the Cross! The more deceivers, the more cause why the faithful and the true should come and fill up the ranks—and prevent the battle being turned over to the enemy!

Or do you hesitate to speak for God because you are afraid your testimony would be so very feeble? But why disquiet yourselves on this ground? Are not all great things the aggregate of little things? And may there not be something great involved in the motion of the little? A good word from your tongue may kindle a thought or a series of thoughts which may issue in the conversion of one whose eloquence shall shake the nation! You emit but a spark, but what a conflagration it may cause, Heaven only knows! What though you seem tiny and insignificant as the coral insect, yet if you do your fair share of the work with your fellows, you may help to pile up an island that shall be abundant in fertility and adorned with beauty. You are not called upon to do anything that exceeds your power or your skill. It is enough that you do what you can. God requires not according to what a man has not, but according to what a man has. Therefore, let it be no excuse for your silence that you cannot speak with a voice of thunder.

"But," says one, "were I to open my mouth on God's behalf, I should feel ever afterwards a weight of responsibility from which I could not escape. A man of God standing by that pool not many

weeks ago said to me, "I dare not be baptized, though I believe it is a Scriptural ordinance, because I feel that it involves such a solemn profession. I would never be able to live up to it." My reply to him was. "Is not that the very reason why you should yield up yourself to God at once—for the more we feel bound to holiness, the better?" "Your vows are upon me." Should the profession of our faith in Christ become a restriction to us, it need not be regretted on that account. We need such restrictions! If we shall feel bound to be more precise, we serve a precise God—and if we feel bound to be more jealous, we serve a jealous God. I like to see men put upon their mettle. Members of this Church, whenever the world picks holes in your coat and watches you, I am thankful to the world for doing so! It is good for our welfare to have an eagle eye upon us. What though Argus uses all his eyes, let us only be what we should be, and we need not mind who criticized or carps at us! If we are not what we ought to be, but mere hypocrites, then, in truth, we may well wish to be hidden! Confess the name of Jesus, become a true follower in His blessed footsteps and walk with all humility and carefulness as His Grace shall enables you, worthy of your high calling! Be bold to confess His name all the more! Certainly none the less because such confession will lay you under solemn obligations to live nearer to Him than before!

Still, I can imagine that there are many here who are using some excuse or other, which they would not like to mention. They say they will wait a little—they will tarry awhile. Others say nothing, but are simply neglecting the duty. Well, I will not stay to argue with them, but I will rather pray that God the Holy Spirit may convince them, if they have been quickened from their spiritual death and are this day heirs of God, to face their incumbent duty and their blessed privilege in all ways—and on all prudent opportunities to speak on God's behalf. But there are—

III. VALID REASONS WHY WE SHOULD SPEAK ON GOD'S BEHALF, to which I will now draw your attention.

Surely it is demanded of all Believers. We are bidden to confess with the mouth if we have believed with the heart. We have, moreover, the promise that, "he that with his heart believes, and with his mouth confesses, shall be saved." And this likewise, "He that confesses Me before men, him will I confess before My Father who is in Heaven." The alternative is fraught with judgment—"He that denies Me"—which signifies a non-confession—"he that denies Me before men, him will I deny before My Father which is in Heaven." If it is, then, the Lord's will, it is at your peril that you forget or neglect it! "He that knows his Master's will, and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." Hasten, then, you backward Christian! Make haste and delay not to keep this Commandment! Be convinced that you have yet to speak on God's behalf.

Be assured that such testimony as you can and ought to bear would be a great comfort to the Lord's people. You do not know, some of you saved ones who have never confessed your faith, what pleasure it would give the minister. I know of no joy comparable to that of hearing that one has been made the instrument of the conversion of a soul. It keeps our spirits up and our Master knows that we have good need, sometimes, of some success to encourage us. He who thinks that the Christian ministry is an easy post—exempt from care and free and from trials—had better try it. It were better to be a galley-slave, chained to the oar, than to be a minister of the Gospel, if it were not for the strong consolations which support us in the present—and for the Divine reward which there will be at the last. He who diligently discharges this solemn vocation never knows rest or release from anxiety. His mind is always actively exercised in his Master's service. His heart bears

about a load which it cannot shake off. He dreams of some who walk disorderly—and wakes to sigh and cry over others who grow cold or lukewarm. He must plow the stony ground and he can but regret the loss of his seed. He scatters the good seed on the way, and if it come not up, by-and-by, according to the promise, he cries, "Who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" As cold water to a thirsty soul, so would the news be of your conversion! You saved ones ought, for that reason, to speak on God's behalf!

And how encouraging it is to the entire Church! In the Church assembly I am sure we often have simple music that is more thrilling than any of the anthems in your cathedrals. There is joyful melody in our hearts before the Lord when we hear of a broken-hearted penitent finding peace, of an outcast reclaimed from the wilds, an outrageous sinner led into paths of obedience and holiness! Even the angels account this to be rare music to be mightily relished. I believe they strike their golden harps to nobler melody when they learn that prodigals have sought their Father's face! You have yet to speak on God's behalf for His Church's sake, that she may be encouraged!

Greatly, too, does it behoove you to speak on God's behalf, for the sake of the undecided. Some of them would probably be fully persuaded if they saw your example. How many people there are in the world who are led by the influence that others exert over them! Thousands have been brought to Jesus just as those early disciples, of whom we read, that Andrew followed Jesus, and presently brought his own brother, Simon, to Jesus. Or Philip, who, after being found of Jesus, finds Nathanael and tells him and draws him to the Savior. We can all exert an influence of some kind—let us tell what God has worked in us and many a one who halts between two opinions may, by Divine Grace, be induced to cast in his lot with the people of God!

Look on the great outlying world. What a mass of creatures whose lives must prove a blessing or a curse! Will you not speak on God's behalf for their sakes? Do you not feel compelled to bear your testimony against their neglect, their waywardness and their willful disobedience of the great Father? With habitual negligence and constant forgetfulness, they slight Him who never forgets them, Him who, with unslumbering eyes, watches for their good! Lay this to heart, my Brothers and Sisters, and come out, I pray you! Be you separate, touch not the unclean thing! You have your Father's promise that He will be a Father to you and you shall be His children. You are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world—why, then, should you seek to remain mingled with the world in name? Be distinct and separate! Take up your cross daily and follow your Master.

For your own sake, too, I would venture to press this upon any of you who are backward in avowing your faith. You cannot conceive what blessing it would bring you were you distinctly and persistently to speak for Jesus! That timidity which now embarrasses you would speedily cease to check your zeal. After you had once openly professed Christ, gifts that now slumber unconsciously to yourself would be developed by exercise. Rich comfort the service of God would then bring you! Were you ever to win a soul for Jesus, you would be happier than the merchantman when he found the goodly pearl! You would think that all the happiness you ever knew before was less than nothing compared with the joy of saving a soul from death and rescuing a sinner from going down into the pit of Hell! Oh, the bliss of speaking a word that affects three worlds, making a change in Heaven, earth and Hell, as devils grind their teeth in wrath because one of their victims is snatched out of their jaws—as men on earth wonder and admire the change that Grace has worked—and as angels rejoice when they hear of sinners saved!

For the sake of Him who bought you with His precious blood, seek out others who have been redeemed at the same inestimable price! For the sake of that blessed Spirit who brought you to Jesus and who now moves in you that you may move others to come to Jesus, be up and doing, steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord! You have yet to speak on God's behalf, and these are the motives that ought to move you. And now let me close with—

IV. ONE OR TWO SUGGESTIONS. Should you feel, dear Friends, that you ought to speak on God's be

half—and I hope you do feel it—whether Brothers in public ministry, or Sisters in the privacy of social circles, I would counsel you, before you begin to speak, to seek of God guidance as to how you shall speak on His behalf. There are better words spoken of by the ignorant when they wait upon God, than by the wise when they speak out of their own heads. It is wonderful to read the answers which some of the martyrs gave to their accusers. Think of that woman, Anne Askew, how, after being racked and tortured, she nonplussed the priests. It is really marvelous to read how she overcame them. And there was my Lord Mayor of London—what a fool she made of him! He put to her this question—"Woman, if a mouse were to eat the blessed sacrament which contains the body and blood of Christ, what do you think would become of it?" "My lord," she answered, "that is a deep question. I had rather you would answer it yourself. My Lord Mayor, what do you think would become of the mouse that should do that," "I verily believe" said the Lord Mayor, whose ears must have been preternaturally long, "I verily believe the mouse would be damned!" And what said Anne Askew? Why, what could she reply better than this, "Alas, poor mouse." Often a few short words—three or four words—have met the case when the martyrs have waited upon God! And they have made their adversaries seem so ridiculous that I think they might hear a laugh both from Heaven and Hell at once at their foolery, for God's servants have convicted them of folly and put them to shame! Ask what you should say, particularly when men would wrest your words, and when they would catch you in the speech. Be like your Master sometimes— stoop down and write on the ground—wait a while. Sometimes a question is best answered by another question. Ask your Master to teach you that rhetoric which confuses men who would catch you in your speech.

And if you seek the conversion of others, especially remember that it is words from God's mouth rather than words from your mouth that will effect it. Ask the Master, for He knows how to draw the bow when you cannot. You might draw it at a venture, but He can draw at a certainty, so that the arrows shall surely pierce between the joints of the armor. Here is a prayer for every man and woman that has to speak for Jesus—"Open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise."

And look to the Holy Spirit, that He would bless what He directs you to say. It were better to speak five words by the promptings of the Holy Spirit than to utter whole volumes without His guidance. Better be filled with silent musings by the blessed Spirit of God than pour forth floods of words and sentences, however pleasant, without His influence. There is an irresistible power about the man who has an unction from the Holy One which Demosthenes or Pericles, Cicero or Socrates, never dreamed of! Put the man up to speak to his fellow men who is endowed with this mysterious power and he will make hearts of stone melt and force a way for the Truth of God through gates of brass and bars of triple steel! Where the Divine Witness attests the word spoken, there is a majesty in

the simplest utterances that carries conviction to the heart, while it makes Satan and all his Myrmidons tremble! Seek for this might. Tarry at Jerusalem till you are endowed with power from on high and then speak boldly on God's behalf! Wherever your calling may be, and whenever your opportunity shall arise, speak as one whose heart has been enlarged, as one whose mouth has been opened, as one who is filled with the Spirit!

Very earnestly would I caution you young Christians not to put off or delay speaking, otherwise you will lack the facility you might quickly attain by habitually attending to it. An aptitude for speaking to people one by one is very desirable. I know some Brothers in the ministry whom I greatly envy for the possession of a talent which I do not possess in the same proportion as they do. The genius of conversation so sanctified that one can be personal and yet prudent—plain and pointed, yet withal pleasant—administering a rebuke without endangering a rebuff, winning a man's confidence while wounding his pride and commending the Gospel by the courteousness with which it is stated—that is a power of utterance to be emulated by us all! We are too apt to be ambitious of speaking to the many and oblivious of the talking power that can deftly speak to a friend. Begin early, then, after your conversion to speak, one by one, with your kinsfolk and acquaintances! Keep up the practice. Should you find yourselves getting sluggish, so that it becomes irksome to you, seek unto the Lord, confess your sin before Him. The tact of speaking to individuals is worth all the study and attention you can bestow upon it. Ask for wisdom and prudence to know when to speak and how to speak! It is not every fisherman who can catch fish. There is a knack about it and so there is about speaking for Christ. There is a suitable time and there is a suitable way. Why, there are some people who, if they were to try to speak for Christ, would do mischief! They have got such forbidding faces, such ungainly manners, such a coarse way of expressing themselves, that in spite of good intentions, they rather hinder than help. They expect to catch their flies with vinegar, but they will never succeed or be able to do it. If they could learn to be kind and genial, affable and sympathetic, they would be far more likely to succeed. There are men who put the Truth of God in such a shape that it looks like a lie. There are other men who do a good deal with so little delicacy that they affront those they intend to oblige. Do let us learn, when we speak for God, to speak in the best possible manner, exercising all the Christian Graces! Of our blessed Lord it was said, "Never man spoke like this Man." Of us who are His humble followers, may it be observed that we have been with Jesus, and have learned of Him.

God grant you, Believers all, Grace to speak for God! And you unbelievers, may you be brought to trust the Master and to love Him, and then speak for Him! And His be the praise, though yours the profit! Amen.

—Adapted from the C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 36,5 #1379 - The Magnanimity of God.doc

THE MAGNANIMITY OF GOD

NO. 1379

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 21, 1877,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Behold, God is mighty, and despises not any:

He is mighty in strength and wisdom" (or, in strength of heart).

Job 36:5.

WE cannot wonder that, in the extreme bitterness of his soul, Job was

driven to utter some expressions which he would not, afterwards, have attempted to justify. Among the rest Job had thought and almost said that God had despised him. In the 10th chapter, at the 3rd verse, he appealed to Him thus, "Is it good unto You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands?" Elihu, in his zeal to vindicate the righteousness of his Maker, fixes his mind, as I think, upon that expression of Job and meets it with a positive denial, proving his point from the might and the great-heartedness of the Lord. He had promised to fetch his argument from afar and, therefore, he does not argue against God's despising any from His mercy or goodness.

Nor does he give us a commonplace reason for his assertion, such as would easily have suggested itself even to the thoughtless, but he grounds his declaration that God despises no one and, consequently, not Job, upon the fact of God's being mighty. "Behold, God is mighty, and despises not any: He is mighty in strength of heart." That form of argument would not have naturally occurred to you or to me. We might even have been inclined to argue the other way and say—He is so mighty that He cannot be expected to consider such feeble things as His creatures and He despises them all! And it is, therefore, little wonder that He should despise Job among the rest. Elihu, with far better judgment than the most of us possess, draws quite the opposite inference and declares that because God is mighty, therefore He despises no one!

Facts are convincing arguments and if you carefully observe, you will see that usually those persons who despise others are weak and, if weak nowhere else, weak in understanding. Those little men who are dressed in brief authority are often harsh and tyrannical, but the truly great are courteous, tender and considerate. The strong have no reason to be suspicious and jealous and, therefore, they are free from envy. They are void of fear of the power of others and, therefore, they become anxious that their own power should not be oppressive to the weak ones around them. They become considerate of others because this furnishes a fit sphere for the use of their strength.

Yon man who is only strong in appearance and is really feeble, despises others because he dreads them—and knowing how much he deserves to be despised, himself, he pretends to look down upon his neighbors.

It is your half-educated man who sneers. It is your pretender to gentility who gives himself airs. Wherever anything is mere pretense, it endeavors to shield itself from criticism by casting sarcasms upon its rivals. It is said of the Pharisees that they trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and despised others. Had they been truly righteous, they would not have despised others, but because they had a mere veneer of religion, a superficial varnish or gilding of righteousness—or something that looked like righteousness—they looked down with supreme scorn upon all who did not make the same show as themselves.

God is so great in all things that He despises none! He has no rivals and has no need to sustain Himself by lowering the good name of others. He is supremely real. He is so true and thorough that in Him there can never be so much as the thought of despising any in order to guard Himself. His power is not soon awakened to war because it has no opposition to fear. His might is associated with gentleness—fury is not in Him because it is such great might that when it is once in action it devours His adversaries as flame consumes the stubble! God is too great to be contemptuous, too mighty to be haughty.

Note, too, that mere brute force may despise the weak, but the might here ascribed to the Lord is of a higher order. His might is seen not only in that power which rocks the solid world with earthquakes and shakes the heavens with tempests, but in that nobler form of might which reveals itself in wisdom and nobleness of mind. The power of His arm is equaled by the greatness of His spirit. His might lies in His heart—in His understanding and in His love. He is mighty in spiritual things, in sublimity of thought, grandeur of motive, nobleness of spirit and loftiness of aim. When you perceive the exaltation of the Divine Mind and the sublimity of the Divine Character, you perceive the reason why the Lord does not despise any.

To put my meaning into one cumbersome but expressive word, it is the magnanimity of God which prevents His despising any. The sun is so glorious that it refuses not to shine upon a dunghill! The rain is so plenteous that it declines not to drop into the tiny flower cup! The sea is so vast that it does not hesitate to waft a feather and God is so mighty that He rejects not the praises of babes and sucklings. If God were little, He might despise the little. If He were weak He would disdain the weak. If He were untrue He would be supercilious to those about Him. But, seeing He is none of these, but is God Over All, blessed forever, the Only Wise God, we have to deal with One who, though He is high, has respect unto the lowly! Our God is One who, though He humbles Himself even to observe the things which are done in Heaven, yet despises not the cry of the humble! The magnanimity of God is the reason why He despises no one. By the aid of the Holy Spirit we will, this morning, first dwell upon the doctrine and then consider its practical uses.

I. First, I want you reverently to consider THE DOCTRINE that God is mighty and, therefore, despises not any. Begin at the beginning. The Lord is mighty—that is to say, God is so strong that immeasurable and inconceivable power belongs to Him. "God has spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongs unto God." All that God has already done proves His power, but we cannot, even from His greatest works, guess at what He is yet able to do! "Lo, these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him? The thunder of His power, who can

understand?" Since there is no boundary to His power and it would be sinful to attempt to limit the Holy One of Israel, we are free to believe that the Lord could work in even a more stupendous scale than He has done if it so pleased Him.

Search as long as you will, and by His help obtain as clear a discovery of Divine power as was ever given to mortal mind, but remember that He is past finding out and that even if you saw Him stand and measure the earth, and drive asunder the nations and cause the everlasting mountains to be scattered, and the perpetual hills to bow, you would yet have to say with Habakkuk, "There was the hiding of His power." With the Lord nothing is impossible! Learn somewhat of His power from the following facts. First, all the power there is in the universe came from God at first, comes from Him, still, and, at His bidding, would, in a single moment, cease! Whatever of force there is in inanimate Nature it is but God at work. He set the wheel of Nature in motion and at His bidding it would cease to turn.

Whatever mental faculty there may be in cherub or seraph, angel or man, it is but an emanation from His creative energy, a ray from His eternal sun which would cease if He restrained His might. If Jehovah willed it, yonder enormous orbs, which now revolve in order around the central sphere, would rush in wild confusion to inevitable destruction! The law of gravitation, which holds all things in their places, would be broken in an instant if He withdrew the force which makes the law a power! There would be no coherence among atoms—no, the atoms, themselves, would dissolve into non-existence and leave one vast sepulcher—one universal void!

Herein is power so great that we cry with Nehemiah, "You, even You, are Lord alone! You have made Heaven, the Heaven of heavens, with all their hosts, the earth and all things that are therein. The seas and all that is therein and You preserve them all and the host of Heaven worships you." The great God can do all things without help. He needs no assistance from any created thing. Indeed, there could be no such aid, since all the power of all other beings is derived from Him! Creatures do not contribute to His strength—they only manifest Him, revealing the power which they have first of all borrowed from Him. To achieve any purpose of His heart He asks none to be His ally, for He does as He wills.

What is more, He could, with equal ease, accomplish all His purposes if all created intelligences and forces were against Him. It would make no difference to His supremacy of might though all the tremendous powers which have now been created should revolt. He that sits in the heavens would have them in derision. Even powers which set up their standard against Him are beneath His control! His enemies are His footstool—out of their rage He brings forth His peaceful purposes—"He makes the wrath of men to praise Him and the remainder thereof He does restrain." Note well that when God has done all that He pleases, He has not spent His strength. "He faints not, neither is weary. There is no searching of His understanding."

He watches always, but He never wearies so as to need to slumber. He works always, but He never pauses to take rest because of any weariness or exhaustion. When He has done all that He has purposed to do, He remains as ready to work as before. When He has, according to our notions, gone to the utmost of His potency, He is but at the beginning! These are the hems of His garments, but His full Glory is not seen. I tremble while I speak upon that of which I know so little, but assuredly God is mighty in the most emphatic sense that can be conceived by the most enlarged intellect, yes, and far beyond all that has entered into the heart of man.

The text, also, tells us that He is "mighty in strength and in wisdom," so that we have to consider that God is powerful in mind. "There is no searching of His understanding." He not only possesses physical might, by which He creates, preserves, or destroys, but the higher power of understanding, for, "He is wonderful in counsel." "Great is our Lord and of great power His understanding is infinite." It is difficult to find words to express my meaning, for God is a Spirit and as far as He may reverently be spoken of as possessing a mind and intellect, He is as Omnipotent in that sphere as in the physical world. This is the security of His creatures—that He is a great-minded God! He who has great power of hand is to be dreaded unless he has corresponding greatness of soul. It is a calamity when the ruler of an empire cannot rule his own spirit.

The world has shuddered at Neros and Domitians and Caligulas who were so weak in character that they broke every law of morality and humanity—and yet had the destinies of nations under their control. Look at the conformation of the heads of those monsters and they strike you as resembling both prizefighters and idiots, or a combination of the two! And one's blood chills at hearing that such beings were once masters of the Roman world. Happy is it for a nation when the master of its legions is of a benevolent mind and generous spirit, strong in self-restraint and irresistible in the force of virtue. In the highest degree we have this in "the Blessed and Only Potentate." God has great thoughts, great designs, great wisdom, great goodness! He is mighty in all respects and especially in the restraint which He puts upon His wrath.

If you wish to see this, look at the forbearance and long-suffering which He manifests towards the disobedient. How matchless is His patience! How enduring His mercy! The wicked provoke Him and He feels the provocation, but yet He does not smite. Week after week they insult Him—they even touch the apple of His eye by persecuting His people—but still He lets the lifted thunder drop and gives space for repentance. He sends them messages of mercy. He implores them to turn from the error of their ways, but they harden their hearts, they blaspheme Him, they take His holy name in vain! Still, by the space of many years He bears with their incessant rebellions and though He is grieved with the hardness of their hearts, He keeps back His indignation. This patience is shown not here and there to one of our race, but to myriads of the human family—and not for one generation, only, but from generation after generation does His good Spirit strive—still does He stretch out His hands all the day long even to the disobedient and to the gainsayers. Not willing that any should perish, He waits long and patiently because He delights in mercy.

Equally wonderful, I think, is the power which God has over His own mind in the ultimate pardoning of many of these transgressors. It is marvelous that He should be able to forgive any and so perfectly to forgive! It often happens to us that we feel compelled to say, when greatly offended, "I can forgive you, but I fear I shall never forget the wrong." God goes far beyond this, for He casts all our sins behind His back and He declares that He will not remember them against us any more, forever. What? Never? Such deep offenses! Such heinous crimes! Such provoking transgressions! Shall they never be remembered? What? Not ever remembered? Shall there not be at least a frown, or a degree of coolness on account of them? No. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions and, as a cloud, your sins."

It shows the great-mindedness of God that He should be able to act thus and to act thus towards the very chief of sinners! "Who is a God like unto You, that pardons iniquity and passes by the transgressions of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger forever because He

delights in mercy." Let me add that when He does not forgive, but when persistent impenitence demands the final doom, God is great-souled even in the punishment of the wicked. He takes no pleasure in the sinner's death. Judgment is His strange work. Punishment is never inflicted as a matter of arbitrary sovereignty, but always because demanded by justice. The Lord, in vindicating His justice, deals not with the poor and the obscure, alone, but with the great ones of the earth—plucking down from their high places, emperors and kings red-handed with human carnage—and casting them down to Hell.

Nor does He, on the other hand, exercise exceptional severity on the great blasphemer, but He deals with the baser sort, also, and does not spare the braggart of the streets who profanes His name. Calmly and impartially does God deal out justice, "for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." His sentence is so just that none shall be able to criticize it. Thus He proves the greatness of His mind, for when He does condemn and punish it is never in passion, never in haste, never without exact weighing of evidence. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? "Yes, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." Our God, then, is mighty of heart. Now, the pith of the doctrine lies here, that because of His might God, despises not any. The proof is very manifest. God is so great and mighty that all things must be little to Him. There can be nothing great to the infinite God.

There are worlds so ponderous that human reckoning cannot estimate their size. There are worlds so numerous that we have to leave them uncounted, yet separately or apart, or taken altogether in their constellations, all these must be as a drop in a bucket to Him. Since, then, all things must be little, it comes to pass that nothing is, therefore, more than little and nothing falls much more below the level of His greatness than other things which we are known to think much of. If the Divine observation and care is to extend to creatures at all, then it must be exercised upon insignificance and weakness, since, compared with Himself, there is nothing else. If you desire proof that the Lord considers the lesser things, look at Creation. The great and mighty God has displayed His greatness as much in the tiny objects which He has made as in the magnificent worlds which He has fashioned. Myriads of creatures disport themselves in a single drop of stagnant water and yet in each one of these, Omnipotence is manifested. The bodies of those minute beings display, in every part, amazing skill and admirable design. Their very minuteness increases our wonder and compels us to feel the mightiness of the Divine Creator. For each of these infusorial creatures, so small as only to be observed beneath a strong microscope, God finds fitting food and puts life-force into each part of its organization so that it can exist, grow, mature, enjoy life, and transmit it to its successor. He sees to everything that concerns a gnat or a fly—and as surely as He watches over seraphim and cherubim He guards the worm of the earth and the minnow of the brook! God has created tiny things, not as a freak or an experiment, nor as the sport of His leisure, but in sober earnest. He has evidently put forth as much of His mind in the formation of the minute as in the fashioning of the immense!

And since He has done so, let us not question that He will deal tenderly with the poor and needy among men and He will despise none that seek Him in sincerity of heart. He who takes care of gnats and flies will hear the prayers of humble hearts and will not refuse to regard the ignorant and the obscure! Jesus, His Son, was meek and lowly in heart, and suffered the little children to come unto Him and, therefore, we who are least among men shall not be despised! The same respect to the minor things is observable in Providence. The Providence of God does not only concern wars

between mighty empires and the discussions of cabinets and royal councils, but it comprehends within its rule everything that transpires. The blooming of each one of the millions of daisies in the meadows is arranged by eternal purpose and the croaking of a frog in the marsh, or the falling of a leaf from an oak in the forest is part of the plan of eternal wisdom!

The migration of each swallow is as much arranged as the voyage of Columbus! The breaking of a fowler's net is as surely ordained as the emancipation of a nation! God is in ALL things—not a sparrow lights to the ground without your Father—and the very hairs of your head are all numbered. A Force which encompasses these little things and condescends to make them a part of His eternal purpose most evidently proves that the Lord cannot be suspected of despising any! One telling argument to prove that the magnanimity of God despises none is found in the fact that He has regarded man. David thought so when he surveyed, "the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which He had ordained," for he exclaimed, "What is man, that You are mindful of him? And the son of man, that You visit him?"

Man is neither the greatest, the strongest, nor the swiftest among animals. Lions outmatch him in force, horses in swiftness, eagles in power to soar and fish in ability to dive. Leviathan far surpasses him in bulk and behemoth exceeds him in the strength of his loins. Man is apparently a feeble creature and more likely to be the prey of beasts than their destroyer. Look at him in his naked weakness and what a defenseless, unprotected creature he appears! And yet he is monarch of the world! As David said, "You made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands. You have put all things under his feet; all sheep and oxen, yes, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea, and whatever passes through the paths of the seas." That God should consider man is an instance of that great-mindedness which does not look at bulk and strength, but abounds in condescension. This is more clear, too, when you think of what sort of men God has most of all favored. Who are his chosen? Remember that the most intimate love of God has seldom fallen to the lot of the great ones of this earth. "Not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God has full often chosen the poor of this world."—

"When the Eternal bows the skies To visit earthly things, With scorn Divine He turns His eyes From towers of haughty kings. He bears His awful chariot roll Far downward from the skies, To visit every humble soul, With pleasure in His eyes."

What does Paul say in His Epistle to the Corinthians? "Things which are despised has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are." He despises not any, we are sure, for when He ordained fathers in His Church and set 12 leaders in the Apostleship, He chose to this office neither philosophers, nor senators, nor kings, but lowly fishermen! And from that day, to this, it has been His pleasure to do His mightiest actions for His people by those who have been least esteemed among the sons of men, for He is so mighty that He despises not any.

Brethren, you know, some of you, another sweet proof that He does not despise any, for you can say in the language of David, in the 22nd Psalm, "He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard." You have, some of you, been in very deep waters through bodily pain, bereavement, poverty, or persecution. You have found loved ones and friends forsake you, for you have been but poor company for their merrymakings. But God has not forsaken you! He has been very near to you in the time of your distress and thus has He proven that He despises not any. To this man, also, has

He looked, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at His Word.

I need not stay to prove this further, for all history declares that God has no esteem for human greatness—that He has no flattery for human excellence—but that, on the contrary, He lays the axe at the root of the tall and the green trees and brings them down even to the ground. But as for those that are lowly and despised and appear to be withered, He has pity upon them and blesses them—and so the word of His servant, Ezekiel, is fulfilled, "And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, the Lord, have spoken and have done it."

Now, Brothers and Sisters, the proof which I have given you that the Lord looks upon little and lowly things shows the greatness of His soul. Our God is not like the great ones among men. Kings and princes generally esteem those most who can do them or the State most service. God needs nothing from any and, therefore, neither esteems the great nor despises the little. He is delivered from all consideration of self, seeing that He is All in All. Those who can do the State no service are usually looked upon by their rulers as the last to be considered. Why should they have a voice? Who are they, that their interests should be thought of? But seeing God requires not to look to any for help, He is not led to look down with despite and contempt upon any!

If you feel an undue esteem for some, it follows almost as a matter of course that you should have a lack of consideration for others. But because God has no need to ask favors of any of His creatures or, in the slightest degree, to care for their strength or wisdom, He makes not much of the great and, therefore, on the other hand, He does not make little of those who are of lowly rank. God has power, also, to protect all interests and this, human rulers say, they cannot do. The great ones of the earth will often argue thus, "For the good of the general public, a portion of the population must suffer. Great measures naturally involve distress here and there, and this is unavoidable. The law bears hard upon a few, but we cannot alter it—all regulations do so, more or less."

But God is so mighty that He has no need to perform a deed which involves injustice to one of the least of His creatures! Strict justice shall be dealt out to every individual as impartially as if He were the only creature God had ever made! The Lord knows how to consider everyone a separate individual of the human family as carefully as if there were no more than that one. He is so great in might and His thoughts are so deeply wise that He looks to the interests of all. "The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all His works." Let us adore and bless Him that this doctrine stands on so sure a basis—He is mighty in heart, and despises not any!

II. Now I come to THE PRACTICAL USES of this great Truth of God. And the first use is, it should greatly encourage those who are tried. You have not come, my dear Friend, to quite so low a state as that of Job when he sat upon a dunghill and scraped his sores with a potsherd. But even if you had, you ought not to conclude that you are despised of the Lord. He could never despise one of those for whom Christ died. The Lord has not thought contemptuously of you and said, "Let Him suffer! He is a nobody—it matters not what becomes of him." On the contrary, whatever your griefs are today, they have been allotted to you by infinite Wisdom and superlative Love. You are in the best condition that you could be in. Bad as it appears to you, God knows that your lot is rightly ordained.

If it had been better for you, upon the whole, to have been rolling in wealth, you would have been. If it had been better for you never to know pang or pain, you would not have known them. But God's great purposes and plans, involving you and the rest of His people, render it the best thing that you should be tried and, therefore, tried you are. If you could have all the facts of the case and all the Divine purposes spread before you—and if you could have as clear an understanding as God has—you would put yourself just where you are now, for your Father's dealings are right and good. He has not put you in the furnace because He despises you, but because He values you! He bought you with the blood of Jesus and, therefore, you may be sure He prizes you.

Neither does the Lord think so little of you as to forget you in your pains. In all your grief, Jesus has deep sympathy with you. In the watches of the night His eyes see your faintness and sleeplessness. When nurse and friend must, from very weariness, leave you, He is still with you, making your bed in your sickness. You must not say, "My God is so busy with Heaven's glories and with the management of the world's affairs that He forgot me." Far from it! "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him." Depend upon it, the great God is too mighty to despise one of His own children!

He does not say, "It is only a work-girl pining away with consumption, she will not be missed." Nor does He say, "It is only a poor old woman, worn out and suffering the natural pains of old age, it little matters what happens to her." He does not speak contemptuously and say, "It is only a man of a small brain who will never do much and is not worth caring about—let him sorrow and die—there will only be one grave more in the cemetery and one less mouth to feed, and that is all." Oh, no, He "despises not any." "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." He sees your tears and hears your groans, for He is in fellowship with the very least of His people! "In all their affliction He is afflicted and the angel of His Presence saves them."

If any of you have come here, this morning, very much cast down because your trials are little known to others and nobody sympathizes with you, get a grasp of this grand fact—"He despises not any"—and you will be much cheered. You are not made to suffer because of any indifference in God's heart towards you, but because He loves you! "As many as I love," He says, "I rebuke and chasten." Take these rebukes and chastening as tokens of His love and when the rod falls more heavily than usual, perceive it to be the rod of the Covenant which is held in a father's hand and only comes upon His own beloved!

A second use of this great Truth of God is one which I pray God to render effectual. It should encourage every sinner who is seeking the face of God to think that God is mighty and despises no one. You, dear Friend, feel now as if God might very well pass you by and suffer you to perish. You have begun to seek His face, but you could not blame Him if He were to hide Himself from you and leave you to perish, for you have such a keen sense of your unworthiness and insignificance. Be comforted by this—God is too great to deny you His favor! What profit would He have in your blood? What benefit would it be to Him that you should go down alive into the Pit? His Justice has been glorified sufficiently in the death of His Son, Jesus, and those that believe in Him shall, therefore, live!

Beloved Friend, it may be you say, "I am so ignorant, I know but little of the Lord." Will He despise you because of that? If He does, woe unto us all, for we are all ignorant—and on that ground He might despise even the angels whom He charged with folly! In comparison with His Omniscience,

all creatures are fools! Little as you know, He will teach you and instruct you, but He will not despise you. "Ah," you say, "but I have such slender faculties." Suppose you have—the greatest intellect that God has created must, in comparison with Him, have little enough of capacity and, therefore, He would despise all that He has made! But it is not so.

Does the Lord ask any faculty from us, except the faculty to receive His mercy and to lay hold upon His Grace? Your very emptiness and sense of need constitute a faculty of receptiveness into which He will pour His Grace! Be not discouraged, however low in the scale of intelligence you may place yourself. God is mighty in heart and despises not any. Your heart is broken. Well, it is written, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." Your graces are very weak. You cannot see clear marks of the Divine Spirit about you. It is written, "He has not despised the day of small things." Even sparks of Grace He never tramples out! And although your Grace is but as a smoking flax, which may have more of offense about it than of excellence, even that He does not quench. The bruised reed, the Grace which seems to be destroyed, and out of which no music can be brought, He does not despise or break! Others may despise you, but the heavenly Father will not.

It is possible that you say, "Oh, Sir, I cannot think deep thoughts. I try to grasp the great doctrines, but they are beyond me." God is so mighty that He does not despise you for that, for He has sent you a Gospel which requires no deep thought. The Gospel of, "believe and live," is on the level of any man's capacity who desires to understand and believe. Christ Jesus has pitched the Gospel note so low that our poor cracked bass voices may join in the tune! He has made the steps of the Palace Beautiful so easy that little children may climb them! I bless Him for that Word, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not," for then I, who feel myself as a mere babe amidst the great mysteries of His Kingdom, may come to Him and be sure that He despises not any and despises not even me!

"Ah, but," you say, "I fear that God will cast me away because I shall never be eminent for any great Grace even if He saves me. My faith, I fear, will always be weak. My love will always be chill, my character will be imperfect." Well, beloved Friend, then you will owe more to His love than others! And more to His patience and His Grace! But in any case He will not despise you. Do you think that the great God needs our great graces? It is true He is pleased with great faith, but He would be a great God if we had no faith at all! It is true He delights to see the heroism of His children, but not because He depends upon that or needs it in the slightest degree! He gets nothing out of us! Our goodness extends not to Him, therefore is He too mighty to despise us if we cannot render anything to Him.

Yet another replies, "I can understand God's saving a man who afterwards becomes an eminent minister or a gifted missionary. But if He were to save me, He could not make much of me. What would I be if Divine Grace did its best with me? I could only be a humble unknown member of the Church drawing greatly upon His resources, but giving Him a very small return." Well, Beloved, the Lord is so mighty that He is willing to receive multitudes of such! Why should He not? If He did not receive them, He would not be enriched by His refusal. If He does receive them, He will not be impoverished by what He bestows upon them!

Believe firmly in the generosity of God! I have known what it is to find shelter behind His magnanimity when I have cried, "O that He would look upon me in love! I am utterly unworthy and

insignificant—will He take the trouble to spurn me? Will it be worth His while to refuse me His Grace? Surely I am too unimportant for Him to break His promise in order to reject me and act contrary to His Nature in order to cast me away—and both of these He would have to do if He rejected one poor, needy, penitent spirit which dares to trust in Him through Jesus Christ!" O poor, discouraged one, believe in God's great-heartedness! Throw yourself at the foot of the Cross, Sinner, and say unto God, "By Your very greatness I will lay hold upon You. Surely you are too mighty to crush a worm like I, too mighty to refuse me, now that I trust the blood and merit of Your Son! Display the greatness of Your might by saving me, even me, I beseech You."

Do you not see how full of consolation is the doctrine of the text? May faith be given by the Holy Spirit to enable you to grasp it! Lastly, this doctrine affords an example for God's people. If our heavenly Father is mighty and despises not any, then it clearly follows that if we are imitators of God, as dear children we must not despise any. I pray you never despise any of your Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Are they poorer than you? Do not despise them, but rather help them! If they are very, very poor, think what they have to bear and do not add to their other sorrows the grief caused by your contempt. Deal gently and tenderly with them!

If they are parts of your Lord's body, you should be glad to serve them, for so you wash His feet. You should feel it to be a blessing that there are poor saints to whom you can minister because, in doing so, you are ministering to Christ. "The poor you have always with you" and they are necessary, for if there were no poor saints, we might begin crying, "Lord Jesus, what can we do for You? We wish we could show our love to You, but now, seeing there are no poor saints, we do not know how to clothe You, nor how to visit You in Your sickness, and we shall miss the blessing of doing it." If poor saints abound around you, esteem them, because it is through them you will be able to be commended by your Lord when He will say to you, "I was hungry and you gave Me meat. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink."

Perhaps your poorer Brothers and Sisters are more honorable in God's esteem than you are—and probably they love the Master better than you do. It is very possible that they show more of the power of godliness in their lives than you do in yours and it may be, when Christ will come in His Glory, He will put them in a higher seat than some who have houses and lands. Brothers and Sisters, do not despise one another! If you see a Brother with very little talent doing his best, never sneer at him. God may, perhaps, bless his one handful of corn more than He will your basketful if he sows in more faith than you do. Do not despise young beginners. What if they do not know as much as you do? You do not know too much and you know but little to the purpose if you have no compassion upon the lambs of the flock.

Never despise a Brother because of the mistakes he makes in doctrine. If you can set him right, do so, but if the love of God is in him, do not cast him out for his blunders. Do not say, "I will never associate with that man." In the family of Grace there are some strange people. Some of the Lord's are such that if He did not choose them in sovereignty, I am at a loss to see how else they were chosen. But then, if the Lord loves them, you should endeavor to do the same. Never despise one of Christ's little ones, or evil will come of it.

Once more, never despise any. There is a text that some people are very pleased with—"Honor the king." Yes, by all means! I trust we shall always be very loyal and honor the sovereign of the realm in which we dwell. But did you ever notice the precept which comes before it, which I

recommend to those people who sneer at the poor? It runs thus—"Honor all men." This is just as much a duty as, "Honor the king." "Honor all men." What? Honor the lower classes? Yes, Sir, "honor all men." Honor agricultural laborers? Yes, "all men." Honor paupers, crossing-sweepers? Yes, "honor all men." Respect the worker and the sufferer? Respect the burden and the burden-bearer? Anything in the shape of a man or a woman deserves to be honored, for man was made in the image of God!

You are not to say of the fallen woman, "Away with her! The less said about her, the better." Perhaps so, Sister, but the more done the better. Nor are you to say of any man, "He is an incorrigible character. We can do nothing for him." No, that is not the way Jesus deals with men—He despises not any. Upon the worst of characters we ought to spend sevenfold love and patience in the hope that we may rescue such depraved ones from the depths of sin. If it comes, you know, to the matter of despising, and you and I begin despising our fellow creatures, God may make short work of us by despising us! He may just shut the door of Mercy in our faces and say, "You think little enough of one another. You poor people are railing at the rich and you rich people are sneering at the poor. By your own judgment you shall all be judged."

The Lord knows if He were to leave a woman to be judged by women, or even if He were to leave a man to be judged by men, a whole host of us would be lost! But instead of that, He sets wide the door of Grace and bids the despised ones come and welcome! For Jesus' sake He looks in pity upon men and has a kindness towards them. He sets before us an open door of Mercy and cries, "I have given My Son to die, and whoever among you will but believe in Him shall prove that I will not despise you, but will receive you to My heart, love you in time and love you in eternity—and give you to be sharers of the Throne of My only begotten Son forever and ever."

Brothers and Sisters, shake off your pride and love your fellow man, for if you love not your brother whom you have seen, how can you love God, whom you have not seen? If He is mighty and despises not any, then you can be sure that if you despise any it is because you are not the mighty body that you think you are! Your contempt of others proves that you are a little-souled creature—weak, pitiful, pretentious! You may measure yourself by this—if you despise others you ought to be despised! But, if on the contrary, your tender heart of sympathy would lift even the beggar from the dunghill, you are magnanimous, great-souled and like unto God! May the Holy Spirit make you more and more so. Amen.

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Chapter 97

Job 37,7 #3289 - The Sealed Hand--A Winter Sersmon

THE SEALED HAND—A WINTER SERMON

NO. 3289

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1912.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He seals up the hand of every man; that all men may know His work."

Job 37:7.

When the Lord seals up a man's hand, he is unable to perform his labor. The Lord has an objective in this, namely, "that all men may know His work." When they cannot do their own work, they are intended to observe the works of God. This is a fact which I fear many of us have never noticed. When the ground is hardened into iron by the frost. When the land lies deep beneath the snow. When the ox rests in the stall and the servants warm their hands at the fire, then the farmer's hand is sealed up. But I fear the Divine Purpose is not often heeded. As you look through the frosted pane upon the driving snow, do you say to yourself, "God has taken me off from my own work and given me a holiday which He would have me turn into a holy day—let me now turn my thoughts to the Lord's great works in Nature, Providence and Grace. Shut out from my calling, I am also shut in to think of my God and of His work"?

To the most of us, it happens that at sundry times we are set aside from our ordinary service—and it is well if we improve the hour. One is never absent from his desk. Another is regularly behind the counter. A third is always diligent in his travelling but, sooner or later, there comes a day of pain and weakness—when the usual course of life is interrupted and the busiest man lies still. In the sickbed for weeks and months, God seals up the active hand, and thus He presents to the busy a quiet season for reflection! In France, they call the hospital, "the House of God," and it is well when it becomes so. The man who will not think of God if he can help it, while he is busy in the world, is, by sickness blessed with time for consideration and, being set aside from turmoil, he is invited to rise above his engrossing cares! The Great Father seems to say, "Lie there alone. Lie awake through the night-watches and think of your past ways and what they lead to. Listen to the tick of the clock and mark the flight of time till you number your days and apply your heart unto wisdom. Your own work you cannot touch. Now, therefore, think of the work of your God and Savior till you obtain the blessing which comes of it." This is the design of sickness and inability to follow our calling! Thus is our hand sealed from its occupation that our heart may be unsealed towards God, Heaven and eternal things!— "It needs our hearts be weaned from earth. It needs that we be driven By loss of every earthly stay, To seek our joys in Heaven."

It is clear that God can easily seal up the hand of man if he uses his strength in rebellion or folly, for He has other seals besides sickness. When the wicked are determined to carry out a plan which is not according to His mind, He can baffle them. See the people gathering on the plain of Shinar, bringing together brick and slime that they may build a tower whose lofty height shall mark the center of a universal monarchy! What does God do? By simply confounding their language, he seals every man's hand! No storm, or flood, or earthquake could have more effectually caused the workmen to desist. Look through the loopholes of retreat tonight upon this wicked world and see men urgent with schemes which to them appear admirable. If they are not for God's Glory, He that sits in Heaven laughs! The Lord has them in derision! With a word He seals up their hand so that it loses all its cunning and their purpose falls to the ground! Sometimes He closes up the hands of His inveterate enemies with the cold seal of death. Walk over the place where Sennacherib's hosts had pitched their tents. They spread themselves upon the face of the earth and threatened to devour Judah and Jerusalem—yes to quickly swallow them up—but "the angel of death spread his wings on the blast," and the sleepers never again rose to blaspheme Jehovah! They lie with their weapons under their heads, but they cannot grasp them! Bows, spears and chariots remain as a spoil to the armies of the Lord! Let us never, therefore, be disturbed by the vaunting of the adversaries of Jehovah! He can seal up their hands and then the men of might are captives! "The Lord reigns"—

"Though sinners boldly join, Against the Lord to rise, Against His Christ combine, The Anointed to despise. Though earth disdain, And Hell engage, Vain is the rage— Their counsel vain."

We will leave that part of the subject and handle the text in another way. Here is, first, a word to Christian workers. And when we have so expounded it, we shall turn to struggling Believers panting for victory—for with both these classes there are seasons when their hands are sealed. Thirdly, we shall speak to such as are toiling after self-salvation for it is a happy thing when such an hour comes to them, also, and they cease from their own work and know the work of the Lord!

I. First, then, I speak to YOU WHO ARE GOD'S PEOPLE and have grown into strong men in Christ Jesus.

Do not be surprised if sometimes your Master seals up your hand by a consciousness of unfitness. You may have preached for years and yet just now you feel as if you could never preach again. Your cry is, "I am shut up and cannot come forth." The brain is weary, the heart is faint and you are on the brink of saying, "I will speak no more in the name of the Lord." Your seed basket is empty and your plow is rusty—when you get to the granary, it seems to be locked against you. What are you to do? No message from God drops sweetly into your soul and how can your speech among the people distil as the dew? Perhaps some of you who have lately begun to serve the Lord wonder that it should ever be so with us older workers. You will not wonder long, for it will also happen to you! When a farmer sows his field with a seeder, the drill has no aches and pains, for it has no nerves and nothing to prevent the seed shaking out of it with precise regularity. But our great Lord never sows His fields with iron seeders. He uses men and women like ourselves, who are liable to headaches, heartaches and all sorts of miseries and, therefore, cannot sow as they could wish. Comrades in the Lord's work, it is essential that we learn our own inability! It is profitable to feel that without our Lord we can do nothing—but that the Lord can do very well without us! If we cannot break the clods, His frost is doing it. If we cannot water the soil, His snow

is saturating it. When man is paralyzed, God is not even hindered. When we feel our own weakness, it is that we may know the Lord's work and comprehend that whatever understanding we have, He gave us. Whatever thought or utterance we have, He worked it in us and if we have any power among men to deliver the precious Gospel of Christ, He has anointed us to that end. Therefore, if we have received, we may not boast as if we had not received! It is a great blessing for us to be emptied of self that God may be All-in-All, for then our infirmities cease to be drawbacks and rise into qualifications through Divine Grace! This has a world of comfort in it.

Sometimes the Christian worker's hand is sealed, not by his own incompetence, but by the hardness of the hearts he has to deal with. Do we not often cry, "I cannot make any impression upon that man! I have tried in several ways, but I cannot find a vulnerable place in him. I cannot get the sword of Truth to strike at him"? Have you never mourned that you could not touch those children—they were so volatile and frivolous? Have you not been ready to weep because so many men are so coarse, so drunk and so reckless? Have you not groaned, "Lord, I cannot get at those wealthy people! They are educated and sneer at my mistakes. And they are so eaten up with the conceit of their own position that they will not come to You as the poor do, and receive Your salvation. Truly, my hand is sealed"? This is all meant to drive you to your God in prayer, crying, "It is time for You, Lord, to work!" Oh, for that word which is like a hammer, breaking the rock in pieces! Oh, that the fire would melt and save the sinner!

Another thing which often seals the hand of the worker and leaves it maimed and bleeding, is the apostasy of any who were thought to be con

Volume 58 3verts. Oh, how we rejoiced over them! Perhaps just a little, behind the door, we thought how wonderfully well we labored to have such converts. As we saw them at worship and remembered that they were once drunks and swearers, we almost whispered that a notable miracle had been worked by us. Ah me, how light-fingered we are! How ready to rob God of His Glory to clothe self with it! What did the Lord do? He let our precious convert go reeling home and he that prayed at the Prayer Meeting was heard cursing! Thus all our weaving was unraveled. Then we wept and cried, "We have accomplished nothing at all! We have only bred a generation of hypocrites! They only need to be tempted and they go back again! Alas for us!" We shall return to our work with more tenderness and humility, with more prayer and faith—and looking alone to God we shall see His hand outstretched to save! We shall wonder that we have not gone back, ourselves, and shall be prepared to sing Jude's doxology, "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the Presence of His Glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen." When the Lord seals up your hand in any way, then, dear Christian worker, consider God's work, and call Him into the field—

"Arm of the Lord, awake, awake! Your power unconquerable take. Your strength put on, assert Your might And triumph in the dreadful fight! Why do You tarry, mighty Lord? Why slumbers in its sheath Your sword? Oh, awaken for Your honor's sake— Arm of the Lord, awake, awake! Hasten then, but come not to destroy. Mercy is Yours—Your crown, Your joy! Their hatred quell, their pride remove, But melt with Grace, subdue with love."

Some think the text teaches that when God seals up a man's hand, it is that he may know his own work, that is, that he may perceive what poor, imperfect work it is—that he may form a correct

estimate of it and not glory in it—that he may observe the scantiness of the sphere of human action and mourn how ineffective, how despicable, how feeble man's efforts are apart from God's power. It is a great blessing to know our own work and to be humble, but still it is a higher blessing to know the Lord's work and to be confident in Him. O Brothers and Sisters, we must be nothing, or the Lord will not use us! If the axe vaunts itself against him that fells trees therewith, he will fling that axe away. If we sacrifice to our own net, the Great Fisherman will never drag the sea with us again till He has made us more fit for use. Oh, to be nothing! To lie at His feet and then, full of His power, because emptied of our own, to move forward to victory! May the Lord work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure— then shall we work out a glorious destiny to His praise! II. This Scripture equally applies to THE CASE OF THE STRUGGLING BELIEVER.

The man is earnestly striving. Look at him! He is seeking to pray. I sometimes ask young people, "Do you pray?" They answer, "We could not live without prayer." "Can you always pray alike?" I thank God that I usually receive the answer, "No, Sir. We wish we could always be earnest." Just so. A steam engine can always do its work with equal force, but a living man cannot always pray. A mere actor can perform the externals of devotion at any time, but the real suppliant has his variations. We have all read of the preacher who, while preaching, used to cry most unaccountably when others were untouched. The reason was that he had put in the margin of his manuscript, "Cry here," and this he had done in the quiet of his study, without considering whether the passage would really produce tears. A man of genuine emotion cannot make himself cry at say, half-past seven in the morning and ten at night. Mighty prevailing prayer is an effect of the inward impulses of the Spirit of God and the Spirit blows where He wishes. We cannot command His influence. We ought always to pray most when we think we cannot pray at all! Mark that paradox. When you feel disinclined to pray, let it be a sign to you that prayer is doubly necessary! Pray for prayer! Yet there are times with me, and I suppose with you, when at the Throne of Grace I mourn because I cannot mourn, and feel wretched because all feeling has fled. The Lord has sealed up my hand! But that is that I may learn anew how His Spirit helps my infirmities and that I am powerless in supplication till He quickens me. We could as easily create a world as present a fervent prayer without the Spirit of God! We need to have this written upon our hearts, for only so shall we offer those inwrought supplications which the Lord hears with delight.

Look at the struggling Believer, next, when he tries to learn the Truth of God. For instance, in reading the Scriptures, he pants to know the meaning of them. Did you never try to dig into a passage and find yourself unable to make headway? Fetch a commentary! Do you find that it leaves your difficulty untouched? Have you not begun at the wrong end? Would it not be better to pray your way into the text and when you have got somewhat through the rind of it, will it not be well to imitate a mouse when he meets with cheese and eats his way to the center? Work away at the passage by prayer and experience and you will tunnel into the secret! Yet you will at times find yourself lost among grand Truths of God and quite unable to cut your way through the forest of Doctrines because your understanding seems to have lost its edge. God has sealed up your hand that now you may go to Him for instruction, and clearly so that not in books nor in teachers, but in His Holy Spirit is the light by which the Word of Truth is to be understood by the soul! He seals up our hands that we may sit at His feet—

"Light in Your light oh may we see,

Volume 58 5Your Grace and mercy prove, Revived, and cheered, and blessed by Thee, Spirit of peace and love."

The struggling Believer may have set himself to watch against certain sin. Possibly he has enjoyed his morning's devotion and he goes downstairs resolved to be patient, whatever provocation may occur, for he wept last night over the evil done by a quick temper. He converses cheerfully and yet, before the breakfast is over, the lion is roused and he is in the wars again! The poor man murmurs to himself, "What will become of me? This hot temper runs away with me." Do not excuse yourself but still learn from your own folly. Does not the Lord thus let you see your own weakness more and more till you gird on His strength and overcome it? Remember, it must be conquered! You must not dare to be the slave of a fierce temper, or, indeed, of any sin! If the Son make you free, you shall be free, indeed! And it is His emancipating hand that you need within. Sanctification is the work of the Spirit of God—only He can accomplish it—and it is for you to cry unto the Strong for strength!

Perhaps the struggle is of yet another kind. You long to grow in Grace. This is a matter worthy of the utmost desire and labor, and yet, as a matter of fact, neither plants nor souls actually grow through conscience effort. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin." Children of God, when they grow, grow up into Christ, not by agonies and excitements, but by the quiet force of the inward life renewed from day to day by the Holy Spirit! We have heard some true saints complain that they felt as if they were rather growing downward than upward, for they feel worse instead of better. Thus do many of the plants of our garden grow—and we are joyful that it is so—for we need not the useless top growth, but we prize the root! To grow downward in humility may be the best possible growth—the hand sealed may be bringing us more spiritual profit than the hand at work!

III. I might thus enlarge, but it would come to the same thing and, therefore, I leave the struggling Christians to lend a hand to THE SELFRIGHTEOUS, whom I would gladly help into a ditch and leave there till the Almighty One shall come to take them out!

If we believe their own statements, there are a great many very good people in this world. True, the Bible says, "There is none that does good; no, not one," but that is an old-fashioned sort of book! Good men are plentiful as blackberries! I hear certain of them bearing witness that they are quite as good as those who make a profession of religion and, in fact, rather better! They are so good that they do not even profess to trust the Lord Jesus Christ! Now, you excessively good people, I am right glad when the Lord seals up your hands so that you cannot persevere in your fine doings and are compelled to try the true way of getting to Heaven!

Sometimes that sealing up comes by a discovery that the Law of God is spiritual, and that the service of God is a matter of the heart. Here is a good woman! She says, "I never stole a penny. I always pay my debts. I am sober, kind and industrious. I thank God I am not a gossip, or proud, or idle, as so many are." Is she not a superior person? But observe a change! She hears a sermon, or reads the Bible and finds that external goodness is nothing unless there is goodness in the heart—unless there is love to God and love to men—unless there is the new birth and a consequent total and radical change of nature manifested by a simple reliance upon Christ! Is this the same woman? How different her manner! How changed the tone of her talk! Hear her exclaim, "I am utterly lost! I had no idea that God required the heart and judged our thoughts and desires.

What searching Truths! A look can make me guilty of adultery. Anger without a cause is murder!" If this fact comes with power to the heart—the hand is sealed and all hope of salvation by works is gone! Oh, that this would happen to all self-justifiers! Oh, that the Lord would wean them from self, that they might know His work, the work of Christ who satisfied the Law for all His people, that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him!

Sometimes an actual sin has let in light upon the sinfulness of the heart! I knew a young man who, in his own esteem, was as fine a fellow as ever worked in a shop. He prided himself that he had never told a lie, nor been dishonest, nor a drunk, nor loose in his life—and if the Savior had said to him that he must keep the commandments, he would have replied, "All these have I kept from my youth up." In pushing a fellow workman, he upset an oilcan. It happened to have been upset before, and the master had spoken strongly about the careless waste. The master, coming along on this occasion, called out, "Who upset that can?"" The young man said that he did not know, though he himself was the offender. That passed away. No further question was asked, but in a moment he said to himself, "I have told a lie! I never would have believed myself capable of such meanness." His beautiful card house tumbled down! The bubble of his reputation burst and he said to himself, "Now I understand what Mr. Spurgeon means by the depravity of the heart. I am a good-for-nothing creature! What must I do to be saved?" No doubt outward sin has often revealed the secret power of evil in the heart. The leprosy has come out upon the skin and so it has been seen to be in the system. Thus is pride hidden from man—and his hand is sealed up that he may look for mercy from God, and live!

Yes, I have known God seal up some men's hands by a sense of spiritual inability, so that they have said, "I cannot pray. I thought I prayed every morning and night, but I now see that it is not prayer at all. I cannot now praise God. I used to sit in the choir and sing as sweetly as any of them, but I was singing to my own glory, and not unto the Lord. I fear I have been deceiving myself and setting up my righteousness instead of Christ's—and that is the worst form of idolatry. I have dishonored God and I have crucified Christ by claiming to myself the power of self

Volume 58 7salvation. I have un-Christed Christ and counted His blood to be a superfluous thing." When a man has come to that, then he—

"Casts his deadly doing down, Down at Jesus' feet— To stand in Him, in Him alone, Gloriously complete!"

"What?" cries yonder friend, "Would you not have us do good works?" Yes, a host of them! But not to thereby save yourself! You must do them because you are saved! You know what children do when they are little and silly—they go into their fathers garden and pick handfuls of flowers, and make a garden. "A pretty, pretty garden," so they say. Wait till tomorrow morning and every flower will be withered and there will be no pretty garden at all, for their flowers have no roots! That is what you do when you cultivate good works before faith—it is a foolish, fruitless business. Repent of sin and believe in Jesus, for these are the roots of good works! And, though at first they look like black bulbs with no beauty in them, yet out of them shall come the rarest flowers in the garden of holiness! Get away with your good works! Get away with your salvation of yourself! This is all proud fancy and falsehood. Why did God send a Savior if you need no saving? What need of the Cross if you can be saved by your own works? Why did Jesus bleed and die if your own merits are sufficient? Come, you guilty ones! Come, you weary! Come, you whose hands are sealed, so that

you can do nothing more—take the work of Christ and be saved by it at once!

A young Sister who I saw just now, told me how a friend helped her to see the way of salvation. She could not believe in Jesus Christ because she did not feel herself to be all that she wanted to be. But the friend said to her, "Suppose I were to give you this Bible for a present." "Yes." "Would it not be yours as soon as you took it? It would not depend upon whether you were good or not, would it?" "No." "Well, then," the friend replied, "the Lord God has given Jesus Christ to you as a free gift—and if you take him by faith, He is immediately yours, whoever you may be." The case stands just so. Accept Jesus as the free gift of God to you and you are saved! And being saved, you will work with all your might to show your gratitude to God your Savior!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Psalms 94:1-23.

This is the prayer of a man of God in great trouble, standing out for God in an evil day, when the Lord's people were greatly oppressed, and the honor of God was being trampled in the mire. The prayer wells up from an oppressed heart struggling against great difficulty.

Verse 1. LORD God—"O Jehovah, El." Men of God in trouble delight to call upon the name of the Lord. His very name is a stronghold to them! The Infinite Jehovah, the strong God. EL. "O Lord God"— 1. To whom vengeance belongs; O God, to whom vengeance belongs, show Yourself. Vengeance does not belong to us! It is not right for any private individual to attempt to avenge himself. But vengeance does belong to the just Judge who will mete out to all the due reward of evil or of good. Hence, my appeal is to the Court of King's Bench, or higher still, to the King, Himself! "O God, to whom vengeance belongs, show Yourself." When false Doctrine abounds, only God can put it down. All the efforts of the faithful will be futile apart from Him.

2-4. Lift up Yourself, You judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things? And all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? That expression, "How long?" repeated three times, is very sorrowful. It seems to get into a kind of howling or wailing. But a child of God, when he sees things going wrong with his Lord's Kingdom, must grow somewhat impatient and he cries out to His God, "How long? How long? How long will You bear it?" The very triumphs of the wicked and the hard things they say, with which they seem to bubble over like fountains, (for that is the force of the term "utter and speak" used here), stir the heart of the man of God to its very depths! He gets alone and grieves before God. And out of a full heart he thus cries to Him, "How long shall they utter and speak hard things? And all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?"

5. They break in pieces Your people, O LORD—There is a strong plea in that declaration, for the Lord of Hosts says to His people, He that touches you, touches the apple of My eye." In days of persecution the saints can pray in this fashion, "They break in pieces Your people, Jehovah."

5, 6. And afflict Your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. This made the appeal still stronger, for God is "a Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows."

7. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Yet this very God of Jacob came to the troubled Patriarch at Jabbok and blessed him there. And He said to

heathen kings, "Touch not My Anointed, and do my Prophets no harm"—so can it be true that He does not see and regard what the wicked do to His people? They dare to say so, and render themselves the more brazen in their sin because of this, their infidelity!

8. Understand, you brutish among the people. Here the pleader turn into a Prophet and, after having spoken to God, he now speaks to men. Understand, you boors," for so the word may be rendered, "You swine among the people."

9. And you fools, when will you be wise? He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? [See Sermon #2118, Vo

lume 35—THE PLANTER OF THE EAR MUST HEAR—Read/download the entire sermon, free of

charge, athttp://www.spurgeongems.org.] You say that God does not see, that He does not regard—but how can that be? You are mad to talk so! He that

Volume 58 9gave men the sense of hearing—cannot He, Himself, hear? He that gave them sight—cannot He see?—

"Shall He who, with transcendent skill, Fashioned the eye and formed the ear— Who modeled Nature to His will— Shall He not see? Shall He not hear? Vain hope! His eyes at once survey Whatever fills Creation's space— He sees our thoughts, and marks our ways, He knows no bounds of time and place."

10. He that chastises the heathen, shall not He correct? He judges the nations—read the Book of Providence and see how He deals out justice to nation after nation! So shall He not also correct the individual man?

10. He that teaches man knowledge—If you look at your Bibles, you will see that the translators have put in here the words, "shall not He know." They are printed in italics because they are not in the original. The original is very abrupt—it is as if the Psalmist had said, "There, I am tired of arguing with you. You can draw your own inference. I will leave you to do that for yourselves. Fools as You are, I need not draw the inference for you." "He that teaches man knowledge." Does man really know anything unless God teaches him? Adam was taught of God at the first— and every particle of true science that man knows has been imparted by God! I do not say that God is the Author of the science of today—much of that evidently comes from man—but all true knowledge is imparted to us by God. "He that teaches man knowledge"—do you think—do you dream that He does not Himself know everything?

10, 11. Shall not He know? The LORD knows the thoughts of man, that they are vanity. He knows that men are vanity, that they are, according to one translation, a vapor! The men themselves are but a vapor, but as for their thoughts, their intellect, their power to think, that of which many men are most proud—what does God think of these? What a wonderful thing "modern thought" seems to be! But listen to this, "The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are nothing." Vanity is a negation, it is a bubble—a thing puffed up that has no substance in it—"The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are vanity."

12. Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O LORD, and teach him out

of Your Law. [See Sermon #2374, Volume 40—BLESSED DISCIPLINE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, athttp://www.spurgeongems.org.] These are two things that go well together—a rod and a book. No man ever learns much without both rod and book. "Blessed is the man whom You chasten." The Book is never properly understood without some touches of the rod, but the Book must also be there—"and teach" him out of Your Law, "for if it were all rod and no Book, there would be plenty of scars, but there would be no learning! Have you got the two together, my dear Friend? Have you been of late very much with the Book in a nook, and very much with the rod upon your bed? Well, then, you are a blessed man, for the Psalmist says, "Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O Lord, and teach him out of Your Law."

13. That You may give him a rest from the days of activity, until the pit is dug for the wicked. In these days, the quiet virtues are not prized as much as they ought to be. Men are always busy—they must be ever on the trot—but blessed is the man who is so taught by the Book and by the rod that he comes to a holy quietism and learns to rest! The man or woman most rested is the best worker. He who knows how to sit at Jesus' feet, knows how to work for Jesus better than if he were continually running about and getting cumbered with much service. We never learn the secret of this rest by the Book, alone, or by the rod, alone—the rod and the book together teach us to rest from the days of adversity. They teach us not to lay the present too much to heart, not to fret because of things as they are today, but to think of what is to be in that Day when the righteous shall be rewarded, and when the Mighty Hunter shall have trapped His adversary and ours—when the pit shall be dug for the wicked and Satan's power shall be forever destroyed!

14. For the LORD will not cast off His people. He may cast them down, but He will never cast them off!

14. Neither will He forsake His inheritance. Even men will not give up their inheritance. This is especially the case among the Jews! You remember how Naboth would not sell his inheritance—he would sooner die. And the Lord will not forsake His inheritance—there is a sacred condition upon His people that never can be broken—and He will never give them up.

15. But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it. The wicked may be the upper spokes of the wheel just now, but they will be the lower spokes before long! The Truth of God may be in the mire, today, but she shall be upon the Throne tomorrow! The revolutions of the wheels of Providence produce strange changes. Wait. Work. Watch. For the Lord will set things right in His own good time.

16. Who will rise up for me against the evildoer or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? The Psalmist appeals for helpers, but he gets no response from man. And sometimes the man of God will have to stand alone— and that can be quite an education for him. Blessed is he who has learned to hang on the bare arm of God—he is better off without his earthly friends than he was with them! Here is the answer to the Psalmist's question—

17. Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. You may be one of the best of God's servants and yet that may be your experience. Here is another piece of testimony in which many of us can join—

18. When I said, My foot slips, Your mercy, O Lord, held me up. "My foot had slipped from under me. I was down. But then, even then, You

Volume 58 11 did put underneath me Your everlasting arms. 'Your mercy, O Lord, held me up.'"

19. In the multitude of my thoughts within me Your comforts delight my soul. [See Sermon #883, Volume 15—MULTIUDINOUS THOUGHTS AND SACRED COMFORTS— Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, athttp://www.spurgeongems.org.] "My thoughts"—so some read this verse—"seem intertwisted and interlaced like the many branches of a tree. I cannot make them out—they are in such a tangle." But the bird has learned to sit among the branches and sing, "Your comforts delight my soul." There are thoughts of grief, thoughts of fear, thoughts of disappointment, thoughts of desertion, thoughts of a broken heart—all sorts of thoughts, but God's comforts come in and delight the soul! You know what it is—do you not?—to be cast down, but not destroyed? To be troubled, and yet to be happy? "As sorrowful," says Paul, "yet always rejoicing." Whereupon an old Divine remarks that it is "as sorrowful"—quasi sorrowful—but it is not "as always rejoicing." There is no "quasi" to that, but there is a real joy in the midst of a seeming sorrow! "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Your comforts delight my soul."

20. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with You, which frames mischief by a Law? Lord, are You on their side? Oh, no, and as You are not on their side, I care not who is! So long as You will not aid iniquity or help wrong-doing, I will, by Your Grace, fight the battle through.

21, 22. They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood. But the LORD is my defense; and my God is the rock of my refuge. He gets away unto his God as he had been accustomed to hide in the cave of Adullam out of reach of his foes! And then he sits down in peace to sing—

23. And He shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yes the LORD our God shall cut them off.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 38,17 #2917 - The Doors of the Shadow of Death

THE DOORS OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

NO. 2917

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, 1905.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 24, 1876.

"Have you seen the doors of the shadow of death?"

Job 38:17.

Last Sabbath our spirits flew forward as far as the Judgment Day. We stood with wondering awe to gaze upon the Great White Throne and the fillet of gold about the head of the Reaper who gathered in the harvest of the earth. We trembled as we saw the other angel take the sharp sickle and reap the world's vintage and hurl it into the winepress of Jehovah's wrath where it was trampled underfoot until the blood of men flowed

forth in torrents. [See Sermon #2910, Volume 50—THE HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge athttp://www.spurgeongems.orgwww.spurgeons.org.] Our excursion at this time will not take us so far in human history. We shall halt at a nearer stopping place. We shall not journey even to the Resurrection— only to the doors of the shadow of death.

The question is, "Have you seen the doors of the shadow at death?" And the answer implied is—"No." In this chapter, God is questioning Job in order to show him his inability and his ignorance. To each question which the Lord puts to the Patriarch, a negative answer is expected. "Have you entered into the springs of the sea?" "Have you walked in the search of the depth?" "Have the gates of death been opened to you?" "Have you perceived the breadth of the earth?" Job had done none of these things.

Well, then, Job, "Have you seen the doors of the shadow of death?" The only answer the Patriarch could have given or that we can give is, "No." We can get as far as the gates of death, but we cannot pry within. Apart from Revelation, we have no information about the dreary land beyond that land which lies enshrouded, as far as we are concerned, in perpetual gloom. We cannot tell when or how we, ourselves, shall die, so we know little of the dread mystery. The message will someday come to us that the pitcher is to be broken at the cistern, but when it shall come, we little dream. It may be much nearer than we think and, on the other hand it, may be farther off than we

have feared. We are all, in this life, something like the prisoners confined during the dreadful French Revolution. They were shut in so that they could not escape—and every morning there came a man with a little slip of paper who read out the names of that day's victims—who were then hurried to the wagon which was in waiting outside to drag off its weary load to death. So every morning comes the death angel into the world and he reads out the names of such an one and such an one. We miss our comrade who has been called and we grow so accustomed to the routine that, alas, we think too little of having missed him. But we are waiting, each one of us, till the missive shall come for ourselves—yet we know no more when we shall die than does the ox in the pasture, or the sheep in the fold.

Neither do we know what it is to die. We know, in a certain sense, what the act of death is, but what is the strange feeling with which the soul finds itself houseless, forsaken of the body which falls about it like a crumbling tenement? What is it to have the link severed which keeps the mortal bound to the immortal—the spiritual caged within the material? What that is, we do not know—neither has any told us. We have watched others passing. We have stood by the beside of the dying. We have witnessed the last gasp and still it remains a secret what it is to die! We only know that these gates of the shadow of death are so shut upon us that we cannot hold any conversation whatever with the world beyond, save only as there is an everlasting fellowship in the Person of Christ between all that are in Him, so that—

"The saints on earth, and all the dead, But one communion make."

Indeed, we are so shut off from the other world that we never even dare to pry behind the curtain which God has thrown across the abode of spirits. There have been necromancers in all ages who have desired to intrude into these mysterious regions—who have pretended to have done so. Their craft is to be abhorred as Hell! Woe unto the man that comes near to them! They are, as far as Christians are concerned, to be utterly loathed, for, where the Lord has hung up a curtain and shut the door, it is not for you and me to meddle, lest in eating those sacrifices of the dead we are found to be having fellowship with devils and be cast down to share their doom!

"Have you seen the gates of the shadow of death?" We are content to give the answer which Job must have given, that we have not seen them and do not wish to see them. Between those iron bars we do not wish to pry. What the Lord reveals we are content to learn from His Word, but we wish to know nothing more. Now, dear Friends, that being the case, we shall only in meditation go down to those gates as far as we may lawfully go—and speak only about what we may actually know, not dreaming or doting about things beyond our knowledge. There have been some poets who have sung of descents to Avernus and of the circles of the Inferno. You need not that I go through Dante's majestic conceptions, or tell how Milton sings of worlds unknown. Ours is a far less ambitious business. We have no poetry to make—we have simple facts to state.

I. First, then, we ask you to come down as near to the gates of death as we may, in mediation, VIEWING DEATH IN GENERAL for a few minutes. Look up in vision to these terrible portals and do you not observe, as you stand before them, that these gates are always open? Never, day and night, are those gates of death shut, for at all hours there is traffic through them. Men die at midnight, as they did in Pharaoh's palace. And men die at noon, as the child did who said, "My head, my head," and whose father said, "Take him to his mother," and who then fell asleep in her lap. They die in springtime and the flowers sweetly waking from the earth adorn the hillock which

marks their tomb. And they die in summer and know nothing of the sweet flowers that bloom and perfume all the air. They drop like autumn leaves and the winter, howling their requiem, bears many of them away. There is never a moment, I suppose, at any time when the fall of feet may not be heard by listening ears that are hard by the gates of death-shade. The dead have always been coming since Abel led the way—one perpetual stream, never ceasing day nor night.

Let us also remember that multitudes have now passed through those iron gates! You cannot count the hosts who have entered. The calculating machine might fail and the powers of mind utterly fail before the mighty total! We speak of them as the great majority and earth with her more than thousand millions has but a slender congregation of living persons compared with the congregation of the dead. What multitudes, I say, have passed through from the first day until now! Sometimes there has been a rush when death's jackals, the kings and princes of the world, have driven their prey in troops through them by means of bloody wars. At other times men in hosts have rushed through those gates pursued by plague or famine—and always by human decay or disease men have come up to these gates, always, always, always passing through. The stream of passengers through the gates of death goes on, on, on. While you and I are sitting here, they are stepping between the posts. Perhaps some dear to us are nearing the portals. We ourselves are, certainly, on the way, and at all times our fellow creatures are being swallowed within the gaping jaws which never shut!

If you will stop here a minute and look—and have eyes strong enough in the shade to mark who they are that come—you will see there a man leaning on his staff. But did you notice that there also went by him little children that had not yet learned to speak? You see the strong man come all of a sudden, running away from life. And you see the invalid who has long waited for his summons—you may count his bones as he passes down to his grave. Do you see yonder man? There is nothing special about him. He looks just like any other. He once was a king—there is still a little royal about him. Do you see that other man? He was once a beggar. He does not seem, now, a bit more beggarly than did the monarch! They have, neither of them, brought anything with them—they come here penniless—all of them, and they pass through with empty hands. Titles, grandeur, estates, position, fame—all are left behind. They

Volume 51 3come a great crowd in a liberty, equality and fraternity of death—a common brotherhood that will never be realized in life. Do you see them going? In view of this general leveling, you may set small store on the distinctions of this world. I have come to declare that nothing is worth seeking after but that which will survive the tomb!

Through that gate you have seen many go in thought tonight. Will you please remember that no one has ever returned, with the exception of a few restored by miracle? They go through that way, but there are no steps backward. Gone, gone forever. Once the breath has left the body, I think that the soul shall not revisit its old haunts or know anything of all that it done under the sun. But whether that is so or not, it is certain that they will not come back in the old familiar form. They are gone. They cannot return. It is idle to weep and wish them among us again—floods of tears cannot restore them. As for the tree that is cut down, at the scent of water it will bud, but rivers of precious water from weeping eyes cannot cause these dead ones to live again.

Now, concerning these gates of the grave, we may say further that though they are thus thronged, there are very few that ever come there as voluntary passengers. Man dreads to die. It is right that

he should, so long as it does not come to a fear that is bondage. Understand this—that God has implanted within us all the desire to live for right ends and purposes. There are a few that pass that way in a hurry or of their own consent. Ah, dreary souls that take away their lives! To what has a man come when he dares to contemplate such an insult to his Maker? He that gave you breath may take it back, but you may not give it up yourself! To die by your own hand is not to escape from suffering, but to plunge yourself into it forever, for we know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Therefore he that murders himself, if he knows what he is doing, gives sure evidence that eternal life is not in him! We must all go through those gates, but we must gallantly bide our time and take arms against the sea of trouble that now awaits us. Then at last, if we are Christ's—and all of us may be His and know we are His—when our Captain bids us come to Him, we will bow our heads and pass through the gates of iron, not fearing for a moment! Our Lord will come to meet us and our soul will stretch her wings in haste and fly fearless through the shadowed portals, nor feel anything of terror as she passes them!

Those thoughts may suffice about death in general.

II. Now, in the second place, let us go down to the doors of that death

shade and stand some moments VIEWING SAINTLY DEATHS. I wish only to speak simply about them.

First, I remark that all saintly deaths are not pleasant to look upon. Some of the grandest men who ever lived have died in a storm. Martin Luther's deathbed was troubled. I do not wonder that when a man has done such glorious mischief to Satan's dominions, he should not be allowed to enter into his rest without one more struggle with his foe! John Knox, again, had a fierce battle when he came to die. He found it hard, though he triumphed at the last even as Luther did. And many that have served their Master well, instead of shouts of joy and singing of hymns in their departure, have had to lay hold with all their might upon their Crucified Savior in order to sustain their hope. There is something right about this, too—it becomes a lesson to us all—"If the righteous scarcely are saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" And if to die is sometimes hard work to a man who is known to be a true Believer and who has shown to others that he is really saved, what shall they expect in the hour of death who have no such confidence in God?

Yet, Beloved, standing at the doors of death tonight, I must confess that as far as I am concerned, of those I have seen passing through, who have believed in Christ, most of the saints have passed through gladly. They have entered the gates with a cheery note, with a song, or with a Hallelujah. I cannot forget the times in which I have been asked to sing at dying beds when I could not possibly have done it for very choking of sympathy with those about me. But the dying man has sung and the dying woman has joined sweetly in the hymn—and when we seemed to feel as if it might be too much for the failing strength—we have been asked by the saint who was ready to depart that we might sing another verse! While they have been—

"Sweeping through the gates of the new Jerusalem,"

they have wanted us to sing them Home! If I had to tell where I have seen the most joy on earth, I would certainly not say at the bridal feasts, for that joy has much that is flimsy about it. In many that partake in that festival, the sentiments are often unreal. But the joy of the dying man— the joy of the expiring saint—has something so deep, so sublime, yet so simple in it that I know not where

to equal it, whether I am permitted to search in the palaces of kings or in the homes of content! The greatest joy on earth is, after all, the joy of departing saints. So you may stand at the gates of death-shade, and hear them sing as they pass through. Some of them you may hear saying extraordinary things. Haliburton cried, "Have at you, Death! Have at you, Death!"—as if he fought and conquered the grim foe without a fear. Others have shouted, "Victory, victory, victory, through the blood of the Lamb!" in their last moments. There has been sorrow, but there has been far oftener joy!

Concerning the doors of the shadow of death, let me say that there are stores of Grace laid up hard by those gates of the grave for saints when they come there. You must not expect, dear Friends, to have dying Grace in living moments. You must not expect at this time to have Grace to die with, when, perhaps, God intends you to live another 50 years! What would you do with such Grace? Where would you put it? You shall have it when you come to die. Only trust in Christ, today, and do His bidding—when the dying time shall come—the dying Grace shall be afforded you.

Volume 51 5In addition to this, I believe that God not only gives His people Grace to die, but, in their last moments, some of the saints get visions of another world before they enter the gates of death. I am persuaded that the glow and the glory that I have seen on some men's faces when they have been dying, have not been of earth—that the strange light that lit their features and the wondrous smile of ineffable delight with which they have fallen asleep—have not been things of time. They could not have been created by their present circumstances, for their surroundings have been all to the contrary. The radiance from the world beyond has been upon them. What strange things, too, they have said! Some of them have been hard to comprehend, for the expiring saints have spoken a language more of Heaven than of earth, as if they knew things which were unlawful for them to utter and must not speak so as to be understood. Stray notes from harps of seraphim they have caught and they have tried to sing them here, below, but have failed. Yet we have heard enough to let us know that God has partly drawn up the blinds and permitted them to see through the lattice and behold the King in His beauty. Angels, too, we doubt not, come to those gates of death. Why should they not? They came to Jesus in Gethsemane. They are bid to the care of the Lord's people, lest they dash their foot against a stone. I have no doubt that they minister to the heirs of salvation, for it is written that when Lazarus died angels carried him into Abraham's bosom. The angelic bands wait, I believe, at these gates of death to help the righteous in their last extremity.

Best of all, I should like you, as you come with me to these doors of death-shade, to notice that there is a blood-mark right across the entrance. If you look down, there is the print of a footprint unlike that of all the rest, for it is the print of a foot that once was pierced! Ah, I recognize that mark. My Lord has gone that way! I have not yet been down to the doors of death-shade, but He, my Savior, has been there. He has passed through them, indeed, and yet He lives! Therefore the joy of the Believer is that when he passes through, because Christ lives, he shall also live! And because Christ is risen, he, too, shall rise! I could not believe the Resurrection if it were not certain that Christ has risen. But if ever there was a fact in history that is well attested beyond all conceivable doubt, it is the fact that He who was put into the grave by the Jews and whose tomb was sealed, rose again from the dead on the third day! All His people shall also rise because He has led the way. O gates of death-shade, we dread you no longer since Christ has passed through

your portals!

And see, Brothers and Sisters, for the Believer, all around those gates of death-shade bright lamps are burning! Do you not see them? They are lamps of promise. "When you pass through the rivers I will be with you, and through the rivers they shall not overflow you." "O death, I will be your plagues." You know how the Lord of the pilgrims has given the assurance over and over and over again, in all shapes and ways, that He will not leave nor forsake His people, but that He will help them even to the end and cause them, when they walk through the Valley of the Shadow at Death, to fear no evil because He is with them.

The gates of the grave, then, as far as Believers are concerned, are not places of gloom at all! We ought often to go there. It is greatly wise to be familiar with our last hours—to antedate them and to die daily. Make a friend of death! Oh, go to the graves, not to weep, but that you may not weep when you go there! Often strip yourself and go through the rehearsal of your death, that when the time shall come it may be no strange work for you to die since you shall have died daily for, it may be, 50 years at a stretch!

III. Now, lastly, and very sorrowfully, a few words VIEWING THE DEATH OF SINNERS. Down to these grim gates the ungodly must go as well as the people of God. To every one of them is the lot appointed. Let us speak the truth about them solemnly and tenderly, with tears in our heart, though sad words are on our lips.

The death of ungodly people is not always terrible. There are many that die and are lost, of whom David says in the Psalm, "Like sheep they are laid in the grave." They never cared for the House of God nor regarded the Sabbath. They knew nothing of prayer, or of faith. Their consciences have become seared. They played bravado with God and He has given them up, so when they come to die, they take it coolly enough. They "shuffle off this mortal coil" almost without a fear, and they that stand around say, "Oh, he died so sweetly—such a happy death." Ah me! Ah me! Ah me! Saints often die struggling—and sinners often die in dreadful peace! I say, "dreadful," for have you never noticed the stillness—the awful silence of nature before a storm, when there is not a breath of air and not a leaf stirs on the trees? The very clouds seem to hang still in mid Heaven and earth and sky get more quiet and still more quiet, and our very breath becomes intensely stifling in the dread stagnation—till with peal on peal the dread artillery of Heaven begins to shake Heaven and earth! Such is the death of many an ungodly man—a treacherous calm. Oh, what an awakening for him when in Hell he shall lift up his eyes, far from every hope of mercy! Pray God you may not die so. I should not like to die stupefied. I would prefer to be in my senses. Presumption is a drug which stupefies the soul and because of it men often die at peace, full many of them. But it were far better that they had never taken that dire drug, but could really look into the future, perhaps, even at the last moment, while their feet were sliding, so they might find Grace enough to start back and lay hold on Everlasting life that they might not descend into the abyss below! Because their eyes are blinded, there are many that die peaceably enough—and are lost.

Of impenitent men I may say that when they come to die, many of them are not at peace. A very large number of such people shrink back from the doors of death because, in the quiet chamber, memory begins to

Volume 51 7work. Then the evil deed, the midnight scene, the neglected Sabbath, the unread Bible, the Throne of Grace forsaken—all claim to speak. And as the clock goes tick, tick, upon the wall, the mind begins to go over childhood, youth, manhood, married life and to remember and to bring up sin. It is not every sinner that is such a fool as to be able to remember a wasted life without some terror or regret! Fear, too, is generally busy, for the mind begins to ask whether the thought is pleasant to the dying person or not—"Where am I going?" And there is a something in man that does not let him believe that he is a mere animal. Look at your wife, man—you that believe all living men to be mere beasts. What is that dear body of your wife whom you have loved these many years? Well, principally so much water and so much gas. When that is taken away, there is a small residuum of earthy ash—that is all. And is that what you have loved—so many pounds of water and gas and earth?

No, Sir, you have not. You have loved a woman! You have loved a thing infinitely better than dead earth and water and gas. You know that. You do not believe that your mother is only mere water and gas and earth, nor your child, nor yourself! You cannot persuade yourself to accept such materialism as that! There is a something in this body that is better than this water, gas and earth—a something that will consciously exist when these have been dissolved. And there is that within all of us that makes us believe it whether we will it or not! Therefore, at the portals of death there comes into the mind the question, "Where am I going?" And if the heart cannot answer that question by saying, "I am going where Jesus is—I am going to my Savior, in whom I have trusted, who has washed me from my sin"—then fear comes up and the man begins to say, "Oh, how can I go forward? The Bible tells me I am going to judgment and I am unfit for judgment—that I am going to resurrection and what must it be for a sinful body like mine to rise from the dead? I am going to condemnation and already in my conscience I am condemned! How can I go? How can I stop? Ah, must I leave you, O earth, and cannot I enter you, O Heaven? Then where must I fly?" Not many ungodly men can manage to shake off such thoughts as these in the dread prospect of departure.

Let me say, further, that near these gates of death-shade is a very difficult place in which to seek the Lord. When a man gets troubled with memory and fear, and his body it racked with pain, he is very ill-fitted to listen to the voice of Jesus. I would not discourage a dying man for a moment from looking to Jesus. If he desires salvation, if he will but believe in the Christ of God, he shall have eternal life even at the last! But speaking from what I have seen, the most of men in the article of death are quite unfit for thought—quite unable to feel anything beyond the stabs of physical anguish—and quite incapable of faith. No man knows how far God's mercy goes, but if that mercy is given to faith, I cannot see how it can be extended to some dying men. Delirium, a wandering mind, an aching head—oh, these will give you quite enough to do in dying without having to seek your peace with God! It is task enough only to die, to take a tearful farewell of those babes and of the partner of your life. It is enough to die without then having to begin to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Have you seen the doors of deathshade? If you have, you will not choose them as a place to repent in—you will rather choose the present time to seek the Lord—now while yet your mind is fresh and vigorous and He is waiting to be gracious!

I must not detain you more than another minute or two, but let me remind you that at the doors of death-shade is the place of testing and the place of stripping. The man comes there who has professed to be a Christian. If he is not, how the rags of his self-righteousness are torn off! Or he

says, "I was no professor of religion. I was better than that! I was an honest man." Now it turns out, at last, that he was not even true to his God and his fancied honesty drops off him like a garment! Build castles in the air if you will, but death is a wonderful dissipater of all your magic! At the shadowy gates nothing will do for you or for God but reality. If the religion you have and the hope you have will not stand the test of self-examination and heart-searching sermons, certainly it will not stand the test of a dying hour. What a stripping time it will be! Now, my lord, you must take the last look at your crown—that will never encircle your brow again. Now look through the window at your broad estates— you will not be able to call a foot of it your own! Even the six feet of earth in which you lie will only be yours as long as the charity of your successors will permit you to slumber in peace. Good-bye to your money bags! Farewell to the market and the exchange! You have got your wealth with much labor, but you are forced to leave it now—every penny of it. None of it can go with you.

Worse still, the gates of death-shade are the places of farewell. An ungodly man has to bid, sometimes, farewell to a Christian wife. Kiss her cheek, man—you will never see her again. You have a Christian child, a dear child that has lately joined the church, but you are no follower of Christ. When you come to die, they will bring her to your bedside and you will have to say, "Good-bye, Mary. I shall never see you again, or if I do it, will only be as Dives, who looked up and saw Lazarus far away in Abraham's bosom, but with an awful gulf between." Some of you unconverted brothers, how will you like to be separated from your Christian sisters? Some of you daughters—how will you like to be divided from your father and your mother who will be in Heaven? Oh, all of you say, "We would like to meet in Heaven as unbroken families." Young girl. Young man. What if your name should be left out when Christ shall summon home His own? Certain it is that death-shade gates are the place of everlasting farewell. God grant you may never have to take such farewell of any of your kin who are in Christ, but may you soar up to Heaven and be raised with them when the trumpet of the archangel sounds!

Volume 51 9Thus I have, as best I could, talked of the end of the earthly life. O Souls, prepare to meet your God, for you may have to meet Him before another sun has risen! I beseech you, by the living God, whose servant I am, postpone not repentance and faith, but now, while mercy's white flag is to the front and God waits to be gracious to you, bow before the Cross of Christ! Trust in Jesus and be saved! The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Psalms 49:1-20.

The chief musician here bids us not to fear the ungodly. However high they may be placed, they are but dying men and when they die their hope shall perish with them. He gives a very graphic description of the deathbed and of the perdition of ungodly men.

Verses 1, 2. Hear this, all you people; give ear, all you inhabitants of the world: both low and high, rich and poor together. Whenever God has a voice for men, it is meant for all sorts of men. No Scripture is of private interpretation. No warning is intended only for a few. Hear this, then, all you people. Whether you are low, you are not too low to listen to His voice. Or, whether you are high, you are not too high to be under His supremacy.

3, 4. My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. I will incline my ear to a parable: I will disclose my dark saying upon the harp. Mysteries are to be preached, but they are to be preached with an earnest endeavor on the preacher's part to make them plain. If it is a dark saying, yet let it be open and, if music will help, so let it be. Whatever there is to be taught, let it be plainly taught to the sons of men.

5. Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? We may read it, "The iniquity of my supplanters shall compass me about." There may be some dark days when the wicked seed, whose delight it is to bite at the heel of the Seed of God, will gather around us. And we think, perhaps, that they will be too many for us. But why should we fear them? Who are they? They are great and mighty, perhaps, but if they are but an iniquity—we need not to be afraid of them. Our righteous God is our defender.

6, 7. They that trust in their wealth and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him. They may be rich as Croesus, but they cannot save a comrade from the grave. They may pay the physician, but they cannot bribe death. How little is the power of wealth, after all! The rich man cannot even save his baby that he loves so well. He certainly cannot save his fellow sinner. 8. (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceases forever). There is no redemption but one. And if a soul is unredeemed, the hope of it ceases forever.

9. That he should still live forever, and not see corruption. For the bodies of the great are fed upon by worms as readily as the bodies of the paupers. They may embalm the body, if they will, to cheat the worms, or put it into a coffin of lead, but little can they do with it. It is a costly business, after all, and is the exception to the rule. Even the wisest cannot live forever so as not to see corruption.

10. For he sees that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish and leave their wealth to others. Whatever men may have gathered, the wisest cannot find an invention which will enable him to take his treasure with him. He must leave it behind. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there."

11. Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling places to all generations. They call their lands after their own names. Man is so fond of immortality that while he foolishly rejects the reality of it, he clings to the name of it—and he builds a house which he ties down by deed to his heirs, and his heirs' heirs, "forever," as he calls it. And then he calls the land by his own name that it may never be forgotten that such a worm as he once crawled over that portion of the earth!

12. Nevertheless man being in honor abides not. He passes away. His grace, his lordship, his reverence must lie in the grave! How ridiculous grand titles seem when once it is said, "Earth to earth; dust to dust; ashes to ashes." "Vain pomp and glory of the earth." Indeed we may say in the presence of the shroud and the mattock, and the grave and the worm—"Man being in honor abides not."

12. He is like the beasts that perish. Not like any one beast, but like any beast that perishes. He does but live and, as far as this world is concerned, he is gone.

13. This their way is their folly: yet their prosperity approves their sayings. Selah. When men have lived only for this world and die and pass away without any future worth the having—without any hope of Heaven—yet still they report it in the papers that he died "worth" so much—as if it were wonderful to have so much to leave! And they speak of the shrewd things he used to say—mostly very greedy things and very grasping things. And though he was a fool, after all, for aiming at the "Mal. chance," as he called it—while he missed the real Mal. chance, namely, the salvation of his soul—yet his posterity inherit his folly with his blood and they approve his sayings.

14. Like sheep they are laid in the grave. They lead a worldly life and die a worldly death—quiet, contented with this world—no thought of the world to come.

Volume 51 11 14. Death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning. That everlasting daybreak shall shed a light on many things. And then the master and the lord who tyrannized over the poor and needy shall find himself under the foot of those he trod upon! "The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning."

14, 15. And their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for He shall receive me. Selah. What a happy confidence! Blessed are those who, by a living faith in a living God, know that their soul shall be received into its Maker's hands! But woe unto those whose confidence lies in the treasure they have accumulated and the acres they have purchased.

16, 17. Be not you afraid when one is made rich when the glory of his house is increased. For when he dies he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. They will not know him in the next world to be the squire, the peer, the prince. Death is a dreadful leveler. Envy not the great man of this world! "His glory shall not descend after him."

18. Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise you, when you do well to yourself. Not "when you do good," mark, for often when you do good, men will criticize and censure—and the better the deed, the more sure is it to provoke the contempt of many. But "men will praise you when you do well to yourself." "A shrewd man, that! That is the kind of man I want to be! See how he prospers! A smart, pushing fellow! Oh, yes, he is the man for a friend." Whenever there is an aggravated selfishness that accumulates to itself like a rolling snow-ball, men are sure to praise. It is the irony of life.

19. He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. They are sleeping in the grave. So shall he. And beyond the grave there is nothing but darkness for him whose heart is set on this world.

20. Man that is in honor and understands not, is like the beasts that perish. Understanding and the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom—not earthly honor—is our only succor in the day of death.

. Adapted from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON

TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Job 38,25-27 #2583 - Rain and Grace--A Parallel

RAIN AND GRACE—A PARALLEL

NO. 2583

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, AUGUST 14, 1898.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, APRIL 5, 1883.

"Who has divided a channel for the overflowing water, or a path for

the thunderbolt, to cause it to rain on the earth, where there is

no one; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man; to

satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause

the bud of the tender herb to spring forth?"

Job 38:25-27.

JOB was an admirable man, but the Lord meant to make him still bet

ter. The best of men are but men at the best and though Job was, in a certain sense, perfect, yet he was not perfectly perfect—there was a further stage beyond that which he had reached, otherwise he would not have been tried as he was. But because the Lord knew that there was something better for Job than he had already attained, he had to be subjected to extraordinary trial. He was such a valuable diamond that there had to be more cutting for him than for a common stone. He was made of such good metal that he paid for being put into the furnace—there would come out something still more pleasing to the great Refiner if He cast that which was so precious into the most fervent heat. Hence it was that Job was so greatly tried. Yet, after all his trials, it seemed as if he would miss their blessed result, for his three friends—the miserable comforters—appeared to be the meddlers in the whole design. By their cruel, cutting, sarcastic observations, they irritated Job so that it looked as if he would be harder instead of softer because of the fires.

Sometimes, when a man knows that he is being unjustly and unfairly treated, he stiffens his back, hardens himself and influences which, by themselves, might have worked great tenderness of spirit, are spoiled because something else is thrown in. Job was in this condition and he, therefore, seemed to rise in his own estimation rather than to sink, as was desired, until, at last, the Lord ended the dispute by manifesting Himself. Out of the whirlwind He spoke to Job and bade him gird

up his loins and meet his Maker if he dared. Then it was that Job was brought to his right position and, at the end, he said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear: but now my eyes see You. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Then Job realized the benefit of his affliction—but not till then. When the Lord revealed to Job His supremacy, His eternal Glory, and in that light compelled him to see his own imperfection and nothingness—then the Patriarch's trials became sanctified to him.

Volume 44 1Our text is a part of God's challenge to Job. The Lord seemed to say, "If Job is, indeed, half as great as he thinks he is, let him see whether he can do what his Creator does." He is challenged about so slight a matter, apparently, as the sending of the rain. Does Job know how it is done? Can he explain all the phenomena? Our modern scientists tell us how rain is produced and I suppose their explanation is the correct one, but they cannot tell us how it is that power is given to carry out what they call, "the laws of Nature." Neither can they make the rain, themselves, nor, if a drought were to continue till the nation was on the verge of famine, would they be able to cover the skies with blackness, or even to water a single acre of land! No, with all our explanations, it is still a great mystery—and it remains a secret with God how it is that He waters the earth with rain.

I am not going into that matter at this time. I intend to use the rain as an emblem of the Grace of God, as it usually is in Scripture—a figure of that blessed overflowing of the river of God's Love which comes down to quench our thirst of sin, to refresh us, to enliven us, to feed us, to soften us and to cleanse us. This matchless water of life has all sorts of uses and God sends it, when He pleases, in abundant showers upon His own people according to that ancient Word of God, "You, O God, did send a plentiful rain whereby You did confirm Your inheritance, when it was weary." The Hebrew means, "You did pour out blessings," as from a cornucopia, and so, "You did confirm Your inheritance, when it was weary." There are many here who are weary—they need to be refreshed and they are praying to God to send a gracious shower, a copious distilling of His matchless Grace upon their hearts and lives. I am going to preach upon this passage with the desire that while I am speaking, such a blessing may come upon us, or that, at any rate, we may begin to pray for it.

I. My first point is that, AS GOD ALONE GIVES RAIN, SO GOD ALONE GIVES GRACE.

Jehovah asks of Job the question, "Who has divided a channel for the overflowing water, or a path for the thunderbolt, to cause it to rain on the earth?" It is God, and God only, who creates rain. We cannot make it, but He can and He does give it. And it is absolutely so with His Grace— The Lord must give it, or there will be none. If it had not been for His eternal plan whereby He purposed to give Grace to the guilty, the whole race of mankind would have been left, like the fallen angels, without hope and without mercy! The angels that kept not their first estate, but rebelled against God, were given over to punishment without any intimation whatever of redemption for them—or of any possibility of their restoration. God, who does as He wills with His Grace which is most sovereign and free, passed over the fallen angels and made His Grace to light on insignificant and guilty men. And it has been after the same fashion in all history—if God has withheld the blessings of His Grace from any of the nations, they have not been able to procure them for themselves.

One lone light burned in Israel for hundreds of years while the rest of the inhabitants of the earth were left in darkness. And the world, with all its wisdom, could not and did not find God. Men, in

their ignorance, set up idols almost as numerous as their worshippers—and in their blindness they went this way and that way, but always away from God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from he Father of Lights"—as certainly as the rain comes down from Heaven! There is but one source of supply for Grace and that source is God Himself. He gives Grace and, "He gives more Grace." otherwise there would be none whatever among the sons of men!

And, moreover, it is God who finds the way by which His Grace can come to men. I will not enter into any elaborate explanations of my text. It indicates that God finds a way by which the rain comes down from the upper regions to water the thirsty fields. "Who has divided a channel for the overflowing water?" Only God Himself has made a channel for the rain—we could not have made it. So is it with His Grace, otherwise how could Grace have come to man? How was it possible for the thrice-holy God to deal leniently with sinners who had provoked Him to anger? How could it be that the Judge of all the earth, who must be just, should, nevertheless, pass by transgression, iniquity and sin? This is a problem which would have perplexed a Sanhedrim of seraphim! If all the mightiest intelligences that God has ever made had sat together in solemn conclave for a thousand years, they would not have been able to solve this problem—How can God be just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly? Infinite Wisdom devised that matchless way of substitution by which, through the death of the Son of God, men might be saved! There is the stamp of Divinity about that verse, "the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

It is God who gives Grace and God who, in a Divinely gracious way, has given His only-begotten and well-beloved Son to be the channel through which Grace can come down to guilty men! Blessed be God for this and let His name be adored forever! Having thus resolved upon giving Grace to men and having made a channel in which His Grace might flow to men, let it never be forgotten that God now directs the pathway of all the Grace that comes into the world. Our parallel, in the natural world, is that, according to the original of our text, there is a sort of canal, or path, made for every drop of water as it descends from the heavens to the earth. There is not the most minute particle of rain that is left to fall according to its own fancy or will—each single drop of water that is blown aslant by the March wind, is as surely steered by God as are yonder glorious stars revolving in their orbits! There is a purpose of God concerning every solitary flake of snow and every single portion of hail that comes down from Heaven—all these are ordered according to His eternal counsel and will. God alone can arrange all this.

It always seems to me to be a very wonderful way in which the world is watered. If all the rain were to pour upon us at once in a deluge, we should all be drowned—but it comes down gently, drop by drop, and thus it effects God's purpose much more surely than if it burst in one tremendous waterspout destroying everything. God, by the mysterious laws by which He governs inanimate matter, has so planned it that the rain shall come in drops exactly the right size, such drops as shall hang upon a tiny blade of grass and scarcely shall bend it. See how the bright drops, like so many diamonds, hang in myriads on the hedgerows just the right size to hang there—neither too large nor too little. So is it with the Grace of God—it is given sovereignly and wisely.

I daresay some Christian people think that they would like to have, in their first five minutes after believing in Christ, all the Grace they will ever have—but it cannot be. I have often admired that

expression of the Apostle Paul, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His Grace; wherein He has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." God teaches us His will, but He does not teach us too much at a time. Have you ever seen children who have been in school, so hardly driven by their masters that they have been mentally crippled and have never made the advance they ought to have made because they were driven too hard at the first? I have met with this sort of thing, spiritually. In several cases I have known, men and women have learned so much of the things of God in a short time that their reason has been most seriously jeopardized. I often have to look at young converts and almost to pray that they might not learn too much at once, for the deep things of God are so amazing to a man who is just plucked out of the world that if the cases of insanity through religion were much more frequent than they are, I should not at all be astonished! I wonder how any of us can bear what God has taught us already. If you could give eyesight to a man born blind and then, in a moment, were to place him in the full blaze of the sun, it would be a serious danger to him. If he has been long in the darkness, he must see the light by degrees. In like manner, we ought to thank God that He does not deluge us all at once with all the Grace we shall ever have, but He gives it to us gently, as soft vernal showers which, in Infinite Wisdom, distil upon the thirsty earth.

So we have seen that God gives Grace and God finds a way of giving Grace. And then God directs the way of His Grace and the measure and the manner of it. And He does it all in wisdom and prudence.

See, then, my dear Friends—I hope you all do—our absolute dependence upon God for all spiritual blessings. A farmer may do all he likes with his ground, but he will never have a harvest if God withholds the rain. He may be the most skillful agriculturist who ever lived, but he can do nothing if the heavens above him are as brass. If he were to call in the most learned astronomer of the day, there is not one who, with his wand, could move the stars, or cause the clouds to open and pour down rain upon the earth. If there were sore trouble in the land because farming was failing for lack of rain, if both Houses of Parliament were to be called together and the Queen were to sit upon her throne of state—and they were unanimously to pass an act ordering the rain to fall—He that sits in the heavens would laugh! The Lord would have them in derision, for the key of the rain is in no hand but that of Jehovah. It is exactly so with the Grace of God. You and I cannot command it. The presence of the most holy men in our midst would not, of itself, bring it. The most earnest preaching, the most Scriptural doctrine, the most faithful obedience to ordinances would not make it necessary that we should receive Grace. God must give it—He is an absolute Sovereign and we are entirely dependent upon Him. To what does this fact drive us? It drives us to prayer. When we have done all that we can—and surely we can scarcely pray if we have neglected anything that we can do—when we have done all that lies within our power as earnest-hearted Christian workers, then we must come to the Lord, Himself, for strength, and unto the God of our salvation for all power. This has been said so many times that when I say it, again, someone may reply, "That is a mere platitude." Just so—and the mischief is that the Church is beginning to think it is only a platitude—but if we all felt that the most important thing for the Church of Christ to do, after she has borne her testimony to the world, is to pray, what a different state of things there would soon be! But now you know what they are doing in far too many places—they push the Prayer Meeting up into a corner and if there is anything to be put off, they give up the Prayer Meeting! In some of our places of worship, we might search a long time for the

Prayer Meeting. It is somewhere in the back settlements, down in some small room which is too big for it even then! People plead that they cannot get out to the Prayer Meeting—they will go out to a lecture or to spend the evening for pleasure—but they do not care to go out when it is "only a Prayer Meeting."

Just so and as long as that is the estimation in which professing Christians hold it, so long must we cease to expect showers of blessing from on high! The main thing is for the Church to pray! She knows that she is dependent upon her God—let her show it by crying day and night to Him that He would send a blessing. There is a big mill with all its spindles and all its workers. I think I see it as we speed along in the train through one of our Northern counties. It is all lit up, tonight, and many busy hands are at work. But where is the power that makes those spindles move? In that little shed outside, where there is a man with black hands, stirring the fire, and keeping up the pressure of steam. That is where the power is! And that is a picture of the Prayer Meeting. It is the source of the Church's energy and if public prayer is neglected, or if private prayer is slackened, or if family prayer is held back in any degree, we lose the power which brings the blessing—this will be acknowledged when we come to truly know that all the power is of God and that as we cannot command a drop of rain, but must leave it in the hands of God, so we cannot command an ounce of Grace—if Grace is to be so measured—it must come from God, and from God alone.

II. Now, secondly, dear Friends, notice in my text that, AS GOD GIVES RAIN, SO RAIN FALLS IRRESPECTIVE OF MEN. "Who has divided a channel for the overflowing water, or a path for the thunderbolt; to cause it to rain on the earth, where there is no one; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man?"

I daresay you have often thought it strange that it should rain out at sea where it cannot water a single furrow, or apparently benefit any human being. Is it not still more strange that the water should fall so abundantly on vast tracts of sand and on plains that as yet have never been trod by the foot of man, and on those lofty peaks, those virgin hills where a human being has never yet been found? Men have a notion that nothing is good for anything if it is not good for them, but they are very foolish for thinking so. If what God does in Providence is good for nothing but for a rat, it is not unwise for Him to do it! He has other creatures to think of beside men and He thinks of them. The little fish in the sea and the birds of the air—and even the worms in the earth are remembered by the Most High and, sometimes, that weather which we say is so bad is only bad because it is bad for us—rebels against God. It may have been given especially for the birds and, perhaps, sometimes, God thinks that it is better to have weather that is good for birds than good for men, for He has to provide for us all and they, at least, have not sinned. And if He thinks of them, there is as much of mercy in the thought as when He thinks of us rebellious creatures. He makes it "to rain on the earth, where there is no one."

Now the parallel in Grace is this—that God's Grace will come without any human observation. If the Grace of God comes to some of us, thousands will see it, for they will mark the working of His Grace in our life and conversation. But there sits a dear friend, over yonder, so obscure that possibly only two or three will ever know anything that she does. Perhaps, my Brother, only half-a-dozen are affected by your influence. Do you not rejoice that God, who makes the rain to fall where there is no one, will make His Grace to come to you, though nobody, or, at most, only two or three, may see it? I have delighted sometimes to wander into the middle of a forest and get far

away from all sound of the voices of fallen men—and then to spy out some little flower growing right among the big trees. The sun gets at it, somehow, for a few hours in the day, and in its golden beams that little flower rejoices. And as I have looked at it and seen its beauty, I have remembered the words of the poet—

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,"

but I have not at all agreed with him when he added—

"And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

It is God's flower! God made it grow that He might look at it, Himself, and, therefore, its sweetness was not wasted, for God was there to appreciate and accept it! The most beautiful places in the world are, doubtless, places where men have never been. The most lovely gardens are those that God, Himself, keeps, where no Adam has been placed to till the soil. His trees, untouched by the axe, and unpruned by the knife, grow gloriously—"The trees of the Lord are full of sap. The cedars of Lebanon which He has planted." My heart has rejoiced as I have thought of God walking among the great trees of the far-off West—those mighty monarchs of the forest that seem to touch the stars—walking among them when nobody was there but Himself, looking at the works of His own hands and admiring what He had made. Well, now, if you happen to be a solitary person, quite alone, one who will never make a noise in the world for all that God does for you, never mind about that—He causes it to rain on the earth where there is no one—and your obscurity shall not keep back the blessing!

So, you see, rain comes without human observation. And it also comes without human co-operation, for it often rains "where there is no one." Therefore, no man helps God to send the rain. As to Grace, it, also, often comes where there is no man to bring it. When a person has not heard a sermon, when he has been on the sea, far away from all means of Grace, yet God has caused it to rain upon him. There is here, tonight, I think, a Brother who left this country unimpressed by the Gospel, who, nevertheless, when near the shores of Australia, sat down and read a sermon which his wife had put into his box—and God met with him there! The Lord has many ways of proving that His Grace descends upon men without any help from them—and that He can send it where He pleases by ways of His own. If the ordinary means should seem to fail, He can cause it to rain "where there is no one."

Perhaps there is somebody here who is going right away from the usual means of Grace. Possibly, dear Friend, you are fretting to yourself as you think, "I shall never come to this place of worship again. Perhaps I may never hear the Gospel to my soul's comfort again." Suppose you are right away in the bush of Australia? God can send His Grace to you, there, just as easily as He can send it here! If you are going to the backwoods of America or Canada, do not be afraid—the Lord is at home there. If you have to settle down in a log hut and are miles from any meeting of Christian people—do not be dispirited or cast down, but, in your loneliness, sit and sing and let this be a part of your song, "He makes a way for the overflowing water, to cause it to rain on the earth, where there is no one; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man." Therefore be encouraged by this second thought.

III. I had many other things to say to you upon this point, but time fails, so I must notice, thirdly, that BOTH RAIN AND GRACE FALL WHERE WE MIGHT LEAST HAVE EXPECTED THEM. "To

satisfy the desolate and waste ground."

Grace comes where there was no Grace before. Where all was desert and waste, there comes the rain. And where all was graceless and godless, there comes the Grace of God. Grace comes where there is the greatest need of it. Here was a dreadful place—it was waste—it was a wilderness yet the rain came there. And where there are men who feel themselves to be just as dead and barren as a desert, Grace will come even there! The rain comes to wildernesses and Grace can come to you, poor guilty Sinners! If you have nothing with which to entertain the Grace, Grace will bring its own company with it. It will come into your empty heart and make you one of the "people prepared for the Lord." Grace waits not for men, neither tarries for the sins of men. We call it Prevenient Grace because it comes before it is sought—and God bestows it on a people who are utterly undeserving of it.

Grace comes where, apparently, there is nothing to repay it for coming. When the rain falls on the wilderness, it seems as if no result could follow from its fall. What a mercy it is that when we have nothing to pay, God lavishes His mercy on us and, in due time, we repay Him in the way He expects. I do not suppose that many of you have ever seen the great steppes of Russia. I have been told that for thousands of miles they are like our London streets, without a single blade of anything green—a horrible desolation! Yet after the snow has gone and springtime comes in and summer, with its wonderful heat, that plain is covered with grass and with abundant flowers of the field. And the grass continues until it is cut for use—and then the land returns to that same barren appearance which it wore before. It is amazing, is it not, that showers of rain and the warmth of the sun should produce vegetation where, apparently, there seemed to be none whatever?

Just so does the Grace of God come to a sinner's heart! It is all hard, dead, black, hopeless. But when the Grace comes, it brings life with it and suddenly there spring up in the man all manner of good works, holy words, gracious thoughts and everything that is sweet and pleasing in the sight of God! And what is best of all, it continues to produce a harvest that never dries up and the soil never returns to its former barrenness again! Therefore, Beloved, let us take heart concerning the Grace of God. If the rain comes where there seems to be no argument in favor of its coming, so may the Grace of God come to you who have no right to it—no expectation of it—no hope of it—no, are even filled with despair concerning it! While you are sitting here, the Lord can meet with you and save you! Be of good comfort—to you is the Gospel sent, saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Trust your guilty soul with Him and you, even you, shall receive the showers of love that come from God's right hand! There is nothing in the Covenant of Grace that shall be held back from you—even though you are the very worst and vilest one in this place—if you only trust the Savior. Though you may write yourself down as most surely lost and given up to barrenness, like the heath that is near unto burning, yet it shall not be so with you—God shall bless you and that right early.

"Oh, if He does!" says one, "I will bless His name." Then that is one reason why He will do it, that you may bless His name. I have often told you of one who said, "If God saves me, He shall never hear the last of it." Well, that is the sort of people He likes to save—people who, with glad heart and voice, will proclaim and proclaim again, and proclaim to all eternity that the Lord saved them—even them! Remember the text of last Sunday night, for it is just in the same key as the text of tonight—"He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent away empty." [See

Sermon #2582, Volume 44—Alto and Bass—read/download the entire sermon free of charge athttp://www.spurgeongems.org] He has caused it "to rain on the earth where there is no one; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man; to satisfy the desolate and waste ground," for it is to these waste grounds, these desolate places, that God specially looks with favor. If you are great in your own esteem, He will make you little. But if you are little, He will make you great. If you live by your own power, you shall be slain. But if you are slain and dead beyond hope of recovery in yourself, you shall be made alive! You empty ones shall be filled and you filled ones shall be emptied. You that are up shall be down—and you that are down shall be lifted up, for God turns things upside down. And when He comes to work, He effects marvelous changes in the condition of the hearts of men.

IV. Now I close by noticing, in the fourth place, that RAIN, WHEN IT COMES, IS MOST VALUED BY LIFE, for we read in our text, that it comes "to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth." You may water a dead post as long as you like, yet nothing will come of it. But the most tender, tiniest little herb that has a bud fast shut, knows when the rain comes and begins to develop its hidden power—and opens its bud to the rain and to the sun! That is why the Grace of God comes, "to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth." I hope that there is a good deal of budding life here. The Lord has looked upon you and has made you feel uneasy—that is a bud. Oh, that the uneasiness might open into full repentance! The Lord has looked upon you and He has given you desires. Oh, that the Grace of God may increase those desires till they shall open into resolution and determination! The Lord has sent the dew from on high upon your soul, dear Friend, and you are beginning to hope that there is salvation somewhere and, perhaps, for you. Oh, that the hope may open, like a bud that has been shut up—open into faith in Jesus Christ, so that you shall say, "I will trust in Him." All the buds everywhere are just now trying to get out into the sunshine. They seem bound up in gummy envelopes, but they are beginning to open in the sunshine. I like to sit under the fir trees and hear the crack of the opening caused by the heat of the sun. You can almost see the trees rejoicing that summertime is coming! So may you see young converts open when the Grace of God is displayed abundantly—they grow before your very eyes till, sometimes, you are astonished at what the Grace of God does, with wise prudence, but yet with a sweet readiness, upon the hearts of the sons of men!

How far have your buds developed? Have you begun to pray a little? Oh, that your prayer might be more intense! I hope that little bud of private prayer will grow till it comes to family prayer so that you can pray with your wife and children. You have been reading your Bible lately, have you? Oh, thank God for that! Now I hope that bud of Bible reading will open into the daily habit of feeding upon the Word of God. Go right through the Bible if you can. Pray to God to give you a solid knowledge of its contents that you may be rooted and grounded in what His Spirit teaches you there. Some of you have another sort of bud—you have been thinking of what you can do for Christ. You thought you were converted, but you have never done much for Christ. I do not use any whips, but sometimes I am tempted to take a good long one to some of those lazy folk who do nothing and yet hope to go to Heaven. One says, "I think, my dear Pastor, that I must try to do something for Christ." Well, that is a bud—may the Grace of God be so abundant that you will leave off trying and get actually to doing!

"How am I to serve God?" said one to me the other day. I answered, "My dear Brother, get at it. 'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.' Don't come and ask me, for where there

is so much to be done, the man is idle who asks, 'What am I to do?' Do the first thing that comes to hand!" If a soldier in battle saw that the enemy was winning the day, he would not be hesitating and asking, "Captain, what can I do?" He would kill the first fellow that came near—and so must you, in a spiritual sense. Do something for Christ. Oh, that this Church might begin to open all its buds! May every little one become a thousand, and every small one a great multitude, to the praise of the glory of the Grace of God! O you little ones, you hidden ones, you timid ones, you trembling ones—the Grace of God is abundant! Open to receive it! See how the crocus, after having been long hidden beneath the soil, knows when the new year begins and, as soon as the sun smiles on the earth, it gently lifts up its golden cup—and is there anything more beautiful in all the world than the crocus cup when God fills that chalice with the light of Heaven? What a depth of wonderful brightness of color there is within it! All the crocus can do is to open itself—and that is all you can do—just stand and drink in God's light! Open yourself to the sweet influences of the Grace of God.

The fair lilies of the garden toil not, neither do they spin; but yet they glorify God. How they seem to stand still and just show what God can do with them! They just drink in the light and heat and then pour it all out again in silent, quiet beauty. Now you do the same! Let the purity of your life, like the purity of the lily, glorify the God who created it in you. So may His blessing rest upon you all, dear Friends, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Isaiah 4:8-20.

Verse 8. But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen,

the seed of Abraham, My friend. Let us, for the time being, forget the people to whom this message was addressed, and see whether it might not be spoken to ourselves. Come, my Friend, are you truly God's servant? Do you delight to do His will and to walk in His ways? If so, then you are God's chosen, for, wherever there is the true spirit of obedience to the Lord, it is the result of His Grace, and Grace never comes except from the wellhead of electing love! If you are God's servant, you are God's chosen. Then see to it that you walk and live as one of the seed of Abraham, whom God calls, "My friend."

It was very touching, the other day, to notice how the Queen spoke of one who was her servant, but who had gained the friendship of his royal mistress. So the Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his Lord does: but I have called you friends." May we so faithfully serve Him that it will be fitting for the Lord to speak of us in all three of these terms—"You, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend."

9. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called you from the chief men thereof, and said unto you, You are My servant; I have chosen you, and not cast you away. May the Lord now say that to each one of you who are His servants! Especially may He say the latter part of it, "I have not cast you away"! Many times He might have done so if He had dealt with us according to our deeds. "Dismiss me not from Your service, Lord," is a prayer we ought often to put up, for, in that service, we are far from perfect. I think I speak for all sane Christians—I do not undertake to speak for certain insane ones that abound at this time—but I believe that all sane servants of the

Lord confess that they are such poor servants that their wonder is that they have not been dismissed from His service. Yet it is sweet to hear Him say, "I have chosen you, and not cast you away."

10. Fear you not, for I am with you: be not dismayed; for I am your God. Oh, the riches of that word, "I am your God"! That is more than, "Your Friend, your Helper." "I am your God."

10. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you. First, "I will give you strength, and then I will use My own strength on your behalf: 'I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you.'"

10. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness. The poor child of God seems to cry, "Lord, You say, 'I will help you,' but I can hardly stand! I am such a babe, I have not yet learned to stand alone." "Well, then," says God, "I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness." Are any of you afraid that you will slip right off your feet? Are you put in very perplexing positions, so that you hardly know which way to turn? Then rest on this sweet promise, "Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness."

11. Behold, all they that were incensed against you shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with you shall perish. The Lord Jesus Christ will put to rout all the enemies of His people! Their sins and their sorrows, their foes and their woes, shall alike be scattered to the wind!

12. You shall seek them, and shall not find them, even them that contended with you: they that war against you shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nothing. You know how it happened to Pharaoh and all his hosts—the Israelites could not find them after the Lord had overthrown them in the Red Sea. The Psalmist sang, long afterwards, concerning the Egyptians who were drowned, "There was not one of them left." So shall it be with all those whom you now fear and dread—God shall appear and work such a deliverance for you that you shall wonder where your trouble is! It shall be drowned, utterly washed away, like the Egyptians whom the children of Israel saw no more.

13, 14. For I the LORD your God will hold your right hand, saying unto you, Fear not; I will help you. Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help you, says the LORD, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. You must not miss those charming words, dear Friends! Let me read them again. Some of you will want them, so do not miss them. There is some medicine here that you will need, maybe, before long— "Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help you, says the Lord, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."

15. Behold, I will make you as a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: you shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff. You know the corn drag was made rough at the bottom, as though it had sharp teeth, and when it was drawn over the wheat after it was spread out on the threshing floor, the grain was separated from the chaff. So God tells His people, if they trust Him, that He will make them into a threshing instrument having teeth—and they shall thresh not ordinary harvests—but shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff! No task is too hard for God's people to accomplish when God is with them! Difficulties vanish and their fears are driven before the wind when God strengthens them.

16. You shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and you shall rejoice in the LORD, and shall glory in the Holy One of Israel. Come, you that are

drooping in spirit— here is God's promise to you that you shall overcome all your difficulties and then shall rejoice in God. "Oh," you say, "I could rejoice in God if He enabled me to do that!" Put the, "if," away, and believe that He is about to help you, and anticipate the victory He is going to give you by singing the song of faith!

17. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst. They have come to such a state that they cannot even tell their needs— they do not know how to speak to others about their grief, or even to describe it to themselves. "Their tongue fails for thirst." What then?

17. I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. "But, Lord, they could not speak! Did You not say, 'Their tongue fails'? Yet You say, 'I the Lord will hear them.'" It shows, dear Friends, that a groan is a prayer, a sigh is a prayer, and that even if we cannot get as far as to sigh or groan, our very hunger and thirst make up a prayer before God! "I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them."

18. I will open rivers in high places. That is an unusual place to find rivers, but God does strange things when He shows mercy to the poor and needy "I will open rivers in high places."

18. And fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. There shall be enough and to spare! There shall be an abundance of the water of which before they could not find a single drop! When God is gracious to a soul, He is gracious. When His mercy is made to enter a man's heart, then He pours floods upon him. No little Grace will God bestow, but endless Grace, and boundless Grace, "and crown that Grace with glory, too."

19, 20. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the cypress tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree. I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it. May these gracious promises be fulfilled in you and me, that we may praise our faithful Covenant-keeping God forever and ever! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—103 (VERSION 2), 72

(Son_2:1-17), 456.

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PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY

TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 100

Job 38,31 #818 - The Pleiades and Orion

THE PLEIADES AND ORION

NO. 818

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 28, 1868,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Can you bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?"

Job 38:31.

MOST of you know that singularly beautiful cluster of stars called the Pleiades—very small, but intensely bright. These are most conspicuous about the time of spring, and therefore, in poetry the vernal influences which quicken the earth and clothe it with the green grass and the manycolored flowers are connected with the Pleiades. By the sweet influences of the Pleiades we understand, then, in plain language, those benign influences which produce the spring and the summer. These, it is said, no man can restrain.

Orion, a very conspicuous constellation with its glittering belt, is best seen towards the close of autumn, just before the coming in of the winter. It is a southern and wintry sign and therefore, poetically, the winter is traced to the bands of Orion, and we are told in the text, literally, that no man is able to loosen the bonds of frost, or check the incoming of the cold. In other words, the whole verse asserts that none can stop the revolutions of the seasons! When God ordains the spring the shining months come laughing on. And when, again, He calls for winter, snow and ice must rule the dreary hour.

The farmer is entirely dependent upon the God of Heaven. He may plow with industry and cast in the good seed with hope, but unless the sweet influences of Heaven shall be given he can reap no harvest. If the drought is long and severe, he cannot cause the clouds to drench the thirsty furrows, or, if the rain descends in torrents, drowning the pastures, he cannot seal up the bottles of Heaven. He is absolutely dependent upon God, who governs all things according to His will. And we who know so little of agricultural operations—being so far removed from the country which God has made and living in the town which man has made—we, also, are as much dependent as any—for even the king is nourished by the fruit of the field! And follow what merchandise we will, ultimately it is still from the fields that our nourishment must come.

All of us, then, and not us alone, but all the beasts and birds, and all the creatures are entirely and absolutely dependent upon God, and unless He helps them, they cannot help themselves. This is the simple teaching of the verse, but it was doubtless used to teach Job that as he could not alter the ordinances of Heaven, so neither could he change the purposes of God in the events of Providence. You cannot hasten the spring nor postpone the winter! Neither can you prevent those

calamities which plunge nations in distress, nor prohibit those mercies which lift up tribes into prosperity. Evil comes to the sons of men by God's purpose, and good comes also. Neither is it in your power, O son of man, with all your discretion and skill, with all your economy and industry to avert the evil which God appoints!

The scythe of the dread mower cannot be arrested by wisdom—the inevitable hour comes to all. Need and sickness, and bereavement invade us at the Lord's bidding, and although we may greatly mitigate their rigor, yet we cannot avert them, for the ordinances of God must surely come to pass. Whatever is written in the folded book of the Divine decree must, in due season, be fulfilled in the history of man. If you cannot alter, then bow yourself and submit! If you cannot change the purpose, then yield to it and ask to have it sanctified to you! O Job, if your cattle must be taken away, if your children must die, if sore boils must break out upon your body, if you must sit upon the dunghill, if you have no power to alter a single circumstance—then accept the affliction at the hand of the Infinite One! Humbly kiss the hand that smites, and say, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him."

The doctrine of a Divine Providence is calculated to create in the minds of the thoughtful and believing, the spirit of resignation. They might, perhaps, rebel and struggle, if this were of some use, but since it would be utterly useless—since the great wheels of Providence proceed in their perpetual revolutions, not pausing for our tears nor hastening for our groans—then it is best for us to admire it as it revolves, to believe that it is producing good and to submit ourselves to whatever the Lord appoints.

However, I do not intend using the text in that sense this morning, but as we are told that no man can restrain the benign influences of the Pleiades, so, in the first place men cannot utterly prevent the working of the gracious Spirit. And as men, in the second place, cannot loose the bands of Orion, so men, of themselves, are not able to overcome those wintry powers which sometimes seize upon the human heart. These two things, and then, in the third place, the lessons from them.

I. WHO SHALL BIND THE SWEET INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT? The Holy Spirit does not always operate in the same degree of power, but when His time, His set time, to favor Zion is come, then, blessed be God, He is like the dew upon the grass that waits not for man, neither tarries for the sons of men. It is not in human or in diabolical power to restrain the influences of the Holy One of Israel when He deigns to visit His Church.

Many attempts have been made against the Church of God but they have all proven failures because the sweet influence of the Holy Spirit has frustrated all the purposes of the Lord's enemies. The Church of God, especially in her early days, has been assailed by the envenomed tongue of slander. All over the Roman empire it was reported that Christians were men of the most brutalized habits. I dare not mention, for the cheek of modesty would be crimsoned, what were the charges brought against Christians of crimes perpetrated in their assemblies. Suffice it to say that among the rest, as they met together to break bread and drink wine in memory of their Lord, it was said they were accustomed to eat the flesh of a man and that they passed round from hand to hand and drank together out of a cup of warm human blood.

Of course, the populace believing these horrible stories were violently opposed to the Christian faith. And how did the Christian faith overcome the popular opposition stimulated by such calumny

as this? Simply by the power of the Holy Spirit! The sweet influences of the Holy Spirit which descended upon the disciples at Pentecost remained with them, so that when they preached they preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven! When in their private assemblies they spoke of Jesus, they spoke in the power with which they had been endowed at Jerusalem and calumny was of no more avail than chaff contending with the whirlwind, or stubble warring against the fire!

In fact, these very calumnies brought men out of curiosity to behold these atrocious sinners in their orgies of vice, and coming, they listened to the gracious words which proceeded out of their mouths, and, in the power of the Holy Spirit they believed and became Christians, too! Beloved, this stands good today. Many a Christian has to endure slander, and of the most cruel kind, too. To a sensitive heart, perhaps, slander is a more severe trial than even the whip or the rack. And yet, glory be to God, if our names are cast out as evil, they cannot deprive us of the comfort of the Holy One of Israel!

Often, when we are worst spoken of by the world, we are best beloved of our God. The Lord has a way of taking up His people when they are despised and rejected of men, and manifesting His love to them after an unusual sort, so that if the cup might have been dashed with bitters, God pours in so much of the honey of His own precious love the bitter is forgotten, and the calumny is swallowed up in the communion. Happy are you, Beloved, when they say all manner of evil against you for Christ's name's sake, for you can reply to your accusers, "Can you bind up the sweet influence of the Holy Spirit? Can you stop from my soul the Divine and overflowing consolations which proceed from the Pleiades of promise when they shine full upon my soul?"

If calumny does not do, the world has always been ready with coarser weapons—she resorts to open persecution. But, Beloved, all the persecutions which have ever assaulted the Church have never been able to stop the sweet influence of the Pleiades—I mean to quench the work of the Spirit and deprive the Church of God of her true comfort. When it has been her springtime, all the blood which could be shed could not thrust her back again into her dreary winter. Her flowers bloomed, her buds began to shoot forth and her fruits adorned her branches to the glory of our God! Behold Paul and Silas in the dungeon of Philippi! Their persecutors have scourged them. They have laid them in the stocks. They have thrust them into the noisome filth of the innermost prison—but the sweet influences of the Pleiades are felt and they begin to sing in the dead of night until the prisoners hear them!

Behold the influence of these same Pleiades in every place where the Apostles went! They were followed by their Jewish persecutors and they were molested by the Gentile mobs—but their preaching drew to the Cross of Christ a company whose hearts the Lord had touched and He added unto the Church, daily, of such as should be saved. After the Apostolic days, often in the midst of the amphitheater, when the nobles and the matrons of Rome and the Plebs—in all their ranks were gathered together and a few defenseless men and women were given up to bears and wolves and lions in the midst of the arena—how the sweet influence of the Pleiades fell on them! How they sung their Psalms as the lions rushed from their dens, or folded their arms in peace, praising the Lord that He thought them worthy to be partakers of His sufferings!

So was it on the snowy Alps! So was it in the valleys of Piedmont! So was it among the suffering Huguenots of France! So was it among our martyred fathers! Smithfield felt the influence of the

Pleiades full often when her flames became as chariots in which the saints mounted to their thrones! In the glens of Scotland, among her lone hills and shaggy woods, when such men as Cargill and Cameron opened the Bible and read the text by a flash of lightning and then preached of the royalties of King Jesus—in those covenanting days the sweet influence of the Pleiades were, perhaps, more felt than in these softer hours when men learn to sleep under the ministry of the Truth—and too many of them are ready to cancel their principles and give up their hopes if but a little gain should cross their path.

Persecution, what have you done? March before us, you cruel ranks of persecutors, each with the Hell-brand on your brow! You sons of Cain, you brethren of Korah, you disciples of Balaam—you have never been able to impede the onward march of the Church of God—no, not so much as for a single hour! Vain were your arts and villainies, for God from Heaven fought against you! Nor, dear Brethren, have even the crafty heresies which at different times have crept into the Church of God been able to bind the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit.

Oftentimes, the very springtime of the Church has come when to all outward appearance it appeared that evil had altogether triumphed. When Popery's power had become consolidated and universal, it was then that Savonarola, Jerome of Prague, and John Huss were raised up together with our own John Wickliffe to shake the foundations of the throne of Antichrist! At the darkest hour of the world's history the light began to shine! These men, when they had either burnt them alive, or consumed their corpses—these men it was supposed, would be forgotten and their influence would perish from off the face of the earth—for, were not all the doctors on the side of Rome? Were not all the school-men zealous to maintain her dogmas?

What were these few men that they should be able to stand against the old, the venerable, the wealthy? But, Brothers and Sisters, the old error had to give way and the light of the Gospel shone forth! And a new spring life came to the world, and the time of the singing of birds and the blooming of the flowers was come, and men called it the Reformation! Rest assured it will be so today. The craft of Satan and the wickedness of man have invented forms of mischief so insinuating that they threaten speedily to envelop our land. We have among us a form of Popery in which Romanism is divested of its grosser idolatries, clothed with gorgeous vestments, garnished with attractive pomp and upheld by the most earnest, and to all appearances, the most pious of men!

Will this prevail? Will this destroy the Gospel by whose dew the nation has so long been watered? We have among us at the same hour a rationalism, sufficiently cautious not to deny too much, stealthily advancing to its ultimate results, but lingering wisely by the way to talk of liberality and breadth of thought. This is fascinating to the last degree to many minds, and is subduing to itself hundreds of the more thoughtful youths of this country. Between these two millstones will not Christ's kingdom be crushed? May we not fear that rationalism and ceremonialism will be like the two hands of Samson to remove the pillars whereon our house does lean?

Ah, not so! If the Holy Spirit does but descend upon the living Churches of God and put power into the preaching of the Truth, we may safely laugh all these to scorn, and say to the greatest of them, "Can you stand for a single second against the benign power of the adorable Spirit who is the Guardian of the Truth of God, the Life of the Church, the Defender of the faith, the Vanquisher of errors, the Defier of Hell, the Establisher of Truth's empire and the Destroyer of the throne of

falsehood?"

Advancing step by step I would remind you that there is a great opposition in man himself to the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit. When the time comes for any one man to be saved, his natural enmity is sure to be on the alert against the Divine power, and Satan is certain, also, to strengthen him lest he should lose his victim. Now, I glorify God in this that you, Sinner, though you may resist and grieve the Spirit for awhile, yet if He comes to you with Omnipotent power effectually to save, you must yield, for you, even you, with all your enmity, cannot bind the sweet influences of the Spirit of eternal life!

It is with many men as I have sometimes seen with a village brook—it has been dammed up for some reason and the water has become a pool. A heavy shower has, by-and-by, fallen upon the hills and the full stream has leaped downward. There stands the dam for a little while, but it trembles as the stream swells. Perhaps the villagers strengthen it, but if the rain continues to fall the stream increases in volume, and at last, with one noble outburst, down leaps the torrent and the dam is swept away like a bowing wall. So with our evil nature—when the Holy Spirit comes with greater and greater power, descending from the hills of God's eternal purposes—He at last sweeps away every remnant of opposition, and on He sweeps in the greatness of His strength.

"You deny, then," says one, "the free will of man?" Who says that? I never denied it! On the contrary, I insist upon it more than most men! There is no opposition between the doctrine of Irresistible Grace and the fact of the free agency of man. "How," you say, "if man is thus irresistibly carried as by storm, how can he be free?" Think, Man, and answer for yourself! Were you never overcome in an argument? Did you never resist an argument for a time, till at last another reason was given, and then another and you could not but yield to the overwhelming arguments? Did you then prove that you had no reason of your own?

No, it proved you had a reason, and therefore could be mastered by arguments fitted to your reason. If you had been bereft of reason—an idiot— nobody could have spoken of an irresistible argument so far as you were concerned. But your powers of understanding enabled you to be overcome by legitimate force. So with the will—we do not dream, as some falsely imagine, that physical force is used by the Lord with men's moral natures! We teach that there are appeals and persuasions, arguments and forces which are applicable to the will which, without violating its freedom even in the smallest degree, yet overwhelm it and subdue it to the right and the true—so that the man, with full consent, yields up himself to the full power of Divine love!

Do not the hymns of Mr. Wesley often express our meaning when he uses such words as overcoming and forcing? As in the verse—

"Save the vilest of the race, Force me to be saved by Grace"?

Such expressions mean just what we mean and no more. We do not mean the violation of the will, but we do mean this, that where the Holy Spirit comes, though the man's will may have been obstinate enough before, when He exerts His wondrous influences, He makes the will to yield itself at once! The man is made willing in the day of God's power—the sweet influences of the Pleiades are not bound even by human rebellion!

It is cause for thankfulness, also, that no man can bind the sweet influence completely after he has been saved. If your experience is at all like mine, you sometimes get into a very horrible state of mind. You may feel as if you had no spiritual life at all. You cannot pray—or, if you pray, you do not enjoy it. You go up to the House of God and get no comfort. You turn to the Bible and behold no gleams of light. You get wretched and you sing with Dr. Watts—

"Dear Lord, and shall we always live At this poor dying rate?" Well, all of a sudden you have such a visitation—you have not had such a time for months. It may be under a sermon, or, perhaps, at the Lord's Table or even in the midst of your business! Before you are aware your soul is made like the chariots of Amminadab—you feel so rejoicing—it is not bodily excitement, it is spiritual life filled with vigor!

Now you can pray. Now you can pour out your soul in tears. Now you feel most happy and blessed you wonder how you could have been like a desert before, for you blossom so much like a garden now. Ah, it is this— the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit could not be bound even by your darkness and your death. God determined to visit you, and coming to you, He overcame every obstacle and made your soul to rejoice with joy unspeakable! Beloved, it is just so with a Church. I am sure this Church was in about as bad a plight as we could well suppose for the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit to work in it. It was a scattered flock, and divided and brought low—yet, though there were a thousand discouragements—no sooner did the Holy Spirit visit this Church than see how it began to multiply and rejoice!

During these years the same influences have blessed us, obstacles have been overcome, difficulties have been swept away and none have been able to keep from us the reviving influences of the Holy Spirit! You have now before you the thought of the freeness of the Spirit of God, who, like wind, blows as He wishes and is not bound by human might. Let me only add that although no man can, by his own power, bind or effectually and finally restrain the power of the Spirit of God, yet the Lord may withdraw His Spirit either from a Church or from an individual for a season and so cause sore distress—and prove that nothing is good or strong without Him.

Be tender, therefore, of the Holy Spirit. O you who know His power, trifle not with any of His Divine warnings! Be jealous lest you grieve Him! Follow His faintest monitions, and in all things do Him honor as your Friend and Guide. He may depart from the sinner who is not obedient to Him, He may leave altogether, and then such a soul is given up! From the saint also He may, for a time, be gone, till the good man repents and humbles himself—and then He will return, like a dove, with all His peaceful powers, to abide with Him evermore.

II. Now we shall turn to the second half of the text. There is a winter time both with Churches and with individuals when Orion is in the ascendant, and then, though we could well wish to do so, WE ARE NOT ABLE TO LOOSE THE BONDS OF THE FROST. This is sadly true in individual cases. My dear Brothers and Sisters, I suppose in your endeavors to do good you have met with persons in despair. There are none who more thoroughly baffle all the arts of the human comforter than these. You bring them the Gospel and they see it, but refuse it. If they cannot help it, they will sometimes get a little light, but only let them have time enough and they will shut their eyes and get into the dark again. They bring objections and you answer them so conclusively that you could almost laugh at them, but they only renounce one set of fears to raise another. You hunt them out of one hole and you close it so that they never can get into it again. Alas, they make another! You

drive them forth, again, but they find another retreat. They are most ingenious in inventing reasons for misery! They are diligent in the business of tormenting themselves. They are good people—they really have the fear of God. They are desirous of eternal life—they have it, even—and yet for all this, are involved in a net in which the more they struggle the more they are entangled. They are like men in the mud of the river Nile, who, sinking in it, splash and plunge only to sink deeper every time.

Have you not felt altogether confused in dealing with them? Have you not come out of the house and said, "I did think I could comfort people. I had some sort of conceit that I could have brought forward precious promises which might have cheered the hopeless, but I am altogether beaten. I can do nothing." Now you may quote the language of the Psalm we sang this morning—

"When he shuts up in long despair, Who can remove the heavy bar?"

Such cases are not at all uncommon. What a happy day it is when God, having proved to us that we cannot loose the bands of Orion, looses them Himself and says to the captives, "Go free!" These make the best of Christians when they obtain liberty! They become among the fairest of the Divine family when they anoint their faces with the oil of joy!

The terrible experience they have had helps them to sympathize with others and instructs them in the devices of Satan so that they can console others. If it sometimes becomes a puzzle how to cheer others, I am sure it is so with yourself. Whenever I get under the bands of Orion, I find I cannot loose them from my own hands. There are some very happy, cheerful spirits who appear to have no winter, but the most of us occasionally fall into doubts and fears, and spiritual decays when our liveliness and joy are at a low ebb—

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

We are, in the words of the text, bound with the bands of Orion, frost bound, ice-bound. The soul which once ran warbling on like a clear stream is cold and hard as a stone. Its prayers are like icicles, its emotions like blocks of ice.

Then, Brothers and Sisters, you may try and make the effort, as you ought to do, to loosen yourself from these bands, but you are powerless. Then is that text learned experimentally, "Without Me you can do nothing." Oh then we feel that we are less than nothing and vanity, while merciless Orion hangs fetters on our soul and hunts our joys to death! Blessed be God, the warmth of love returns before long and the Pleiades shine again, and then we, "Rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." Now, Brethren, this same Truth is carried out in our works of faith in connection with each soul. You are going into your classes this afternoon and I would be far from dispiriting you, but I would have you remember that if you attempt to convert a soul yourself, you had better first answer the question of our text, "Can you loose the bands of Orion?" It were easier for you to turn winter into summer than to turn a child of wrath into an heir of Divine Grace. You have a task before you which is utterly impossible to human strength!

Conversion is no more in your power than creation. Regeneration lies not with you, but men are begotten again by the great Father of Spirits unto a lively hope. Bow before the power of God and feel at this moment your own utter powerlessness in the work to which He has called you. To turn an understanding from darkness to light, to make the stubborn will supple, to break the iron sinew

of pride and make the neck to bow with cheerful obedience—this belongs not unto you, but unto the eternal Spirit who is Omnipotent in the world of mind. Think of this and go in His strength—not in your own.

Brethren, if it is so with individuals, it is in proportion equally so with entire congregations. We have, under God, as His servants, to save a perishing world. We are sent out as laborers in Christ's vineyard to be the means of reclaiming the wild wastes to the husbandry of Christ. And what a task is ours! How impossible! We had better first attempt to loose the bands of Orion before we shall be able, unaided of God, to loose the bands of wickedness and say to the oppressed, "Go free!" The missionary enterprise, apart from supernatural influences, is the most insane that ever crossed the mind of man!

Yes, I will venture to say that the work of preaching the Gospel, even in Christian England, is of all attempts the most foolish unless we believe in the celestial power which alone can make preaching to be of any avail. Withdraw the Spirit—withdraw our belief in His power—and our teachings become the subjects of deserved ridicule! It is even so in our attempts to revive a slumbering Church. I discern a sleeping Church pretty readily. When I am preaching in any place I can soon tell what kind of people I am preaching to by their looks. There is a fire that flashes where there is life. Truth draws forth a responsive glance—good men's bosoms heave while Christ is preached!

But in some places hearers are stolid, cold, dead—you might almost as well preach to the green hillocks that surround the Church as preach to them. They stir not, they move not, neither can they be moved. Now, at such times it is very dispiriting unless one can fall back upon the belief that the Holy Spirit can, if He wills, on a sudden quicken the most dead of all professing Churches and make His people again to live! And like the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision, they shall stand upon their feet an exceedingly great army, ready to fight the battle of their Master! Can you loose the bands of Orion? Christian, feel your powerlessness! Behold, what must be done, and yet how you can do less than nothing in it!

III. Stand here and hear the voice of God which now speaks to you— that voice I will try to expound in the third part of the subject which consists of THE LESSONS DRAWN FROM THIS GREAT TRUTH, that we can neither restrain nor yet command the influences of the Holy Spirit. On the very surface lies the lesson of humility. I trust, Brethren, I have no need to say this, for the doctrine before us must have already had an effect upon your minds—while you have been thinking of the power of God, and of your own insignificance—you must have felt bowed down and humbled.

It is always dangerous to be useful. It is to be desired above silver, and coveted above fine gold, and yet, when obtained, it has its measure of dangers, for Satan will whisper, even if natural pride does not, "What an excellent man you must be! What qualifications there must be in you! What glory God gets out of you!" "See," says the devil, "hundreds saved under you! Believers comforted under you!" And then the foul thought, the wicked thought seeks to build its nest right under the eaves of God's own temple in the heart, "You are something after all."

But, Brethren, we need to be brought back to this—"You can do nothing out of Christ. You are, apart from Him, a withered bough to be gathered and cast into the fire." Yes, you

preacher—powerful, useful, honored of God—nothing but a withered bough apart from Christ! Yes, you goodly woman, you godly, earnest man engaged in the Sunday school or in the Bible-class—all speak well of you and yet you art a cloud without rain, and a well without water—unless you have a vital union with Christ! As well might a child uproot an Alp as you attempt to win a soul apart from Christ! As well an infant creep from the cradle and pluck the sun from its place, and hurl the moon into the deep as you be able to deliver a soul from going down into the pit! Oh, this thought, Brothers and Sisters! I feel as if I should not speak of it for it prostrates me before God and makes me ask Him never to leave me to myself to think myself something lest He be angry with me, and use me no more!

Should not the next thought which comes into the mind be that of gratitude and adoration to God? If we cannot command the Holy Spirit's power, yet He can. What if Orion's bands cannot be loosed by us—they can be loosed by Him! There is no despairing soul that cannot find comfort when He visits it. "Yes, He makes the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children." "He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people." "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined." He opens the blind eyes, and brings "out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." Glory be to His name! Where the human arm fails to work results, the Divine arm, with ease, achieves its purpose. And with us here, within our hearts, these gardens so frostbitten can be visited by Him. And if the WellBeloved comes, the summer comes with all its pleasant fruits! If Jesus will but walk into this garden and open the doors of our hearts and enter in, then there will be a paradise where there was before a wilderness! Blessed be the Lord, we cannot have sunk so low but He can lift us up! We cannot be so barren and so comfortless but what He can make us fruitful and give us joy and peace again.

There is no Church which He cannot revive! Are you members of congregations which are slumbering? Do not despair! You will go home after the day's service, and say, "I wish I could do some good here, but I am only one." No, dear Brother, you cannot loose the bands of Orion, but God can! The great Head of His Church can suddenly come into His temple and fill it with His glory. He can rake together the almost expiring ashes and kindle the fire anew, and bring the sacrifice and make your Church yet to be a temple to His praise! Glorify the name of God, the All-Powerful One! never let despair cross your soul. While He lives, who made Heaven and earth. While He works, who bears up the pillars of the universe. While He loves, who once gave up His Son to redeem us—there can be no cause for trembling! Zion shall be comforted! Her days of gladness shall dawn! Her winter of sorrow shall flee away! God is on her side and Orion relaxes his bonds.

There is another lesson, however, which I must not fail to bring before you in a word or two, namely this—behold the path and walk of Faith! She cannot walk in human power. She has quick eyes and she perceives mortal might to be a mere pretense, but she walks in the power of the Unseen One. "Can you bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades?" Faith answers, "I can." If Joshua bound the sun—put chains upon the horns of the moon—Faith feels that she can do the same. Can you loose the bands of Orion? "Yes," says Faith, "that I can." If Elijah, after three years of drought, prayed, and the heavens were covered with clouds and there was a sound of abundance of rain—and he did this by the prayer of faith— even so can we do by the power of Him

that lives and rules in the highest heavens!

Faith has the art of getting hold upon the arm of God and then, though she cannot stir or move in her own strength, yet she moves the arm of God that moves everything! She touches the motor nerve of Omnipotence and He acts whose action is conquest, whose work never fails. O Brothers and Sisters, if we can believe and pray, all things will be possible to us and we shall hold the Holy Spirit bound in this Church to remain with us for many and many a year! He will never depart while His people's cries, and tears, and joyful thanksgivings are like a golden chain to stop His blessed feet! He will be bound and held by us. We may do with Him as the spouse did with her Beloved. "I found him," says she, "and I would not let him go." O Beloved members of this Church, make it a resolution that the Holy Spirit shall not go from us! That we will, with diligent service and unceasing prayer, and constant gratitude stay Him and compel Him, seeing the day is far spent, to abide with us! One of the best ways to retain the Holy Spirit is to use what powers we have. Look at our farmers, how busy they have been during the last two or three weeks while the sun was shining, to gather in their hay! We must use every gleam of heavenly sunshine for Jesus' sake! It does not always come, but when a Church is favored with it, let it use it to the utmost of its power, for God will not continue to give while we do not appreciate and prove our appreciation by making the full use of it.

Yes, prayer and faith can hold the Spirit! Prayer and faith can also loose the bonds of Orion. We will have sinners saved, we will have Churches revived, we will have London yet warmed with the life of God! Not because we can do it, but because we will give Him no rest until He comes forth from His secret dwelling place and makes the power and life of His Truth to be known from the ends of the earth!

The drift of the sermon is to cut you off from yourselves and throw you flat on your faces before God. Sinner, you cannot save yourself! You cannot bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades! You cannot take away from yourself those bands of Orion! But Jehovah can, and in simple faith in Him who offers His blood before the Throne, come to your Father and ask Him to do these things for you and they shall be done! And you shall glorify His name! May the blessing of God descend upon these words, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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